

Pacific Islander News

Past, Present and Future

The Pacific Cultures Gallery is the oldest surviving gallery in the museum and was first opened to the public in 1895.

The Pacific Gallery displays over 3000 artefacts with minimal text or images. This is in marked contrast to contemporary methods of display which use fewer objects and place a greater emphasis on interpretation. Progressively, this will be remedied by the introduction of electronic methods of interpretation rather than by reducing the number of exhibits.

The Past - This gallery represents the Pacific islands when they were colonies administered by Britain, Germany, Holland, France and Australia.

Almost all the museum's Pacific collections are from New Guinea and the Melanesian islands of New Ireland, New Britain, the Solomons, Vanuatu, New Caledonia and Fiji. There is little from Polynesia or Micronesia.

Since World War II, the Pacific has been emerging from its colonial past.

Formerly a British colony, Australia administered Papua from 1908 and New Guinea from 1914 until Papua New Guinea achieved Independence in 1975.

This gallery gives us a view into the past of the Pacific and its peoples, and into the history of museum collecting and display.



However, many of the objects gallery no longer present a true picture of the cultures of these new nations.

But we can learn a lot about their cultures and their history by looking at the objects people once used in their ceremonies, for hunting and warfare, and for daily life.

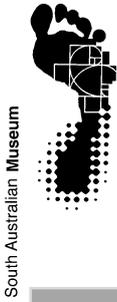
In some cases, those objects, and the traditions associated with them, continue to the present, though in modified form.



The Present - Many of the Pacific islands are now independent nations. These new states are asserting their national identities.

They value their cultural heritage as a means of establishing their distinctiveness within a region of great diversity.

These distinctive identities are revealed in the objects displayed in this gallery.



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Did you know?

- The Pacific Cultures Gallery opened in 1895 and is oldest in the museum.
- It has the largest display of artefacts from the Pacific region in Australia - 3000 artefacts.
- The people of New Guinea and surrounding Islands speak approximately 1000 languages – 25% of the languages on earth.

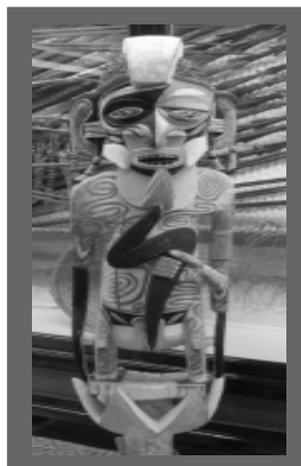
The Future - Pacific island cultures are changing all the time. But, this gallery has stood still for several decades.

We want to make this gallery relevant to the Pacific of the third millenium while at the same time preserving its historic character.



We are doing this by keeping the structure and content of the original wall cases and placing contemporary material nearby.

This process was commenced in 1993 for the New Britain and New Ireland displays and continued in 1998 for Vanuatu.



With the guidance of contemporary Pacific Islanders, and additional information obtained by archival and field research, we will be able to show something of the Pacific our great-grandfathers saw, the changes that have taken place over the past century and also the continuities that demonstrate the strength and lasting value of their traditions.

Material was obtained by the museum mainly from individuals who lived and worked in the Pacific region as traders, missionaries, researchers and colonial government officials.

Many of these people grew up and were educated in South Australia, were based in South Australia, or retired here.

The South Australian Museum is committed to reviving and maintaining relationships with those Pacific communities whose cultural material is represented in its collections. This gallery provides the space for presenting the tangible evidence of those relationships.





Pacific Cultures Gallery Map

