

# what language is spoken in micronesia

What Language Is Spoken in Micronesia? Exploring the Linguistic Tapestry of the Pacific Islands

**what language is spoken in micronesia** is a question that often comes up when people learn about this fascinating region in the western Pacific Ocean. Micronesia, known for its scattered islands and rich cultural heritage, boasts a diverse linguistic landscape that reflects its unique history and ethnic diversity. Whether you're planning a visit, studying Pacific cultures, or just curious about world languages, understanding the languages spoken in Micronesia offers a window into its people and traditions.

## The Linguistic Diversity of Micronesia

Micronesia is not a single island but rather a vast region comprising hundreds of small islands and atolls spread across the western Pacific. This geographical spread has led to a mosaic of languages, many of which are indigenous and have been spoken for centuries. When you ask what language is spoken in Micronesia, the answer isn't straightforward because the region is home to multiple languages and dialects.

### Official Language: English

In the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), which is one of the main political entities in Micronesia, English is the official language. This stems from its historical ties with the United States after World War II. English serves as the language of government, education, and inter-island communication. For travelers and outsiders, English often acts as a bridge language, making communication easier despite the linguistic diversity.

### Indigenous Micronesian Languages

Beyond English, the backbone of linguistic identity in Micronesia lies in its indigenous languages. These belong primarily to the Austronesian language family, which is widespread across the Pacific and parts of Southeast Asia. Let's look closer at some prominent Micronesian languages:

- **Chuukese:** Spoken mainly in Chuuk State, this language is one of the most widely used native tongues in the FSM.
- **Pohnpeian:** The dominant language in Pohnpei State, it boasts a rich oral tradition and unique phonetic structure.

- **Kosraean:** Found in Kosrae State, this language is distinct but shares some similarities with other Micronesian languages.
- **Yapese:** Spoken in Yap State, this language stands out for its complex system of honorifics and traditional vocabulary.

Each island or state often has its own primary indigenous language, and these languages carry deep cultural meanings and histories.

## How Language Reflects Culture in Micronesia

Language in Micronesia is more than just a means of communication—it's a vessel for culture, identity, and tradition. Many indigenous languages are tied to oral storytelling, navigation skills, social structure, and rituals. For example, traditional chants, legends, and genealogies are preserved and passed down through generations in native tongues rather than in English.

## Preservation Challenges

The spread of English and modernization pose challenges to the survival of Micronesia's indigenous languages. Younger generations, especially those moving to urban areas or abroad, often adopt English as their primary language. This shift can lead to language attrition, where native languages gradually lose speakers.

Efforts are underway by local governments and cultural organizations to revitalize and preserve these languages. Educational programs incorporating native languages into school curricula and community events celebrating traditional language use are key strategies to keep these tongues alive.

## The Role of Other Languages in Micronesia

While English and indigenous Micronesian languages dominate, other languages have left their mark on the region due to historical colonization and trade.

## Influence of Japanese and Spanish

During different periods of history, Micronesia was governed by Spain, Germany, Japan, and the United States. Spanish influence, though older, introduced some loanwords into local languages. The Japanese occupation in the early 20th century also introduced Japanese language elements, especially in education and administration. Today, remnants of these influences appear in place names and some vocabulary.

## Pidgin and Creole Languages

In some parts of Micronesia, simplified forms of communication, known as pidgins, emerged to facilitate trade and interaction between different linguistic groups. However, these pidgins have not developed into fully-fledged creole languages and remain limited in scope.

## Learning the Languages of Micronesia: Tips and Insights

If you're interested in learning what language is spoken in Micronesia or even picking up a few words, here are some useful tips:

- **Start with English:** Since English is the official language and widely used, it's a practical entry point for communication and travel.
- **Focus on a specific island language:** If you plan to visit or engage deeply with one state, learning basic phrases in Chuukese, Pohnpeian, or Yapese can enrich your experience.
- **Use multimedia resources:** Online videos, audio recordings, and language apps can help you get familiar with pronunciation and common expressions.
- **Engage with locals:** The best way to learn and appreciate Micronesian languages is through conversation and cultural exchange with native speakers.

## Common Words and Phrases

Here are a few simple phrases from some of the main Micronesian languages:

- **Chuukese:** "Kaselehlle" (Hello/Thank you)

- **Pohnpeian:** “Kaselehlie” (Hello/Thank you)
- **Yapese:** “Gaday” (Hello)

Interestingly, “Kaselehlie” is a common greeting in several Micronesian languages, reflecting shared cultural roots.

## Understanding Micronesia’s Language in a Global Context

Micronesia’s linguistic variety is part of the broader Austronesian family, which connects it to languages spoken as far away as Madagascar, Indonesia, and Hawaii. This linguistic connection highlights centuries of migration, trade, and cultural exchange across the Pacific.

For linguists and anthropologists, Micronesia offers a living laboratory to study language evolution, contact, and preservation. For travelers, immersing in these languages offers a deeper appreciation of Micronesia’s vibrant cultural fabric.

Exploring what language is spoken in Micronesia is not just about identifying a single tongue but about embracing a multilingual world where every island tells its own story through language. Whether you’re fascinated by the fluidity of English use or the rich heritage embedded in Chuukese or Pohnpeian, the languages of Micronesia open doors to understanding the heart of the Pacific islands.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### What is the official language spoken in Micronesia?

The official language of the Federated States of Micronesia is English.

### Are there indigenous languages spoken in Micronesia?

Yes, several indigenous languages are spoken in Micronesia, including Chuukese, Pohnpeian, Kosraean, and Yapese.

### Is English widely spoken throughout Micronesia?

English is widely used in government, education, and business, but many locals also speak their native Micronesian languages at home.

## **How many languages are spoken in the Federated States of Micronesia?**

There are around eight main indigenous languages spoken across the different states of Micronesia.

## **Do people in Micronesia speak any languages besides English and indigenous languages?**

Some communities may also speak languages from neighboring regions or have knowledge of languages such as Japanese due to historical ties.

## **Is Micronesian language the same throughout the islands?**

No, Micronesia is linguistically diverse, with different islands having distinct languages and dialects.

## **What language family do Micronesian languages belong to?**

Most Micronesian indigenous languages belong to the Austronesian language family.

## **Are Micronesian languages written or primarily oral?**

Many Micronesian languages have traditionally been oral but now have written forms, often using the Latin alphabet.

## **Can tourists communicate easily in English in Micronesia?**

Yes, tourists can generally communicate in English, especially in urban areas and tourist centers.

## **Additional Resources**

**\*\*Languages of Micronesia: An In-Depth Exploration of the Linguistic Landscape\*\***

**what language is spoken in micronesia** is a question that invites a fascinating exploration into the rich tapestry of languages spoken across the Micronesian region. Micronesia, a sprawling region of islands in the western Pacific Ocean, is home to a diverse array of indigenous languages as well as official languages shaped by historical influences. Understanding the linguistic profile of this area requires an examination of both the native tongues and the role of colonial and global languages in daily communication and governance.

# The Linguistic Diversity of Micronesia

Micronesia is not a single country but a region encompassing thousands of small islands scattered over a vast area. It includes several sovereign states and territories such as the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Palau, the Marshall Islands, Nauru, and Kiribati. Each of these entities possesses its own unique linguistic characteristics, which reflects the complex history and cultural diversity of the region.

The primary question—what language is spoken in micronesia—cannot be answered with a single name. Instead, the region hosts a multitude of languages belonging predominantly to the Austronesian language family, with several Micronesian languages forming a distinct subgroup within this family. These languages, while related, vary significantly from island to island.

## Major Indigenous Languages of Micronesia

Within the Federated States of Micronesia, the most widely spoken indigenous languages include:

- **Chuukese:** Spoken primarily on Chuuk State's islands, Chuukese is one of the most populous Micronesian languages, with tens of thousands of speakers.
- **Pohnpeian:** Native to Pohnpei State, this language has a rich oral tradition and remains a dominant mode of communication among locals.
- **Kosraean:** Found in Kosrae State, this language is known for its relatively small number of speakers but maintains a vital role within its community.
- **Yapese:** Spoken in Yap State, Yapese is distinguished by its unique phonology and grammar compared to other Micronesian languages.

Outside FSM, the Marshall Islands primarily use Marshallese, another Micronesian language with its own dialectal variations, while Palauan is the principal language of Palau and reflects a slightly different linguistic lineage within the Austronesian family. Nauru, a tiny island nation, has its distinct Nauruan language, and Kiribati's Gilbertese language extends into parts of Micronesia, though Kiribati is often classified within Polynesia.

## Official and Lingua Franca Languages in Micronesia

While indigenous languages thrive in local communities, the role of official and colonial languages cannot be overlooked when discussing what language is spoken in Micronesia. English, for instance, serves as the official language in several Micronesian states, including the Federated States of Micronesia and the Marshall Islands. This is largely due to historical ties with the United States, which administered several Micronesian territories following World War II.

English functions as the language of government, education, and international communication in many parts of Micronesia. Its widespread use has pros and cons: it facilitates global connectivity and administrative efficiency but also presents challenges for preserving indigenous languages, as younger generations may favor English for socioeconomic advancement.

In Palau, both Palauan and English are official languages, reflecting a bilingual approach to governance and education. This bilingualism helps maintain cultural identity while accommodating international engagement.

## Impact of Colonial History on Language Use

The linguistic landscape of Micronesia has been profoundly shaped by colonial powers including Spain, Germany, Japan, and the United States. Each colonial era introduced new languages and influenced the status of indigenous tongues.

- **Spanish Period:** Spain's early colonization efforts left minimal lasting linguistic impact, but Spanish religious and administrative terms filtered into local vocabularies.
- **German Administration (1899-1914):** German was briefly the language of governance, though with limited penetration into daily life.
- **Japanese Occupation (1914-1945):** Japanese was introduced widely in schools and government, especially in the northern islands like the Marshalls and parts of FSM, leaving traces in place names and loanwords.
- **American Trusteeship (post-1945):** The United States established English as the administrative language, cementing its role in modern Micronesia.

This layered colonial history explains the presence of loanwords and the coexistence of multiple languages within single communities.

# Language Preservation and Challenges

The question of what language is spoken in micronesia today is not only about identifying languages but also about recognizing the challenges facing linguistic preservation. Many Micronesian languages are endangered due to globalization, migration, and the dominance of English in education and media.

## Threats to Indigenous Languages

- **Language Shift:** Younger generations increasingly use English for professional and social mobility, sometimes at the expense of their mother tongues.
- **Urbanization:** Movement to urban centers where multiple ethnic groups coexist leads to language mixing and potential loss of linguistic purity.
- **Limited Documentation:** Some Micronesian languages have few written materials, complicating efforts to teach and revitalize them.

## Efforts in Language Revitalization

Recognizing these challenges, governments and cultural organizations have initiated programs to preserve and promote indigenous languages. These include:

1. Incorporating native languages into school curricula alongside English.
2. Recording oral histories, traditional songs, and stories to preserve linguistic heritage.
3. Supporting media in local languages such as radio broadcasts and publications.

Such measures aim to balance modernization with cultural preservation, ensuring that the question of what language is spoken in micronesia remains dynamic and inclusive of its rich indigenous heritage.

# Comparative Insights: Micronesian Languages and Other Pacific Languages

The languages spoken in Micronesia form part of the broader Austronesian family, which spans from Madagascar to Easter Island. However, Micronesian languages exhibit distinct features that differentiate them from Polynesian and Melanesian languages.

For example, Micronesian languages often have complex verb morphology and unique phonological systems. Compared to Polynesian languages such as Hawaiian or Samoan, Micronesian languages tend to have more consonant clusters and a wider variety of vowel sounds.

This linguistic diversity reflects the varied migration patterns and cultural developments in the Pacific region. Scholars studying what language is spoken in micronesia often emphasize the importance of these languages for understanding human migration and cultural exchange across Oceania.

## The Role of English in Regional Integration

English's role extends beyond national borders, serving as a lingua franca among the many islands and ethnic groups in Micronesia. This facilitates regional cooperation in organizations such as the Pacific Islands Forum and aids in international diplomacy.

Nevertheless, reliance on English can sometimes overshadow the importance of local languages in cultural identity and community cohesion. Balancing these interests remains a key challenge for policymakers and community leaders alike.

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Exploring what language is spoken in micronesia reveals a complex and vibrant linguistic environment shaped by geography, history, and cultural resilience. The coexistence of multiple indigenous languages alongside English and other colonial languages paints a picture of a region where language serves as both a practical tool and a profound marker of identity. As Micronesia navigates the pressures of globalization, the preservation and celebration of its linguistic heritage remain central to its cultural future.

## [What Language Is Spoken In Micronesia](#)

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Micronesia, the first modern study of this remarkable work, reveals that there is no such thing as primitive architecture but only primitive means. This study presents five distinctly different examples of Micronesia's ancient architecture. The sites include the extraordinary stone cities of Leluh and Nan Madol on the islands of Kosrae and Pohnpei, respectively. Other structures include the meeting houses and residences built on hexagonal stone platforms in the Yap Islands, the earth terraces and ornately decorated meeting houses of Palau, and the megalithic columns and capstones of prehistoric houses in the Mariana Islands. These structures are illustrated by photographs, maps, plans, and other drawings. Many of the basic data come from archaeological investigations of the specific sites. Summaries at the ends of chapters and in the concluding section compare the architectural characteristics of the island groups with each other and with monuments outside Micronesia. One of the most remarkable achievements of any ancient people, the prehistoric architecture of Micronesia is a source of continuing inspiration for persons who search for meaning in the built form of our present-day environment.

**what language is spoken in micronesia:** *Introduction to Micronesia* Gilad James, PhD, Micronesia is a region in the Pacific Ocean that is composed of thousands of small islands. These islands are divided into four groups: Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, and the Marshall Islands. The region is known for its diverse cultures, languages, and breathtaking natural beauty. Although it is one of the least populated regions on earth, its people have a rich history and unique identity. The region is home to many species of plants and animals that are endemic to the area, meaning they can only be found in Micronesia. Tourism is one of the major industries in Micronesia, with visitors drawn to its crystal clear waters, coral reefs, and exotic marine life. Despite its natural beauty, however, the region faces many challenges such as climate change, rising sea levels, and issues with waste management. Nonetheless, the people and governments of Micronesia are working together to address these challenges and protect the region's unique culture and natural resources for generations to come.

**what language is spoken in micronesia: Pacific Languages** John Lynch, 2016-06-01 Almost one-quarter of the world's languages are (or were) spoken in the Pacific, making it linguistically the most complex region in the world. Although numerous technical books on groups of Pacific or Australian languages have been published, and descriptions of individual languages are available, until now there has been no single book that attempts a wide regional coverage for a general audience. *Pacific Languages* introduces readers to the grammatical features of Oceanic, Papuan, and Australian languages as well as to the semantic structures of these languages. For readers without a formal linguistic background, a brief introduction to descriptive linguistics is provided. In addition to describing the structure of Pacific languages, this volume places them in their historical and geographical context, discusses the linguistic evidence for the settlement of the Pacific, and speculates on the reason for the region's many languages. It devotes considerable attention to the effects of contact between speakers of different languages and to the development of pidgin and creole languages in the Pacific. Throughout, technical language is kept to a minimum without oversimplifying the concepts or the issues involved. A glossary of technical terms, maps, and diagrams help identify a language geographically or genetically; reading lists and a language index guide the researcher interested in a particular language or group to other sources of information. Here at last is a clear and straightforward overview of Pacific languages for linguists and anyone interested in the history of sociology of the Pacific.

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**what language is spoken in micronesia: The Oceanic Languages** John Lynch, Malcolm Ross, Terry Crowley, 2002 The volume contains five background chapters: The Oceanic Languages, Sociolinguistic Background, Typological Overview, Proto-Oceanic and Internal Subgrouping. Part of 2 vol set. Author Ross from ANU.

**what language is spoken in micronesia: Encyclopedia of Bilingualism and Bilingual Education** Colin Baker, Sylvia Prys Jones, 1998 This encyclopedia is divided into three sections: individual bilingualism; bilingualism in society and bilingual education. It includes many pictures, graphs, maps and diagrams. The book concludes with a comprehensive bibliography on bilingualism.

**what language is spoken in micronesia: Making Sense of Micronesia** Francis X. Hezel, 2013-04-30 Why are islanders so lavishly generous with food and material possessions but so guarded with information? Why do these people, unfailingly polite for the most part, laugh openly when others embarrass themselves? What does a smile mean to an islander? What might a sudden lapse into silence signify? These questions are common in encounters with an unfamiliar Pacific Island culture. Making Sense of Micronesia is intended for westerners who find themselves in contact with Micronesians—as teachers, social workers, health-care providers, or simply as friends—and are puzzled by their island ways. It is for anyone struggling to make sense of cultural exchanges they don't quite understand. The author focuses on the guts of island culture: the importance of the social map, the tension between the individual and social identity, the ways in which wealth and knowledge are used, the huge importance of respect, emotional expression and its restraints, island ways of handling both conflict and intimacy, the real but indirect power of women. Far from a theoretical exposition, the book begins and ends with the real-life behavior of islanders. Each section of every chapter is introduced by a vignette that illustrates the theme discussed. The book attempts to explain island behavior, as curious as it may seem to outsiders at times, against the over-riding pattern of values and attitudes that have always guided island life. Even as the author maps the cultural terrain of Micronesia, he identifies those areas where island logic and the demands of the modern world conflict: the “dilemmas of development.” In some cases, changes are being made; in others, the very features of island culture that were highly functional in the past may remain so even today. Overall, he advocates restraint—in our judgments on island practices, in our assumption that many of these are dysfunctional, and in leading the charge for “development” before understanding the broader context of the culture we are trying to convert.

**what language is spoken in micronesia: The ^AOxford Handbook of Prehistoric Oceania** Terry L. Hunt, Ethan E. Cochrane, 2018-04-03 The Oxford Handbook of Prehistoric Oceania presents the archaeology, linguistics, environment and human biology of Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia. First colonized 50,000 years ago, Oceania witnessed the independent invention of agriculture, the construction of Easter Island's statues, and the development of the world's last archaic states.

**what language is spoken in micronesia: Ponapean Reference Grammar** Kenneth L. Rehg, Damian G. Sohl, 2021-05-25 Here is the most comprehensive description to date of the indigenous language of the island of Ponape. Designed as a reference volume for Ponapean educators, particularly those working in bilingual education programs, this work will also be of value to English-speaking students of Ponapean and to scholars of other Pacific languages and cultures. The grammar begins with useful background information on Ponape and Ponapean and then systematically explores the phonology, morphology, and syntax of this language. Separate treatment is given to Ponapean honorific speech styles. Also included are an appendix of current Ponapean spelling conventions and a bibliography of selected books and articles useful in the study of this language. This new work is a companion volume to the Ponapean-English Dictionary by the same

authors.

**what language is spoken in micronesia: The Federated States of Micronesia's Engagement with the Outside World** Gonzaga Puas, 2021-09-28 This study addresses the neglected history of the people of the Federated States of Micronesia's (FSM) engagement with the outside world. Situated in the northwest Pacific, FSM's strategic location has led to four colonial rulers. Histories of FSM to date have been largely written by sympathetic outsiders. Indigenous perspectives of FSM history have been largely absent from the main corpus of historical literature. A new generation of Micronesian scholars are starting to write their own history from Micronesian perspectives and using Micronesian forms of history. This book argues that Micronesians have been dealing successfully with the outside world throughout the colonial era in ways colonial authorities were often unaware of. This argument is sustained by examination of oral histories, secondary sources, interviews, field research and the personal experience of a person raised in the Mortlock Islands of Chuuk State. It reconstructs how Micronesian internal processes for social stability and mutual support endured, rather than succumbing to the different waves of colonisation. This study argues that colonisation did not destroy Micronesian cultures and identities, but that Micronesians recontextualised the changing conditions to suit their own circumstances. Their success rested on the indigenous doctrines of adaptation, assimilation and accommodation deeply rooted in the kinship doctrine of eaea fengen (sharing) and alilis fengen (assisting each other). These values pervade the Constitution of the FSM, which formally defines the modern identity of its indigenous peoples, reasserting and perpetuating Micronesian values and future continuity.

**what language is spoken in micronesia: Traditional Micronesian Societies** Glenn Petersen, 2009-06-30 Traditional Micronesian Societies explores the extraordinary successes of the ancient voyaging peoples who first settled the Central Pacific islands some two thousand years ago. They and their descendants devised social and cultural adaptations that have enabled them to survive—and thrive—under the most demanding environmental conditions. The dispersed matrilineal clans so typical of Micronesian societies ensure that every individual, every local family and lineage, and every community maintain close relations with the peoples of many other islands. When hurricanes and droughts or political struggles force a group to move, they are sure of being taken in by kin residing elsewhere. Out of this common theme, shared patterns of land tenure, political rule, philosophy, and even personal character have flowed. To describe and explain Micronesian societies, the author begins with an overview of the region, including a brief consideration of the scholarly debate about whether Micronesia actually exists as a genuine and meaningful region. This is followed by an account of how Micronesia was originally settled, how its peoples adapted to conditions there, and how several basic adaptations diffused throughout the islands. He then considers the fundamental matters of descent (ideas about how individuals and groups are bound together through ties of kinship) and descent groups and the closely interlinked subjects of households, families, land, and labor. Because women form the core of the clans, their roles are particularly respected and their contributions to social life honored. Socio-political life, art, religion, and values are discussed in detail. Finally, the author examines a number of exceptions to these common Micronesian patterns of social life. Traditional Micronesian Societies illustrates the idiosyncrasies of individual Micronesian communities and celebrates the Micronesians' shared ability to adapt, survive, and thrive over millennia. At a time when global climate change has seized our imaginations, the Micronesians' historical ability to cope with their watery environment is of the greatest relevance.

**what language is spoken in micronesia: Encyclopedia of Islands** Rosemary G. Gillespie, David Clague, 2009-08-19 Islands have captured the imagination of scientists and the public for centuries - unique and rare environments, their isolation makes them natural laboratories for ecology and evolution. This authoritative, alphabetically arranged reference, featuring more than 200 succinct articles by leading scientists from around the world, provides broad coverage of all the island sciences. But what exactly is an island? The volume editors define it here as any discrete habitat isolated from other habitats by inhospitable surroundings. The Encyclopedia of Islands

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**what language is spoken in micronesia: Congressional Record** United States. Congress, 1968

**what language is spoken in micronesia: Native Peoples of the World** Steven L. Danver, 2015-03-10 This work examines the world's indigenous peoples, their cultures, the countries in which they reside, and the issues that impact these groups.

**what language is spoken in micronesia: The Peace Corps in Micronesia** , 1980

**what language is spoken in micronesia: Micronesian Realities** Frances McReynolds Smith, 1972

**what language is spoken in micronesia: ARCHAEOLOGY - Volume II** Donald L. Hardesty, 2010-06-15 Archaeology is a component of Encyclopedia of Social Sciences and Humanities in the global Encyclopedia of Life Support Systems (EOLSS), which is an integrated compendium of twenty one Encyclopedias. Archaeology is a road for traveling into the past that is independent of and complementary to documents and memory. The archaeological record provides historical perspectives on variability and change in human life support systems with the potential for use in planning for future sustainable development. The Theme is organized into four different topics which represent the main scientific areas of the theme: - Foundations of Archaeology; - The Archaeology of Life Support Systems; - World Cultural Heritage; - Preserving Archaeological Sites and Monuments which are then expanded into multiple subtopics, each as a chapter. The first topic deals with historical, methodological, and theoretical foundations of archaeology. The second topic explores the archaeological record of human life support systems and includes chapters on foraging, food production such as farming and nomadic lifestyles, civilizations, water-management systems, and sustainability. World cultural heritage is the third topic. Finally, the fourth topic covers the preservation of cultural memorials such as archaeological sites, landscapes, and monuments. These two volumes are aimed at the following five major target audiences: University and College Students Educators, Professional Practitioners, Research Personnel and Policy Analysts, Managers, and Decision Makers, NGOs and GOs.

**what language is spoken in micronesia: Pacific Languages in Education** France Mugler, John Lynch, 1996 This collection of articles and interviews explores policy, practice and attitudes relating to the use of Pacific languages in education systems of most Pacific Island countries and territories, from pre-school to tertiary level. It records history ; it deals with current attitudes and prejudices ; and it focuses attention on perceived problems with the medium of education in many parts of the region.--Back cover

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