

Tepo Mat

SAMA, TAWI-TAWI ISLAND GROUP PROVINCE, SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES.

The Sama, in the little island of Tandubas, weaves a mat made of pandanus leaves called tepo. The two-layered, abstractly designed mat is unique to the people of Tawi-Tawi.



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The uniquely two-layered mat, tepo, of the Sama is woven from pandanus leaves.

THE SAMA MAT of Tawi-Tawi is double-layered and brightly colored. Known locally as *tepo*, it is traditionally used as sleeping mat, a gift for newlyweds and even for *imams* for the recitation of prayers.

Produced by women, the tepo is made of *pandan* (*Pandanus spp.*) leaves which are pressed to soften and boiled to dye before woven in vivid hues. Cultivated pandan varieties are preferred over the wild ones for their durability. These mats are highly coveted as they use finer strips woven tightly, plus they have an array of intricate and colorful designs. Sama workmanship is considered among the best in the country.

After gathering pandan leaves, the *ngalaan hiting* (thorns) are removed and the leaves are cut lengthwise. The raw materials are brought to a communal *paggusan* (presser) making the pandan leaves soft and dry. The strips (*dalamba*) of pandan are hung in a shaded portion outside the house. After a day, the strips are taken and pressed again. After this, they are folded

(*madjangat*) and left for three days. Sun drying (*palau*) follows until the strips are bleached. The strips are dyed with *anjibi* (synthetic commercial dye), then subjected again to *magpagus* (pressing) and drying.

After a week, the strips are ready for weaving. The weaving proper starts at one corner of the mat. The motifs and designs woven into the mats include: *balintung* (a mixture of zigzag and diamonds), *pinaleko* (zigzag design), *palang born* (large square of different colors), *jali* (striped design), *kusta sima* (stripes and diamonds), *kusta* (a different variation of the checkered pattern) and *malasa* (small hexagons).

The woven mat is not considered finished at this stage. It is mounted on a slightly larger, but plainly woven mat (*lapis*) that serves as a backing for the ornately woven piece. This is the distinguishing feature of the Sama tepo. When it is carried to the market, it is neatly folded with the plain backing on the outside protecting the designed surface.

ACB