

## The Urikuri Palm - Symbol of Indigenous Craftsmanship and Tradition



### On the way to the Urikuri Palm

The earth is softened by heavy rain. As I hold onto the branches of shrubs and plants, we snake our way through narrow paths in the hot and humid thicket. Deep in the Brazilian Amazon rainforest, I accompany the men and boys of the indigenous Huni Kuin [1] people as they work in the forest. One of the men is Teriano, who lives in the village with his family. Suddenly, he climbs up a palm tree. "We call this type of palm 'Urikuri'," Teriano calls out to me. "It holds a special traditional significance for us. We use its leaves for building our houses and for our craftsmanship." Standing in the crown of the palm, Teriano begins to cut its leaves.





**Traditional craftsmanship from palm leaves**



Back in the village, the women and girls are already waiting for the cut leaves of the Urikuri Palm. Together with the men, they prepare them for their craftsmanship. "The production of traditional handicrafts is part of our responsibilities," tells me Dani, a resident of the village. "Come, join us, and we will show you our craft." I sit down with her and watch as she skillfully weaves the palm leaves into a basket. "With these leaves, we make a variety of utensils, such as baskets and containers for storing and transporting food, sieves for food preparation, fans, bags, and mats," Dani explains to me.



### **Lunch in the traditional Maloca**

Large steaming aluminum pots sizzle over open fireplaces as the women eagerly prepare lunch. There is beef, fresh fish, rice, beans, eggs, boiled or grilled bananas, corn, cassava, and pineapple tea. It is served on mats woven from the leaves of the Urikuri Palm, spread out on the floor of a Maloca. In a group, we sit around the mats and enjoy our meal. The Malocas, whose roofs are also made from the leaves of the Urikuri Palm, have been the traditional houses of the indigenous peoples for many generations. "Nowadays, the Malocas serve as family homes and gathering places for us, but in the past, before the first contact with Europeans more than 500 years ago, the



entire village community lived together in them, without using mattresses or hammocks like we do today," a village resident tells me.



### **An Evening with Music**

The sun slowly sets, and evening falls. It's time for music. Once again, the village community gathers in one of the Malocas. The drums are played with intensity, and powerful healing songs are sung. It's a daily ritual through which the people express their spirituality. Children play wildly around us. Teriano sits next to me and says, "Tomorrow, there will be a sacred ritual here in the village. You are warmly invited to join."



### **Festival in Honor of Vegetables and the Urikuri Palm ("Festival de Legumes")**

The entire village is dressed in their traditional costumes and body paintings. The leaves of the Urikuri Palm also adorn the chests and foreheads of the men. The village's Cacique [2] wears an impressive headdress made of long white harpy eagle feathers and red feathers from macaws. Holding palm leaves in their hands, the men link shoulders and form a snake-like procession. Singing and dancing, they move towards the central square of the village. There, the women and children await them. Together, they form a large



circle, join hands, and dance while singing. Curiously, I ask one of the village residents about the significance of this ritual. "We call this ritual the 'Festival de Legumes' ('Vegetable Festival'). It is performed to support the cultivation and harvest of vegetables that are consumed in the village, such as corn, yams, or cassava. We also wrap the Urikuri Palm leaves around our bodies to honor and sanctify them, as they have been a reliable partner supplying us with the materials essential for the survival of our traditions for centuries." I am impressed as I watch the ritual and admire how proudly they showcase their culture.







## **A New Era**

My stay in the village of the indigenous Huni Kuin people is coming to an end. I have learned that a new era has dawned for the indigenous peoples of Brazil, in which they not only wish to pass on their culture and knowledge to the new generations within their community but also to the non-indigenous population. They hope that through this, there will be a coming together of different cultures and an increased awareness of the significance of nature.

[1] The Huni Kuin people are one of the most prominent indigenous tribes in Brazil. They live on the border with Peru, along the lower reaches of the Jordão River, in Acre, Brazil. The term "Huni Kuin" (Kaxinawá) roughly translates to "true people" or "people with known customs." More detailed information about the Huni Kuin people can be found at the following link (in Portuguese):

[https://pib.socioambiental.org/pt/Povo:Huni\\_Kuin\\_\(Kaxinawá\)](https://pib.socioambiental.org/pt/Povo:Huni_Kuin_(Kaxinawá))

[2] "Cacique" is the term used for the political leader of an indigenous community.