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The First People

Indigenous cultures of the World

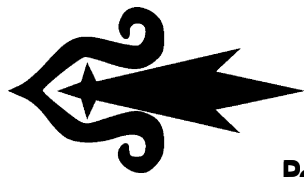


By Lauren Princi

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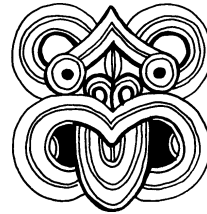
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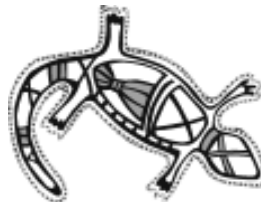
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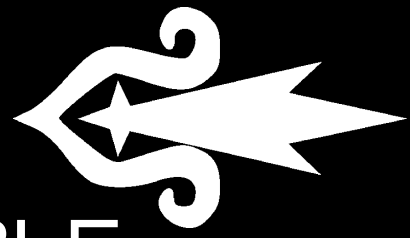
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Japan's OTHER PEOPLE



Ainu hunter in mountain clothes, 1871.
Courtesy National Park Service, Longfellow
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In 1986, Prime Minister Nakasone made a statement that "Japan is a nation of homogenous people". The word homogenous means 'of the same nature' and suggests that all Japanese people are alike. This is not the case as there are some people living in Japan today who are descendants of the ancient Ainu (pronounced eye-nu). These people are the original inhabitants of Hokkaido, the northernmost island of Japan; Sakhalin and the Kurils, islands that are near to, and belong to, Russia.

What makes these people so fascinating is the fact that they have both European and Asian physical traits, and speak a language that is unrelated to any other known language in the world. These facts have forced many people to ask the question – Where did they come from?

Ainu people have deep-set eyes, more body hair and higher-bridged noses than Japanese people.

ONE THEORY SUGGESTS THAT THE AINU ARE ACTUALLY A LOST RACE OF PEOPLE FROM EUROPE WHO MADE THEIR WAY TO THE ISLANDS OF JAPAN THOUSANDS OF YEARS AGO.

You are probably wondering where the Japanese people living there now originally came from. Well, during the Ice Age there was believed to have been a land bridge connecting mainland Asia with the islands of Japan. Between 35,000 BC and 30,000 BC people from Asia migrated to these islands and settled there, eventually meeting the Ainu people and enforcing their way of life upon them.

First Facts

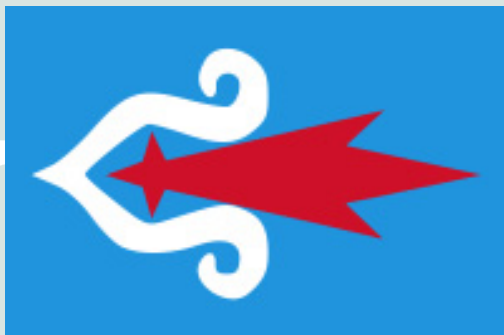
Some people think that the Ainu people could be descendants of the prehistoric race that produced the Australian Aborigines as they have similar facial characteristics.

Life at Home

Four to ten families made up an Ainu village or 'kotan' which could be found near river basins and seashores where food was easy to obtain. The single roomed houses were made of different types of grasses and tree bark and were about seven metres in length, with an entrance at the west end. A sacred window located on the east side of the house was called 'rorun puyar' and was believed to be the entrance and exit site of the gods. Looking through this window was strictly forbidden by the Ainu and any guests of honour brought into the house were seated at the east end of the room near this opening of the gods. The two other windows could be found on the south side of the house. An open fireplace was constructed in the centre of the room with mats placed on either side. The husband and wife sat on mats on the left side of the fireplace whilst the children sat on the right.



A traditional Ainu house.



This flag of the Ainu people was designed by [Bikki Sunazawa](#) in 1973. Courtesy of Wikipedia



Being very clever people, the Ainu understood how important it was for males and females to have different toilet arrangements so they built separate lavatories outside their houses – 'ashinru' for men and 'menokoru' for women.

Super SAMI



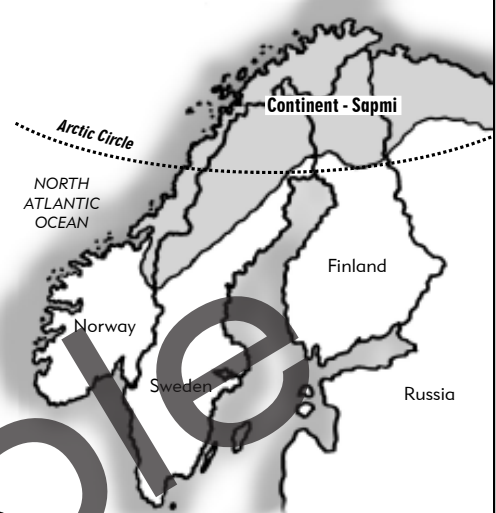
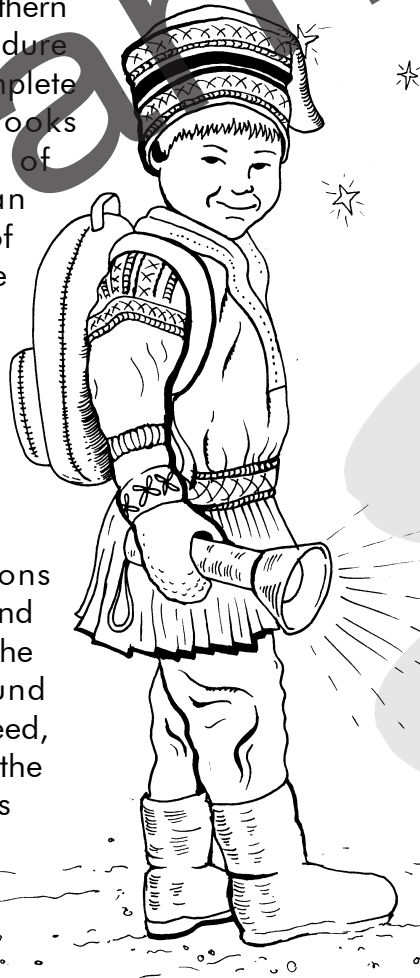
Europe's only indigenous people, the Sami, live in a giant area of the continent named Sapmi. This area covers all land north of the Arctic Circle in Sweden, Norway, Russia and Finland. To live in these freezing, harsh conditions, the Sami have to be super strong and super smart to survive. Originally they lived a nomadic lifestyle which meant that they didn't stay in the same spot for long periods of time. Herding reindeer, hunting and fishing were the basic occupations of the Sami people and some of them have continued this traditional way of life today.

Can you imagine going to bed when the sun is still shining? Or even worse, waking up and going to school in the dark? School is hard enough without having to do times tables by moonlight.

This is the reality for people living in the Sapmi region of Northern Europe who have to endure long winter days of complete darkness. Everybody looks forward to the arrival of summer when they can enjoy nearly 24 hours of daylight, also known as the midnight sun.

Sapmi residents certainly couldn't complain that there weren't enough hours in the day to get their work done!

These extreme conditions resulted in an intelligent and resilient people who used the natural resources around them to survive and succeed, making the Sami one of the most studied indigenous cultures of the world.



FIRST FACTS

Scientists believe that reindeer can change their eyes according to the season. This is so they can cope with 24 hour sunlight in summer and 24 hour darkness in winter. The eyes of winter reindeer are deep blue when a light is shone into them and the eyes of summer reindeer are yellow.

A Nuclear Disaster

On the night of April 26, 1986, something happened that would alter the lives of the Sami living in Sweden and Norway for many years to come. A nuclear reactor at the Chernobyl plant in Ukraine exploded, causing radioactive fallout to contaminate the soil and water of countries thousands of kilometres away. As a result, nearly 80% of all reindeer meat in Sweden was destroyed during the 1986 slaughter season. Following the explosion, rainfall carrying radioactive fallout spread through lakes and forests, contaminating the berries, animals and fish that lived there. The threat of cancer still remains today in the people who were exposed to this radiation over twenty years ago as it takes between five and twenty years after exposure to radiation for cancer to develop. Today, there are special mobile units that visit Sami communities to test the radiation levels of the people living there.

FIRST FACTS

The Sami National Day is celebrated on 6 February in Norway, Finland, Russia and Sweden.

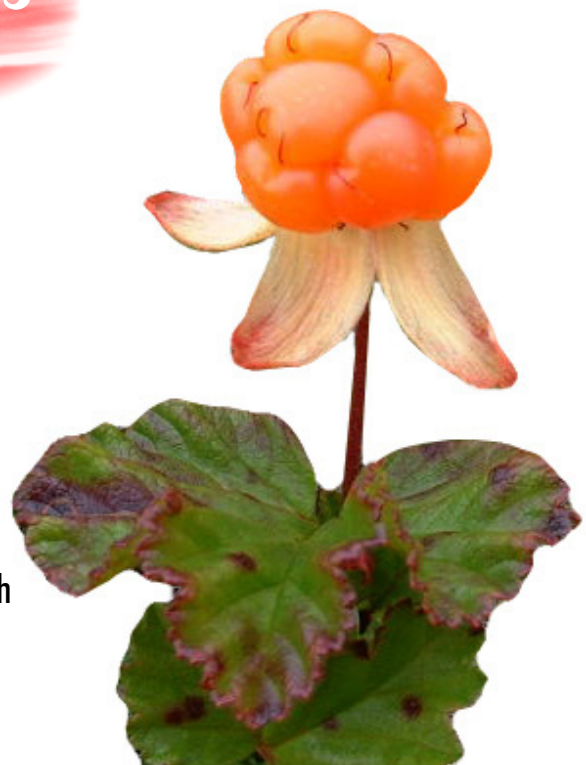
Heavenly Berries

Fish, caught in the many lakes of the Sami's homelands, and reindeer meat are eaten smoked, dried, salted or boiled.

In the Sami kitchen you can also find a berry that seems to have fallen from the sky.

During the summer months the cloudberry, along with many other types, such as lingonberries and bilberries, become a part of the Sami diet.

Today these little clouds of vitamin C are eaten with cheese in Finland, ice-cream in Sweden and with whipped cream and sugar in Norway. Delicious!



FIRST PEOPLE OF THE Kalahari



In Southern Africa there live the Bushmen of the Kalahari, regarded by some scholars as one of the oldest living cultures on earth.

Also known as the San or Basarwa people, their homeland stretches across South Africa, Botswana and Namibia. Groups or bands of Bushmen and women consisted of between 15 and 80 people and all decisions were made as a group rather than by a chief or leader. These peaceful tribes lived as hunter-gatherers until white colonists claimed the land as their own, forcing the San to ask permission to forage for food or collect firewood in the space they used to call their home.



Trance Dance

An all night dance party sounds great, right? By participating in these late night boogie sessions, the San Bushmen enter into a trance which links them to the spirit world. In this state they can appeal for rain, heal the sick and even drive away evil spirits. The Shamans or medicine people of the village use the sound of the dancing and the chanting of the women to trigger a trance in which they can take on the powers of different animals, particularly the eland which is a very important symbol in the religion of the San. Rattles are made from dried seed pods and are worn on the dancers' legs, creating a more intense rhythm as their legs beat faster and harder. With legs rattling and bodies shaking uncontrollably, the men are at the height of their trance and can begin healing people. Sometimes they might even try and throw themselves into the fire or cover themselves in hot coals but there are always people present who help control the dancers and make sure they come to no harm. When they awake from their trance they may truly feel as if they have danced the night away.





First Facts

Eland are the world's largest antelope and are found in East and Southern Africa.

They can jump very high and both the male and female have long horns.



'The Danger Diner'

Makes eating out an experience to remember

Roasted Porcupine with bush vegetables.

The chef recommends ordering this dish with the spikes included as they make excellent toothpicks.

Women provide the majority of the food, traveling some distance away from the camp to forage for mongongo nuts, water roots, bitter melon, berries and fruits. Men are responsible for hunting meat and will often run for hours at a time, tracking a herd of eland or antelope. They also eat zebras, fish, porcupines, flying ants, snakes and even tortoises.

Fast Food

Could a tiny beetle kill a full grown giraffe? With the San knowledge of hunting and tracking, they have successfully developed a foolproof technique for killing animals of all sizes, an essential skill when a MacDonald's restaurant hasn't been built in your town.

When an animal is pierced by the arrow of a San, they know that the animal will not die immediately. This is because the arrow head has been treated with a poison that has been made from the larvae of the diamphidia beetle. Depending on the size of the animal it can take a few minutes or a few days for it to die.

The poison is extremely dangerous but does not contaminate the whole animal. This means that the area around which the arrow hit the animal is cut out and thrown away, whilst the remaining meat is safe to eat. Poison has also been made from plants and snake venom but the method of using beetle larvae is preferred by San living in the Northern Kalahari.