Cultural Practices & Protocols

Engagement that is meaningful is about respecting cultural practices and protocols. Pacific values common to all Pacific Islands should always be considered when observing any customs. However, among the different islands there are distinct differences in cultural practices, roles of family members, traditional dress and power structures. If you’re asked to attend a Pacific event or ceremony, it’s anticipated that you be accompanied and/or advised by Pacific peoples who can help guide you.

Advice may be about:
• Formal ceremonies and knowing who and how to address people and their roles in the appropriate manner
• Use of island languages and translation by non-English speakers
• Acknowledging and allowing time for elders to contribute
• Taking time to observe protocols which uphold spirituality through prayers

Note: A full list of basic greetings can be found at www.mp.govt.nz
- Tonga, Fiji and Samoa are the only Pacific countries that are commonly known for kava ceremony practices.

Pan-Pacific

Preface
The ceremony will always include the presentation of ceremonial items adorned with gifts and well wishes for the future, followed by a large feast. These gatherings are usually held on a Saturday in private homes. The girl is pierced by a representative from each side of the girl’s parent family. The hair cutting ceremony is a rite of passage for young boys. They celebrate their entry into manhood and is celebrated with a big gathering. The young boys hair is left to grow from birth up until their special hair cutting ceremony, usually at age 15. The boys is seated at the front of the event, with his hair separated into small ponytails or plates, and family are invited to cut out a piece of his hair. In exchange, they give an atinga (donation) to go towards the young boys life. This custom serves to maintain reciprocities within the extended family and community.

Welcome ceremony for special guests (turou)

The turau is a formal performance to welcome chiefs, important dignitaries or high ranking officials. It is a loud and respectful greeting involving ua (dance), panu/haeakea (colourful clothing), evakai u e kalu and rauti/flowers and imene (song/hymn).

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Fiji

Welcoming ceremony

Greetings are traditional in the way to welcome an honoured guest and accompanying visitors. It is the embodiment of Fijian cultural identity and heritage. The welcome event is performed and observed in silence as a sign of respect and dignity. If you are asked to take part in such a ceremony remember:
• The matanivanua (chief guest’s herald or spokesman) will sit on the ground close to the chief guest and makes the formal speeches, receives and acknowledges the presentation on the chief guest’s behalf.
• As the chief guest enters the venue, they will be greeted by the tama (an acclamation) by the assembled chiefs or group performing the ceremony. The matanivanua will respond. Apart from the sound of the tama, it’s considered disrespectful to be loud and noisy and strict silence is kept.
• The ceremony will always include the presentation of ceremonial items that hold great significance acknowledging how far friends have come; the yasawa (kava ceremony) speeches and ends with a celebratory feast.

适当的礼服

At some events, as a kava ceremony involves sitting on the floor for long periods of time, so use a lavalava (sarong) to cover your legs. It’s considered rude to show the inappropriate.

Avoid walking in front of people

Some events, such as a kava ceremony involve sitting on the floor for long periods

Walking in front of people during a meeting or event is considered bad-mannered. It’s polite to slightly bow your head and say ‘tulou’ which means ‘excuse me’.

Traditional ceremonies and protocols

Gift giving

Gifiting is an integral part of many Pacific cultures, and occupies a position similar to that of kava within Māori culture. Gifting occurs in a number of contexts, including interactions between Pacific individuals, churches, groups, organizations, and communities. Gifting is understood and practiced as a reciprocal gesture (money or payment in kind) whereby an unconditional gift is bestowed upon a recipient who has neither stipulated that it be given, nor has any expectation of receiving it. Reciprocity and unconditionality are explicit in Pacific gifiting.

Do’s and don’ts of dress etiquette

Women smell you when this exchange happens. It’s common for Kuki women to ongi (literal

Clothing and hat-making

Clothing is mostly causal, cool and comfortable but women usually cover their shoulders and men wear long trousers. A lavalava is referred to as a sleepwear in the Nesian culture. Women and men are usually seen in church. Clothing and hat-making is an important art form to Nesian culture and is skilled practice. The distinctive publica, is a hat woven together using different materials including the traditional pandanus leaves (lau fa) and can usually be seen in men and women in church.

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Being respectful

In Fiji, there are multiple gestures and things a person does in order to show respect. For example: fastowel is to be removed and placed outside the house before entering as shoes are considered dirty and shoes deigned for the house-owner. It’s disrespectful to touch the head of a Fiji. Attire is usually associated with different positions of authority, such as chiefly attire and someone of status in the community. Wearing the appropriate attire demonstrates you are showing vakarokonoko (respect).

Multiculturalism across Fiji

Fijian communities are very multicultural across ethnic groups, religion and language. It’s important to understand that dialects vary across the different provinces of Fiji and that the nation’s multiculturalism influences their protocols and customs. For example, in the Lauan Groups (Eastern Fiji), customs and protocols are strongly influenced by their linkages to their Tongan ancestors.

Coming of age ceremonies

Natives take pride in their many traditions handed down from generation to generation as a living entity. They believe this is more important to give than to receive something in return, and this is referred to as vakakawa - giving from the heart. Significant traditions include:

Haircutting ceremony for boys

It’s customary for boys to shave their hair until they are a young teenager and then have it cut in a special ceremony. Guests and families are invited to cut out an individual’s hair and then contribute to a monetary fund which goes to the boy, once ceremony costs are paid for. This is followed by a large feast.

Ear piercing ceremony for girls

It’s customary for girls to have an ear piercing ceremony. Girls get their ears pierced by a representative from each side of the girls parent family.

Language and culture

Roa (language) connects the people of the Cook Islands to their pa (culture), mana, and the vaerua (world) of all things they are. Whether through imene (song), tama (dance), panu (drum) Vaughan (forums to discuss Biblical topics), or family and community gatherings, the use of our roa helps them to connect as tangata tāmata Rarere (Cook Islands people), and to their taonga (treasurers) and pa (place).

Chanting, singing and dance

Cook Island singing is very distinct with different levels and sounds including pans (chants) and imene (hymn). They are imene apa (salutation), imene tuki and imene mea metua (hymn of the parents/ancestor). It’s considered impolite to decline or refusing to dance (uapu) when asked to participate in any ceremonial events.

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Cook Islands

Haircutting ceremony (pakokiu round)

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Niue

Welcoming ceremony and dance

Takalo was traditionally performed before going to war. Women were also forbidden from performing the takalo but nowadays this can vary depending on which village you come from. Nowadays, it’s performed at formal welcoming occasions and usually led by a male who leads the haka (calling out) throughout the takalo. Males are at the forefront with females standing side by side in support. There are two types of takalo. The ceremonial takalo is usually performed for dignitaries with a prepared green coconut presented to the visiting dignitary to consume. This symbolises acceptance and welcome onto the land by the Nesian community. The takalo dance performance is usually performed at events and celebrations such as Puamau, Taufalea (featuring secondary schools competing in traditional music, dance, costume and speech).

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Samoa

**Ava ceremony**
The 'ava or kava ceremony is one of Samoa’s most important social events. Sharing the ceremonial ‘ava drink marks important milestones in Samoan society and is a way for the host to welcome his or her guests. The ceremony begins with the host placing the ‘ava in a bowl and offering it to the guests to drink. The ‘ava is then passed around the room, and each guest is expected to take a sip. The ceremony is considered to be a form of respect and an invitation to share in the host’s hospitality.

**Sharing systems**

Traditional welcome and respect

The faalife is traditional Samoan song and dance performed during special occasions such as welcoming special guests, weddings and at community gatherings. While the faalife differs amongst the eight Samoan islands, it is similar in its structure and function across the islands. The faalife is performed by a group of people singing and dancing in unison, with each person taking turns to lead the performance. The faalife is an important cultural event in Samoa and is a way to express gratitude and appreciation for the guests.

Cultural dress

Appropriate traditional wear includes:

- **Men’s traditional wear:**
  - Ta’ovala: a woven wrap that covers the arms and legs, and is secured with a decorative sash. Ta’ovala are made from natural materials such as pandanus leaves and coconuts.
  - Kava girdle: a belt worn around the waist to hold the kava bowl.
  - Ta’u’afu or tapa sash: a decorative sash made from natural materials such as tapa, a type of barkcloth.

- **Women’s traditional wear:**
  - Lavalava: a wrap skirt that covers the body from the waist to the knees. Lavalava are made from natural materials such as pandanus leaves and coconuts.
  - Tapa dress: a full-length dress made from tapa, a type of barkcloth.

**Territorial and family titles**

The matai title is a traditional title in Samoa that signifies the hierarchical structure of Samoan society. The matai title is divided into different categories based on the size of the territory, with higher ranks being associated with larger territories. The matai title is passed down from father to son and is an important part of Samoan culture. When a man is passed a matai title, he is expected to understand his responsibilities and the traditions associated with the title.

**Ceremonial dress**

The lacefaga is a traditional dress worn by important figures in Samoan society, such as the king or queen. The lacefaga is a decorative headdress made from coconut petals and shells, and is worn with a traditional cloak called the ‘i’a. The lacefaga is a symbol of authority and is worn during formal occasions such as state functions and royal events.

**Spirituality and beliefs**

Fau/fau/mae:

- **Malele**:
  - Wear a traditional dancing skirt made from pandanus leaves.
  - Use a traditional ceremonial necklace made of flowers and leaves woven together.
  - Use a traditional girdle worn around the waist for semi-formal events.

- **Fou/fau/mae**:
  - Wear a traditional girdle worn around the waist for semi-formal events.
  - Use a traditional girdle worn around the waist for semi-formal events.

**Sitting and standing etiquette**

When eating, it is customary to sit on the ground and use your hands to eat. It is important to address others with respect and to follow proper protocol. When addressing someone, it is customary to use the person’s name or title, and to use proper titles such as “尊者” (honorable) or “部长” (minister). It is also customary to use “请” (please) and “谢谢” (thank you) when communicating with others.

**Tuvalu’s nine distinct islands**

Tuvalu comprises nine separate islands with Fakarava being the capital. The islands span a range of environments, from tropical to sub-tropical, and from coral reefs to volcanic islands. The islands are home to a diverse range of flora and fauna, and are known for their beautiful beaches and clear waters. The islands are also home to a number of cultural traditions and practices, such as traditional dances, music, and storytelling.

**Cultural performances**

Tuvaluans are known for their love of music and dancing. Many of the cultural performances are performed by local groups and individuals, and are a way to celebrate and preserve the island’s rich cultural heritage. Some of the most popular performances include traditional dances, music, and storytelling, and are performed during special occasions such as festivals and ceremonies.