

Seasons

In the past, Inuit have had scientists, seamstresses, hunters, doctors, geologists, whalers, archaeologists, policemen, nurses, enforcers, mid-wives, philosophers, meteorologists, teachers, and of course astrologists long before outside influence. Most Inuit were required to have many of these skills to survive. An individual may possess one, some, or many of the skills. Some were more knowledgeable than some. Inuit did not go through formal education like today but they had elders to teach them skills to survive in this harsh land. They may not have received a certificate, a diploma or degree to recognize their abilities, but they were experts in their field. Some carried some type of amulet to show their abilities or achievements. Some even performed brain surgery without antiseptic of any type, or university training. We still have many of these experts today but they are not recognized as skilled individuals because they never went through formal education, speak English, or have obtained their credentials. Those of us who know these individuals, take advantage of their skills, as they are experts in many fields. They have saved many lives.

There are six seasons in the Inuit world unlike the traditional four seasons that we are accustomed to around the world. The north has long winters and short summers. Early fall, fall, winter, early spring, spring and summer are the main seasons. Some communities are known to have seven seasons. The seasons are closely identified due to the fact Inuit had to be precise in preparations for the future. Preparing too soon may result in hunger later on (meat ages too quickly). Waiting too long meant no meat stored away for the future. Timing was crucial when people were preparing meat for later use. It is still practiced today.

Caribou are cached early in the fall so they don't rot too much. Caching caribou too early will result in rotten meat. Too late, the meat will not fermentate well enough for good eating. Caching walrus requires the right season, right gravel, and that it be cached properly. Igloolik and Hall Beach are known to have the best igunaq (aged meat) in Baffin region, due to the fact they have the right gravel, cached properly and cached at the right time. Caching a walrus properly is extremely important as the meat fermentates quickly and can be more poisonous than other meat. Polar bear meat is similar.

Seal pups are born in the early spring but are hunted in the spring. Seals caught during early spring are usually premature and have yellow fur. Premature pups usually do not live for very long. Very young seal pups are a delicacy amongst the older people as the meat is very tender and the bones are chewable. Spring is the best time to hunt young seals.

There are traditional names for each month of the year. Each community has their own. Depending on their geographical location, availability of animals, sun or moon changes, or environmental conditions, each community has its unique way of identifying months of the year. Towns that are close to each other tend to share similar names as their location, weather conditions, and animal availability are similar. Communities that are separated by further distances, tend to have totally different names. Some communities

do not practice the use of the traditional names of the months. More and more communities are turning to the traditional months of the year due to its preciseness and besides, traditional names are important and should not be forgotten. Having calendar names in Inuktitut makes more sense than using the traditional English calendars, as the names have explanation, history, meaning and community ownership.

There are other indicators for season changes. There are stars to identify certain seasons, such as when the two stars around Tununiq (Pond Inlet) “Akuttujuuk” that tells us the return of the month. The “ring” around the moon tells us that bad weather is coming. The moon tells us about high and low tide. The sundown\sunup tells us that season is changing. There are many more indicators that I don’t have time to write about.

Government of Nunavut encourages IQ activities for every season. Does that mean each department can have six IQ activities per year?

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June\September 2008