

Indigenous peoples of the Arctic

Approximately four million people live in the Arctic region.
The number of indigenous people in this area makes up 10% of the total population.

Chukchi

The Chukchi live in the north-eastern part of Siberia on the Chukotka Peninsula. Originally, they were nomadic hunters of wild reindeer but over time they divided into two groups. One group became semi-nomadic reindeer herders and the other group became settlers who hunted on the Arctic Ocean for mammals and fish. Today, there are some Chukchi who live in modern homes and have modern lifestyles. However, others still follow their traditional ways of living, reindeer herding and hunting aquatic animals.

Yup'ik

The Yup'ik are found in the wilderness of Alaska. In the past, they were nomadic hunters and lived in lightweight structures made of sealskin mats over a wooden frame that were easy to transport. The Yup'ik hunted on the water in kayaks, harpooning seals, walruses, fish and whales. On land, they would use spears or bows and arrows for hunting caribou, birds and small animals. Today, many of the Yup'ik live modern lifestyles in permanent villages, while maintaining many of their cultural traditions.

Inuit

The Inuit migrated from Siberia to settle in parts of Alaska, Canada and Greenland. The harsh conditions of these areas meant that the Inuit people settled in coastal areas so they could hunt and fish. Hunting has always been a central part of the Inuit culture. In the past, the Inuit lived completely off the land and sea. They developed their hunting skills and used every part of animals for their diet and to make clothing. Today, some of the Inuit still follow this way of life. Others have moved into modern, permanent settlements and adopted modern clothing and technology.

Sami

The Sami are located in Norway, Sweden, Finland and parts of Russia. In the past, the Sami were reindeer herders and were nomadic people who migrated with their herds. The Sami travelled in groups of five or six families and lived in tents or turf huts. Traditionally, they went hunting and fishing but reindeer became their main source of food. Today, many Sami live modern lives but have worked with the government to protect and develop Sami culture. Schools teach Sami history and the Sami language is used on information signs and spoken more widely. Some Sami still work with reindeer and migrate with the herds.

Evenk

The Evenk are the most numerous of the Arctic indigenous people but are widely scattered throughout Mongolia, Russia and China. In the past, they were hunters and reindeer breeders. They bred the reindeer not for food but for use as transport and for their milk. This meant that the reindeer had a closer relationship with humans and would wear saddles to carry packs or riders. Today, many Evenk have moved into modern homes and no longer follow their traditional ways of life. Other Evenk have continued to practise their old traditions and customs. They support themselves by hunting and breeding reindeer.

Dolgan

The Dolgan live on the Taymyr Peninsula in the central Siberian Arctic in small numbers. They are believed to have come from Yakut, Evenk and Nenets tribes. In the past, the Dolgan were reindeer breeders who hunted wild reindeer. They lived in small huts called baloks that were mounted on sledge runners and insulated with reindeer skin. Today, some of the Dolgan have moved away from their traditional life and live in modern cities. Other Dolgan have continued to live their traditional nomadic life.

Nenets

The Nenets are found in the Siberian Arctic. In the past, they moved gigantic herds of reindeer over 1000km from summer pastures in the north of the region to winter pastures in the south. The Nenets wore clothing made of reindeer skin to keep warm. In the extreme winters, they wore an extra layer that allowed them to stay outside at night with temperatures falling to -50°C . Today, many of the Nenets continue to live this way of life and maintain their traditions and practices.

