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UPU MA TALA LIVING HERITAGE





UPU MA TALA HERITAGE TALANOA SERIES

- 01** O le Fagufagu (nose flute) | 22 September 2025
- 02** O le Pā-alo-atu (composite bonito lure) | 4 October 2025
- 03** O le Gaosiga o le 'Afa (coconut sennit) | 11 October 2025
- 04** O le Va'a Tā Palolo I (palolo canoe) | 18 October & 3-7 November 2025
- 05** O le Gaosiga o le Siapo (tapa or barkcloth art) | 8 November 2025
- 06** O le Va'a Tā Palolo II (palolo expedition) | 13 November 2025
- 07** Fa'asao lou Fa'asinomaga Fa'aleaganu'u (safeguarding your cultural heritage) | 10 December 2025

SAFEGUARDING SAMOA'S LIVING HERITAGE

Samoa stands at the heart of the Pacific's rich tapestry of living heritage—its oral traditions, performing arts, craftsmanship, rituals, and knowledge systems shaping the identity, cohesion, and resilience of its communities. In recognition of this cultural wealth, UNESCO and the Tiapapata Art Centre have launched the Upu ma Tala – Heritage Talanoa Series, a national initiative dedicated to the revitalization and transmission of intangible cultural heritage at risk across Samoa.

Rooted in Samoa's National Culture Framework (2018–2028) and aligned with the Pacific Regional Culture Strategy (2022–2032), the initiative directly supports the implementation of UNESCO's 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, to which Samoa is a State Party. From September to December 2025, the series brings together knowledge holders, artisans, community members, and cultural experts to explore and document iconic Samoan practices.

Samoa also holds a unique distinction in the Pacific as one of only three Pacific Island countries with an element inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity—'le Samoa, the fine mat weaving tradition, which was inscribed in 2019—highlighting the country's strong commitment to safeguarding and transmitting living heritage.

Through talanoa, field explorations, and collaborative knowledge exchange, the series fosters spaces where generations meet—where knowledge is transmitted, renewed, and celebrated. Beyond documentation, the initiative will generate high-quality digital archives, short documentary films, and visually engaging educational materials, ensuring lasting visibility and accessibility of Samoan cultural heritage for schools, communities, policymakers, and international partners.



■ O LE FAGU FAGU
NOSE FLUTE



O LE FAGUFAGU

NOSE FLUTE

Knowledge holders: Saia Tau'ihati & Tau'ilili Alpha Maiava

Saia Tu'itahi is a Pacific musician and producer whose work centres around the traditional Tongan nose-flute and the revitalisation of this artform in contemporary musical contexts

Tau'ilili Alpha Maiava is a Samoan-born New Zealand-based composer, vocalist and cultural content creator whose work focuses on the revival and preservation of Tagata Moana (Pacific) cultural & musical heritage

Music and dance are vital expressions of the rich intangible cultural heritage of the Pacific. They serve not only as entertainment but as an integral part of ceremonies, rituals, and identity. Across many islands of Polynesia, traditional musical instruments include slit drums, a rolled-up mat used primarily as a timekeeper, and the nose flute known as *fagufagu* in Samoa.

The word *fagufagu* means to awaken, and the instrument is believed to have been used to wake the highest chiefs of the land. This instrument is not played with the mouth but with the breath of one nostril. In Samoan belief, the nose carries the sacred “breath of life”, and the act of breathing through it is considered pure and spiritually significant. This symbolism is also reflected in the traditional Samoan greeting, *sogi*, where two people press noses together, a practice no longer used in Samoa but still carried out among the Maori in New Zealand, where it is known as *hongi*.

Crafted from bamboo, Samoan nose flutes are simple yet profoundly refined. Sealed at both ends by natural nodes of the bamboo, the playing surface has five evenly spaced holes, with a sixth hole placed just below the center one.

The Heritage Talanoa Session on the *fagufagu* generated concrete momentum toward revitalizing one of Samoa's most delicate musical traditions. By combining documentary learning, hands-on demonstrations, and direct engagement with knowledge holders, the session enabled participants to understand and practice the essential steps of crafting and playing the bamboo nose-flute—from selecting and preparing raw materials to shaping, tuning, and producing its distinctive sound.



O LE PĀ-ALO-ATU COMPOSITE BONITO LURE



O LE PĀ-ALO-ATU

COMPOSITE BONITO LURE

Knowledge holder: Galumalemana Steven Percival

Galumalemana Steven Percival is the Managing Trustee of the Tiafata Art Centre. His research, documentation, and creative engagement with Samoan material culture, including craft revival initiatives, traditional architecture work, pottery and canoe-making workshops, and community-based heritage projects, provided the conceptual foundation and practical experience that shaped this national initiative.

The Pā-alo-atu is a traditional Samoan composite trolling lure used for bonito fishing in customary marine practice. The lure's construction and use form part of the Fa'a Samoa, the traditional Samoan way of life that emphasises communal activity, shared responsibility, and the transmission of specialised knowledge through generations. Its construction, use, and symbolism reflect an intimate understanding of ocean currents, fish behaviour, seasonal patterns, and the natural materials available along the coast. While traditional bonito trolling lures are no longer made in Samoa today, a number of hooks remain in private family collections, cared for by the descendants of the fishermen who once crafted and used them.

Historically, lures were crafted in a range of colours and designs, each created with a specific purpose and season in mind. Fishers distinguished between these variations with names such as pā-sina, laumilo, ulia, and ulia-laumilo, showcasing the depth and precision of Samoan ecological knowledge. More than a tool, the lure carries a rich body of specialised knowledge once held by the expert fishers of a bygone era.

Crafted from a combination of shell, bone, fibre, and wood, the pā-alo-atu required exceptional skill and a deep understanding of fish behaviour passed down through generations. Although the practice of making these lures has largely faded, their craftsmanship remains a powerful testament to Samoa's seafaring heritage. The workshop helped document and share knowledge that now rests with only a small number of experienced fishermen, thereby contributing to its continuity and keeping the conversation around these traditional practices alive.



O LE GAOSIGA O LE 'AFA

CRAFTING COCONUT SENNIT



O LE GAOSIGA O LE 'AFA

CRAFTING COCONUT SENNIT

Knowledge holders: Avamua Alatina Tikeri Matamua and Lesa Laufale Faanu Togipau

Avamua Alatina Tikeri Matamua is a distinguished Samoan heritage artist known for his specialised craftsmanship in stone-tool making and the broader traditional crafts of Samoa

Lesla Laufale Faanu Togipau is an artist from Saanaou Village, Samoa, known for his highly skilled house and canoe building and knowledge of the natural environment and the materials required for his craft

In Samoa, the coconut tree is deeply valued for its versatility and enduring place in everyday life. Often called the “tree of life,” it provides food, materials, and medicine, with nearly every part of the tree used in some way. Among its many contributions, one of the most culturally significant is the production of coconut sennit, or ‘afa Samoa—a strong, hand-twisted cordage made from coconut husk fibres.

‘Afa is essential to traditional Samoan construction and craftsmanship that is made of niu'afa—a coconut variety that may well yield the longest coconut husk in the world. The meticulous process involves soaking coconut husks in seawater to soften them, extracting and drying the fibres, and then twisting and braiding them into dense, resilient cord. This durable material has long been used to lash together the structural elements of fale (traditional houses) and vā'a (outrigger canoes), providing strength that withstands both time and saltwater.

Beyond its practical function, ‘afa carries symbolic meaning in Samoan culture. Its interwoven fibres evoke unity, cooperation, and the ingenuity of creating indispensable tools from the natural environment.

By documenting and sharing these techniques, the workshop helped sustain community knowledge of ‘afa production and strengthened appreciation for the craftsmanship that underpins Samoa's built heritage and maritime traditions.



O LE VA'A TĀ PALOLO

PALOLO CANOE



O LE VA'A TĀ PALOLO

PALOLO CANOE

Knowledge holders: Galumalemana Steven Percival & Avamua Alatina Tikeri Matamua

Galumalemana Steven Percival, Managing Trustee of the Tiapapata Art Centre
Avamua Alatina Tikeri Matamua is a distinguished Samoan heritage artist

Fishing for palolo in Samoa involves catching the swarming reproductive segments of the *Eunice viridis* worm just before dawn during the waning moon in October or November. Occurring only on specific nights tied to the lunar cycle, the palolo rising has long been a valued food source and a cherished communal practice. Preparing the va'a and organizing the fishing trip bring families and villages together, drawing on deep knowledge of tides, moon phases, and nearshore ecosystems.

The Heritage Talanoa Session on Va'a Tā Palolo provided participants with the opportunity to reconnect with this tradition by learning how the lightweight, swift canoe is crafted for stability in nearshore waters. Under the guidance of knowledge holders, participants explored the careful selection of materials, the carving stages involved in shaping the hull, and the cultural protocols embedded within the practice of preparing a va'a for the palolo season.

Once at sea, palolo fishing involves using small nets, woven scoops, or even the hands to gather the delicate worms as they rise to the surface. Because the palolo is fragile and appears only briefly, the practice demands attentiveness, cooperation, and precise timing. Villagers often work side by side, calling out sightings and helping one another collect the catch efficiently while respecting the reef environment.

Today, Va'a Tā Palolo and the tradition of palolo fishing remain symbols of Samoan resilience, identity, and sustainable coastal harvesting. By documenting knowledge and offering structured spaces for intergenerational learning, the workshop contributed to the continuity of skills and strengthened appreciation for the cultural, ecological, and communal significance of the palolo rising.



O LE GAOSIGA O LE SIAPO

THE MAKING OF TAPA



O LE GAOSIGA O LE SIAPO

THE MAKING OF TAPA

Knowledge holders: Makulata Taua, Rebecca Tautala and Tusolo Aumale

Makulata Taua, Rebecca Tautala and Tusolo Aumale are master siapo artists based in Siutu, Savai'i, who are recognised as knowledge holders, cultural practitioners, and educators of their crafts

Siapo, the traditional tapa or barkcloth of Samoa, is made from the inner bark of the paper mulberry tree, u'a. After 10 to 14 months of growth, the trees are harvested, and the outer bark is carefully peeled away to reveal the soft bast within. This inner bark is soaked and cleaned— using clam shells—before being prepared for beating. The careful preparation of u'a requires patience, and attentiveness, ensuring that each strip is properly softened and purified before it can be transformed into cloth.

During the Heritage Talanoa Session on siapo, participants were guided through the process by experienced practitioners, gaining hands-on insight into each stage of production. Using the tutua (wooden anvil) and i'e (wooden mallet), they learned how steady, rhythmic pounding widens and thins the bark into pliable sheets. Multiple sheets are then joined using natural starch glue made from the manioka plant, demonstrating the precision and knowledge needed to create a single cohesive cloth.

Once the cloth is formed, it is decorated with natural dyes derived from plants and earth pigments. The workshop introduced participants to the deep reds of togo, the blacks of burnt candlenut, the yellow range from ano (wild turmeric), and other traditional hues. Artisans showcased both freehand design techniques, known as siapo mamananu, and the use of upeti—carved wooden design boards—over which the cloth is rubbed to transfer intricate patterns. These motifs, rich with Samoan symbolism, reflect identity, environment, and cultural continuity.



O LE IPU'ELE

SAMOAN POTTERY



O LE IPU'ELE

SAMOAN POTTERY

Knowledge holder: Prof. Helene Martinsson-Wallin

Helene Martinsson-Wallin is a Swedish archaeologist and professor at Uppsala University in Sweden, where she serves in the Department of Archaeology and Ancient History

Samoa pottery, or ipu 'ele, represents one of the archipelago's oldest artistic traditions, tracing its roots to the Lapita people who settled the region nearly 3,000 years ago. Although archaeological discoveries reveal a rich ceramic heritage, pottery-making gradually disappeared from everyday practice. Today, renewed interest in local clay craftsmanship is helping communities reconnect with these deep ancestral traditions and revive knowledge that has long remained buried beneath the soil.

During the Heritage Talanoa Session on Samoan pottery, participants learned to locate and collect local clay and prepare it through drying, crushing, sieving, and removing impurities. This meticulous preparation ensures the clay becomes workable and strong enough to be shaped into vessels that draw from both ancient techniques and contemporary creativity. Under the guidance of skilled ceramicists and archaeologists, participants practiced traditional hand-building methods, including coiling, pinching, and smoothing surfaces with natural tools.

The workshop also introduced Lapita-style decorative techniques, allowing participants to experiment with patterns inspired by motifs found on excavated pottery sherds. Firing the finished pieces—whether in an open pit or kiln—marked the final transformation of raw clay into durable ceramic, echoing the craftsmanship of Samoa's earliest artisans.

Beyond technical training, the revival of Samoan pottery strengthens cultural pride and deepens public appreciation for the islands' archaeological heritage. By reconnecting communities with local materials and ancestral craftsmanship, the workshop contributes to the goals of the Upu ma Tala – Heritage Talanoa Series, helping safeguard endangered practices and ensuring that the knowledge and spirit of ipu 'ele remain part of Samoa's living heritage.



FA'ASAO LOU FA'ASINOMAGA

FA'ALEAGANU'U

SAFEGUARDING YOUR CULTURAL HERITAGE



FA'ASAO LOU FA'ASINOMAGA FA'ALEAGANU'U

SAFEGUARDING YOUR CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Upu ma Tala – Heritage Talanoa Series takes its name from the Samoan proverb O tama a tagata e fafaga i upu ma tala, a'o tama a manu e fafaga i fuga o lā'au, which reminds us that people are nourished by words and stories. This idea lays at the heart of the series: dialogue, shared knowledge, and spoken tradition as pillars for safeguarding Samoa's intangible cultural heritage.

Since 2006, the Tiapapata Art Centre has supported the transmission of Samoan knowledge systems, creative practices, and oral traditions. Its community-based cultural work provided the foundation for the development of the Upu ma Tala – Heritage Talanoa Series.

The final session, Fa'asao lou Fa'asinomaga Fa'aleaganu'u – Safeguarding Your Cultural Heritage, is held on International Human Rights Day, 10 December 2025, to emphasise the deep links between cultural heritage and human rights. UNESCO affirms that cultural rights—individual and collective—are fundamental human rights, enabling people to participate in, create, and enjoy their culture; express themselves in their language; receive culturally respectful education; and safeguard and transmit their traditions. Marking this conclusion on Human Rights Day underscores that protecting Samoa's living heritage is inseparable from realising these rights.

The session brings together Government, civil society, cultural professionals, practitioners, and knowledge holders for a dynamic talanoa reflecting on the knowledge shared, the practices transmitted, and the responsibilities ahead for the ongoing safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage. The session also provides a platform to exchange perspectives on the opportunities that safeguarding traditional knowledge offers for sustainable livelihoods and an inclusive creative economy.

The initiative highlights that living heritage supports identity, wellbeing, resilience, and sustainable livelihoods. It also demonstrates the strong synergies between UNESCO's 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.





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