

# Hula: Dance That Tells a Story

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Dancers sway gracefully, their grass skirts seeming to wave in the breeze. Their hands make soft flowing motions. This is hula dancing. In Hawaii, hula has been used

for hundreds of years to tell stories and to pay respect to gods, goddesses, and nature. Hula was created long before the Hawaiian people created a system of writing. Instead they communicated through dance and song.

Although there are many stories about how hula was invented, some believe that Pele, Hawaii's goddess of fire and volcanoes, wanted her sisters to dance for her. According to the story, only her sister Hi'iaka danced for the goddess. This sister is said to have been the first person to perform hula.

Over the years, both Hawaiians and visitors changed the dances. In the early 1800s, long before Hawaii became part of the United States, missionaries traveled there. The missionaries did not approve of hula. Although they tried to persuade the Hawaiian people to

stop dancing, the missionaries could not erase hula from the Hawaiian culture. In addition, Hawaiians began to sail around the world and bring back ideas from other cultures. They added these ideas to hula to create new dances to tell a traditional story.

There are two types of hula. Hula kahiko uses the same traditional movements and instruments as did the ancient Hawaiians. When dancers perform hula kahiko, they dance to chanting and traditional musical instruments, such as rattles and drums. In contrast, hula 'auana is considered modern hula. Modern hula is danced to modern Hawaiian music, which often features the ukulele, an instrument that looks like a small guitar. Dancers wear skirts made from leaves and bracelets and anklets made from flowers.

Today, visitors to Hawaii often go to see hula performances.

The gentle, waving movements of the dancers remind them of soft winds blowing through the islands' palm trees.



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