

Two Maasai Artifacts: The Wedding Necklace & The Rungu

Marriage in traditional Maasai communities is always an arranged affair, with parents choosing the most appropriate partner for their son or daughter. Once the match is decided, the mother of the bride will make two items. The first is a necklace of beaded strings that indicates the woman is engaged. **The second item her mother will make is a wedding collar.** Every part of the collar represents some aspect of the bride's community.



Red symbolizes bravery and strength, but above all, unity as it is the color of the blood of the cow that is slaughtered when the community comes together during celebrations.

Blue symbolizes energy and represents the sky. The sky is of great importance because it provides rain for the cattle.

Green stands for the land, which grows food for the cattle. It symbolizes health.

Orange and yellow represent hospitality because they are the colors of the animal skins on guest beds.

White means purity, as it is the color of the milk from the cows, considered by the Maasai as pure and holy animals.

Finally, black symbolizes the people and all the struggles they must endure.

The collar is a map of the village. Maasai villages are always laid out in a circle, with a fence around the outer perimeter to protect from lions (represented on the edge of the collar by a thin ring of alternating dark and light beads). Houses are arranged just inside the fence (each of the geometric shapes on the collar represents a house in the village).

The center of the village is where the cattle, goats, and sheep are kept at night, and this is represented by the hole in the center of the collar. The number of beaded strings hanging from the collar indicates the number of animals that will be given by the groom's family to the bride's family. The cowry shells on the end of the strings are the symbol of peace (cowries are also placed on a baby's eyes to promote healthy eyesight).



All Maasai men and women wear a beaded pendant corresponding to their age class. All children born in a new decade will receive a collar that signifies that decade.

Women in Maasai society do A LOT! They build houses, gather water and firewood, raise their children and cook meals. On top of all of that, they always find time in the evenings to make beaded creations. Beaded jewelry is an important part of the Maasai culture because they have worn beads for generations. Each beaded piece of art symbolizes an

occasion, an accomplishment or a special relationship. The Maasai now sell their beaded artwork to visitors, and internationally.



Rungu is a traditional stick used in fighting and hunting. Maasai men carry it around as a symbol of power and leadership. If a man is the head of his household, he has a Rungu stick.

