Sámi Culture

The Sami culture is the oldest culture in large areas of Nord Norway, but there are also Sami people living in Sweden, Finland, and Russia. The total population in these four countries is estimated at approximately 80,000, of whom around half live in Norway. The Sami are the descendants of nomadic peoples who had inhabited northern Scandinavia for thousands of years. The origin of the Sami is obscure; some scholars include them among the Siberian people; others maintain that they were alpine and came from central Europe. Reindeer herding was the basis of the Sami economy until very recently. The reindeer-herding Sami lived in tents or turf huts and migrated with their herds in units of five or six families, supplementing their diet along the way by hunting and fishing. Nomadism, however, has virtually disappeared; the remaining herders now accompany their reindeer alone while their families reside in permanent modern housing. Many Norwegian Sami are coastal fishermen, and those in other areas depend for their livelihoods on farming, forestry, freshwater fishing, and mining or on government, industrial, and commercial employment in cities and towns. Sami increasingly participate in the Scandinavian professional, cultural, and academic world. The Scandinavian countries periodically tried to assimilate the Sami, and the use of the Sami languages in schoo ls and public life was long forbidden. In the second half of the 20th century, however, attention was drawn to the problems of the Sami minority and nowadays there are Sami political and cultural societies, and there are a few Sami newspapers and radio programs. It's a surprise to many but the Sami language has nothing in common with Norwegian, or any of the Scandinavian languages for that matter. Hungarian is actually its closest relative.