

Sarong Encyclopedia Article

Sarong

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Sarong

The sarong is a basic form of dress, best known as the fundamental dress form of the Malay Archipelago peoples, men and women alike. A long, straight piece of cloth wraps around the waist. In deference to its primacy in Malay dress, it is generally thought of as being in colorful batik and cognate materials, but metaphorically the sarong can seem to describe the short kilt of ancient Egyptian men. In the 1930s and 1940s, the "exotic South Seas" attire was popularized in Dorothy Lamour films generous in native or par-native skin. Meanwhile, the name lent itself to such imperialist Bob Hope word play as, "what'sarong?" Although never assimilated into mainstream Western dress, the sarong has been used in designer collections and sportswear to connote the beach and/or Orientalism. For America, the sarong symbolizes an exotic, luxurious existence of pleasure.