

Brief History Of Esan Culture & People

Esan (pronounced /aysan/) is one of the major ethnic groups in [Edo State, Nigeria](#). The name 'Esan' owes its origin to Bini and was once corrupted to 'Ishan' by colonial Britain. Esan land is bordered to the south by Benin, to the south-east by Agbor, to the north and east by Etsako, to the west by River Niger. From Ewu to Benin City, the State capital, is 100kms long. The people populate areas such as [Uromi](#), [Ewatto](#), [Igueben](#), [Irrua](#), [Ubiaja](#), [Ebele](#), [Ehor](#), [Ekpoma](#), [Ewu](#), etc in central Edo State, South-South Nigeria. It has flat landscape, one lacking in rocks and mountains, and good for agricultural purpose. Palm tree and rubber tree (used for the production of plastic products) rank highest among Esan trees. The land's variety of fruits range from mango, orange, grape, pineapple, guava, cashew, banana, plantain, black pear, avocado pear, lime to walnut and even more. Cassava, yam, cocoa yam, sweet potato, pepper, okra and rice are some of its farm produce. It has numerous streams that are too small to afford fishing. Esan people are proud of their ancestry and heritage.

The people are said to be positive in outlook, creative, industrious and highly educated. History has it that they hailed from ancient Bini, and their language is of Kwa subdivision of the Niger-Congo language family. Replete with different dialects, Esan language is quite unintelligible to even many native speakers. For instance, the Esan word for person (or, somebody) is variously called by the different kingdoms' dialects as *oria* (by Uromi, etc), *ohia* (by Uzea, etc), *oyia* (by Unea, etc), *ghan* (by Ugbõha, etc). This obvious difficulty associated with speaking others' dialect other than one's mother dialect has given rise to the widespread use of Pidgin English, which is the local patois, a mishmash of Portuguese, English and Nigeria's local languages.

During the era of the military, the Esan had between five to six high ranking military, police and Naval officers as governors of various states around the country at different occasions, a feat that owed much to their learning and sociability. [Chief Ikimi](#) and [Chief Anenih](#)— have been known to occupy the position of chairman of two national parties —[NRC](#) and [SDP](#) respectively.

[Esan Day](#) is celebrated at the Tafawa Balewa square, [Lagos](#) every December; there, names of all prominent Esan people are read to loud ovation. Esans believe in self help, thus assisting to reach villages and towns to achieve development. Prominent Esan are [Chief Anthony Enahoro](#), who raised the motion for the independence of Nigeria; [Peter Enahoro](#), who wrote **How to be a Nigerian**, [Tony Anenih](#), a top Nigerian politician and former minister of Works and Housing. Other names include the late [Ambrose Alli](#), Governor of [Bendel State](#); [Bishop Ekpu](#), [Anthony Cardinal Okogie](#); late first lady [Stella Obasanjo](#) (late); musician [Sonny Okosun](#) and writer [Aba Aburime I](#). Also included are [Chief Tom Ikimi](#), former foreign minister (during the period of Gen. Sani Abacha); former [Lagos](#) state police commissioner, [Oyakhilomen](#); former vice president of Nigeria, [Augustus Aikhonmu](#) (retired Real Admiral); former deputy commissioner of Lagos state [Vincent Airebamen](#).

Esan are fun-loving people who have various festivities and ritualistic traditions. Their folktales and folklores serve as forms of learning and entertainment, like the famous [Igbabonelimin](#). They have prominent traditional rulers who keep order and sanity in a complex society where beauty and manners are intertwined. Despite the long-term impact of Christianity among Esan, the people are fetish in that a large number still practice traditional beliefs in the form of worship of ancestral spirits and other gods. A

large percentage of Esan are **Christians**, mostly **Catholic** and recently of other denominations. Esan has various dialects all of which stem from **Bini** and there is still close affinity between the Esan and the **Bini**, which leads to the common saying 'Esan ii gbi Edo' meaning, Esan does not harm the Edo (i.e. Bini).

Esan are great poets, writers, singers, carvers, farmers, scholars, storytellers, etc. The folklore and history of the Esan tribe is worth re-visiting and attempt should be made to research the various ways that the villages are related to the Edos, and others who may have occupied Ifeku Island many years ago. The Esan heritage is unique despite the variation of **dialects**.

A handful of Esan families are known to possess **Portuguese** ancestry, resulting from links dating back to the **16th Century** when Portuguese sailors and tradesman first entered the Bini Kingdom via the coast. British arrived Bini in the wake of the Portuguese numerous expeditions to, and intercourse with, Bini.

Esan Land Demographic information

Esan Land in Edo State	
Mar 16, 2005	
Local Government Areas, Headquarters, and Official Addresses	Esan-West local government Ekpoma, PMB 3, Ekpoma, Telephone: 055-98741, 98383, 98384, 98470, 98488; Esan-Central local government Irrua, PMB 04, Irrua; Esan- North local government Uromi, PMB 013, Uromi; Esan-South local government Ubiaja, PMB 002, Ubiaja, Telephone: 055-91250; Igueben local government Igueben, PMB, Igueben, Telephone:
Number of Households	14,668 + 14,111 + 16,160 + 15,583 + 8,290 = 68,812
Total Consolidated Population (1999 est.)	75,832 +78,264 + 88,687 + 81,728 + 47,611 = 372,122,000
Male Population	
Female Population	
Area (km²)	
Population Density (persons/km²)	
Year of Creation	
Major Towns	Ekpoma, Irrua, Uromi, Ubiaja, and Igueben, ADD OTHER MAJOR TOWNS IF NECESSARY

Economic Mainstays	Commerce, cottage industries, farming, wood processing, furniture making, poultry, and fishing
Tourist Centres/Attractions	Commemorative Statue of Prof. Ambrose Alli, Ibiekuma River, and Oba's Palaces; Lake Obiemen, Obiemen Shrine, the Ogirrua's Palace, and the Ugbalo Spring; and The Okomu-Udo National Game Reserve, and the Amahor waterfalls
Natural Resources	Limestone, Timber; Kaolin, Clay, Kaolin, laterite, Sandstone, and Rubber
Major Agricultural Products	Cocoa, oil palm, rubber, kolabuts, cassava, yam, cocoyam, pineapple, and citrus fruits, rice, tomatoes, rubber, oranges, maize, tomatoes, okro, melon, and fish
Health Facilities	The Ambrose Alli University Teaching Hospital is at Ekpoma, along with various public health centers, private and public hospitals, clinics and maternity homes; The Irrua Specialist Hospital, the School of Nursing and Midwifery, as well as public primary health centers, public and private hospitals, clinics, and maternity homes; The General Hospital, Uromi; and The General Hospital, Igueben
Educational Facilities	In addition to the Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, there are 48 primary schools and 12 secondary schools, including the Christ the King Nursery & Primary School, Ekpoma; Mousco International School, Ekpoma; Cosmopolitan Church Primary School; Christ Foundation Nursery/Primary School; and Christ Adam College; Needs more detail information on educational facilities in Irrua Uromi and Ubiaja ; Famous secondary schools such Igueben College and Ewu Grammar School are located here, as well as Adult Education Centers, which were set up to provide education for adults without formal education;

Esan Local Government Areas in Edo State

The autonomous clans/kingdoms in Esan land are currently administratively arranged as follows under the current five local government areas:

(1) Esan North East LGA, Uromi:

Uromi, Uzea

(2) Esan Central LGA, Irrua:

Irrua, Ugbegun, Okpoji, Ido, Ewu

(3) Esan West LGA, Ekpoma:

Ekpoma, Urohi, Ukhun, Egoro

(4) Esan South East LGA, Ubiaja:

Ubiaja, Ewohimhin, Emulu, Ohordua, Ēbhoato, Okhuesan, Orowa,

Ugboha, Oria, Illushi, Onogholo

(5) Igueben LGA, Igueben:

Igueben, Ebele, Amaho, Ēbhosa, Udo, Ekpon, Ujorgba, Ogwa, Ugun,

Okalo