

TIWI ART & FOOTBALL

Art and football are two things you don't see together that often. But, for the people of the Tiwi Islands, these are the two main ingredients for the most exciting day of the year – the Annual Tiwi Art Sale and Footy Grand Final. And you're invited.

By Anna Dowd

Aussie Rules Football has been played on the Tiwi Islands – Bathurst and Melville – since Catholic missionaries introduced it in 1930. People say the first ball was an old leather football case stuffed with rags, and it was love at first kick. By the 1950s, a local competition had evolved. Back then, the winning team of the Sunday afternoon game was presented with a 23 kilogram bag of flour from the losers.

These days, Tiwi boasts the highest football participation per capita of anywhere in Australia. There are 900 players out of a population of 2600, with a long list of AFL stars hailing from it's shores to boot, literally. Over the wettest and hottest season of the year, local teams battle it out for the holy grail – a place in the Grand Final.

Growing up at Pirlangimpi on Melville Island, Uncle Luke Imalu Morcom has been a die-hard fan of the local team Imalu Tigers, winners of last year's final, his whole life. He says every Tiwi kid grows up dreaming of making it to the top. "Tiwi people live, eat and breath football."

Uncle Morcom says a day at the Grand Final is guaranteed to be a new experience for visitors, whether they're sports fans or not. Besides the occasional barefoot player, dog on the oval, and traditionally painted spectator munching on cooked turtle leg, he says Tiwi footy is a unique brand of it's own.

"It's super fast. The players are flamboyant. They always go for the impossible. You think they're gonna break they're neck, but they never do! They love doing it, and the families go wild."

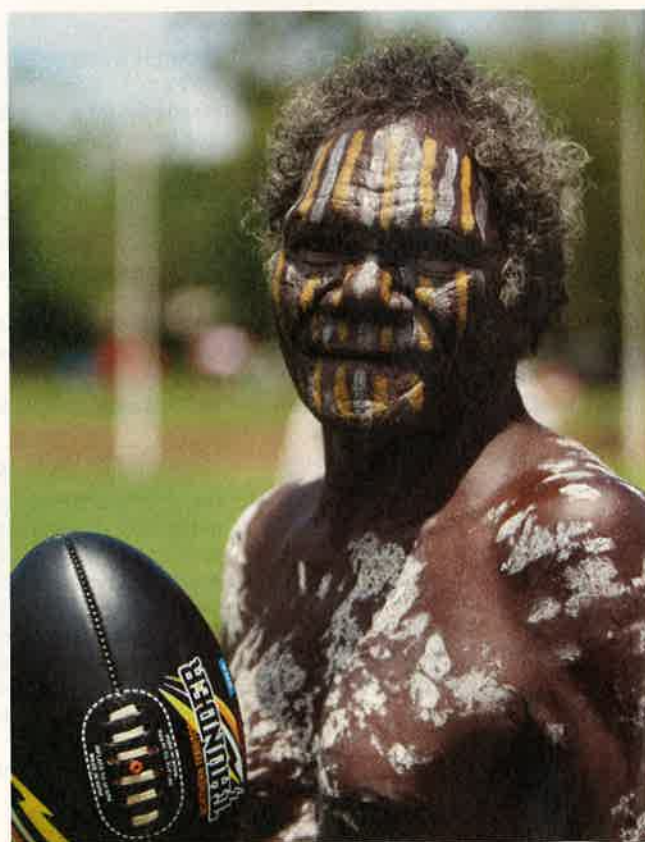
Another passionate love is art. Long before football made its mark, Tiwi Islanders were celebrated for their elaborately decorated Pukumani burial poles, significant cultural objects still made today for ceremonies and for sale.

Visitors making the 20-minute flight from Darwin for the Art Fair are sure to be rewarded with the first pick of carvings, paintings, ceramics, screen prints and jewellery made by artists over the wet season. And everything is at wholesale prices.

Generations of local artists have maintained the tradition of painting with red, white and yellow ochre collected from the land and ground up by hand, something Mel Goetze from the Tiwi Art Network says makes Tiwi art stand out in the crowd.

“You can see it in the different mediums, the ochres come together to make something really special.”

It's a bit like mixing art and football, then throw in some Tiwi hospitality – there's something really special and worth checking out.



Images courtesy of Tourism NT



Hands with Ochre courtesy of Munupl Arts & Crafts

GETTING THERE

WHEN: Sun 16 Mar | Art sale begins 9am
Football Grand Final begins at 1pm
WHERE: Wurrumiyanga, Bathurst Island
COST: Free
GETTING THERE: flytiwi.com.au
sealinknt.com.au
INFO: tiwiart.com

POP-UP ART

For those who can't make the trek to Bathurst Island, there's a special pop-up exhibition of some of Tiwi's finest arts and crafts.

WHEN: Fri 14 Mar – Fri 28 Mar
WHERE: The Gallery,
Darwin Entertainment Centre
INFO: tiwiart.com