

The Formation of Kussharo Kotan

Establishing a village near Lake Kussharo meant that its residents could easily obtain drinking water and food. The surrounding environment, weather, geological forces, and seasons dictated nearly all aspects of their daily life. Over thousands of years, humans accumulated the wisdom needed to thrive in the harsh environment of the Kussharo Caldera.

Living off the land in the Kussharo Caldera

The people of Kussharo Kotan depended on the plants and animals around them for survival: berries for food and medicine, tree bark for making clothes, and animals like deer, brown bear, and fish for meat. Dried plants and illustrations of animals that live in the Kussharo Caldera are on display in this section of the Kussharo Kotan Ainu Museum. Graphs compare weather patterns on the main Japanese island of Honshu to Teshikaga, showing that winters in this part of Hokkaido are particularly bitter. Residents of the *kotan* crafted salmon-skin boots and snowshoes (also displayed in this section) to wear in the winter, and hunted small animals like rabbit and sable.

A land shaped by volcanic activity

Before humans settled in Kussharo Kotan, the landscape was shaped by repeated volcanic activity over hundreds of thousands of years. A major eruption of the Kussharo Volcano 30,000 years ago caused it to collapse, creating a caldera several hundred meters deep. Rainwater and snowmelt from the surrounding mountains filled the caldera and created Lake Kussharo. The lake stretches 26 kilometers from east to west and 20 kilometers north to south. Diagrams illustrating the volcanic activity that formed Lake Kussharo and nearby Lake Mashu are on display.