

Living Off the Bounty of the Land

In this section of the Kussharo Kotan Ainu Museum, visitors can explore exhibits that focus on traditional Ainu houses, food, hunting, clothing, religion, and festivals.

Ainu homes

Ainu dwellings consisted of a main building, the *cise*, and a separate temporary hut, the *kuca*, which was used for hunting. *Cise* had thatched roofs and were built with natural materials such as wood, grasses, and bark. *Kuca* were used as bases for fishing in summer and hunting in winter, and were essential in securing a regular food source for the community. A display shows the interior of an actual Kussharo Kotan *cise* based on archival records.

Clothing

Ainu garments were simple and practical, with few flamboyant patterns. The items at the Kussharo Kotan Ainu Museum highlight the functionality of clothing used for daily wear. Ainu garments exhibited in other museums in Hokkaido tends to be those used for festivals, with more colorful designs and elaborate patterns.

Hunting

The Ainu were hunting experts who used their knowledge of the local terrain to track wild animals. They hunted mainly Japanese deer, brown bear, and rabbit. Archeological studies reveal that Ainu communities also consumed salmon, trout, Japanese dace, Japanese char, Sakhalin taimen, sturgeon, and shellfish such as freshwater clams. Tools used for hunting and fishing, including spears, bows, arrows, and knives, are on display in this section of the museum.

Religion

Ainu spiritual beliefs center around *kamuy*, deities that manifest themselves in nature and animals. Ainu have many festivals and ceremonies to honor these deities. The Blakiston's fish owl is the most revered of all animals. In the Ainu language it is called *kotan kor kamuy*, meaning "deity that protects the village." In the past, large numbers of

these owls lived around the *kotan*. The owl's call signaled the direction of prey to the villagers, providing knowledge that was invaluable for successful hunting.

This section of the Kussharo Kotan Ainu Museum displays photographs of rituals and ceremonial dances, as well as an altar and carved wooden libation sticks used during ceremonies to deliver people's prayers to the *kamuy*.