

Lotus Silk: A Sacred Luxury and Rarest Fabrics in the World

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SUMMARY

Lotus silk is one of the rarest fabrics in the world, produced only in small scale across Cambodia, Myanmar and more recently Vietnam. This natural fibre is only extracted by a few skilled craftspeople across the world. But making this silk isn't easy. Extracting enough lotus silk for one scarf can take two months and the final product can cost 10 times as much as regular silk. So just how it made and what is makes it so expensive.

INTRODUCTION

Lotus (*Nelumbo nucifera*) is the National Flower of India and Vietnam. It is a sacred flower and occupies a unique position in the art and mythology of ancient India and has been an auspicious symbol of Indian culture since time immemorial. Lotus silk is a type of textile produced using delicate lotus stem fibres. The fabric first originated in Myanmar (Burma) and is now also woven by smaller-scale cottage industries in Vietnam. Due to the complexity and labor-intensive nature of weaving lotus fibres, lotus silk is considered one of the most expensive fabrics in the world. Burmese lotus silk uses fibres from a specific variety of lotus called *Padonma kya* which produces large fragrant pink flowers. The lotus stems are sourced from Shan State's Inle Lake and throughout Myanmar including Mandalay Region (Sunye Lake in Sintkaing Township), Bago Region (Inma Lake in Thegon Township), Magway Region (Wetthe and Salin Natural lakes in Sain Township), Sagaing Region (Kandaunggyi Lake in Taze Township). In India, Bijiyashanti Tongbram from Thanga Tongbram village located in the Bishnupur district of Manipur makes fibres from lotus stem gathered from the Loktak Lake then she spins this yarn into scarves, stoles neckties and apparels.

History

Lotus flowers are sacred to Hindus and Buddhists. They symbolize the mind, the soul, enlightenment and purification of the body. Mythology has it that the origins of lotus root silk lie in one Myanmar woman's devotion to their faith. Phan Thi Thuan's family of Myanmar has been making silk for generations, growing and harvesting the threads from silkworms themselves to create luxury garments. But making lotus silk is different which usually comes from silkworms. But lotus silk comes from flower fibre it doesn't depend on any kind of worm, it is completely handmade.

Uses of Lotus Silk

- The fibre extracted from the lotus stems and stalk is produced as yarns for weaving cloths, neckties and loin loom.
- Lotus silk was first used to weaven monastic robes as an offering to Buddha images or Buddhists monks but is now also used for a variety of clothing types including scarves and hats. Lora Piana, a luxury clothing company has imported Burmese lotus silk to produce jackets and other clothing products since 2010.



Lotus flower



Lotus stem

The art of making silk from lotus stem



Some instructions for lotus silk

This lotus fabric will not need a lot of washing. If anyone would like to wash their lotus scarf though, they have to consider the following instructions

- Use only a drop of very mild soap
- Do not leave your scarf soaking
- Do not wring out or twist the scarf
- Leave the scarf to dry in a flat position
- Avoid direct sunlight when drying
- Do not use a tumble dryer
- Use an iron-on silk program and iron the scarf when still moist

CONCLUSION

Some luxurious features have made it popular with tourists searching for rare souvenirs. It's also recently been picked up by international fashion brands searching for new luxury fibre and also uncommon like lotus fabric. But the scale of it has been limited, as there are still few trained in the making of these silk threads or yarn.

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