

Festivals & Foods of the Ibo tribe



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What/when is the yam festival?



Ceremony from
traditional ceremony



Fowl used for sacrifice

- The Igbo Yam Festival, also known as “!WA JI”, is an annual festival in the spirit of thanksgiving about breaking the first yam of the season's harvest.
- The festival begins with an offering where members pray for renewed life. Yams are then cut by the eldest man in the community ("Eze") and then tossed in prayers of kindness and protection to the Earth and the people's gods. They also make an offering to the spirits of the field. The people, finally, sacrifice a fowl and spread its blood over the farm.
- In preparation for the ceremony, children have performed religious rituals on them, consisting of prayer and brushing materials on the child's body.

After the offerings, the people head home and prepare an abundant amount of food for the feast of all the new yams. This feast (called Afia-ji Ọkụ) is held in thanksgiving for their harvest. The yams are prepared into a yam soup, as fowl is boiled. It is well-known that every guest receives plenty of food, even if they don't attend. The festival is known to have a carnival-like mood, as many attend. No yams are eaten until it is laid before the Yam god "Alusi".



Pictures of Traditional
Igbo Yam Feasts



- This festival occurs once a year in early August and is observed at a sacred location each time.
- The festival can only be held when the first yams are available, therefore, the annual initial planting of the yams must be timed in account for the festival each year. They are planted by seed six months before the ceremony in the first month of the year.

What does it symbolize?

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- The Festival symbolizes to the people the enjoyment following a season of cultivation and hard work. The festival marks the end of the yam farming cycle and the beginning of another. It unites them with the Igbo culture and their heritage.
 - The feast following the ceremony symbolizes the commensality, merriment, and abundance.
 - Religiously, the Igbo Yam Festival and the celebration of the deity of the given land used for yams, represents the people's belief that the yam god "Alusi". This also represents their thankfulness for the crops and their devotion to their culture that is partly-centered around the value of yams.

Why are yams important?

- Yams are an essential part to the Igbo society, as hold immense economic and spiritual value to the Igbo people. Not only do the Igbo people enjoy eating yams, but they're also their main source of food. If the Igbo people have a shortage of yams, they're in major distress.
- Yams traditionally sustain the economy and measure the wealth of a person; the more yams, a person has, the more clout they obtain. They're so significant to the point where robing someone's yam field is a capital offense, regardless of the growth of the yams.
- Yams also hold religious significance, as they have various gods surrounding yams. Examples of yams in their religion are "Chukwu", the god of wealth that holds a yam, and "Ahiajioku", the god that brings protection over the farms.



The background of the entire slide is a close-up photograph of numerous kola nuts. These nuts are oval-shaped and have a mottled appearance with colors ranging from deep red to light tan. They are piled together, creating a textured background.

What is the kola nut?

The Kola Nut is a nut that is a little bit smaller than your thumb. The nut contains caffeine and varies from red to brown. The Kola Nut is grown on trees. The Igbo people use the Nut in traditional ceremonies.

How is it used?

- The Kola Nut is used in multiple events, but the key-purpose of it to the Igbo people is for traditionally welcoming guests into the village through a ceremony. The ceremony starts out with a man picking a kola nut from a tree, which is then followed by the oldest Igbo man blessing the nut.
- The same elder, goes on to break the nut with his hands or a knife. The nut will crack and reveal how many parts it has inside of it. The number of pieces that are inside of it determine the prosperity that it gives to the people present at the ceremony. For example, breaking a nut with six pieces calls for a celebration in itself, on the other hand, breaking a nut with only two pieces in it signifies that there is a problem and the one who broke the nut has a dangerous motive behind the kola.
- Once this process is finished, the visitors explain why they're visiting. During this, parts of the nut are passed around, as well as peanut butter, garden eggs, and palm wine.



Igbo Weddings

- During the season of the Igbo Yam Festivals, many funerals and weddings also take place. It's not uncommon to get invited to a wedding.
- The pre-wedding process starts out with a mutual agreement between the bride and groom that they will marry. The potential groom and his father then will ask permission from the bride's father, as they bring gifts of wine and Kola nuts with them. The men go on to discuss the price of the bride, which can take more than a day to negotiate. After a price is settled, they go on to plan the wedding.



- The post-wedding process begins at the bride's compound/house. The bride sells boiled eggs to the guests to show that she has the capability to generate money and/or open a shop. It is tradition for the bride to search for the groom and be distracted by the invitees. Once she finally finds the groom, they share a cup of wine and the couple is traditionally married. Guests wish the couple prosperity by throwing bills on their foreheads.



Newly-wed after a traditional Igbo Wedding



Guests in a traditional Igbo wedding throwing bills at the newly-weds

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