



The presence of Alaska Native people can be traced back hundreds of thousands of years to when the first descendents crossed the Bering Land Bridge from Asia to North America. Today, Alaska Native people make up about 16 percent of Alaska's total population. Many still practice traditional subsistence hunting and fishing to this day, while others have blended their customs and traditions with a Western lifestyle. Alaska's Native people are divided into 11 distinct cultures, 11 different languages and 22 unique dialects. These cultures are categorized by similarities in tradition, language and geographic regions. From the Inupiat of the Arctic Slope region, above the Arctic Circle, to the Tlingit of the Inside Passage, Native cultural diversity is a hallmark of the state.

### **Athabascans**

The Southcentral and Interior regions of Alaska are home to the state's largest populations of [Athabascan](#), whose early territory ranged from the Brooks Range in Alaska's Far North to Cook Inlet in Southcentral Alaska and from near Norton Sound in the west to the Canadian border and beyond. Known for their innovative survival skills in one of the earth's harshest environments, the Athabascan people rely on moose, caribou, plants, berries and fish. Athabascan art features superb skin sewing skills using pelts from big game in the region. Athabascan beadwork and embroidery is recognized as being among the finest in the world.

#### **Highlights**

Eklutna Historical Park, 26 miles north of Anchorage, provides a glimpse into Dena'ina Athabascan culture and the influence of Russian Orthodox missionaries.

A fly-in excursion to Fort Yukon on the Arctic Circle will give you a picture of life on the Yukon River in Alaska's largest Athabascan village. The Dinji Zhuu Enjit Museum has excellent examples of old and new beadwork created by the Gwich'in Athabascans.

In Fairbanks, a tour on the Riverboat Discovery will introduce visitors to life in an Athabascan village and includes beading demonstrations and explanations of traditional hunting and trapping practices.

### **Tlingit, Haida, Eyak and Tsimshian**

The Northwest Coast Indians – [Tlingit, Haida and Tsimshian](#) – shaped the history of the

Inside Passage. Known as fishermen, hunters, artisans and carvers, the indigenous people of this region were blessed with milder temperatures and abundant food, which allowed an artistic culture to flourish. Perhaps most iconic among these works of art are the intricate totem poles they created, some of which reach 90 feet tall. Today, the craftsmen of the region are also known for their handmade dance masks, decorative paddles, button blankets and finely woven cedar bark and spruce root baskets.

### **Highlights**

Chief Shakes Island, in Wrangell, features an impressive collection of totem poles and the Shakes Community House. Tlingit and Tsimshian petroglyphs can also be found at Petroglyph Beach State Historic Park.

Saxman Native Village, located three miles south of Ketchikan, has more than two-dozen cedar totem poles, comprising one of the world's largest collections of totemic art in the world. Ketchikan is also home to Totem Bight State Park, featuring the largest collection of totems in Alaska.

The Sheldon Museum & Cultural Center in Haines is a cultural and historic center with Tlingit exhibits, featuring basketry, carvings and informational displays on fishing and dance.

In Sitka, Sitka National Historical Park also features a large collection of totem poles arranged along a mile-long walking path through the forest. At the visitor center, Tlingit carvers work on new poles and other carvings and answer questions about their craft.

### **Aleut and Alutiiq**

The [Aleuts](#) of the Aleutian Islands were the first Alaskans in contact with Europeans hired to explore for the czars of Russia in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. These maritime people depend on fish, sea otters, seals and whales for subsistence. Today the Russian influence on their way of life remains and the Russian Orthodox Church plays a large part in their lives. The largest single population of Aleuts lives on the Pribilof Islands — St. Paul and St. George — in the Bering Sea. Others remain in the Aleutian Islands, on Kodiak Island and throughout the Alaska Peninsula.

### **Highlights**

The Alutiiq Museum and Archaeological Repository in Kodiak provides a general overview of prehistoric Alutiiq life and includes an exhibit gallery, traveling displays, a repository and museum store.

The Kodiak Island Convention & Visitors Bureau provides visitor information on the six Native villages on the island and on other activities such as bear viewing on the Katmai Coast.

## **Yup'ik and Cu'pik**

Named after the two main dialects of the Yup'ik language, the [Yup'ik and Cup'ik](#) people live in various parts of Western Alaska, primarily in the region defined by the Yukon and Kuskokwim rivers. The largest Yup'ik community in Alaska is Bethel, which serves as a hub to several smaller villages in the area. Like the Yup'ik of Saint Lawrence Island and the Inupiat of the Far North, they depend on a subsistence lifestyle of fishing, hunting and gathering. Traditionally, the Yup'ik relied on the rivers and tributaries in the region for traveling to other villages and to facilitate hunting and fishing, and this lifestyle is still common.

### **Highlights**

Located on the campus on the Kuskokwim Campus of the University of Alaska Fairbanks in Bethel, the Yup'it Piciryarait is a unique facility that celebrates the Yup'ik culture.

The annual Cama-i Dance Festival in Bethel features song and dance from the Native people in the Bethel region and beyond. Held each March, the festival draws participants from surrounding villages and across North America. The slogan of the 2010 event, "Cauyarput Piciyaraput," means "our drum, our song."

## **Inupiaq and St. Lawrence Island Yupik**

The [Inupiaq and the St. Lawrence Island Yup'ik](#) people reside in small towns and villages in the north and northwest region of Alaska. Primarily hunting and gathering societies, they largely subsist on what the land provides — hunting whales, seals, walrus and other large animals and gathering berries in season. They also hunt birds and fish when the conditions are right. This region of the state features three larger "hub" communities – Nome, Kotzebue and Barrow – while the rest of the region is composed primarily of small rural villages accessible only by air.

### **Highlights**

The Inupiat Heritage Center in Barrow is part museum, part meeting space and part cultural venue. It includes a cultural arts exhibit room with 14 historical exhibits of the Inupiat people.

The Northwest Arctic Heritage Center, located in Kotzebue, opened in January 2010 and is jointly managed by the National Park Service and NANA, an Alaska Native corporation. The center provides Far North visitors a new destination for information and cultural events.

## **Additional Resources**

The Anchorage Museum permanent collection depicts 10,000 years of Alaska history and culture. Its newest addition, the Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center, includes rare Alaska Native heritage objects from the Smithsonian Institution.

The Alaska Native Heritage Center is a cultural center in Anchorage depicting the heritage of Alaska's eleven major cultural groups. The center hosts Native dance performances, classes and special events.

The University of Alaska Museum of the North in Fairbanks features cultural and historical exhibits from all regions of the state, as well as 2,000 years of art including ivory carvings and Alaska Native paintings and sculptures.

The Alaska State Museum is located in Juneau and hosts a spectacular collection of Alaskan artifacts and objects from Inupiat, Athabascan, Aleut and Northwest Coast groups.

### **If You Go**

#### **Alaska Travel Industry Association**

[www.travelalaska.com/Media%20Center](http://www.travelalaska.com/Media%20Center)

Phone: (800) 327-9372

#### **National Park Service – Alaska Region**

[www.nps.gov/akso](http://www.nps.gov/akso)

Phone: (907) 644-3510

#### **Alaska Native Heritage Center**

[www.alaskanative.net](http://www.alaskanative.net)

Phone: (800) 315-6608

#### **Alaska State Museum**

[www.museums.state.ak.us/asm/asmhome.html](http://www.museums.state.ak.us/asm/asmhome.html)

Phone: (907) 465-2901

#### **Alutiiq Museum and Archaeological Repository**

<http://alutiiqmuseum.org>

Phone: (907) 486-7004

#### **Anchorage Convention & Visitors Bureau**

[www.anchorage.net](http://www.anchorage.net)

Phone: (907) 276-4118

#### **Anchorage Museum**

[www.anchoragemuseum.org](http://www.anchoragemuseum.org)

Phone: (907) 929-9201

#### **Camai Dance Festival**

<http://bethelarts.com>

#### **Cape Fox Tours**

[www.capefoxtours.com](http://www.capefoxtours.com)

Phone: (907) 225-4846

#### **Chief Shakes Island**

<http://shakesisland.com>

Phone: (907) 874-3097

#### **Eklutna Historical Park**

[www.eklutnahistoricalpark.org](http://www.eklutnahistoricalpark.org)

Phone: (907) 688-6026

#### **Fairbanks Convention & Visitors Bureau**

[www.explorefairbanks.com](http://www.explorefairbanks.com)

Phone: (800) 327-5774

#### **Haines Convention & Visitors Bureau**

[www.haines.ak.us](http://www.haines.ak.us)

Phone: (800) 458-3579

**Inupiat Heritage Center**

[www.nps.gov/inup/index.htm](http://www.nps.gov/inup/index.htm)

Phone: (907) 852-0422

**Juneau Convention & Visitors Bureau**

[www.traveljuneau.com](http://www.traveljuneau.com)

Phone: (888) 581-2201

**Ketchikan Visitors Bureau**

[www.visit-ketchikan.com](http://www.visit-ketchikan.com)

Phone: (800) 770-3300

**Kodiak Island Convention & Visitors Bureau**

[www.kodiak.org](http://www.kodiak.org)

Phone: (800) 789-4782

**Nome Convention & Visitors Bureau**

[www.visitnomealaska.com](http://www.visitnomealaska.com)

Phone: (907) 443-6624

**Northwest Arctic Heritage Center**

[www.nps.gov/kova/parknews/nwahc.htm](http://www.nps.gov/kova/parknews/nwahc.htm)

Phone: (907) 442-3890

**Riverboat Discovery**

<http://riverboatdiscovery.com>

Phone: (866) 479-6673

**Sheldon Museum & Cultural Center**

[www.sheldonmuseum.org](http://www.sheldonmuseum.org)

Phone: (907) 766-2366

**Sitka Convention & Visitors Bureau**

[www.sitka.org](http://www.sitka.org)

Phone: (800) 557-4852

**Sitka National Historical Park**

[www.nps.gov/sitk/index.htm](http://www.nps.gov/sitk/index.htm)

Phone: (907) 747-0107

**Totem Bight State Park**

<http://dnr.alaska.gov/parks/units/totembgh.htm>

Phone: (907) 465-4563

**University of Alaska Museum of the North**

[www.uaf.edu/museum](http://www.uaf.edu/museum)

Phone: (907) 474-7505

**Wrangell Convention & Visitors Bureau**

[www.wrangellalaska.org](http://www.wrangellalaska.org)

Phone: (800) 367-9745

**Yup'it Piciryarait**

[www.bethel.uaf.edu](http://www.bethel.uaf.edu)

Phone: (800) 478-5822