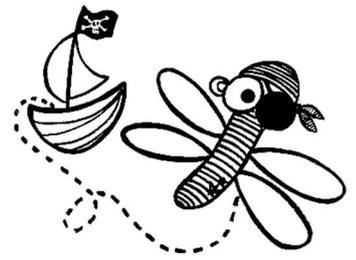


## GENERAL INFORMATION OF KUNA YALA



**Kuna Yala.** Earth means Mountain Kuna or Kuna. Indian community in Panama, inhabited by the Kuna. Cultural landscape where natural beauty of the coral archipelago and the continental forest with indigenous culture based on a comprehensive world view of the man-society-environment relationship merges. It is testament to the strength of the Native American cultures that have survived for more than 500 years to the process of cultural penetration. The name of the region of Kuna Yala was changed in October 2011 when the Government of Panama recognized the Guna people that assertion was not equivalent to the letter "K" in their mother tongue and the official name should be "Guna Yala ".

### **History**

The Kuna oral history indicates that they come from the north of Colombia, from where they were migrating to Darien pressured by other indigenous groups. In recent centuries they were moving to the Caribbean, until the nineteenth century settled in the islands.

It is known that since colonial times the Kuna Darien inhabited by narratives of the time. Records of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the Kuna have settled between the region of Chepo, Panama Province, and Sambu, Darien Province; that made resistance to the Spaniards and to fight them to the English, French and Scots they allied.

By the end of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, it had to begin the migration to the Atlantic coast. One reason for the migration kuna was the incentive of visits by the British and French on the Atlantic side; Some groups responded to the thrust of the Spanish colonization and the Choco and African origin who settled in the place. The Kuna preferred the islands to the mainland, to live because the conditions were healthier and could build better trade relations.

Kuna Yala was created on 19 September 1938. To date, it is ruled by the Kuna General Congress, under the authority of three caciques or Dummagan Saila.

### **Location**

Northeastern coast of Panama. Comprising 5500 km<sup>2</sup> of land and sea, of which 237.5 km<sup>2</sup> for the continental geographical area. The insular area consists of 365 coral islands.

It bordered on the north by the Caribbean Sea, south by the provinces of Panama and Darien, to the east with the Republic of Colombia and to the west with the province of Colon. The land is part of a strip of land between the mountains parallel to the coast and the Atlantic coast. It goes from the province of Panama to the border with Colombia with an area of 230 km.

### **Geographic characteristics**

There is very humid tropical climate in the mountains and tropical humid in the plains and the coast. Highlights include the Cordillera de San Blas, near the coastal plains and coral islands. The forests are home to many wild species. There are about twenty rivers, jumps, falls and rapids, along with a wide variety of marine environments: the sea, reefs, islands, mangroves and beaches.

### **Population**

The region is inhabited by the Kuna Indians, who occupy the two geographical, insular and continental areas, language is the kuna. On land there is no state officials Kuna population and black residents. The population of the region is located on 40 islands and 11 villages on the coast and amounts to a total of 32,411 according to figures from the 2000 census.

### **Political Organization**

- General Kuna Congress
- Local Congress
- The big three sahilas (sahila tumadi)
- The sahilas for populations of more than 500 villagers
- The sahilas for populations of more than 100 or less than 500 villagers
- The argarganas (spokespersons)
- The sualibedis (enforcement officers)

The political organization is hierarchical, participatory and democratic. Each island has a sahila or village that is subject to the three major sahilas of the region appointed by the representatives of each community in the Kuna General Congress. These are based in Narganá, Ailigandí and Tubuala.

The authority of the three principales sahilas is subject to the Kuna General Congress, which is the supreme authority. The congress is held every six months and involved the three major sahilas, the mayor, all sahilas of each island, spokespersons and representatives of each community. Before Congress principals, managers party puberty, state officials involved. Here economic, educational, health issues are discussed and can review all attendees.

Local congresses meet two or three times a week, all the inhabitants of the island to attend and is chaired by the sahila or sahilas. The Charter states that abarquinet sahilas are the legitimate authorities in their respective villages, working in the tradition and morality. Population in villages there is a second and third sahila, which are divided between the functions.

The sualibedis or suaribganas are civilian police, in charge of convening the local congress, keep order and audience participation in discussions, meet visitors and tourists. The argarganas sahila interpret the song of their community, are the delegation sent by each Congress and people carry the feel of their communities. The sahilas individuals must be blameless in their actions, they are chosen by the community and your choice depends on your knowledge about the Indian tradition and behavior.

Communities have created working committees for agriculture, access roads, health, etc. El Porvenir is the island that becomes the administrative center that concentrates kuna government offices and administrative headquarters. The Kuna are responsible for managing its territory, which has contributed greatly to preserve their traditions.

The Kuna General Congress is a pillar that has strengthened the permanence of the Kuna culture and the struggle for autonomy. The songs of the sahilas in Congress illustrate the traditions, history and provide lessons that emphasize handling morality, collective work and the importance of respecting nature as an essential part of being kuna.

## **Relations with the Panamanian state**

The Kuna people of their own territories. No outsider can own property on their land. This condition is achieved thanks to the strength of its culture and organization. 1915 the Panamanian government installed the quartermaster on the island Porvenir and schools and the colonial police detachments were established.

In 1925 he got the call Revolution Tule (Kuna) following this police abuse, which sought to subdue the Kuna customs and ways of life. The leaders of this revolution were Nele Kantule and Colman, who organized and brought to the colonial police force.

A treaty with the Panamanian government and five years after the partial autonomy of San Blas was recognized was then signed. The Kuna based political structure in which the national government has granted reserve and may have their own government. In 1938 the district was created under the law 2 September 16, and is declared Indian reservation in accordance with Law 20 of January 31, 1957, which includes the island and mainland.

In 1945 the charter of San Blas, including the appointment of three chiefs and formalizes the Kuna General Congress setting the obligation of writing yearly meetings. Congress decides by a majority of the region's courses. The Charter reaffirms the figure of the mayor, public position held by an individual not Kuna. Since 1980, the Congress proposes a short list and the government chooses the mayor. The quartermaster is the principal organ linking the national government with the region based in El Porvenir. The mayor is for the region, which a governor to the provinces, and is appointed by the president of the republic. In the period 1999-2000, a Kuna was president of the legislature becoming the first Indian to hold this important position in the country.

## **General characteristics**

Marriage is monogamous and residence is matrilineal or uxorilocal type. The husbands of the daughters went to live with this family and children who are not yet united in marriage. In Kuna society, women have a predominant position, reflected in the rite of puberty.

The Kuna live in villages or crossed by two main streets or villages. Housing is of reed with palm leaf roof. It is built, attached to one another, one bedroom house is called Casa Grande (nega tumat) and another for cooking and eating, which is called fire house (so-nega). There are houses like the house of chicha (innanega) where ceremonies and festivals and the House of Congress, where community meetings are held are held in all communities Kuna. There are also special houses for healers.

The man wears a Western fashion and women wear the cool shirt and skirt in fabric manufacturing industry headscarf in bright colors. Women are decorated with pectorals and gold earrings, from small a ring placed in the nose and adorn their ankles and wrists with colorful beads, the center of the nose are painted with black paint plant and also wear necklaces made with teeth uedar or wild pig.

The principles on which the Kuna culture is based are the conservation and respect for nature and life in community. In their meetings or assemblies, the elders speak through metaphorical song about nature that provides food, medicines and building materials.

Kuna Yala has the highest percentage of forested land (about 90%) of the country. It has been shown that the best preserved landscapes coincide with areas of indigenous occupation,

thanks to the specialized use and making conscious of the environment and the development of an economy at the service of life and not consumption.

### **Economy**

They practice subsistence economy. It is fundamentally a farmer and fisherman village. On land cultivated corn, bananas and tubers. They use the traditional way of burning cutting and planting. Are men, the father and sons living in the same household, those involved planting, plus they also work basketry, baskets and fans made to activate the fire.

The coconut is planted for commercial purposes. This support base is practiced since the nineteenth century and located market in Panama and Cartagena. Some islands and areas around the coast are converted into coconut monoculture. Colombian canoes bring household products to exchange.

In an agricultural plot you can find many useful species with fruit trees, edible plants, medicinal plants of extracting dyes traditional festivals. They practice a traditional agroforestry system that involves planting trees to demarcate plots and into other crops, ensuring forest regeneration.

Fishing, besides being devoted to food, also marketed with the capture of lobster and turtle. It is practiced individually or communally used nets and fences or pens where the fish are enclosed advantage of the tide. In the continental river fishing with bait, harpoons and nets are also performed. Women and children collect shrimp and molluscs.

Women engaged in homemaking, children and housework. They contribute to the economy molas tailoring, craft colorful cloth that is marketed as a product associated with tourism. No animal husbandry practice. Dejan fallow land four to ten years to grow them for a period of two to three years.

Work will also be made of wood, the men make canoes or canoes, for which they use whole tree trunks. Size of household objects and human and animal figures that are used in healing rituals practiced. The house is collectively constructed using the natural resources of the environment. City obtained goods such as boots, clothing, tools and have incorporated some buying food they used to get to work. This has led to the penetration of the capitalist economy, but the kuna has established trade relations since time immemorial.

On the other hand, they have been incorporated into Western education, which has encouraged the development of non-governmental organizations by the indigenous (biologists, agronomists, sociologists, technicians) who want to protect their natural and cultural wealth. The Kuna have been organized through PEMASKY, ecology program created and approved by the Kuna General Congress, as a project for the conservation of natural resources. There are other Kuna organizations such as, Kuna States Association for Napguana (Mother Earth), Dobbo Yala Foundation, Kalu Koskum Institute Kuna General Congress Center Support of Native Lands and Development Institute of Kuna Yala.

### **Tourism**

It is one of the most important activities. The harmonious combination between the lush vegetation, the beauty of the seascape and the strength of the Kuna culture generate an outstanding cultural landscape that is one of the most important centers of tourist attraction in Panama. Tourism development is regulated by the authorities and forms of Kuna life. It has

tourist services run by the community that are a source of income for their families. The sale of the mola is an activity linked to tourism of great importance.

### **La Mola**

It is formed by superimposing fabrics of various colors. The cutting and sewing techniques are crucial for a quality product. The current mola is a redesign of original dress of Kuna women, which have been incorporated and new forms imported fabrics. Texts describe the late nineteenth century women's skirts and hats that still use; blouses have evolved. Molas in his drawings narrate the lifestyle of the Kuna people, are a material expression of the spirit kuna.

### **Traditional Medicine**

In Kuna medicine is a large degree of expertise and relationship with the plant world, animal and supernatural. The kuna considers that plants have souls, is for them to speak with them and guide them to achieve healing, ask them to accompany them to the house to heal the sick, it is your duty to treat them with respect and praise them. To combat disease Kuna use three characters:

Inadulet. Know the world of botany, has extensive knowledge and training, and also uses rocks, stones with magical powers, animal bones. Their practices include potions, healing baths, poultices, frictions, incense, steam baths.

Nele Nelegua or female version. A doctor who has access to the spirits continuously, is predestined and their condition is recognized at the time of his birth by the midwife. Have visions and dreams of the causes of the disease, the origin of the ailments and determines whether the inadulet is practicing proper healing.

Namakaled-Sunmakaled. Specialized in songs that frighten the spirits responsible for the disease. With the balsa tree human figures representing the spiritual doctor in rituals are built.

### **Source**

Kuna Yala. In: Cultural Landscapes in Mesoamerica. Expert Meeting. Memory. 27 to 30 September 2000. Costa Rica