



Maasai Wedding Necklace (inkarewa)

A *Maasai* bride is expected to make her own "*inkarewa*" or bridal necklace. The *inkarewa* is a ring of leather attached to a rectangular piece that hangs down from the front. Both the ring and the rectangle are completely covered with colourful beads. Beaded strings hang down from the chest and are usually finished off with small shells.

The bride designs and creates the *inkarewa* to reflect her own tastes and to show off her skills. It is considered very important for the bridal necklace to reflect well on the young bride, so a great deal of thought is given to the *inkarewa*'s design.

The traditional Maasai wedding dress is an ankle-length red gown with a white stripe or fringe along the bottom hem. A shawl (which can be made in various colours, including red and bright blue) is worn over the dress itself, and the bridal necklace is worn above the shawl. The bride will also wear a wedding headdress made of beads dangling from looped strings. The bride also wears a red powder on her face to protect her from evil sorcerers.

A Maasai wedding ceremony begins with the payment of the bride price, which is part of the process of making the wedding dress. The groom brings a gift of one black bull and two black cows, along with two sheep, of which one must be female and one male. The male sheep is butchered as part of the marriage ceremony. The fat and oil from the sheep are smeared on the wedding dress. The fat of a lamb is also applied to the bride's shaved head.

The Maasai wedding ceremony marks the transition from youth status to the role of a tribal elder with its increased responsibilities. As such, it involves the entire Maasai community and not merely the individuals or their immediate households. For this reason, both the wedding dress and the "imasaa" or bead decorations are made by all of the bride's female relatives who work together. This symbolises the involvement and approval to the marriage of the community as a whole. After the dress is made, the bride is blessed by her elders before she leaves her home to join her husband's family.

