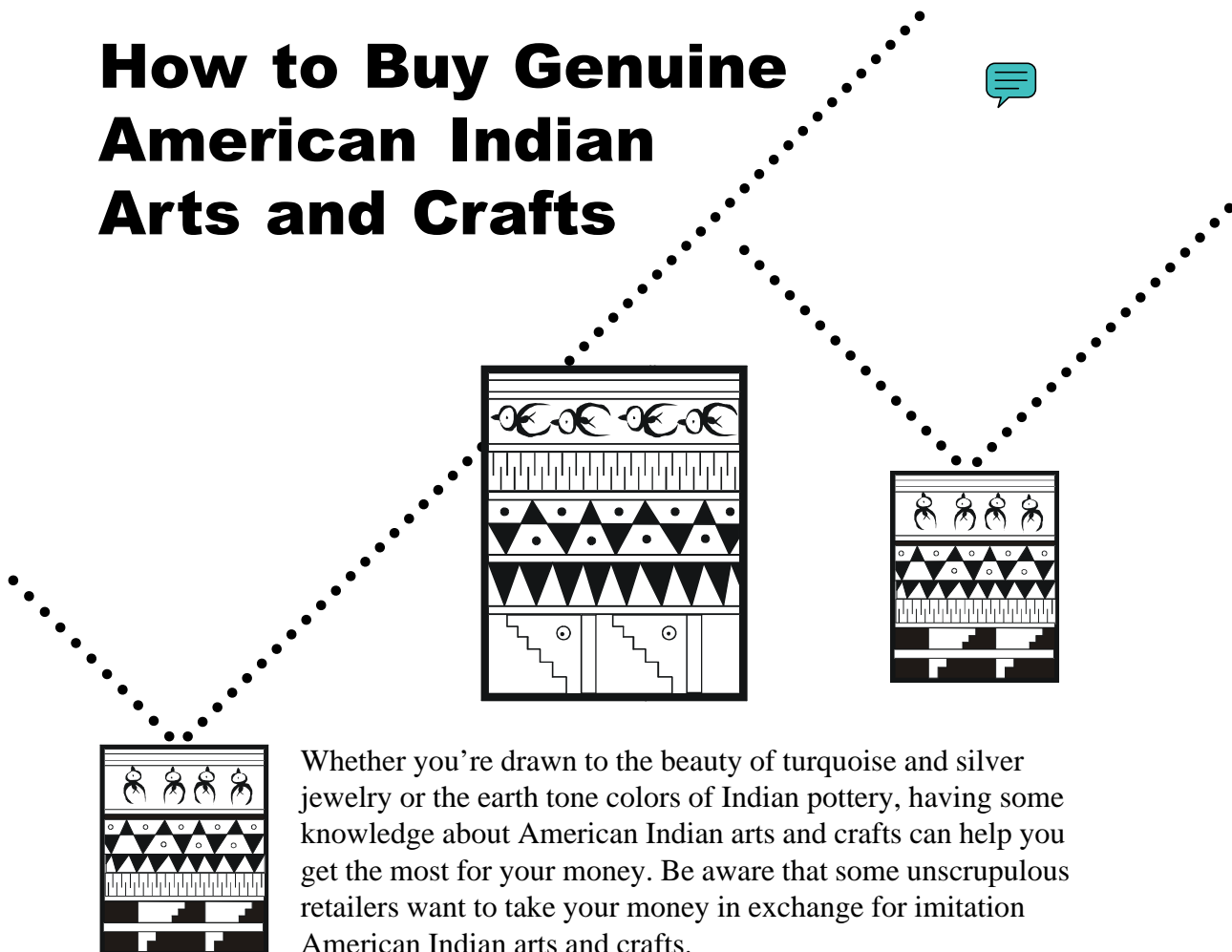


# FTC FACTS for Consumers

## How to Buy Genuine American Indian Arts and Crafts



Whether you're drawn to the beauty of turquoise and silver jewelry or the earth tone colors of Indian pottery, having some knowledge about American Indian arts and crafts can help you get the most for your money. Be aware that some unscrupulous retailers want to take your money in exchange for imitation American Indian arts and crafts.

### Getting What You Pay For

Under the Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1990, any item produced after 1935 that is marketed using terms such as "Indian," "Native American" or "Alaska Native" must be made by a member of a State or federally-recognized tribe or a certified Indian artisan. A certified Indian artisan is an individual who is certified by the governing body of an Indian tribe as a non-member Indian artisan.

Under the Act, all Indian arts and crafts products must be marketed truthfully. For example, selling products using a sign claiming "Indian Jewelry – Direct from the Reservation to You" is a violation of the Indian Arts and Crafts Act if the jewelry was produced by someone other than a member of an Indian tribe or a certified non-member Indian artisan. Advertising products as "Navajo Jewelry" violates the Act if the products were produced by someone who is not a member of the Navajo tribe or certified as a non-member Indian artisan of the Navajo tribe. And qualifiers such as "ancestry," "descent" and "heritage" used in connection with the terms "Indian," "Native American" or with the name of a particular Indian tribe – say, "Native American heritage" or "Cherokee descent" – do not mean that the person is a member of an Indian tribe. These terms mean that the person is of descent, heritage or ancestry of the tribe, and are acceptable only if they are used truthfully.

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## Buying Tips

American Indian arts and crafts are sold through many outlets, including tourist stores, gift shops and art galleries. Here are some tips to help you shop wisely:

- Buy from an established dealer who will give you a written guarantee or written verification of authenticity.
- Ask if your item comes with a certification tag. While not all authentic Indian arts and crafts carry this tag, those that do are certified by the Department of the Interior (DOI) to be genuine.



This sample tag identifies the artisan as a member of the Oklahoma Indian Arts and Crafts Cooperative. However, you may see a different name and logo appearing in the circle on the item you buy.

- Get a receipt that includes all the vital information about the value of your purchase, including any verbal representations. For example, if the salesperson told you that the piece of jewelry you're buying is sterling silver and natural turquoise and was handmade by an American Indian artisan, insist that this information appear on your receipt.
- Before buying Indian arts and crafts at powwows, annual fairs, juried competitions, and other events, check the event requirements for information about the authenticity of the products being offered for sale. Many events list their requirements in newspaper ads, promotional flyers and printed programs. If the event organizers make no

statement about the authenticity of Indian arts and crafts being offered for sale, get written verification of authenticity for any item you purchase that claims to be authentic.

- Be aware that not all Indian-made items are handmade. There are three general methods of production, all of which are used to make legitimate American Indian arts and crafts:
  - **handmade** – an individual has control over the design and quality of the craftsmanship of each piece;
  - **assembly line or mass-produced** – a number of individuals who may be American Indians each do only a small part of the work on each piece, in some cases assembling components produced elsewhere; and
  - **machine made** – individuals do little, if any, handwork.

## Identifying Authentic American Indian Jewelry

It's not always easy to spot a counterfeit item but price, materials, appearance, and the seller's guarantee of authenticity may help.

- **Price** – Although Indians make and sell inexpensive souvenir-type items, authentic high-quality Indian jewelry can be expensive.
- **Type of materials** – Most Indian artisans use sterling silver complemented with opaque stones, such as coral, onyx, shell, turquoise, lapis lazuli, or carnelian.
- **Appearance** – Well-crafted jewelry has no wavering lines or lopsided designs. If a design is stamped into silver – the most common metal used – the image should be clear. Images on imitations often are blurred. High-quality pieces use stones that are well-cut and uniform in size, and fit snugly into their settings. The stones on imitations may be poorly cut, leaving a large amount of metal-colored glue visible between the stone and the metal. Look for the artist's "hallmark" stamped on the jewelry. Many Indian artists use a hallmark – a symbol or signature

– to identify their work.

- **Guarantee of authenticity** – A reputable dealer will give you a written guarantee.

## Shopping for American Indian Jewelry

Whether you're buying Indian jewelry for yourself or someone special, take some time to learn the terms used in its production. Keep in mind that the value of any piece depends not only on the materials used, but also on the quality of craftsmanship and the harmony of the design.

### Silver

Silver is the most common metal used in American Indian jewelry.

- **Sterling** describes metal containing 92.5 parts silver and 7.5 parts other metal. According to the Federal Trade Commission's Jewelry Guides, any item marked "silver" must be sterling.
- **Coin Silver** describes metal containing 90 parts silver and 10 parts other metal. It is called "coin" because Indians melted down pre-1900 American and Mexican coins to make jewelry before they were able to obtain commercially made ingots and sheet silver.
- **German Silver** – also called Nickel Silver – refers to 60 parts copper, 20 parts zinc, and 20 parts nickel. Under the FTC Jewelry Guides, no item should be called silver, even with a modifier such as "German" or "Nickel," unless it contains at least 90 percent silver. Nevertheless, you may see or hear this term used in connection with Indian jewelry. In particular, some Sioux and Southern Plains Indian metalsmiths work in this metal because it is associated with their cultural heritage.
- **Drawn Silver** refers to the way sterling sheet silver is rolled and pulled through a drawplate to get a certain circumference. It is then cut into tiny segments, filed and strung into strands for necklaces. It is sometimes called "liquid silver." A few artists

make hand-pulled silver but the majority of liquid silver is manufactured, not handmade.

### Stones

The most common stones used in American Indian jewelry include:

- **Carnelian** – a translucent reddish quartz stone.
- **Coral** – the hardened secretion of tiny sea creatures. Coral ranges in color from white and pale pink to deep reds and oranges.
- **Lapis Lazuli** – a rock composed chiefly of the minerals lazurite (deep blue), pyrite (metallic yellow) and calcite (white). The blue stone is commonly used in modern designs by contemporary Indian artists.
- **Onyx** – a translucent quartz stone which, in its natural state, is usually gray or pale blue. Onyx frequently is dyed black.
- **Shell** – the general term used for pieces of the outer hard surface of marine animals, particularly those of pearl oysters and abalones. Shell may be used in silver inlay work or may be shaped into flattened disks, drilled and strung into necklaces known as heishi.
- **Turquoise** – a copper mineral, often containing small brown or gray veins. Turquoise ranges in color from sky-blue to greenish-blue. The stone varies in hardness from soft/somewhat porous to hard. In the U.S., turquoise is found in the southwestern states. Use of turquoise from other countries is common.

### Stone Treatments

**Treating** refers to any alteration of the properties or appearance of natural turquoise and other stones, with the exception of cutting and polishing.

- **Dyeing** – adding blue dye to low-grade turquoise, and adding black to gray or pale blue onyx, to enhance the stone's appearance.
- **Reconstitution** – pulverizing fragments of turquoise, coral or lapis lazuli into powder.

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The powder is mixed with epoxy and worked into cakes or stones, which are used just like natural stones.

- **Stabilizing** – injecting clear, colorless acrylics into low- to medium-grade turquoise to toughen and harden the stone and enhance its color. Stabilizing is the most advanced and sophisticated method of treating turquoise. The majority of turquoise used today is stabilized. Natural gem-quality turquoise is usually only used by top artists and commands much higher prices than stabilized turquoise.

## For More Information

To learn more about American Indian arts and crafts, contact:

- Indian Arts and Crafts Association, P.O. Box 29780, Santa Fe, NM 87592-9780; 505-265-9149; [www.iaca.com](http://www.iaca.com)
- Your local library or museums
- Publications that focus on American Indian art:

**Indian Trader** (newspaper), P.O. Box 1421, Gallup, NM 87305; 505-722-6694

**Indian Country Today** (newspaper), 1920 Lombardy Drive, Rapid City, SD 57703; 605-341-0011

**Native Peoples** (magazine), 5333 North 7<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite C-224, Phoenix, AZ 85014-2804; 602-265-4855

**American Indian Art Magazine**, 7314 East Osborn Drive, Scottsdale, AZ 85251; 480-994-5445

## Where to Complain

- The FTC works for the consumer to prevent fraudulent, deceptive and unfair business

practices in the marketplace and to provide information to help consumers spot, stop and avoid them. To file a complaint, or to get free information on any of 150 consumer topics, call toll-free, **1-877-FTC-HELP** (1-877-382-4357), or use the complaint form at [www.ftc.gov](http://www.ftc.gov). The FTC enters Internet, telemarketing, and other fraud-related complaints into **Consumer Sentinel**, a secure, online database available to hundreds of civil and criminal law enforcement agencies worldwide.

- The Indian Arts and Crafts Board receives and refers valid complaints about violations of the Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1990 to the FBI for investigation and to the Department of Justice for legal action. To file a complaint under the Act, or to get free information about the Act, contact the Indian Arts and Crafts Board, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1849 C Street, N.W., MS 4004-M1B, Washington, D.C. 20240; 202-208-3773; [www.iacb.doi.gov](http://www.iacb.doi.gov).

Complaints to the IACB must be in writing and include the following information:

- The name, address and telephone number of the seller.
- A description of the art or craft item.
- How the item was offered for sale.
- What representations were made about the item. Include any claims that the item was made by a member of a particular tribe or statements about its authenticity.
- Any other documentation, such as advertisements, catalogs, business cards, photos, or brochures. Include copies (NOT originals) of documents that support your position.

FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION	FOR THE CONSUMER
1-877-FTC-HELP	<a href="http://www.ftc.gov">www.ftc.gov</a>

**Federal Trade Commission**  
Bureau of Consumer Protection  
Office of Consumer and Business Education

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