

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, but each Native person has a preference. 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 the oldest name for our people. It means “real person” in our language. It is a way our people described themselves before the arrival of Russian traders. Sugpiaq is a popular self-designator on the Kenai Peninsula and on Kodiak.

ALEUT – Russian traders reported hearing this word in the western Aleutian Islands and used it to describe all the Native people they encountered in the Gulf of Alaska. Aleut is still frequently used to refer to the Native people of the Aleutian Islands, although many people prefer Unangaŕ.

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 26 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 Native 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 or First Nation.