

Chamoru Art of Weaving



Weaving continues to be an important practice in Guam. For thousands of years the Chamoru people have used Guam's abundant foliage to produce useful and unique items. Although the art of weaving is not as prevalent in Guam today as it has been in days gone by, or as critical for everyday life, it is still seen as one of the lasting artistries of Chamoru culture.

Many pieces were created from the same material but served different purposes. For example, a mat woven out of pandanus leaves, or akgak, could be used for sleeping, blankets, funeral preparations, food serving platters or cloths to clean surfaces. Typical, everyday woven items included mats, boxes and hats. Rectangular baskets (kottot) were used for presenting gifts of rice.

Ancient Chamoru people also used their weaving skills to create fish nets (talaya), traps and slings but less is known about these practices. Some sources indicate the ancient society used bark from the wild hibiscus (pagu) tree or bamboo for nets and traps. Some weavers also incorporated coconut husk fibers into rope and bamboo needles and gauges when weaving fishing nets. The pandanus plant (*Pandanus tectorius*) is native to Guam and provides fibrous leaves that are good for weaving.

One of the most popular areas in Guam to watch and learn weaving is at Gef Pa'go, Inajaran, a cultural demonstration center in Southern Guam. Gef Pa'go employs several master weavers who demonstrate the art to students, tourists and interested residents. Guam's traditional weavers say they're worried that their craft could disappear if invasive coconut rhino beetles continue to destroy local trees. The rhino beetles dig into the heart of coconut trees to eat and pass-through undeveloped leaves. The damaged leaves grown in a V shape that makes them unsuitable for weaving.

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