For Māori, a tāonga is a treasure. A tāonga might be a carving, a woven cloak or some other work of art. But a tāonga has far more than artistic value. It has spiritual value, it may tell stories about people or places, and it may link its creator back to ancestors of earlier generations. Māori retain links with their tūpuna (ancestors) by passing on their history and traditions through storytelling. These stories aren’t just told orally, they are also told through carving and weaving.

The New Zealand Māori Arts and Crafts Institute (NZMACI) opened in 1967 in Rotorua, New Zealand due to the impending threat of the loss of these traditional Māori arts. This built on the earlier establishment in 1926 of a Māori Arts and Crafts school in Rotorua by Sir Apirana Ngata. The new school continued the tradition in a location well-established for traditional Māori arts and crafts due to the decline in the teaching and passing in of the knowledge of these art forms in their traditional setting on the marae. The establishment of the school was by Public Act of Parliament, The New Zealand Māori Arts and Crafts Institute Act of 1963, originally titled the Rotorua Māori Arts and Crafts Institute Act of 1963.

The New Zealand Māori Arts and Crafts Institute (MACI) is a statutory corporation created by the New Zealand Māori Arts and Crafts Institute Act 1963. The general functions of the Institute outlined in Section 14 state:

1. To encourage, foster, and promote all types of Māori culture and the practice and appreciation of Māori arts and crafts;
2. To train Māoris in the practice of Māori arts and crafts;
3. To provide demonstrations or exhibitions of Māori arts and crafts and suitable premises for any such demonstrations or exhibitions;
4. To arrange and conduct exhibitions of Māori arts and crafts and of tours of performers demonstrating Māori arts and aspects of Māori culture;
5. Develop and maintain areas in the Rotorua district or elsewhere as scenic or tourist attractions;
6. To foster and maintain public interest in Māori culture and Māori arts and crafts;
7. To assist in the preservation of Māori culture and Māori arts and crafts;

1 www.tepuia.com
2 Sir Apirana Ngata (3 July 1874 – 14 July 1950) was a prominent New Zealand politician and lawyer. He has often been described as the foremost Māori politician to have ever served in Parliament, and is also known for his work in promoting and protecting Māori culture and language.
3 Marae: is a sacred place which served both religious and social purposes in pre-Christian Polynesian societies.
4 The New Zealand Māori Arts and Crafts Institute Act 1963 created what is now known as the New Zealand Māori Arts and Crafts Institute, located in Rotorua. The aim of the Institute is to encourage and promote all types of Māori arts, craft, performance and culture.
The New Zealand Māori Arts and Crafts Institute was established as a centre of learning and excellence to nurture and preserve the artistic cultural traditions of Māori. Funding of the Institute’s activities has been secured largely from its authority to collect entry fees to the adjacent Whakarewarewa Geothermal Reserves and from tourists interested in the school’s work. In 2000, the Institute decided to re-brand, settling on the name Te Puia. This name refers to an impenetrable fortress (dating from around 1325) which is located in the Whakarewarewa Valley. Work is now commencing on negotiations over the vesting of Te Puia with Ngāti Whakaue and Tūhourangi-Ngāti Wāhiao, two local tribes.

**Te Rito (Weaving School)**

The aim of the school is to reinforce the traditional techniques and traditional ways of weaving, handed down from our ancestors. Students not only learn different methods and ways of weaving but also stories and designs unique to each iwi (tribe).

Image sourced from Te Ara – the Encyclopedia of New Zealand.
Te Wananga Whakairo (Carving School)
Te Puia’s carving school is lead by Clive Fugill, a Master Carver who was amongst the first intake of students to the school in 1967. In 1963, some of these traditions were in danger of being lost forever. Since then, students from across New Zealand have come to Te Puia to study the traditions of their ancestors. For over 40 years, successive generations of students at Te Puia have been involved in the carving of over 30 wharenui (meeting houses) throughout New Zealand and created countless weaving gifts for official guests and dignitaries visiting the country.

Image sourced from New Zealand Māori Arts and Crafts Institute.

Tourism

E kore e ngaro, te purapura i ruia mai i Rangiātea
The seeds that were sown in Rangiātea will never be lost

Explanation: ‘Seeds’ refer to traditional knowledge and customs of Māori which have been handed down through generations. The proverb emphasises the importance of retaining Māori heritage as a living culture. Like any seed, it requires care, protection and nurturing to ensure its continued life and wellbeing.

This whakatauki (or proverb) relates to Te Puia’s ‘Responsible Tourism Statement’. Tourism has been a main driver in allowing an institute such as Te Puia to operate; Tourism New Zealand’s Visitor Satisfaction research suggests that, amongst
international visitors, interest is highest overall in regard to Māori cultural experiences and major art/cultural events. Te Puia promotes their tourism through a number of different facets, like their carving and weaving school, the taonga gallery which houses a wide range of Māori carvings, weaved tāonga include kete (flax bags) and korowai (cloaks).

**Support for Māori Culture**

Te Puia has recently made a commitment to become a major sponsor to the Te Matatini National Kapahaka Festival. There are story synergies between Te Puia and Te Matatini as entities operating at a national level with a similar focus to nurture and develop traditional arts, crafts and culture; of which the performing arts is an integral part. UNESCO has promoted Te Matatini through its global networks and United Nations agencies as a premier cultural event on the international festival calendar. UNESCO sees kapa haka as a cultural treasure to be sustained for future generations.

Since the establishment of the New Zealand Māori Arts and Crafts School a large number of other Māori arts and crafts training facilities and courses have been established around New Zealand, also many other agencies are supporting Māori arts such as Creative New Zealand, Te Papa Tongarewa and Te Matatini. The requirement for Te Puia to fulfil a national role to retain and advance the intangible and tangible cultural tradition of weaving and carving is slightly less compelling today than it may have been in the past.

Māori culture has always been very oral in nature, the tauparapara⁵ or whaikōrero⁶ passed down through generations, would often depict the intangible and fluid nature of disseminating information, before it enters the realm of tangible and is reflected through carving and weaving. A whakairo (carving) or taniko (weaving) can be seen as a place where knowledge is stored and transmitted and where links with someone’s past are made tangible.

The carving and weaving schools at Te Puia have helped to revive arts and crafts in communities and around New Zealand at a time in the late 1960s when the ancient teachings of our ancestors were slowly receding. Te Puia has been successful in taking the art of whakairo (carving) and taniko (weaving) to an international stage and showcased the renaissance of a vision Sir Apirana Ngata had to secure the future of Māori Arts and Crafts in Aotearoa (New Zealand).

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⁵ Tauparapara: A prayer or chant suitable to the purpose of the meeting to invoke the gods’ protection and to honour the visitors.

⁶ Whaikōrero: Whaikōrero are formal speeches generally made by men during pōwhiri (formal welcome ceremonies) and in social gatherings.