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Okazi Festival, Emii: *A Celebration of Heritage, Unity, and Tradition in Imo State*

By Chuka Odike

Ozikoro.com · Cultural Heritage · 3 min read

FEATURE
IMAGE

Okazi Emii Festival - Ou Travel and Tour

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Okazi, Emii Festival men in display photo by showlate entertainment limited.

The Okazi Festival, also known as Ite Okazi, is a prominent cultural celebration held annually in Emii, a community in Owerri North Local Government Area of Imo State, Nigeria. This festival typically occurs in late December or early January, aligning with the traditional calendar of the Emii people.

Historical and Cultural Significance

The origins of the Okazi Festival are deeply rooted in the history of the Emii community. According to local traditions, during a period of severe famine, the founding ancestors of Emii were guided by the deities to consume the leaves of the Okazi plant (*Gnetum africanum*), known locally as Okashi. This plant provided sustenance during challenging times, and in gratitude, the community established the Okazi Festival to honor the plant's significance and reenact their ancestors' journey.



Odogwu Masquerade of Uba Emii Owerri North Local Government on the Okazi Emii Festival – Photo, Emmanuel Nwachukwu

Festival Activities

The festival is marked by a series of vibrant activities that showcase the rich cultural heritage of the Emii people:

- **Rituals and Ceremonies:** On the eve of the festival, community leaders venture into the bush to perform rituals, expressing gratitude to the Okazi plant for its historical significance. This act symbolizes a connection to their ancestors and the sustenance provided by the plant.



Okazi Emii Masquerade at Okazi Emii Festival – Ou Travel and Tour

- **Masquerade Performances:** A highlight of the festival is the masquerade displays, where performers adorned in elaborate costumes and masks entertain the community. These performances are not only entertaining but also serve to convey moral lessons and preserve folklore.
- **Cultural Dances and Music:** Traditional dance troupes and musicians

perform, showcasing the rhythmic and melodic heritage of the Igbo culture. These performances foster unity and provide entertainment for attendees.



Men of Emii showcasing music and dance display at the Okazi Emii Festival 2024 – Ou Travel and Tour.

- **Communal Feasting:** Food plays a central role in the celebrations, with dishes prominently featuring the Okazi leaf. This communal feasting reinforces social bonds and reflects the community's appreciation for their cultural roots.

03

Nutritional and Medicinal Value of Okazi Leaf



Okazi Leaf

The Okazi leaf (*Gnetum africanum*) is not only culturally significant but also valued for its nutritional and medicinal properties:

- **Dietary Benefits:** High in fiber, the leaf aids digestion, promotes weight loss, and improves metabolism.
- **Cardiovascular Health:** It supplies good cholesterol, beneficial for heart health.
- **Iodine Content:** The leaf contains iodine, essential for thyroid function and prevention of tooth decay.
- **Vitamin C:** Its vitamin C content helps prevent scurvy and detoxifies the blood.
- **Pregnancy Benefits:** Consumption can reduce morning sickness and ease childbirth pains.

- **Bone Health:** Rich in calcium, it strengthens bones and teeth.
- **Antifungal Properties:** Traditionally used to treat measles, boils, and warts.

04

Modern Relevance

Despite the encroachment of modern religions and lifestyles, the Okazi Festival remains a vital aspect of the Emii community's identity. It attracts both locals and tourists, providing an opportunity to experience the rich Igbo culture firsthand. The festival serves as a platform for cultural expression, community bonding, and the preservation of traditions for future generations.



Okazi, Emii Festival 2023 – African Festival of Music and Culture

Jonah, P. E. (2022, December 28). Okashi Emii Festival 2023. Oluonumurukwa.

Showlate Films Production. (2023, June 15). Okazi Emii Festival: Celebrating Unity, Tradition, and the Vibrant Igbo Culture. Medium.

For a visual glimpse into the festival, you can watch the following video: <https://youtu.be/TMiVGKPh974?si=rysowo6Smccm7UIW>

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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