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Igwa Nshi Festival: *A Sacred Celebration of Heritage in Eke, Udi, Enugu State*

By Chuka Odike

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FEATURE
IMAGE

**Igwa Nshi Eke Cultural Festival at
Eke in Udi LGA of Enugu - Amokwe
Community TV.**

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IGWA NSHI FESTIVAL

Igwa Nshi Festival: A Sacred Celebration of Heritage in Eke, Udi, Enugu State

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The Igwa Nshi Festival is a revered cultural and spiritual event celebrated by the Eke community in Udi Local Government Area of Enugu State, Nigeria. This festival is deeply embedded in Igbo tradition, serving as a time for ancestral veneration, thanksgiving, and communal unity. It is one of the most significant festivals in the Waawa Igbo sub-group, reflecting their belief in the continuous connection between the living and their ancestors.

The Igwa Nshi Festival is more than just a celebration; it is a sacred obligation that reaffirms the cultural identity and historical heritage of the Eke people. Through rituals, masquerade performances, traditional wrestling, and communal feasting, the festival strengthens social bonds and reinforces the values of peace, bravery, and prosperity.

01

Historical and Cultural Background

The Igwa Nshi Festival dates back centuries and is believed to have originated from the warrior traditions of the ancient Eke people. Oral history suggests that it was initially a victory festival, a time when warriors returned from battles to offer thanksgiving to the gods and ancestors for protection and success. Over time, the festival evolved into a broader celebration that encompasses agriculture, social

justice, spiritual cleansing, and leadership recognition.



• Okechukwu leading village contingency

Igwa Nshi festival enlivens Eke, Enugu community – The Sun Newspaper.

The festival's name, "Igwa Nshi," translates to "invoking the spirits" or "celebrating the spirits", which highlights its spiritual nature. It is believed that during the festival, the spirits of the ancestors return to bless the land. To honor them, the people of Eke perform rituals, offer sacrifices, and participate in sacred dances.

02

Major Highlights of the Igwa Nshi Festival

The festival begins with a sacred invocation led by the Nze na Ozo (titled elders) and traditional priests at the community shrine. This ceremony is crucial as it seeks the blessings of the ancestors and the

gods for peace, fertility, and prosperity.

The elders offer kola nuts, palm wine, and animal sacrifices to appease the deities. Prayers are made for a fruitful year, protection from misfortune, and the unity of the Eke people. The Eze (traditional ruler) of Eke plays a central role in leading these prayers and pronouncing blessings upon the people. This ritual sets the tone for the entire festival, ensuring that the spiritual world acknowledges and accepts the community's offerings.

2. Masquerade Processions (Mmanwụ Performance)

One of the most visually striking aspects of the Igwa Nshi Festival is the masquerade display (Mmanwụ). In Igbo cosmology, masquerades are believed to be earthly manifestations of spirits, representing ancestral forces, moral authority, and historical figures. Different categories of masquerades participate, each with unique symbolic meanings. Some are entertainers, while others enforce traditional laws and deliver mystical performances.

The masquerades wear complicated designed costumes and masks, performing energetic dances and acrobatics that captivate the audience. Some masquerades engage in mock battles, symbolizing the bravery of past warriors. This performance serves as a spiritual bridge between the human and ancestral realms, reinforcing the community's cultural heritage and belief system.

Wrestling (Mgba Ndi Igbo) is a highly anticipated segment of the Igwa Nshi Festival. It is a display of physical strength, endurance, and skill, dating back to the days when wrestling was used to select warriors and leaders.

Young men from different villages compete in friendly yet intense wrestling matches. Victors earn respect, prestige, and sometimes chieftaincy titles. The event is accompanied by traditional drumming and chanting, creating an atmosphere of excitement and pride. This contest is a symbol of manhood in Igbo society and continues to be an

important rite of passage for young men in Eke.

4. Communal Feasting, Drumming and Entertainment

Food plays a central role in the Igwa Nshi Festival. As a harvest festival, it is a time for the community to share the bounty of the land and enjoy a variety of traditional delicacies. Special foods such as pounded yam, abacha (African salad), nkwoobi (spicy cow leg), and palm wine are prepared in large quantities.

The feasting encourages social interaction, reconciliation, and the strengthening of family ties. Music and dance accompany the meal, with performances from local musicians playing indigenous instruments such as the ogene (gong), ekwe (slit drum), and oja (flute). This aspect of the festival reflects the spirit of hospitality and unity that defines Igbo culture.



Igwa Nshi Festival Eke – Ou Travel and Tour.

The Igwa Nshi Festival is also an occasion for recognizing community

leaders, titleholders, and individuals who have contributed to the progress of Eke. The Eze of Eke and the Nze na Ozo titleholders confer honors and chieftaincy titles on deserving individuals.

These titles come with responsibilities and serve as a way of preserving the traditional governance structure. The event also provides an opportunity to resolve disputes and reaffirm communal laws. This segment highlights the importance of leadership, wisdom, and service to the community.

03

Modern Relevance and Challenges

In today's rapidly changing world, the Igwa Nshi Festival faces challenges due to urban migration, Western influences, and religious shifts. Many young people relocate to cities, leading to a decline in participation. Additionally, the spread of Christianity and modern lifestyles has led some to question certain aspects of the festival.

However, efforts are being made to preserve and promote the festival as an essential part of Igbo heritage. Some of these efforts include:

- Documentation of Igwa Nshi Festival through academic research and cultural archives.
- Integration of tourism activities, attracting visitors who wish to experience authentic Igbo traditions.
- Educational programs to teach younger generations about the significance of the festival.

Despite these challenges, the Igwa Nshi Festival remains a powerful expression of Igbo identity and spirituality.

The Igwa Nshi Festival of Eke, Udi, Enugu State is a sacred and vibrant celebration that embodies the ancestral, cultural, and spiritual essence of the Igbo people. From its sacred rituals and masquerade performances to its wrestling competitions and communal feasting, the festival serves as a living connection between the past and the present.

As Eke continues to preserve its heritage, the Igwa Nshi Festival stands as a testament to the resilience, unity, and rich traditions of the Igbo people. By maintaining and promoting this festival, the community not only honours its ancestors but also ensures that future generations inherit a culture of strength, identity, and communal harmony.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chuka Odiike

I'm a dedicated civil engineer with a passion for infrastructure development and community empowerment. With a strong background in engineering, my work focuses on creating sustainable solutions for urban and rural development projects. Outside of my professional career, I'm deeply interested in Igbo history and culture. I actively explore ways to impact society by using historical lessons to inspire and educate others about the rich cultural heritage of the Igbo people, aiming to bridge tradition and modern development.



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