



## Maasai Warrior Mask

### **Mask of the Maasai People (Kenya & Tanzania)**

The *Maasai* are a tribe of semi-nomadic people located in Kenya and northern Tanzania. Due to their distinctive customs and homes being near the many game parks of East Africa - which attract thousands of tourists every year - they are among the most well-known African ethnic groups internationally.

Traditional Maasai life centres around their cattle whose milk and blood is their primary source of food. A man's wealth is measured in terms of cattle and children: a herd of 50 cattle is respectable, and the more children the better!

Maintaining a traditional pastoral lifestyle has become increasingly difficult due to outside influences of the modern world. The Maasai have been forced from the Serengeti National Park to areas in and around the Ngorongoro Conservation Area (NCA) and the promise to put Maasai interests above all else has never been met.

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With an increase in Maasai population and the loss of cattle to disease and lack of available grazing, the Maasai have been forced to develop new ways of sustaining themselves. Many began to cultivate corn and other crops to get by, a practice that was culturally looked down upon by the Maasai.

Over the years various projects have been started to help Maasai tribal leaders find ways to preserve their traditions whilst balancing the educational needs of their children for the modern world. The making and selling of Maasai beadwork and masks - such as this one - to the tourist trade is just one of the ways they now earn money.

This particular mask shows the characteristic piercing and stretching of the earlobes which is common among the Maasai. Interestingly there are no accounts of masks ever being used by the Maasai as part of tribal culture so it would appear that these masks exist purely for the tourist trade and yet in turn they help to preserve what is left of the Maasai's culture and way of life.

