

THE KAVA CEREMONY



Yaqona or kava, is an infusion prepared from the root of *Piper Methysticum*, which is a type of pepper plant. It is extremely important in the Fijian culture. In the time of the 'old religion' it was used ceremonially and only consumed by chiefs and priests.

Today yaqona is part of daily life, not only in villages but across the different races and in urban areas. Drinking grog is used for welcoming and bonding with visitors, for storytelling sessions or for passing time.

Certain protocols should be followed during a kava ceremony and in some remote villages, it is still a semi religious experience.

Sit cross-legged, facing the chief and the tanoa, or large wooden bowl. Women usually sit behind the men and won't get offered the first drink unless they are the guest of honour. Never walk across the circle of participants, turn your back to the tanoa or step over the cord that leads from the tanoa to a white cowry shell. This cord represents a link with the spirits.

The drink is prepared in the tanoa. The dried and powdered root, wrapped in a piece of cloth, is mixed with water and the resulting concoction looks and tastes like muddy water.

You will be offered a drink from a bilo, half a coconut shell. Clap once, accept the bilo and say 'bula' meaning 'cheers', before drinking it all in one go.

Clap three times in gratification and try not to grimace.

The drink will be shared until the tanoa is empty.

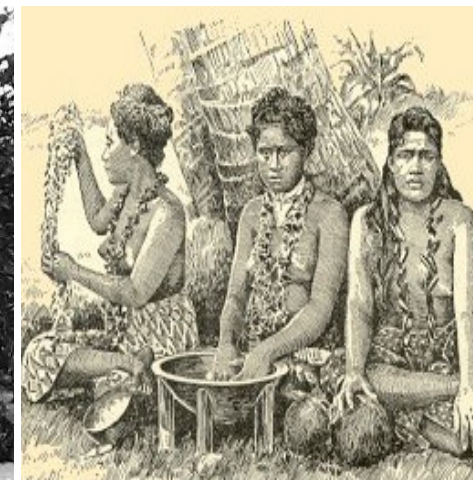
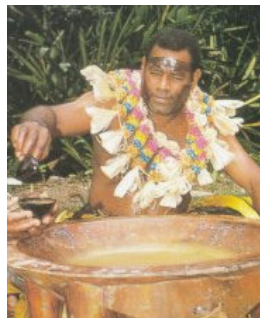
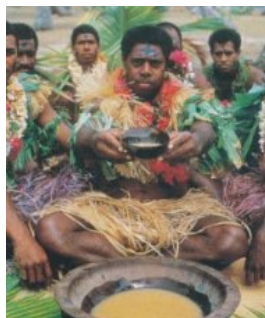
You are not obligated to drink every bilo offered to you, but it is polite to drink at least the first.



**LIKULIKU
LAGOON
RESORT**

**KAVA
CEREMONY**

**YAQONA
DRINKING**



**KAVA
YAQONA**
(*Piper Methysticum*)



THE KAVA ROOT



THE KAVA PLANT

The kava plant is a shrub which thrives in well-drained soils and it grows well as an understory crop. Too much sunlight especially in early growth is harmful to the plant. It grows naturally where rainfall is plentiful, over 2,000mm a year.

Ideal growing conditions range from temperatures of 20-35 degrees, and 70-100% relative humidity.

The soil it is kept in should be loose to ensure plenty of air reaching the root.

Kava is unable to sexually reproduce. Female flowers are especially rare and do not produce fruit even when hand-pollinated. Its propagation is entirely due to human efforts by the method of striking. Traditionally plants were not harvested until they were around 4 years of age, older plants have higher concentrations of kavalactones.

Kavalactone's are the active principal ingredient in kava and 15 types have been identified. These kavalactones are considered psychoactive, that is they contain a chemical substance which affects the central nervous system.

Only six of these kavalactones produce noticeable effects, and their concentrations in kava plants vary.

Mature plants are around 2 meters tall with growth adding diameter to the culm and more stalks than height. A grown plant's roots can reach up to 60 centimeters in depth.

The Republic of Vanuatu is recognised as the 'home' of kava because it hosts the largest number of cultivars. The kava plant has historically been grown only in the Pacific islands of Hawaii, Federated States of Micronesia, Vanuatu, Fiji, the Samoas and Tonga. Since world war 2 there has been some kava grown in the Solomon Islands, but most kava used in that country is imported.

Kava is a cash crop in Vanuatu and Fiji.

TRADITIONAL KAVA DRINKING



Kava is consumed in various ways throughout the pacific including Polynesia, Vanuatu, Melanesia, some parts of Micronesia and Australia. Traditionally it is prepared by either chewing, grinding or pounding the roots of the kava plant.

Grinding is done by hand against a cone-shaped block of dead coral; the hand forms a mortar and the coral a pestle. The ground root is mixed with a little water, as the fresh root releases moisture during grinding.

Pounding is done in a large stone with a small log. This is then added to cold water and consumed as quickly as possible.

The taste is slightly pungent, while the distinctive aroma depends on whether it was prepared from dry or fresh plant, and on the variety.

The colour is grey to tan to opaque greenish.

Kava prepared as described above is more potent than processed kava.

Chewing produces the strongest effect because it produces the finest particles. Fresh, undried kava produces a stronger beverage than dry kava.

The strength depends on the species and techniques of cultivation.

Fijians commonly share a drink called "grog", made by pounding sun-dried kava root into a fine powder and mixing it with cold water. Traditionally, grog is drunk from the shorn half-shell of a coconut, called a "bilo."

Despite tasting very much like dirty water, grog is very popular in Fiji, especially among young men and often brings people together for storytelling and socializing.

