

Lake Toya Area Ecomuseum

Peacefully Coexisting with Volcanoes

Look at the large photo on this page. This terrifying eruption took place as recently as 1977, and you can see how close its effects were to the city on the lakeshore. Another eruption took place in 2000, and more are sure to follow, though no one can say exactly when. How can anyone, much less a whole town, choose to live in such close proximity to an active volcano? The question is not unusual, but Lake Toya town's response certainly is: on the one hand, the volcano is a threat, albeit a manageable one; on the other hand, Mount Usu has given as much as it has taken, with the best example being the two new *onsen* hot springs that appeared following the 1910 eruption. These are now Lake Toya Hot Spring and Sobetsu Hot Spring, two prominent attractions that bring tourists to this area. However, Lake Toya town is not living in denial—it continues to take active steps toward disaster prevention, both through civil engineering and by relocating schools and other critical facilities to safer areas. Like Lake Toya, other nearby towns also teach their citizens and tourists about the history, activity, and future prospects for Mount Usu's eruptions.

Local residents realize that this entire area is an ecomuseum, that is, a “nature museum” that provides a unique opportunity for people to study the positive and negative effects of volcanic activity first-hand. People who live and work near Lake Toya want to teach others how to respect rather than fear the power of nature and learn how best to live together in harmony with both its helpful and harmful aspects.