

# **KORYAKS**

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The Koryaks (*Koryaki*) are an indigenous Paleo-Asiatic people living in northeast Siberia on the northern part of the Kamchatka peninsula and on the adjoining mainland from the Taigonos Peninsula to the Bering Sea (a total of 152,000 square miles, or 393,680 square kilometers). The traditional roaming area of the nomadic Koryaks has been west of the Kamchatka Central Range, up to the Itelmen settlements. In addition to Koryaks, Itelmens, Chukchi, and Evens have also lived on this territory for centuries as well. Administratively the Koryaks live in the Koryak Autonomous Region (*Okrug*) - about the size of Arizona - which is one of the ten autonomous regions recognized in the Russian Constitution of 1993.

The Koryak Autonomous Region is just one part of the larger Kamchatka Peninsula, which includes the Karaginsky and Komandorsky islands in the Bering Sea. With an area of about 490,425 square miles, the countries England, Portugal, Belgium and Luxemburg together could be placed on the territory of Kamchatka. The peninsula contains many volcanoes, some of them active. The Koryak territory is mostly forest tundra, as well as tundra in the subarctic climate belt. The highest temperature in the summer is 34°C and the lowest in the winter (in the central and northern parts of the peninsula) about -49 °C .

The term *Koryak* derives from the word for reindeer (*kor'*). When combined with its prepositional suffix, the term *korak* means “at” or “with the reindeer.” This is not surprising, given the heavy reliance on deer for a wide range of bare essentials--meat, transportation, household articles, fat (to light indoor lamps), materials for constructing mobile dwellings (*yarangas*), bones (for tools and household items), and reindeer skin (to make clothes, footwear, and even diapers and sanitary napkins). When referring to themselves, however, the Koryaks do not use the term. Instead, they call themselves either *nimilany* ("residents of a settled village") or *chavchuvens* (nomadic "reindeer people").

In contrast to some other non-Russian nationalities, such as the Tuvinians, the Koryaks are a minority in their own region. Russians and Ukrainians make up over 75% of the total population. The remaining 25% are Koryaks, Chukchi, Itelmens, and Evens. Koryaks make up only one-fifth of the indigenous Siberian population.

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