

Jaki-ed museum launched

Would you like to wander through the British Museum and admire its well-preserved collection of jaki-ed? How about zipping over to Stuttgart, Germany, so you can take a stroll through the Linden Museum to see its extensive set of finely-woven Marshallese clothing mats.

Don't have the time or money? No problem, you can stay home and visit the local Majuro cinema and watch a 'Majuro Productions' show on the history of the beautiful Marshallese mats.

Cinema? In Majuro? Yes! You can find the movie house and the museums on your computer. Type www.clothingmatsofthemarshalls.com into Firefox, Explorer, Safari or whichever Internet browser you prefer and within moments you will be able to visit the Marshall Islands' newest museum, which is dedicated to the history, revival, and future of jaki-ed.

"About five years ago, Betty Kam of Honolulu's Bishop Museum, Maria Fowler, MaryLou Foley, and myself were having lunch in Honolulu and we were talking about the problem of Marshallese not having access to the jaki-ed," the University of the South Pacific's Director Dr. Irene Taafaki said. "We were trying to think of the safest way to show the mats, old and new.

"Overseas, museums have sophisticated buildings with climate control to protect the collections. Plus they have highly-tuned archival systems.

"That didn't seem likely here and so a museum for jaki-ed didn't appear to be possible," Irene said. "But the four of us kept considering how Marshallese people needed to be connected to this special part of their culture."

It was then that the idea hit them. "We thought, 'Wouldn't it be great if we could have a virtual museum. It would be a place where everyone, everywhere can view and learn about jaki-ed.'"

There was still the hitch that Majuro had, at that time, slow Internet. "Then, as soon as we got broadband when NTA brought in the fiber optic cable, that's when I thought, 'Now is the time.'"

Irene said she was delighted that Australia generously supported the concept of a virtual museum. "We then looked at various virtual museum styles on the web and, frankly, didn't like any of them. We wanted one that was characteristically Marshallese, unique and engaging. And that's what we've got.

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While the goal is to familiarize



The entrance to the Virtual Museum of Marshallese Fine Weaving.

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Fine mats on sale in the store

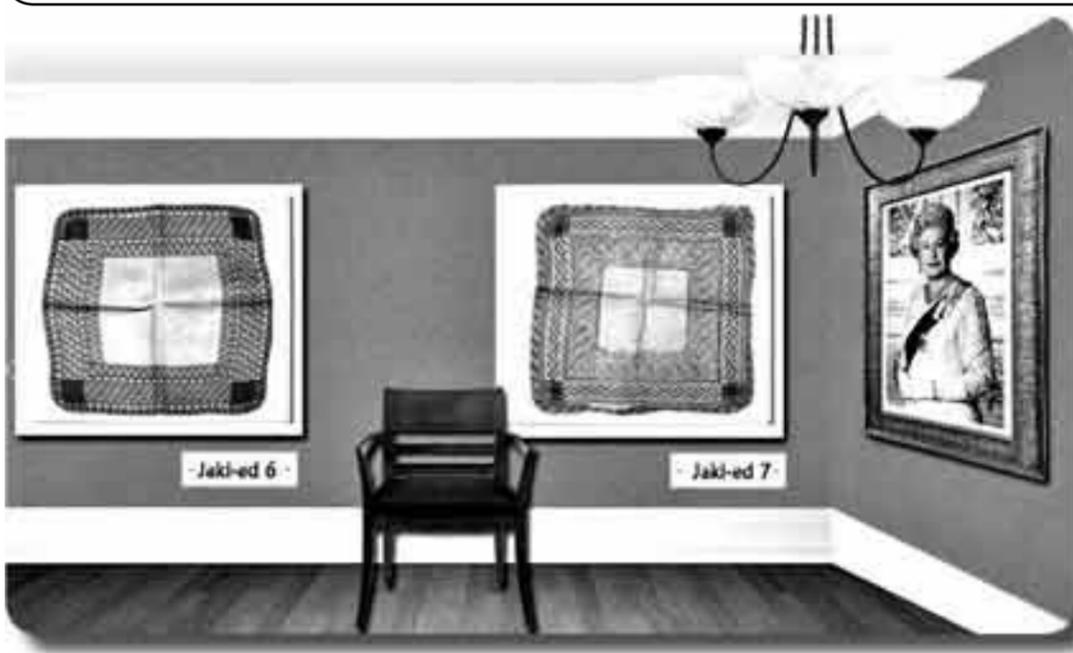


At the heart of the jaki-ed virtual museum is the store, which allows contemporary weavers to sell their creations around the globe. Each jaki-ed is displayed in color alongside a photograph of the weaver and her name and home atoll. As well, the size and price of the jaki-ed appears in another picture on the wall.

The University of the South Pacific's Tamara Greenstone is thrilled about the museum store. "Up until now, the only way the weavers could sell their jaki-ed was at the annual exhibition and auction held each September at the Marshall Islands Resort." That said, a few mats

are sold on a semi-regular basis from the USP campus. "Quite a few people in Majuro know that the weavers have their 'home' at USP and they will come looking to see if they can buy a jaki-ed. But that's not terribly satisfactory," Tamara said, "because sometimes we have spare jaki-ed and sometimes we don't.

"By looking at the store online, anyone can see what is available and contact us to buy. Doesn't matter if they're in Majuro, in Springdale, Arkansas, or wherever in the world, people can now order a jaki-ed of their choice for a wedding, a kemem or just because they want to own one of these special mats."



One of the rooms in the British museum featuring jaki-ed.

Islands and Majuro Atoll Local Government. "I learned some new tricks," he said, "but the biggest challenge I faced was coming up with a design for the imaginary buildings."

Other virtual museums have real museums to photograph and then use on their sites. The jaki-ed team did not have this luxury, so they had to create a museum of their own. "Thanks to design expert, Karen, things were made a lot easier," Jaston said.

On the way, Jaston didn't just learn new tricks, he also touched base with his history.

"When I first heard of and saw pictures of jaki-ed, I thought they were just finely woven decorative mats. Little did I know that these were what my ancestors used as clothes. Another thing I didn't know about was that there are jaki-ed housed in large museums overseas."

and educate Marshallese about jaki-ed, there is a hope that the virtual museum's existence will bring about the discovery of more historic mats.

"We are hoping that curators of other museums around the world will contact us to tell us that they, too, have jaki-ed in their col-

lections and that they would be willing to share," Irene said. "It would be so lovely if we got an email saying, 'ooh, we've got one of these mats.'"

The site was created by Karen Earnshaw and Jaston Anjain. "We're particularly proud of Jaston who got his information sys-

tems degrees at USP in Suva and has been key to the technical side of the site."

Jaston said that he learned a lot from the project as the site bears little resemblance to the other web sites with which he has been involved, which include those belonging to the Bank of Marshall