

The Passion Of Polynesia

Dance is at the heart and soul of Cook Islands culture, and this year's premier dance competitions, the Senior Dancer of the Year 2008 held in May, showcased distinctive Cook Islands culture and dance at its best.

Last year's champion female dancer, the graceful Uirangi Bishop ([photo-1,3,4,5](#)) from Aitutaki, took out the title once more, proving that you don't always have to dance to fast-beat drums to have the audience eating out of your hand.

Uirangi's evocative slow-beat performance as well as her lighting fast-beat sashaying helped her secure the champion's crown for the second year in a row.

Judged on their dancing and technical skills, choreography and costume, the Senior Dancer of the Year competition marked the end of the annual Cook Islands dance competitions, Te Mire Kapa, which include junior and intermediate dance sections, a Golden Oldies section and the Papa'a Dancer of the Year crown for visitors and expatriates.

Second place in the women's competition went to Paula Turua who dedicated her performance to the late Mamia Tunui Savage, and was also awarded best costume. Through her dance Alana Short ([photo-8,9](#)) told the story of legendary Takitumu maiden, Ta'akura, and was awarded third place. Ritia Moara ([photo-6,7](#)) represented the Northern Group island of Tongareva (Penrhyn), winning Outer Island Dancer of the Year and 4th overall.

The senior men's section was also hotly contested, with the defending champion Teariki Mateariki delivering a crowd-pleasing performance to take out second place (and winner of the fast beat category) against Auckland's Tuteru Samson's ([photo-2,5](#)) powerful performance. Samson has contested this crown over a number of years and his persistence paid off with this year's Male Dancer of the Year title, and winner of the slow beat category. Third place went to Eteroma Cummings whose performance was dedicated to the art of tapa cloth making, while Tupa Tupa from Atiu won the best costume category.

If ever any proof was needed, the passionate performances, amazing and intricate costumes and the large turnouts for the annual series of Dance Competitions show that the Cook Islands' love of dance is today as strong as ever.

Story: Matariki Wilson / Spasifik Magazine
Photos: Paul Osta / The Rarotongan Beach Resort & Spa

