

Brown Bears

The brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) is among the world's largest bear species, second only to the polar bear in size. Brown bears are found across the Eurasian continent, as well as in North America (where they are called grizzly bears) and in Hokkaido. Hokkaido's largest brown bear population is in Shiretoko, northeast of Kushiro.

Living gods

The indigenous Ainu people consider bears to be mountain gods (*kimun kamuy* in the Ainu language). Bears were traditionally hunted for fur and meat, which were regarded as gifts from the mountain gods. When a bear was killed, the Ainu people performed a ceremony to send the bear's soul back to the realm of the gods.

A varied diet

Brown bears are omnivorous. Their diet includes salmon and trout, small mammals, and occasionally Yezo deer, as well as plants such as acorns, butterbur stalks, and fruit.

Brown bears hibernate in caves through the winter, emerging from their dens in spring, around April or May. While brown bears and humans generally coexist peacefully, bear attacks are sometimes reported, and hikers should be cautious in forested areas.