

Lelu

On land | Micronesia (Kosrae) | about 1250-1800s CE | Grades 3-5

Name _____ Date _____

Lelu was a royal city built from black stone columns, a lot like the famous ruins of Nan Madol.

Read the story

Kosrae is a lush island in the western Pacific. Around 1250 CE, its people began building a city on Lelu Island, a small island right beside Kosrae. Over time it became the center of a powerful kingdom ruled by a high king called the Tokosra.

The builders stacked long basalt columns in crisscross layers, like log cabins, to make walls up to about 6 meters high. Inside were walled compounds for the royal family and chiefs, burial places, and a network of canals that canoes could use at high tide.

Around 1,500 people lived on Lelu at its height. The kingdom controlled the whole island of Kosrae.

How it ended

In the 1800s, whaling ships and other outsiders brought diseases that killed most of Kosrae's people. The traditional kingdom collapsed, and the walls were left to the jungle, though people still live on Lelu.

Key words

- basalt: a dark, hard rock formed from lava
- compound: an area with buildings surrounded by a wall
- breadfruit: a starchy tropical fruit that is cooked and eaten

Wow facts

- The walls were built from long basalt columns stacked like logs.
- Canals let canoes travel right into the city at high tide.
- Kosraeans wove cloth on looms, which was rare in the Pacific.

Talk about it

1. How did living on islands shape the way Kosraeans built their city?

2. Why can outside diseases be so dangerous to island peoples?

Try this

Draw a map of Lelu as it looked at its busiest. Label three things people did there.

Quick quiz

Circle the best answer.

1. What were Lelu's walls made of?

- A. Basalt columns
- B. Ice
- C. Glass
- D. Wood planks

2. Which famous ruin is Lelu like?

- A. Nan Madol
- B. Stonehenge
- C. Petra
- D. Troy

3. What helped canoes reach the city?

- A. Canals
- B. Roads
- C. Bridges
- D. Railways

Go further

Open ruinscape.live/lelu/ for photos, the Then and Now picture where there is one, and links to museum collections and research. On the globe, Lyra Kael can fly the class there and answer questions.

Answer key (for teachers)

1. A. Builders stacked long basalt columns.
2. A. Lelu and Nan Madol both used stacked basalt columns.
3. A. Canals let canoes enter at high tide.