

Indonesian Batik: Intangible Heritage Wonder

The techniques, symbolism and culture surrounding hand-dyed cotton and silk garments known as Indonesian Batik permeate the lives of Indonesians from beginning to end: infants are carried in batik slings decorated with symbols designed to bring the child luck, and the dead are shrouded in funerary batik. Clothes with everyday designs are worn regularly in business and academic settings, while special varieties are incorporated into celebrations of marriage and pregnancy and into puppet theatre and other art forms. The garments even play the central role in certain rituals, such as the ceremonial casting of royal batik into a volcano.



Batik is also inseparable from Javanese life — annual offerings to the guardians of Java's main volcanoes and the Goddess of the South Sea still include pieces of batik cloth. In weddings throughout Central Java, the patterns of sidomukti, sidoluhur, sidoasih, sidomulyo, wirasat and truntum are used to bless newly married couples and their parents. The rulers of Yogyakarta and Surakarta Palaces always use prescribed patterns like the parang design.

There is also a belief that certain patterns bring bad luck if worn on unsuitable occasions, such as the tambal pattern, which is avoided by a bridal couples as it is feared to bring in patchy luck, like the material's patchwork pattern, while the kawung pattern should not be used to cover the body of a person who dies on a Saturday.


Batik is dyed by proud craftspeople who draw designs on fabric using dots and lines of hot wax, which resists vegetable and other dyes and therefore allows the artisan to colour selectively by

soaking the cloth in one colour, removing the wax with boiling water and repeating if multiple colours are desired.



The wide diversity of patterns reflects a variety of influences, ranging from Arabic calligraphy, European bouquets and Chinese phoenixes to Japanese cherry blossoms and Indian or Persian peacocks. Often handed down within families for generations, the craft of batik is intertwined with the cultural identity of the Indonesian people and, through the symbolic meanings of its colours and designs, expresses their creativity and spirituality.

Traditional dress includes batik. Batiks are collected and passed down as family heirlooms, each being a work of art with its own story. Batik craftspersons would fast and pray before making batik while meditating accompanied by traditional songs. It takes several days to make a hand-stamped batik, and at least 1 month to 1 year to complete a hand-drawn batik. The center of batik artistry is in cities on the island of Java, including Solo, Yogyakarta, Pekalongan or Cirebon.



**Inscribed in 2009 on the Representative List of the
Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity**

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