

BASKETS

TIMOR LESTE



Baskets

Basket weaving is most probably the oldest and widest spread crafts in human history. A wide range of basket wares are used both in towns and in villages throughout Timor Leste. Baskets of smaller sizes are generally made for people to gather, share, and store food and daily essentials.

Baskets may be carried on the shoulder, the head or in the hand, as well as hung on the end of a stick that is balanced over the shoulder. Larger ones are usually worn on the shoulder or on the head for support or strapped on to the back. Medium-sized ones – are suspended over the back attached with long straps that wrap across the forehead, while small ones are carried in the hand.



Baskets used for storing cotton wool to be spun into threads for the making of tais (Timorese woven material)



Mulberry leaves in the basket to feed the buffalos



Baskets of corn and corn meals.



A baby carrying basket

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Baskets came in different shapes and sizes depending on their original purpose.

Larger pieces of items made using similar weaving techniques are often used for furnishings such as mats. Baskets made of tougher materials are used to carry heavy items including babies and firewood.



A wide variety of baskets displayed by the road side in Metinaro to sell to passers-by

Baskets play a significant role in maintaining cultural traditions and the ethnic identity of the makers. Weavers are usually women and each has their unique designs and styles, depending on the type of raw materials accessible to them. In Timor Leste, the skill and technique of basketry are passed on from the older women in the family to the younger ones. This form of learning fosters a positive family dynamic and mutual respect. It ensures an effective learning and mentoring system in the community whilst passing tradition from generation to generation.

Today, skilled weavers, like their mothers and grandmothers before them, often achieve positions of importance and respect in their families and in their communities. Women who are skilled weavers can earn a living from selling their baskets, mats and other woven products at markets, stalls and shops. In some cases distinguished skilled weavers get to participate in international basket weavers gatherings and some even managed to sell their wares at galleries.



Women weaving baskets in Maubara

WHAT ARE TIMORESE BASKETS MADE OF

Several types of palm trees grown in the coastal, river flood plains and altitude up to 1,000 metre provide useful raw materials for the weavers. Commonly, leaves from the pandanus (*Pandanus tectorius* or Heda in Tetum), lontar palm (*Borassus flabellifer* or Akadiru in Tetum), the sago palm (*Corypha utan* Lam. or Ai tali in Tetum), aren palm (*Arenga pinnata* or Ai tua metan in Tetum) are used to weave into a wide range of basket wares.



A lontar palm in Maubara

The most sought after material is the leaves of the young pandanus and they are used extensively for weaving. Pandanus has many thick prop roots near the base, which provide lateral support as the tree becomes top-heavy with leaves, fruit, and branches.

The pandanus can withstand salt spray, drought and strong winds. Pandanus leaves have a higher social value than those of the coconut palm, as they are used for mats of a higher grade. Usually it is only the young leaves that are cut in order to allow the plant to naturally regenerate. The thorns on the leaf edges and the midribs are stripped away and the leaves dried in the sun. Leaves can also be boiled to soften them or soaked in mud and other natural substances for dyeing. Bright manufactured dyes are often used



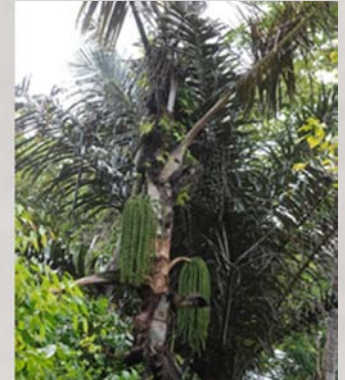
*Young pandanus grown in the bush next to the Valu Sere Eco-
lodges in Tutuala*

today as can be seen from the range of basket wares in Maubara.

Basket weaving particularly thrives well in the coastal region where a wide range of palms grow naturally. Aren palm can be found in altitude up to 1,000 metre. Basketry continues to thrive from the ancient time due to its combined aesthetic art form and the wide range of practical uses of baskets wares for the people. These qualities have helped the art to survive and to evolve and change with time whilst preserving the technique that has been passed down from one generation to another since ancient time.



*A Tali Metan (sago palm) in
Hera*



*A matured aren palm in the
Konis Noni Santana National
Park*

BASKETS IN TIMOR LESTE TODAY

Basketry in Timor Leste has undergone some changes since the country gained its independence and opens its doors to foreigners. With the influence of foreign artists and designers, basketry in Maubara especially has undergone rapid transformation to cater for the tourist market.

The newer basket wares have incorporated other decorated items such as beads, tais (traditional woven cloth of Timor Leste), colourful strings and coloured with a range of commercial dyes.



A range of modern basket wares on display for sales in Maubara



**WHERE CAN YOU
BUY
BASKET WARES**

MAUBARA

The widest range of basket wares and plant-based woven items can be bought from the stalls opposite the Dutch Fort in Maubara town about an hour and a half drive from Dili, pending on road conditions.



The Maubara Fort Sovenir Shop and Community Stall across the road



A road-side stall at Mau Liu selling a wide range of more traditional basket wares

METINARO

On the way to Baucau to the eastern part of Timor Leste, by the sides of the highway in the villages of Metinaro and Mau Liu, baskets, mats and other items can be seen hanging on road side stalls for sales to passers by.



A stall selling homemade basket wares and other goods in a rural market

LOCAL MARKETS

Plain baskets and mats made for local uses are generally available in wet markets in Dili and rural towns in the coastal districts where palm and pandanus are grown. Once a week local farmer's markets are held in most village administration centres or suco – the day of the market varies, it is Saturday for Mau Liu and Saturday for Hera.

These farmer's market are usually held from 7am to noon or when they sell out of their produce and goods. Basket sellers are often found in markets in Dili and near major hotel areas.

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