

Kinkut Alutiit – WHO ARE THE ALUTIIQ?



In the historic era, Russian traders called all of the Native peoples of southwestern Alaska “Aleut” —despite regional differences in language, cultural practices, and history. In the modern era, this has caused confusion. People with distinct cultures are known by the same name. Today, Kodiak’s Native people use a variety of self-designators. There is no one correct term. Many Elders prefer Aleut, a term they were taught as children. Today, others choose Alutiq or Sugpiaq. What does each of these terms mean?

SUGPIAQ – This is a traditional self-designator of the Native people of Prince William Sound, the outer Kenai Peninsula, the Kodiak Archipelago, and the Alaska Peninsula. It means “real person,” and it is the way Native people described themselves prior to Western contact. Sugpiaq is a popular self-designator on the Kenai Peninsula, and is gaining use on Kodiak.

ALEUT – This word means “coastal dweller,” and it is derived from a Siberian Native language. Russian traders introduced the term, using it to describe the Native people they encountered in the Aleutian Islands, the Alaska Peninsula, and the Kodiak Archipelago. Aleut is still frequently used to refer to the Native people of the Aleutian Islands, although Unangaġ is gaining popularity.

ALUTIIQ – “Alutiq” is the way Sugpiaq people say “Aleut.” It is the Native way of pronouncing the Russian-introduced word “Aleut” in their own language. Alutiq is a popular self-designator in Kodiak and reflects the region’s complex Russian and Native history. People used this term occasionally in the Russian era. It gained popularity starting in the 1980s.

ALUTIIQ OR ALUTIIT?

ALUTIIQ (singular)

- Noun: to describe one person:
I am an Alutiq.

- Noun: to describe the language:
They are speaking Alutiq.

- Adjective: as a modifier:
There are many Alutiq artists.

ALUTIIT (plural)

- Noun: to describe more than two:
There are 40 Alutiit living in Karluk.

- Noun: to describe the people or culture collectively: **The ancestors of the Alutiit settled Kodiak Island.**

WHAT ABOUT ESKIMOS? The word Eskimo comes from Montagnais, a Canadian Indian language.

It means “snowshoe netter,” and not, as many think, “eaters of raw meat.” Anthropologists use “Eskimo” to refer to a distinctive set of related cultures in the North American Arctic—from the Gulf of Alaska to Greenland. In Alaska, this includes the Alutiq, Yup’ik, and Inupiaq peoples. The term Eskimo, however, is not a popular self-designator. Many people feel it is offensive. They prefer to be recognized by their cultural affiliation (e.g., Alutiq, Yup’ik, or Inupiaq). Similarly, in Canada, Native people prefer the term Inuit.