



CHUVASH

SOME USEFUL PHRASES IN CHUVASH

Салам. Эпё Джон ятлә.

[sa 'tam, 'ebə dzɔn 'jatlə]
/sah-LAHM. EH-buh JOHN YAHT-luh/
Hi. My name is John.

Тэсё мён ятлә?

['ezə mən 'jatlə]
/EH-zuh MUHN YAHT-luh/
What is your name?

Мёнле пурăнатан? Ёссем лайăх.

[mən 'le purə 'nadən əs 'sem 'tajəχ]
/muhn-LEH pood-ah-NAH-duhn. oosh-SEHMLAH-yuhkh/
How are you doing? I'm fine.

Эсё хăш сёршывраң?

['ezə χɔʃ sɔrʃuwrə'n]
/EH-zuh KHAWSH shir-shoowv-RAN/
Where are you from?

Эпё Индианаран килнё.

['ebə indjə'nə 'ran 'kilnə]
/EH-buh een-dzee-AHN-uh-RAHN KEEL-nuh/
I'm from Indiana.

Санăн пурту питё хитре.

['sanən pyr'ty 'pidə xit're]
/SAH-nuhn puer-TUE PEE-duh heet-REH/
You have a beautiful home.

Ăшта аллăна сума пулать?

[ɔs'ta alɫə'nə su'ma pu'latʃ]
/awsh-DAH ahl-luh-NAH shoo-MAH poo-LAHT/
Where is the bathroom?

Пысăк тав сана.

['puzək taw sa'nə]
/PUH-zuhk tahwv sah-NAH/
Thank you very much.

Чипер.

[tʃi'ber]
/chee-BEHR/
Good bye.

FIVE REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD LEARN MORE ABOUT THE CHUVASH PEOPLE AND THEIR LANGUAGE

1. Chuvash is spoken natively in Russia (specifically in the Chuvash Republic), Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan but you can also find small groups of Chuvash speakers in other Central Asian countries.
2. A member of the Turkic language family, Chuvash shares many structural similarities to Turkish (agglutinative, SOV structure, postpositions, etc.).
3. Chuvash is greatly influenced by Finnic and Russian languages, and their modern lexicon uses borrowed words from Russian, Tartar, Mongolian, Arabic, and Persian.
4. Chuvash is considered an endangered language, and is the only surviving language of the Oghur branch of the Turkic language family.
5. Because of their strong pagan roots, the Chuvash have some interesting and unique traditions, such as their holidays and wedding rituals.

ABOUT US

The Center for Languages of the Central Asian Region (CeLCAR) at Indiana University develops materials for learning and teaching a wide variety of Central Asian languages.

For more information, go to celcar.indiana.edu.



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WHO ARE THE CHUVASH PEOPLE AND WHERE DO THEY LIVE?

The Chuvash people are a Turkic ethnic group living throughout Eurasia and Central Asia.

Historically, the Chuvash people are thought to be from central Siberia and migrated west, mixing with other tribes along the way. Today, the Chuvash population

is estimated to be about 2,000,000 with the majority (1.6 million) living in the Volga basin in the Chuvash Republic of Russia and significant populations in Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan. Additionally, there are small populations of Chuvash people in other Central Asian countries, such as Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Azerbaijan.

WHAT KIND OF LANGUAGE IS CHUVASH?

Chuvash belongs to the Altaic group of languages, which includes languages such as Turkish, Mongolian, and arguably even Korean and Japanese. Altaic languages have historically been spoken across areas of Asia and Eastern Europe and are named after the Altai Mountains in Central Asia. More specifically, Chuvash is a member of the Oghur branch of the Turkic language family, along with Khazar, Turkic Avar, Bulgar, and Hunnic. However, Chuvash is the only one of these languages that is not yet extinct. Despite having over two million native speakers, Chuvash is considered



an endangered language, because it is not the main language in any education systems or media of the regions in which it is spoken, therefore there are consistently less active users of the language.

There are two dialects of Chuvash: Viryal and Antari (also known as Upper and Lower, respectively).

Similar to other Altaic languages, Chuvash uses a subject-object-verb word order and is an agglutinative language, where one root word may have a series of suffixes added to indicate discrete grammatical functions. And like many other Central Asian languages, Chuvash features vowel harmony, wherein the vowel quality of a vowel in a word directly affects the vowel quality of the other vowels within the word. Another feature of Chuvash is the use of postpositions, so instead of saying “on the table” like in English, a Chuvash speaker would say сĕтелте (*table on*).

WHAT ALPHABET DO THE CHUVASH USE?

Chuvash is written using the Chuvash alphabet (чăваш алфавичĕ) which is a modified version of the Russian Cyrillic alphabet. Historically, Chuvash was written in a runic script called *Orkhon*, also known as Old Turkic script, until it was replaced by an Arabic writing system when many Chuvash people converted to Islam in the 14th century. For a short period, Chuvash was also written in a Latin script, before eventually adopting the Cyrillic writing system in 1873. The current Chuvash alphabet used today is based on that writing system; however it was significantly modified in 1938 to more accurately represent the sounds of the Chuvash language.

WHAT IS CHUVASH CULTURE LIKE?

The Chuvash people are predominately Christian; however, they have a varied history of religious beliefs and practices. The foundation of Chuvash religion had pagan roots and centered on Tura (God). Over the centuries, groups of Muslims and Christians attempted to convert them; however the Chuvash retained their pagan traditions. Today, the majority of Chuvash people belong to the Russian Orthodox Church, with small populations of Chuvash identifying as Muslim or atheist.

In Chuvash culture, Friday is a festive day, called *uyav kun*, and is observed by many Chuvash families as a day to groom themselves, dress in white, and visit with one another. Typically, Chuvash do not work or build fires on this today, and they hold a superstition that if they do, they will be struck by lightning.

Traditional Chuvash cuisine is based on agriculture and cattle-breeding products. Some common Chuvash dishes include *pătă* (porridge), *Kakay-shurpy* (giblets soup), and *tultarmash* (blood sausage).

A favorite Chuvash drink is a sort of mead called *sim-pil*, made from a fermented honey.

The Chuvash are known for carving objects (cups, jugs, spoons, etc.) out of a single piece of wood. Some other traditional folk art includes hand embroidering, ceramics, painting, and goldsmithing.

