

## **A History Apart**

Japan's main island of Honshu (with Kyoto, Osaka, Tokyo, and so forth) gets most of the attention in history books. However, the indigenous Ainu people of Hokkaido also have a long history, with contact between them and Honshu-based Japanese possibly going back as far as the seventh century CE. In 1590, the Matsumae clan from Honshu was granted sovereignty over the island of Hokkaido. They constructed settlements in the southern areas, including here in the Lake Shikotsu region, but did little to develop the land. Real growth didn't begin until the nineteenth century, when the new Tokyo-based national government wanted to develop Hokkaido as a defense against nearby Russia. Transportation, agriculture, commerce, and various industries were promoted over the next century, making Hokkaido a kind of "new" state within Japan.