

History and Purpose of the Marimo Exhibition and Observation Center

Marimo have been a source of fascination in Japan since their discovery in 1897. To protect *marimo* and encourage sustainable tourism, the Marimo Exhibition and Observation Center was built on Churui Island in 1978. Since the 1960s, however, there have been various iterations of observation facilities, from simple outdoor aquariums to a small pond and, eventually, to the current indoor observation center, which went through a complete renovation beginning in 1995.

Marimo conservation efforts began in the 1950s after two *marimo* colonies were wiped out on the western and northern shore of the lake. The destruction of these colonies has been attributed to poor tourism practices, the lumber transportation industry, and the hydroelectric power generator installed in the 1920s. Lumber that had been transported on Lake Akan caused a harmful increase of sediment in the lake, and hydroelectric power generation caused water levels to drop significantly. Invasive sightseeing cruises, along with the taking of the algae for later sale or as souvenirs, were devastating for the lake's *marimo* population.

Preservationists and locals recognized the need for sustainable tourism and began to take measures to protect the *marimo*, such as by banning removal of the algae from the lake, establishing the observation center on Churui Island, and deterring boats from intruding into their habitat.

One of the center's highlights is a large aquarium displaying *marimo* of all sizes. Smaller tanks exhibit the algae during different stages of the life cycle, from formation to disintegration.

Today, the Marimo Exhibition and Observation Center plays a vital conservational role. Its lake cruises, indoor aquariums, and videos facilitate a deeper understanding of Lake Akan's natural environment, enabling visitors to enjoy an in-depth look at these plants and interact sustainably with them.