

Daily Traditional Skills



Meke

The meke is the traditional dance of Fiji. In years past, a priest would walk to the top of a mountain or sacred spot and wait for the *kalou vu* to speak to him directly and bestow the movements of the meke to tell a story. The movements would then be taught to the members of the village and only performed after gaining permission from the village chief.

The meke tells a story, whether it be the history of the village/family or even the ancestors. It is in this oral tradition that history was recorded in Fiji. The meke is performed separately by men and woman, having different dances for each. The male meke is often a display of strength and power, the female meke a display of grace. The dance is accompanied by a rhythmic song sung by members of the community to the rhythm of a *lali ni meke* drum.

The meke is often performed as part of a formal ceremony.

Mat weaving

Mats weaved from pandanus leaves are an extremely functional and extremely common feature of a Fijian household or building. The leaves are prepared first by boiling them and then leaving them to dry in the sun. The mats are intricately woven in particular and repeating patterns with stripped thick threads from the dried leaves.

They have been used throughout Fiji's history as valuable gifts. They are time consuming to make, the making of it often consists of multiple women sitting in one room and working on a single mat for days on end.

Basket Weaving

Baskets are woven from fresh leaves to create functional and strong baskets for daily use. Often they are used to bring in produce from the farm or to transport goods to the markets.

Masi cloth

Masi or *tapa* is a cloth like material that has an essential part of traditional formal ceremonies in Fiji, whether it be an official *sevusevu* for a revered guest or worn as part of a 21st birthday celebration or wedding. Each family may own one particular masi that is used on multiple occasions as they are quite rare and expensive today. The masi itself is created from the bark of a mulberry tree. The bark is stripped from the tree, soaked to soften and pounded by mallets to flatten. The now thin and fibrous material is left to dry in the sun before the pattern is applied.

Intricate decorative designs are then applied to the masi cloth, differing between regions. Sometimes the pattern might include images of turtles or fish. They can be decorated with paint, dye, they can be stenciled or even smoked.

Sadly, Masi production is in decline in Fiji. It's predominantly produced in the South-Eastern Lau group.

Bilo

This is the cup (or bowl depending on the size!) used to serve and drink *yaqona*. The *bilo* is made from a coconut shell, stripped of its husk and scraped and sanded on the inside and out until perfectly smooth. After the shell is smooth, it is buried in thick black mud for at least three days to dye the shell jet black. Once removed from the mud, the shell is washed with water and oiled.

Qoligoli fishing

Simply translated, this is net fishing. Undertaken by women and men of coastal communities, a long net is shared between multiple people. With one person manning each end and the rest of the team holding the net throughout, they swim/wade out to a shallow reef. A large semicircle is created with the net over an expanse of reef leaving few routes for fish to escape. To finish the job, allocated swimmers swim to the open side of the net and pound the water with whatever they can, often flip flops, and make as much of a disturbance as they can to scare the fish netwards. It is a very effective and sustainable form of fishing, only what is needed being taken.

Spearfishing

You guessed it, as the name suggests, this form of fishing involves accurately shooting a thin metal rod like spear through the water to hit the chosen fish. This particular form of fishing can provide very good income for a fisherman as the bigger and more canny fish can be singled out in deeper water.

Nowadays, a spear gun can be used where the spear is loaded into a wooden stock and fixed in place by an elastic propulsion mechanism. The trigger is fired with an outstretched arm to accurately hit the fish. Often, modern spears on spear guns have a line attached so that once the fish is caught, it can easily be retrieved by pulling in the attached line.

However, purists use a method which is much harder but just as accurate when mastered. A rubber, bike inner-tube like, tube is used with a simple loop at the top where the metal spear is inserted and held like an arrow. Using this setup, the spear is fired freehand and the hit fish is also retrieved by hand.

The fish caught in one session are usually kept on a thread tied around the fisherman's waist.