

## AMERICAN INDIAN POW WOWS

Many people who have attended American Indian Pow Wows are familiar with the traditional [dances](#) that take place in the sacred circle. The dancers will take to the Pow Wow arena and perform dances related to the American Indian culture. Men and women alike participate in these dances. American Indian "Traditional Dances" are for both men and women to participate in.

The "Traditional Dance" is one of the most spectacular that you will witness at Pow Wow events. Since the days when warriors would act out their accomplishments, traditional dance has played a major role in American Indian dance.

In men's traditional dance, a story of bravery, or the story of the hunt is acted out. Traditionally the men would come home from their venture and act out their accomplishments to the villagers. This form of storytelling has been handed down for centuries. These stories are still acted out in the form of traditional dancing on the Pow Wow circuit today.

With the traditional dance comes responsibility. Each [dancer](#) must assemble regalia by traditional means. The dancer must procure eagle feathers as well as animal sinew. Bones and animal skins are also used to assemble the dance regalia. Each item must be obtained in traditional American Indian fashion much like the ancestors did centuries ago. Each of the items must be blessed before using in the regalia because these items are sacred.

Northern Plains Traditional Dancers can be easily identified at the Pow Wow. These men wear a bustle on the back of their dance regalia that is assembled of eagle feathers. Like their ancestors the feathers must be gained by traditional means and this bustle must be treated as a sacred object. If any part of this bustle touches the ground it must be cleansed with powerful prayer in traditional American Indian fashion.

Southern Plains Traditional dancers are slightly different in their regalia. The Southern Traditional men wear a otter skin down their back instead of the eagle feather bustle. This skin symbolizes the sacred hunt. This otter skin is considered sacred and must be blessed also.

The remaining regalia is much the same. Buckskin pants are sewn in traditional fashion with animal sinew. Usually the dancers will not wear shirts, although occasionally a dancer may wear a buckskin vest. Moccasins are the footwear to compliment the regalia. Usually boot style lace-up moccasins are worn that rise to the knee.

Whether from the Northern Plains, or the Southern Plains the traditional dances are a spectacular site. The traditional dance is a dance of bravery and spirit. This is one of the oldest known dances from the Plains Indian nations.

For the women dancers the Traditional dance takes on another meaning. The value of women in the Indian community is demonstrated by the honor shown. Her role as a giver of life and the keeper of the home and family is portrayed in the traditional dance.

Traditionally the women wore buckskin, or woolen dresses. This tradition is also true today. The traditional women dancers wear regalia of traditional of their ancestors long ago.

The buckskin dress worn is sewn in traditional fashion with animal sinew. The women dancers will also wear a breastplate made from animal bone over the front of the buckskin dress. The buckskin dress will have long flowing fringe along the arms and hem. Moccasins of tanned skin will also be worn to compliment the regalia.

The alternative of a woolen dress is often used by both Northern and Southern Plains dancers. This heavy woolen dress is usually dark in color. Fringe along the inside arms and the hem of the dress will display small shells. These shells are sewn, or tied onto the bottom of the fringe.

The dances vary according to region. The southern womens' traditional dancers will always dance in a clockwise fashion in the Pow Wow arena. The southern womens' traditional dance has plenty of movement such as spins and sharp turns.

The Northern women traditional dancers will always remain in the same spot when they dance.

The regalia of both North and South alike tells a story. The fringe on the arms and hems of the dress represent the sacred waterfalls. Both dances are done with grace and elegance as well as respect for tradition and mother earth. Each of these dances represents the beauty of Indian women and what they sacrifice for Mother Earth, life, and family.

American Indian dance represents a lifelong commitment. Usually the dance is taught to the children at a young age. Throughout this child's life he or she will dance into their adulthood. It is then prayed for that this adult will then teach the dance to their children. By teaching the dance this way it will prevent American Indian culture and tradition from becoming extinct.

During Pow Wow many things occur. Prayers are said for those that will perform any of the dances. Prayers are also said for those ancestors who have passed

on whether it was yesterday or one thousand years ago. The ancestors are prayed for in thanks for all the wisdom they passed on and for the traditions that are still carried out today. Many prayers carry blessings for everyone who attends the Pow Wow and shares and appreciates the traditions that have been held sacred for many centuries