

EMBERA WOUNAAN

POPULATION (estimation)
22,485 Embera inhabitants
6,882 Wounaan inhabitants



LANGUAGE

Emberas speak Embera dialect, while Wounaans speak Nómara dialect.



HOUSING

The typical house of the Embera-Wounaan is built on pillars so it is not in contact with the surface. Also, houses are built on river banks, and there is almost no furniture.

SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Emberá-Wounaan are monogamous. The father is the main authority; however the mother also inspires deep respect.



HANDICRAFT

They are skillful in carving tagua (Phytelephas seemanpii) and cocobolo wood (Dalbergia Retusa), and are well-appreciated by Darien craftsmen. Tagua is commonly known as vegetal ivory and its seeds are ivory-colored chicken egg sized.



Beautiful and fine baskets made of palm fibers called "chunga" are their most famous handicrafts.



LEISURE AND TRADITIONS

The most prominent of their traditions is Female Puberty Ceremony (also known as "Chicha Cantada"), in which there are dances and music played by accordion, flutes, drums and maracas. This music and its rhythm are quite similar to a lament.

LOCATION

The tribe is located inside of Chagres National Park, which is an hour and a half away of the city. You can get there with a short trip in canoe while enjoying through beautiful natural landscapes along the Chagres River, in the province of Darien, which is also considered as an ecological bridge in Central America.

POLITICAL STRUCTURE

Embera Wounaans' are governed by two types of authorities: the traditional government, that includes General Chieftains ("Cacicques") and the Regional Congress; and, the national government, which is composed by governors, mayors and magistrates recognized by the Government of the Republic of Panama.

ECONOMIC STRUCTURE

Both Emberas and Wounaans practice agriculture, hunting and fishing, which are mainly male activities.



They trade banana and corn, which are transported in canoes through rivers until arriving at the marketplaces. In the last decades, since tourism has been stepping up, handicraft demand has been increased as well.



COSTUME

Emberá Wounaan females are recognized as the most beautiful American indigenous. The upper part of their bodies is uncovered and wear just a colorful narrow skirt. Women also use in their breasts gorgeous Chaquira necklaces made also of silver coins, and adorn their hair with natural red flowers called "Papo". On the other hand, men wear loin-clothes ("taparrabos"). Both women and men do body-painting using natural colorings.

Other Tribes: Teribe (Nazo), Bokotá, Bri Bri and Parará-Purú.

5 indigenous regions (comarcas): Cémeco, Wargandí, Madugandí, Kuna Yala, Ngobe Buglé

During so many years, indigenous comarcas have been visited by national and international tourists, who have been welcomed warmly with flutes, drums and maracas.

Usually, indigenous people have fish and banana or cassava for meal. Enjoying with them its delicious cuisine and its original dances in which they represent animal life, is surely an unforgettable experience.

Visitors can purchase handicrafts, take a look of indigenous housing and get into their lifestyle. Moreover, tourists can enjoy the experience of having their faces and body painted with vegetable coloring "jagua" that lasts for about 8 days.



You can also enjoy ethnotourism groups that travel around several provinces by air or by roads, while deciding which ethnic group or region you would mostly like to visit.

With no doubt, what you will always find in these ethnic groups is a clear smile in its dark-skinned faces with limp hairs. Panamanian Indians are waiting for your visit. Surely, they will treat you with hospitality and kindness.



Edited and published by the Embassy of Panama in Japan, 2005

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PANAMANIAN INDIAN TRIBES



We invite you to know the main Indian tribes of Panama, distributed throughout the Isthmus, which are peaceful, friendly and open-mind to visitors.



KUNA

LOCATION

20-minute flight from Panama City to San Blas archipelago.

POPULATION

61,707 inhabitants (Estimation 2000)



GENERAL FACTS

Kuna Indians are the most organized tribe of Panama and also are extensively researched all around the world. They are famous for its "molas", colorful embroidered panels used by woman in their traditional dress. Molas symbolize the identity of the Kuna people to outsiders, and has colorful designs of animals.

PHYSICAL FEATURES

Kuna people are short and have wide back, limp hair, nose flattened and coppery-colored skin.

LANGUAGE

Kunatutu-Galla dialect and Spanish

RELIGION

Monotheistic, however they feel deep respect for nature.

SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Marriage with one woman is allowed. Male-led Society.



POLITICAL STRUCTURE

The Kuna Congress chooses democratically a chieftain called "Cacique", who is recognized by the Government of the Republic of Panama.



HOUSING

They live in bungalows made of straw and brave cane, built of trunks, barks, trees and palm leaves. There is almost no furniture; however hammocks are used to sleep.



ECONOMIC STRUCTURE

It is focused on coconuts cultivation, hunting, cattle farming and fishing, especially lobsters fishing. Nevertheless, for the last years the tourism has become a source of income for some families among the community.

LEISURE

The typical dances are called "Noga Koppe", and music is played with maracas made of pumpkins, as well as flutes made of thin bamboo threaded by themselves.



One of their festivities is "Ico-Inna" (Needle Festival), in which the drilling of the nasal partition of the girl is celebrated. It is carried out inside the family quarters, and the person in charge for executing the drilling performs a surgery in the girl's nose, with a thread previously soaked in coconut oil in order to avoid infections. Few days later, a ring is placed at the girl's nose, and it will be changed according to the girl's growing pace.



MOLA & Handicrafts



An important aspect of the kuna culture is to make Mola, which has mythological, anthropomorphic, geometric animal designs, and represents life scenes.

Traditional baskets of several sizes are hand-made only by men.



COSTUME

Women wear a skirt and a vivid-colored blouse, decorated in the chest and the back with the famous "mola". In the wrists and the ankles, women use accessories composed by colorful beads; also they use chains, pectorals, and gold rings in the nose.

In contrast, men dress very simple, with a cotton shirt, long pants made of smooth cloth and also wear a hat.



NGOBE-BUGLÉ (Also called Guaymí)

It is the biggest tribe of Panama, and it is concentrated mainly in Chiriquí Province. To access there, take Pan-American Highway and then pick some access ways toward the Central Mountain Chain.

PHYSICAL FEATURES

Since it has been mixed with the Afro-Antillean people, the adoption of foreign cultural elements is observed as a consequence.

HOUSING

The traditional Ngobe-Bugle housing is a circular-shaped shack. Inside, it is usual to have the "Jorón" or attic, where the crop is kept.

LEISURE

Still nowadays, they practice ancient rites such as the play of the "Balsaría" (men of whose villages battle by swatting at each other's ankles with huge logs of balsa wood). Also, "Chichería" is practiced and it consists on an invitation to drink a popular beverage called "chichi" and to participate in a fine banquet.

COSTUME

Women dress a huge robe known as "Nahuas", which has smooth colors with geometric applications in the area of the chest, hemlines and sleeves.



Men wear clothes very similar to what is used in urban places, such as pants, cotton-made shirts and hats.

HANDICRAFTS

Guaymí are famous by the making of "chacarás" (bags made with fibers and colorants) and the popular "Chaquiras", which are geometric necklaces used for special occasions. They have been made with beads obtained from seashells and bones.

POPULATION

186,861 inhabitants (Estimation 2000)

SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Marriage with multiple women is allowed. Moreover, a man with several wives is considered prosperous and of great social acceptance.



LANGUAGE

Guaymí dialect



NGOBE BUGLE

ECONOMIC STRUCTURE

The agriculture is the fundamental base of the guaymí's economy.



Mostly Guaymí Indians work in coffee farms, as a mean to generate incomes for their families.

