

## The History of Bungee Jumping

The history of bungee jumping goes back many hundreds, if not thousands of years. Coming from another culture in a land that time seems to have forgotten, we find an ancient ritual called 'naghol' or land diving. It is an intriguing story with some elements of mystery, religion, and adventure. Let's take a closer look at the history of bungee jumping.

Examining the history of bungee jumping takes us to a small island in the South Pacific named Pentecost Island, one of 83 islands that make up the country of Vanuatu. Pentecost Island was discovered in 1768 by French explorer Louis Antoine de Bougainville during his voyage to circumnavigate the globe. It was not named, however, until sighted by the infamous Captain Cook in 1774. The name came as a result of the day on which Cook spotted the island, which was the Christian holy day of Pentecost. During the history of bungee jumping, many Christian missionaries have attempted to change the culture of the inhabitants of Pentecost Island. However, even though most of the inhabitants of the island profess Christianity today, their ancient culture and rituals remain strong. Bungee jumping is one such ritual.

The history of bungee jumping goes back to ancient times and beliefs about pleasing the gods in order to get good crops. The yam harvest is the principle event around which the naghol, the ancient predecessor of bungee jumping, takes place. The natives believed that if your jump was acceptable that the gods would grant you a good harvest. It is also a ceremony which marks the right of passage from a boy's youth to manhood. They believed that the males who jump (it was only males, by the way), should not have sex the evening before their jump, and should wear no 'good luck charms'. Either of these was said to produce a bad jump. On an island without a hospital of any kind, any injury can become life threatening. Indeed, the history of bungee jumping has some very strange roots.

While examining the history of bungee jumping, it is intriguing to see how these ancient people practice this religious ceremony. Prior to the jump day, a wooden tower is built that is some seventy feet in height. Latched together with vines and no modern construction methods, it appears to be far from stable. To reduce the swaying of the tower from the wind, vines are used like guy wires. Groups of 20 or so men participate in the land diving ceremony. As the young men would jump, their mothers would toss an object from their childhood to the earth, symbolizing their transition from a child to a man.

While the ancient history of bungee jumping is still shrouded in some mystery, we do know where the modern activity originated. It is a wonder that this

practice remained isolated to the South Pacific after the discovery from the European explorers. Only in the 20th century has this ancient ritual been promoted to the world as a new sport. The history of bungee jumping will never be the same.