

## **Kakinoshima Site**

The Kakinoshima Site, in Hakodate, southern Hokkaido, dates from 7000 BCE. Excavations have uncovered burial pits, evidence of pit dwellings, and artifacts spanning more than 6000 years of prehistory. These discoveries give an insight into life in prehistoric Japan and provide evidence of social, cultural, and spiritual development. The Hakodate Jomon Culture Center [\[link\]](#) adjacent to the site exhibits artifacts from the Kakinoshima Site and has exhibitions that give a comprehensive introduction to the world of prehistoric Japan.

### *The development of funeral rites and burial practices*

Funeral rites and burial practices developed significantly during the course of the Jomon period (13,000–400 BCE). From 7000 BCE, settlements came to include designated burial areas located away from dwelling areas. Separate dwelling and burial areas have been discovered at the Kakinoshima Site. Some of the earliest burial pits discovered at the site date between 5000 and 4500 BCE.

### *Rare burial items*

Burial pits at the Kakinoshima Site contained a range of burial goods, including clay tablets that display footprints. The tablets (5000–4500 BCE) differ in shape and size, but all are patterned with cord markings and bear the impression of a single foot or of two feet. The footprints measure between 6 and 18 centimeters, and are likely those of children. Some tablets also display handprints on the reverse side.

### *U-shaped earthwork*

A large U-shaped earthwork remains visible at the site. It contains large quantities of pottery, stone tools, and the fragments of animal bones. Soil and some artifacts from parts of the earthwork show evidence of charring, suggesting fires may have been lit here. Archaeologists discovered a channel which they believe to be a path leading into the center of the U, dug into the ground at one of its corners. Within the center of the U, they found a small mound containing ritual tools such as stone rods and swords. Archaeologists believe offerings and ceremonies including funeral rites were held at the earthwork.

The earthwork dates from 3000 BCE and was likely constructed over many centuries. It measures more than 190 meters in length and is 120-meters wide. The embankments reach 2 meters at their tallest points.

#### *Pottery artifacts*

A great range of pottery has been discovered at the Kakinoshima Site. The earliest examples are vessels with pointed bottoms, patterned by pressing shells into the clay. Later items include an ornately decorated and lacquered spouted vessel and an intricately crafted pot with multiple openings, shaped like an incense burner. The artifacts demonstrate a highly developed design sense and the mastery of advanced ceramic techniques.

#### *The Hakodate Jomon Culture Center*

The Hakodate Jomon Culture Center [\[link\]](#) displays artifacts from the Kakinoshima Site, the Ofune Site [\[link\]](#) (a ten-minute drive away), and other local archaeological sites. The most prized artifact is a hollow clay figurine (*chuku dogu*) that was discovered by a lady tending her vegetable garden. The figurine is praised by archaeologists and art historians for its intricate design, burnished finish, detailed patterning, and excellent state of preservation. It is designated a National Treasure of Japan and has been exhibited at leading museums around the world including the Tokyo National Museum, British Museum, and the Smithsonian Institution.

In addition to the exhibits, the museum has a workshop where visitors can try weaving, pottery making, and other prehistoric-themed crafts. The museum charges a small admission fee. Information is provided in English.

#### *Related archaeological sites*

The Ofune Site [\[link\]](#) is 10 minutes from the Kakinoshima Site by car. Evidence of a large-scale settlement has been found here, and visitors can view the foundations of large pit dwellings at the site. Other sites in Hokkaido include the Irie Site [\[link\]](#) and the Kitakogane Site [\[link\]](#), where large shell mounds have been discovered, and the Kiusu Earthwork Burial Circles [\[link\]](#), near Sapporo.