

A Museum that Embodies Ainu Culture

The history, spirituality, and legends of Ainu culture are embodied in the design and architecture of the Kussharo Kotan Ainu Museum.

Twenty-three wooden pillars inside the building represent the *nusasan* (altar), a sacred place of worship erected outside of Ainu homes. The pillars also symbolize the forest and mountains surrounding the village. An audio recording of *yukar*, music-accompanied epic Ainu poetry, streams from speakers inside the pillars. Visitors can ask to watch a 10-minute slideshow, projected on the museum wall, about *iomante*, a ceremony that returns a bear's spirit to the divine realm of the *kamuy*.

Outside the museum, in the open-air space next to Lake Kussharo, visitors will find a *nusasan* and an *eperset*—a cage that Ainu used to raise small bears.