



# Who Are the Alutiiq?

Who are the Alutiiq? Kodiak visitors ask this question frequently. During the historic era, Russian traders called all of the Native peoples of southwestern Alaska “Aleut” – despite regional differences in language, cultural practices, and histories. In the modern era, this has caused confusion. People with distinct heritages are known by the same term. Today, Kodiak’s Native people use a variety of self-designators. There is no one correct term. Many still prefer Aleut, a term they learned as children. Others choose Alutiiq, Sugpiaq, or Koniag. What does each of these terms mean?

## Who’s Who in Southwestern Alaska

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

**Eskimo** – This word 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 the distinctive cultures of the North American arctic, from the Gulf of Alaska to Greenland. In Alaska, these groups include the Alutiiq, the Yup’ik and the Inupiaq. These societies share many cultural practices, have related languages, and are descended from a common ancestral population. The word Eskimo, however, is not a popular self-designator. Many people feel it is derogatory. They prefer to be recognized by their cultural affiliation (e.g., Alutiiq, Yup’ik or Inupiaq) rather than the broader term Eskimo.

**Sugpiaq** – The 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 people” and it is the way the Native people described themselves prior to Western contact.

**Alutiiq** – “Alutiiq” is the way Sugpiaq people say Aleut. It is the Native way of pronouncing the Russian-introduced word in their own language. Alutiiq is a popular self-designator in the Kodiak region.

### ALUTIIQ or ALUTIIT?

#### ALUTIIQ(singular)

Noun: to describe one person: I am an Alutiiq.  
 Noun: to describe the language: They are speaking Alutiiq.  
 Adjective: as a modifier: There are a growing number of Alutiiq artists.

#### ALUTIIT (Plural)

Noun: to describe more than one person: There are 40 Alutiit living in Karluk.  
 Noun: to describe the people or culture collectively: The ancestors of the Alutiit came to Kodiak Island more than 7,500 years ago.

**Koniag** - The Alutiit of Kodiak Island and the Alaska Peninsula. This word is derived from an Unangan word for the people of Kodiak. Some Islanders also refer to themselves as **Qikrtarmiut** – a Sugt’stun word meaning island people (qikrtaq [island] + miut [people of] = qikrtarmiut [island people]). Others refer to themselves as **Sugpiat**, which is translated as “real people.” The Norton Sound people called the people of Kodiak and Bristol Bay **Ackugnuit**, “inhabitants of the warm regions.”

**Chugach** – The Alutiit of Prince William Sound and the Kenai Peninsula. The word Chugach may be derived from the Alutiiq name for Cook Inlet. Some Chugach Alutiit refer to themselves as **Unegkurmiut** - a Chugach word meaning “people way over there.”

