

# The Kuna Phrasebook Project

## *Duleigaiyabipi Kuna*

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### About the Project

Before visiting the Comarca Kuna Yala, also known as the San Blas Islands, of northeastern Panama, my friend Colin and I were unable to locate a Kuna dictionary or phrasebook. As of this writing, I still can't find one readily available online; please let me know if you do.

Thus, as part of the two weeks we spent in our thatched palm hut on the idyllic island of Achudup (Dog Island), Colin and I compiled this hopefully handy little dictionary for you to download. With some 70,000 native speakers of Kuna – which many older and female residents of the Kuna Yala speak exclusively – visitors will have plenty of opportunities to practice in between snorkeling the fantastic coral reefs and lolling around beneath the palm trees on those perfect white beaches.

Please keep in mind that I am not a professional linguist, and you may also notice that even my Spanish isn't perfect. Feel free to email corrections and additions to this little lexicon to [paigerpenland@hotmail.com](mailto:paigerpenland@hotmail.com).

### About the Language

*Duleigaiya*, the Kuna language, is not traditionally written, but is spoken by between 30,000 and 70,000 people as their primary language. Like other native regional languages, much meaning relies on groups of suffixes, and some prefixes, tacked on to the word. While Spanish grammar uses the sex of objects and to determine the structure of their modifiers, Kuna grammar changes according to direction, location, and/or the time and duration of the subject. Position is evidently more important grammatically than verb tenses.

### Vowels

This is just one of many ways that the Kuna language has been transcribed. There are six vowels, any of which can be doubled, usually for some type of emphasis. Each vowel is pronounced separately, with stress usually on the second-to-last syllable.

A, as in "cat," "pan" or "madu" (bread)  
Ai, pronounce like the long i in "kite," the ay in "hay" or "anai" (friend)  
Ei, as in "freight" or "eiyei" (yes)  
I, as in "mini," "listo" or "-bipi" (small)  
O, as in "toe," "dedo" or "gono" (finger or toe)  
U, as in "blue," "azul" or "dup" (island)

### Consonants

Kuna consonants are slightly different from their closest Spanish or English equivalents. Important sounds are located at the intersections of our b and p (bipi vs. pipi, "small"), t and d (dulai vs. tulei, "the people"), k and g (kalu vs. galu "holy place"), and v and w (weimar vs. veimar, "we"). Consonants can also

be doubled, with each pronounced separately, as in sappi, or tree. A double r is rolled in a fashion similar to Spanish.

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## Key Words and Phrases

Nuwedi	buenos dias, gracias, bueno	thank you, good morning, catch-all phrase meaning "good"
Nuweigambi	mucho gusto	nice to meet you
Beikeni ginika?	¿Como se llama?	What's your name?
Anugaden Paige	Me llamo Paige.	My name is Paige.
Bei igi birga nika?	¿Cuantos años tiene usted?	How old are you?
Beiya benega?	¿De donde eres?	Where are you from?
Bia natei?	Dondé esta?	Where is it?
Paneimalo	hasta la mañana	see you, good night
Takeimalo	adios	goodbye!
Eiyei	si	yes
Satei	no (hay)	no (none)
Suli	no	no
Eduei	cerrado	closed
Eiki	abierto	open
Anai	amigo	friend
Kuna	persona/pueblo	person/people
Mergi	turista/gringo	tourist, from "American"
Macharit	hombre	man
Mimmi	niño, hijo	child
Mola	ropa, camisa	Literally "clothing," refers specifically to the Kuna's famous reverse-embroidered artwork.
Nali	Tiburon	shark
Nele	jefe espiritual	spiritual leader
Omei	mujer	woman
Saila	jefe political	political leader
Wini	shakira	beads
Yala	montaña	mountain

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<b>Kuna</b>	<b>Spanish</b>	<b>English</b>
Abeigei	querer	to want
Abya Yala	las Americas	the Americas, literally "saved land"
Acualele (acuanusa)	pedra suave del río	smooth river rock, sometimes attributed with healing powers
Achuagua	embrazar	hug
Akwei	cuidar	care for
Alei	sonrisa	smile
Ama	tia	aunt
Amagutza	cayer	to fall
Ampokamala	dormir	to sleep
An-	mio	prefix generally meaning "mine"
Andup	mi isla	my island
Anmimmi	mi hijo	my child
Anai	amigo	friend
Ani	yo	I/me
Angi	langostino	crawfish
Anmar	nosotros	we
Anugaden Paige	Me llamo Paige	My name is Paige
Arkar	representante del gobierno	spokesperson for the chief
Asu	nariz	nose
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Baba (papa)	padre (dios)	father (often God)
Bab Tummat	dios masculino	male god
Bei	tu/usted	you
Bei igi birga nika?	¿Cuántos años tiene usted?	How old are you?
Bei yabenega?	¿De donde eres?	Where are you from?
Beikeniginika?	¿Como se llama?	What's your name?
Bia natei?	Dónde esta?	Where is it?
Bipi	pequeño	small

Dupbipi	isleta	small island
Negabipi	casita	small house
-bo	ambos	both
(This suffix is added to the second of two subjects, for instance, "Be nika anai guarbo, Paige Colinbo," which means, "You have two friends, both Paige and Colin." This seemed to be the most common way to form "and.")		
Boei	ceño	frown
Biryá	tormenta, lugar de espiritos malos	storm, tornado, home of evil spirits
Builatokei	pobrecito	oh, you poor thing you
Buñulogwa	niño	medium-sized child
Burba	alma, sentido	soul, feeling
Cagan	césped	grass
Carta Organica	Carta Organica	Kuna Yala constitution
Chicha	bebida alcoholica de maiz	An alcoholic drink made of fermented corn
Chicha also refers to monthly four-day celebrations when work is not done, and instead everyone drinks heavily starting at breakfast. This ceremony, which takes place every couple of months, effectively replaces birthdays and annual holidays.		
Chili	negro	black
Chuchu	mariposa	butterfly
Coroguat	amarillo	yellow
Dada/Baba	padre, abuelo	father, grandfather
Daisa	vi	I saw
Datoibei	sol	sun
Deimar	mar	sea
Dien	lagarto	crocodile, alligator
Digei	sembrar	to plant
Diguargit	verde	green
Diguarr	río	river

Dinit	rojo	red
Domumakei	nadar	to swim
Dulei (Tulei)	la gente	the people
Dulemola	ropa de la gente	the "people's clothes," or traditional clothing of the Kuna people.
Duleigaiya	idioma	language
Dulup	langosta	lobster
Dumat	grande	big
Dupdumat	isla grande	big island
Negadumat	casa grande	big house
Dupu	isla	island
<a href="#">(top)</a>		
Eduei	cerrado	closed
Eiki	abierto	open
Eimi	hoy	today
Eiomei	esposa	wife
Eiyei	si	yes
Escubiyei	loco	crazy
Esui	esposo	husband
Galú	hogar de los espíritus	home of the spirits
Ganil	pollo	chicken
Gerdaileigei	hermosa	beautiful
Gono	dedo	finger, toe
Goukim	hombros	shoulders
Guadigip	morada, azul	blue, purple
Guage	corazón	heart
Gundeileibi	ahogar	to drown
Guneimasi	comer	to eat

A central figure of Kuna creation

Ibeler (Tat Ipe)	Dios del Sol	mythology, associated with the sun, balance and protection.
Ibelelekana	heroes culturales	The family of deities, perhaps analogous to the Greek Titans, who ruled the Earth early on.
Ibia	ojo	eye
Ibia guarbo	ojos	both eyes
Igala	Sendero, camino	road, path; Bab Igala is the "Road of God," the path of creation itself.
Imasubalei	tatuaje	tattoo
Ina	medicina natural	medicinal plants, traditional medicine in general
Inaduled	doctor botánico	Kuna doctor, the word is also a used for any type of botanist
Ipa	nube	cloud
Iyagua	Señora	ma'am
Kaa	chile picante	hot pepper
Katchi	hamaca	hammock
Kaka	boca	mouth
Kalu	tierra sagrada	sacred ground
Kami	remo	oar
Kanaletei	remar	to row
Kilu	tio	uncle
Kilu Ulusui	Dios de Cocodrilios	Literally "Uncle Long Canoe," this is the crocodile god and often evil god of the underworld, more analogous with the Egyptian Set(h) than the Christian devil.
Kiplu	aguila	hawk
Koirgua	papaya	papaya
Korokwa	maduro	ripe
Koskun Kalu	Congreso Kuna Yala	Congress of Kuna Yala
Koyei	muñeca	doll
Kukwei	volar	to fly
Kukunai	volar en avion	to fly in a plane
Kuna	persona/pueblo	person/people

Kunei	comer	eat
Kunu	plastica	plastic
Kurgen	sombrero, gorro	hat
Kwalu	papa dulce	sweet potato
Kwallu	grasa	grease
Kwento	cuento	story
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Macharet	hombre	man
Machi	niño	boy
Madu	pan	bread
Mama	madre, pechos, yucca	mother, breasts (male or female); and rather tellingly, yucca/manioc
Magei	maquillarse	to put on makeup
Mani	plata	silver
Marganai	rayas	lightening
Mergi	turista/gringo	tourist, from "American"
Merginega	Estados Unidos	USA, literally, "House of the Americans"
Mimmi	niño, hijo	child
Misi	gato	cat
Mo	calabasas	squash
Moguir	cielo	sky
Mola	ropa, camisa	Literally just "clothing," this now usually refers specifically to the famous reverse-embroidered cloth squares prized by collectors worldwide.
Mora	tela	cloth
Morlgo	herida	wound
Morrbep	caracol	snail, conch
Mulatupo	Archipelago San Blas	San Blas Islands
Mulmakei	persona que hace molas	mola maker
Muu	oceano, abuela, anciana	ocean, grandmother, elder female

Nadamakei	escribir	to write
Nadapi	se fue	to have left
Omei nadapi	ella se fue	the woman left
Naga	pie	foot
Namakei	cantar	sing
Nana (Mama)	madre	mother
Nali	tiburón	shark
Napa	tierra firme	the mainland
Napguana	Madre Tierra	Mother Earth
Narascam	naranja	orange
Natei	fue	he/she went
Neg Kunas	Terra	Earth
Nega	casa, lugar	house, place
Nele	mago, shaman	wise man/woman, spiritual healers; this word can also refer to psychologists, philosophers, some politicians, artists and others involved with spiritual or community leadership.
Ni	luna	moon
Nia	malo, el diablo, marijuana	evil, Satan, also marijuana
Nika	tener	to have
Nisqua	estrella	star
Nono	cara	face
Nuba	estomago	stomach
Nuchu	fetish	fetish, usually a small, carved wooden animal
Nuga	nombre	name
Nuwedi	Buenos días, gracias, pura vida	thank you, good morning, catch-all phrase meaning "good"
Nuweigambi	mucho gusto	nice to meet you
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Obei	playa	beach



Ogup	coco	coconut
Olo, or	oro, collar	gold, necklace
Olowaili	Diosa de Paz	Goddess of Peace
Olu	gallo	rooster
Olua	arretes	earrings
Omei	mujer	woman
Opi	bañar	to swim
Osi	piña	pineapple
Ornasi	uñas	fingernails
Orr	barco	sail-less boat
Orrgo	madera	wood
Oua	pescado, pez	fish
Panaba	muy lejos	very far
Panei	mañana	tomorrow
Paneimalo	hasta la mañana	see you tomorrow, good night
Pap kalimpapa	cielo	Literally "father's place," this is roughly analogous to the Christian heaven
Po	llorar	to cry
Saila	cacique, jefe	spiritual or political leader
Sapi	arbol	tree
Sapudei	falda	skirt
Sanda	sandales	sandals
Saqua	mano, brazo	hand, arm
Satei	no	no
Nali satei	No hay tiburones!	There are no sharks!
Sia	sobrino/a	niece/nephew
Sirro	ombbligo	belly button
Siagua	cocoa	chocolate
Siglei	ayer	yesterday
Sigue	sientate	have a seat

Sika	barba, bigota	facial hair
Siligwia	pelo	hair
So	fuego	fire
Soi	pescar	to fish
Suga	cangrejo	crab
Suli	no	no
Suna	verdad	truth
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Tabu	barracuda	barracuda
Takei	ver	to see
Takei malo	adios	goodbye
Tat Ipe ulu	sol	sun, Ibeler's chariot
Tadarguanet	donde puesto del sol	Where the sun sets
Tii	agua	water
Tumbi	comer	to eat
Tupbak	ballena	whale
Tutu	flower	floor
Unolugwa	niña/o	child
Ulu	canoa	dugout canoe
Unmorr	barco a vela	sailboat
Urrba	nieto, hermana/o menor	grandchild, younger sibling
Urrbali	bajo	Ander
Vini	conejo	rabbit
Wa	humo	smoke
Waga	extranjero	foreigner (non-Kuna, incluye most Panamanians)
Wagalumala	beso	a kiss
Wagaluei	besar	to kiss
Warkwen	solo	only, alone
		a small, purple fruit with delicate,

Weechup	fruta morada	foamy white flesh, very little flavor and a large pit, that grows as a large bush in salty sand
Wini	shakira	beads, or anything made of beads
Winibaizna		beaded armbands
Wisi	saber	to know
Wei	el/ella	he/she
Weimar	ellos	they
Yala	montaña	mountain
Yeiolo	hermano/a mayor	older sibling
Yo	codo	elbow
Yokorr	rodilla	knee

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