

Ikenoyu–Kussharo Kotan Old Road

Ainu people traditionally lived in villages (called *kotan*) around the lakes and along the rivers and coasts of Hokkaido. They fished for salmon and trout and hunted and foraged on the land. Waterways provided valuable resources and enabled communities to travel and trade. One of the main villages in the Kussharo area is Kussharo Kotan, located on the southernmost shore of the lake, close to the source of the Kushiro River.

A stretch of the Mashu Kussharo Trail (MKT) follows the old road between the Ikenoyu hot spring and Kussharo Kotan. The trail continues for approximately 4 kilometers through lakeside woodland. Trees along the trail include Manchurian elm, the bark of which was used to produce thread for weaving cloth. In summer and early fall, woodland perennials such as jack-in-the-pulpit and purple-flowering monkshood fringe the trail.

Many generations of Ainu have walked between Kussharo Kotan and Ikenoyu to bathe in the hot spring or use the warm water to prepare materials, such as tree bark, for weaving. Visitors can learn about the traditional Ainu way of life at the Kussharo Kotan Ainu Museum. Exhibits include old photographs and artifacts such as tools and traditional clothing. A provider of Ainu cultural programs and several outdoor-activity guides offering lake and river canoeing tours are based in Kussharo Kotan.