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Native Americans

Inuit Peoples

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The Inuit people live in the far northern areas of [Alaska](#), Canada, Siberia, and Greenland. They originally made their home along the Alaskan coast, but migrated to other areas. Everything about the lives of the Inuit is influenced by the cold [tundra](#) climate in which they live.



Inuit Family by George R. King

What kind of homes did they live in?

The typical materials for making homes such as wood and mud are hard to find in the frozen tundra of the Arctic. The Inuit learned to make warm homes out of snow and ice for the winter. During the summer they would make homes from animal skin stretched over a frame made from driftwood or whalebones. The Inuit word for home is "igloo".

What was their clothing like?

The Inuit needed thick and warm clothing to survive the cold weather. They used animal skins and furs to stay warm. They made shirts, pants, boots, hats, and big jackets called anoraks from caribou and seal skin. They would line their clothes with furs from animals like [polar bears](#), rabbits, and foxes.

What did the Inuit people eat?

The Inuit people were unable to farm and grow their own food in the harsh desert of the tundra. They mostly lived off of meat from hunting animals. They used harpoons to hunt seals, walrus, and the bowhead whale. They also ate fish and foraged for wild berries. A high percentage of their food was fatty, which gave them energy in the cold weather.

How did they hunt whales?

In order to hunt larger prey like walrus and whales, the Inuit hunters would gather in a large group. To hunt a whale, typically at least 20 hunters would gather on a large boat armed with a number of harpoons. They would attach a number of seal-skin balloons filled with air to the harpoons. This way the whale could not dive deep into the water when it was first speared. Each time that the whale would come to the surface for air, the hunters would harpoon it again. Once the whale died, they would tie it to the boat and tow it back to shore.

It would sometimes take a number of men a long time to catch and kill a whale, but it was well worth it. The Inuit used all parts of the whale including the meat, blubber, skin, oil, and bones. A large whale could feed a small community for a year.

Transportation

Despite the harsh landscape of the Arctic, the Inuit still found ways to travel long distances. On land and ice they used dogsleds called qamutik. They bred strong sled dogs from wolves and dogs to pull the sleds which were made from whale bones and wood. These dogs became the husky dog breed.

On the water, the Inuit used different kinds of boats for different activities. For hunting they used small single-passenger boats called kayaks. They also built larger, faster boats called umiaqs that were used for transporting people, dogs, and goods.

Interesting Facts about the Inuit

- A member of the Inuit people is called an Inuk.
- The warm soft boots worn by the Inuit are called mukluks or kamik.
- In order to mark areas and to keep from getting lost, paths were marked with a pile of stones called an inuksuk.
- Nearly ninety percent of the Inuit in Western Alaska died from disease after they came into contact with Europeans in the 1800s.
- Inuit women were responsible for sewing, cooking, and raising the children. The men provided food by hunting and fishing.
- The Inuit had no formal marriage ceremony or ritual.
- After hunting, they would perform rituals and sing songs in honor of the animal's spirit.

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