



Ozi Ikòrò

AFRICAN HISTORY · CULTURE · INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

CULTURAL HERITAGE

Nwaotam Ndoki: *A Vibrant Celebration of Igbo Culture*

By Chuka Odike

Ozikoro.com · Cultural Heritage · 4 min read

FEATURE
IMAGE

Screenshot

Article image · caption retained from the published Ozikoro article



Ozi Ikòrò
NWAOTAM NDOKI

Nwaotam Ndoki: A Vibrant Celebration of Igbo Culture

By Chuka Odike · Cultural Heritage · Ozikoro.com

Imagine a lively village in Abia and States, Nigeria, where the streets come alive with the rhythmic beat of drums and the colourful sway of masquerades under the December sun. This is Ohanso, a hidden treasure in Ukwa East Local Government Area, and every year, it hosts the Nwaotam Festival—a captivating cultural celebration that pulses with Igbo heritage. Picture families reuniting, the air filled with the aroma of yam dishes, and the community gathering to honor their ancestors with dance and feasting. Held annually on December 25, unless it falls on a Sunday, this festival is a vibrant expression of gratitude, unity, and pride, drawing Ohanso's people and visitors into a rich tapestry of tradition. It's a moment when this quiet Abia community shines, offering a glimpse into the soul of Igbo culture.

01

A Tradition Tied to Ancestral Roots

The Nwaotam Festival in Ohanso has its origins among the Ndoki people, an Igbo subgroup historically linked to Abia, Rivers and Akwa Ibom States. While specific origins in Ohanso are passed down through oral tradition, the festival shares roots with the broader Nwaotam tradition of the Ubani people, particularly those of Opobo and Bonny in Rivers State. The name "Nwaotam" is believed to derive from the ancient Ndoki deity Ottam, a spiritual figure central to the festival's early rites. Historical accounts suggest the Ndoki, known for

their distinctive tribal marks and robust physiques, brought this tradition during their interactions with the Ibani in the 18th and 19th centuries, a period marked by the slave trade.



Photo: Ndoki Nmanma nu Media

In Ohanso, Nwaotam evolved into a thanksgiving celebration for the yam harvest, a staple crop, and a time to honor ancestors and seek blessings for the coming year. Celebrated on December 25—shifting to the following day if it's a Sunday—it aligns with the Christian holiday of Christmas, blending indigenous rituals with modern influences. This fusion reflects Ohanso's adaptability, maintaining its cultural essence while embracing a shared festive spirit.

02

Preparing for the Cultural Showcase

Preparation begins in early December. Families in Ohanso's villages gather yams, the festival's centerpiece, and women cook traditional

dishes—pounded yam, pepper soup, and palm wine. Men craft masquerades in secret, using raffia, feathers, and painted masks to represent ancestral spirits, a practice echoing the Ottam cult's legacy. The community sets the date, ensuring it honours both tradition and the Christmas calendar, with elders overseeing the process to maintain authenticity.



Nwaotam Masquerade Ndoki

The days before build excitement with preliminary dances, and the town welcomes indigenes returning from cities or abroad. By December 25, Ohanso is alive—streets decorated, homes open, and hearts ready for a day of celebration that blends old rites with new joy.

03

A Day of Dance, Feasting, and Unity

The Nwaotam Festival unfolds on December 25, starting with a morning ceremony where community leaders offer prayers and the first yam to ancestors and God, a ritual of gratitude for the harvest. The yam, often roasted and shared, marks the eating season's start, a moment of communal bonding.

The streets then burst with masquerade parades, their dances a mix of grace and energy that delight the crowd. Children chase the figures, laughing, while adults toss coins in appreciation. Cultural performances—traditional dances and storytelling—fill the day, showcasing Ohanso's artistic spirit. Food stalls serve yam dishes and palm wine, fostering a festive atmosphere. The event ends with a final blessing, the masquerades retreating as the community reflects on its heritage, often extending into evening celebrations.

04

A Festival with Purpose and Challenges

Nwaotam is Ohanso's cultural lifeline. The masquerades and prayers connect the living to their ancestors, reinforcing Igbo values of gratitude and community. It unites the village, pulling indigenes home and attracting visitors who marvel at its vibrant displays. The festival also boosts local pride, with leaders encouraging cultural preservation amidst modern influences.

Economically, it draws tourists, filling local markets, though it faces

challenges. The blend with Christmas raises questions from some Christian factions about its spiritual elements, but Ohanso's people view it as a cultural celebration, not idolatry. Security ensures safety, addressing rare incidents, ensuring the festival's growth.

05

Ohanso: A Village of Culture and Resilience

Ohanso, part of Ukwa East LGA, is a rural hub in Abia State, known for farming and its Ndoki heritage. Near the Imo River, it shares ties with Opobo and Bonny, its history shaped by trade and migration. The Nwaotam Festival amplifies this legacy, drawing visitors to its vibrant streets.



Photo: Ndoki Nmanma nu Media.

Tourists love the festival's energy—music, food, and masquerade displays—pairing well with nearby Aba's markets. For Ohanso, it's a chance to shine, a vibrant reminder of its roots.

A Festival That Endures

As the drums fade and the masquerades depart, Nwaotam leaves Ohanso glowing. It's a thanksgiving, a reunion, and a cultural triumph all in one. In a changing world, this festival holds firm—a testament to Igbo resilience. Next December 25, the rites will resume, the dances will flow, and Ohanso will welcome all. If you're in Abia State, follow the beat—you'll find a celebration that's pure magic.

eTimes News Africa. (2025, January 21). 25 must-experience Igbo festivals in 2025: A cultural journey through Nigeria.

Medium. (2024, August 2). Opobo Nwaotam Festival: A Vibrant Festival in Opobo, Rivers State, Nigeria.

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.



Ozi Ikòrò

History worth reading.

African history · culture · indigenous knowledge
