



Canoes of Vanuatu: Sustainable Sea Transport  
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# Vanuatu



# Vanuatu's canoe culture is a living one!

- ❑ First canoes brought the intrepid Lapita people, food crops, knowledge & island technologies
- ❑ 'Spare parts are on the island'- sustainable!!!
- ❑ Sea is a highway!
- ❑ Continues to meet day-to-day needs for fishing, transport & hauling goods, visit gardens, 'wokabot' to visit family & friends & trade/exchange goods
- ❑ Canoes linked all islands of Vanuatu and beyond
- ❑ Ship, water-taxi, fishing boat, truck & family car – **are working boats & are free!**
- ❑ Canoe styles vary by Island
- ❑ Imp't in oral histories





# Canoes as expressions of TK

- Are brilliant expression of traditional knowledge
- Various woods chosen, carving techniques, canoe & sail designs, lashings & caulking methods, joinery, rope making, sail weaving
- A dozen different trees & plants used on a sail canoe
- Canoes also helped to maintain biodiversity
- Outrigger design perseveres



# Knowledge of the sea, weather, marine life, navigation & sailing techniques

- ❑ Tides, currents, swells, winds, weather prediction- cloud types, cyclones, etc.
- ❑ Navigation - environmental & celestial cues;
- ❑ Sailing, steering, paddling & safety techniques in various weather conditions
- ❑ Knowledge of offshore marine life - whales & dolphins, turtles, flying fish, tunas & other pelagic fish, seabirds, etc



Large inter-island sail canoes - trade (redistribute resources & 'bisnis pig'), ceremonies, strengthening kinship alliances & knowledge diffusion















Whalers, Sandalwooders, Blackbirders, Traders, Planters & Missionaries all came to coastal areas - depopulation, displacement & disruption of seafarers













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# VCC Canoe Program

- Document different canoe & sail styles & ethnobotany
- Encourage & promote canoe use and events incl. inter-island sail canoes
- Museum exhibition/poster
- Canoe picture booklets
- Produce canoe sails
- Promote canoe handicrafts
- **Revival highlights include:**
- 'Vanuatu' canoe to PNG
- Fisheries program in 1990s
- Dayspring IV of Aneityum
- National Arts Festivals
- Te Ngaru Matua Waka Fest
- Melanesian Arts Festivals
- Akhamb Sandrawing Fest
- Comm. & School Workshops



Two types of pre-contact sails; 1) Oceanic Spritsail -  
'Wing tip' unique to central & northern Vanuatu  
(Delta-foil with vortex lift!!! -a study in birds)





## 2) Oceanic Lateen sail of TAFEA seen by Cook: links with Fiji & Polynesia via back migrations



# Sails today - Sprit, lug & 'leg of mutton'



























# Canoe knowledge & practice issues

- ❑ Loss of traditional designs
- ❑ Loss of TK associated with the sea, weather, navigation
- ❑ Loss of sailing skills
- ❑ Loss of canoe cutting skills
- ❑ Shortage of preferred woods (need to replant)
- ❑ Lack of accessible canoe cutting tools-adzes, chisels
- ❑ Canoes are under-valued & somewhat taken for granted
- ❑ Helps to sponsor canoe events to promote them
- ❑ Need to ‘mainstream’ canoes in development programs so they are not displaced by boats



What is the economic contribution of canoes? Million's of vatu every island/year!

















# Concluding Remarks - Why do people continue to sail canoes?

- ❑ **Mostly due to a need!**
- ❑ Remote areas where shipping is limited for fuel, spare parts
- ❑ Areas where people live on offshore islets but have gardens on the mainland
- ❑ Remote areas where the cash economy is limited as boats are expensive to purchase
- ❑ Festivals & canoe races stimulate sail canoe use, so skills are maintained
- ❑ Now linked with eco-tourism
- ❑ Cultural revival, identity & mana are additional reasons & process is strengthened by Festivals & other canoe events



# Concluding Remarks -other observations

- Paddle canoes still common & used for coastal work including fishing & some inter-island travel
- Introduction of FG canoes has not been self-sustaining
- Donors contribute to an artificial economy by donating O/B boats to communities for the asking
- Often no training goes with the boats regarding maintenance & small business management
- skills, so many of these donations not sustainable but undermine sail canoe revival attempts & associated TK revival
- Gov't policy not always supportive of inter-island sailing due to safety concerns -inter-island travel is often banned;
- Canoes have very low environmental footprint 😊
- Provide sustainable sea transport for free, day-to-day!

- Canoes remain an enduring expression of Oceanic ingenuity, art, science, tradition & knowledge & are an appropriate symbol of independence, self-reliance & cooperation.
- We need to support this rich heritage!



# Fair Winds & Tangio Tumas

