

A Dangerous Way Down

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(Courtesy of Major Kottan)



A wooden Tower is built 5 weeks before the ritual

(Courtesy of Michael Craig)

What is Naghol

Naghol is a commonly practiced ritual that consists of a young male individual that is ready to become a man. He needs to jump from heights ranging from 10 feet to 25 meter (98 Ft.) from a wooden stick tower with just a vine tied into his ankles. This ritual is done for many reasons. The 2 main reasons are that it will show the community that he is no longer a child and to show the commitment to his tribe and braveness. It is believed that a successful ritual will be good for the harvesting season so the vegetables will be more nutritious. The people of the Villages of Loltafala perform this ritual in the Vanuatu islands.

How did it Begin

Naghol began by a legend in which a woman was escaping from her abusive husband, she then climbed a tree and tied vines to her ankles; her husband followed and they both jumped. Sadly the husband died because he was not tied. Now, men to show strength and how they won't let women trick them, do the ritual.

Why is it Performed

It is performed before harvesting season to ensure that the season will be fertile and make the vegetables nutritious. The higher the jump, and the more close the diver gets to the ground, the better the yam season. If a diver dies during the jump it is considered a failure, and it won't help the harvesting season. To ensure this doesn't occur the



The divers prepare for the ritual.

(Courtesy of Michael Craig)

diver tucks his head between his shoulders, and since this is done with no protection the diver is exposing himself to fatal injuries or even death.



*Vanuatu Islands Location
(Courtesy of
tourismvanuatu.com)*

Pre-Ritual

Preparations for the ritual begin 5 weeks before it is actually performed. The wood found in the nearby jungle is used to build a huge wooden tower. The vines are collected and cut by the wisest of elders. These vines must be collected when they are humid, because if they were collected dry they would break. The elders cut this vines without thinking about the measures, they just take in count their years of failure and success.

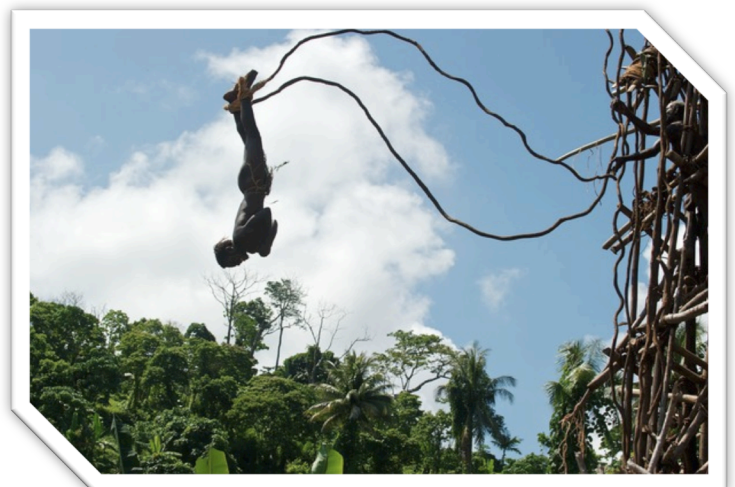
How is the Ritual Done

The tower has many platforms at different heights so the most skilled divers would go on highest, and the least experience diver will go from the bottom. This tower can be destroyed by a one diver's mistake. The jump is usually performed in front of the whole village including the elders to show their strength and bravery. Some tourists can also go, and watch the ritual, and if they want to take the risk they can even jump from the tower after asking from permission of the elders.

Prohibitions and Obligations

There are some requirements that are crucial in the community's traditions. The day before you are going to jump you cannot have any type of sex.

You cannot use any charm symbols as they are of bad luck one. You need to clear the



*After the diver climbs up the tower he jumps of the point he was assigned to
(Courtesy of Jean-Luc Metzcer)*

unsolved problems that you have pending with your friends or family incase you die. You can also not have any type of lucky charms because it is considered cheating for the other divers.

The Ritual as Rite of Passage

Only men do can do this ritual. When a boy gets old enough he has to do the ritual as a rite of passage to show himself that he is a man. When the diver is going to jump his mom holds his favorite childhood item, and then burns it to represent that his son is

no longer a child. This jump is done in the lowest point of the tower. If the boy doesn't jump, his tribe won't consider him a man.

How it begins

The ritual begins with dancing from women in a coordinated way that leads into the wooden tower. The divers go in order of the youngest and bravest to the oldest and most skilled. The mother of the current diver is on the bottom of the tower holding the child's favorite childhood item and throws it on the fire or away the same time the child touches the ground with his hair of head.



Obligations

Every year divers that want to participate need to resolve their doubts with all the persons they owe, diving is optional unless you are doing it for the rite of passage, which is obligatory. This Ritual has nothing to do with the tribe's religious beliefs; it is a tradition that has been going on for more than 1,500 years. The less skilled divers start jumping, and then they move on to the more skilled divers until they reach the top of the tower, the divers that jump from this height are treated with greatness because of their bravery.

Ritual Dangers, Cautions, and Endings

In case a diver fails the jump and hits the ground, his friends and family will attend him. The soil is also softened with long wooden sticks. The dangers are mostly on the length of the vine. If the vine is too short The diver can get stuck in midair and not hit the ground and will maybe be destroy the tower, and if it is too long the divers can get severely injure. At the end of the jump they have a celebration for the newly transformed men.

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