

Guest, Stranger, Outsider — Allanertaq

ALLENERTAKINGA AKGUA'AQ. – A STRANGER CAME TO SEE ME YESTERDAY.



Photo: A visitor signed the guestbook at the Alutiiq Museum, May, 2008.

Hosting guests was a sign of power and prosperity in Alutiiq communities. Each winter, as the sun sank below the horizon, wealthy families initiated festivals, inviting friends from their own community and neighboring villages to participate in feasting, dancing, singing, visiting, and gift-giving. Guests were anxiously awaited. As skin boats loaded with visitors appeared, members of the host community waded into the water to carry both the boats and their occupants ashore. In the ceremonial house, guests were seated and fed according to their social standing. The most important people sat by the door and were the first to be offered freshwater and food served in ornately carved wooden bowls. All festival guests received gifts, and an elaborately embroidered parka was the ultimate present.

These lavish festivals were just one form of hospitality. Throughout the year, Alutiiq people took pride in providing guests with hearty meals. People served visitors dried fish and meats alongside bentwood bowls filled with oil, and guests often left with refreshments for the trip home.

Welcoming guests with food remains an Alutiiq tradition. A cup of tea, a bit of smoked salmon, or a sweet are common offerings in Native homes and a sign of both respect and hospitality.