

Iñupiat Heritage Center

National Park Service Affiliated Area



A whaling crew (Hopson 1) waits patiently for a bowhead whale, May 2002. Photo by Luciana Whitaker



Iñupiat Heritage Center May 2003. NPS photo



The *People of Whaling* exhibit inside the Iñupiat Heritage Center illustrates traditional and modern life and values of Iñupiat culture. Photo by John Robson

Welcome to the Iñupiat Heritage Center

The Iñupiat Heritage Center (IHC) promotes Iñupiaq culture, history, and language through exhibits, classes, performances, and activities. The facility includes a gallery, a traditional room for working on arts and crafts, a classroom, and a large conference/performance room. It also contains the offices of the Iñupiat History, Language, and Culture Commission and the Tuzzy Consortium Library. The Center houses and maintains collections and archives while a gift shop sells local crafts like baleen baskets, ivory carvings, jewelry, and educational materials. The Center opened to the public in early 1999 and is currently managed by the North Slope Borough Planning Department.

People of Whaling Exhibit

The *People of Whaling* exhibit tells about our traditional and modern life and values. Iñupiaq life is centered around hunting the bowhead whale, so whaling is the focal point of our exhibits. By showing how we hunt the bowhead whale, the equipment we use, and the central role whaling plays in our lives, the visitor has the opportunity to fully enter the world of Iñupiaq whaling: you can observe life on the ice at whale camp; you can feel the joy of community sharing and celebration at Nalukataq, our annual whale feast and blanket toss; and you can experience the respect we feel for the whale when it gives itself to a hunter.

The seasonal round of other subsistence activities such as fishing, seal hunting and caribou hunting are also important to our way of life. By including both traditional and modern items and practices, we demonstrate the continuity and change that exists within our culture. We collaborated with the University of Alaska Museum of the North to develop this exhibit, presented from our Iñupiaq perspective. In addition, members of seven North Slope communities designed profiles highlighting the unique traits and history of their villages, showing the variation between our inland and coastal lifestyles.

Visiting the Iñupiat Heritage Center



Frederick Brower performs the Kalukaq dance at Kivgiq, a bi-annual mid-winter festival in Barrow. Photo by Luciana Whitaker



Little Kupaaq crew launches their umiaq from the ice edge to chase a whale, May 2002. Photo by Luciana Whitaker



Iñupiat bring supplies to shore from a whaling ship, ca. 1915. Courtesy North Slope Borough, Iñupiat History, Language and Culture Commission



Women sew the sealskin cover for an umiaq frame in preparation for whaling, ca. 1920. Courtesy North Slope Borough, Iñupiat History, Language and Culture Commission

A Place of Living Culture

The IHC is a place where we share, live, practice, and remember our traditional ways. We honor our elders and our past by sharing their knowledge, objects, and photographs. We cherish our youth by teaching them our traditions, values, and way of life. As keepers of our community's treasures, we host activities that bring people of all ages together to explore our rich history and culture. You might see an artist in our traditional room carving an ivory sculpture or building a model boat from baleen. In February and March, you can see whaling crews building, repairing, and covering their skin boats. During the summer months, we schedule demonstrations of Iñupiaq dancing, games, the blanket toss, and sponsor local craft sales. We host a variety of life-long learning opportunities: school tours and class activities; Ilisagvik College's classes on Iñupiaq language, sewing, art, and dance; and the Barrow Arctic Science Consortium public lecture series.

Our Whaling History

Whaling has dominated Iñupiaq identity for centuries. Our traditional way of life was impacted in the late 19th century when commercial whalers from the eastern United States arrived in the Arctic. They relied upon the Iñupiat for food, shelter, warm fur clothing, and survival. The Iñupiat also worked as their crewmembers. The legacy of commercial whaling remains in our communities today. We still use some commercial whaling weapons and some Iñupiaq can trace their family names and ties back to the commercial whalers.

The IHC is a National Park Service Affiliated Area with New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park. Together, we ensure that the contributions of Alaska Natives to the history of whaling are recognized and interpreted.

Get in Touch!

Hours: 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. M-F
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