

## **Former Etchuya Hotel**

The Etchuya Hotel was Otaru's first hotel built in European architectural style. It was completed in 1931 to accommodate the growing number of overseas traders and merchants coming to Otaru. In the early twentieth century, Otaru was the most prosperous city in Hokkaido. When war broke out in Western Europe in 1914, grain, beans, sulfur, and other commodities were shipped from Otaru to Europe, and this international trade contributed to a building boom of banks, hotels, and restaurants.

The hotel was an annex of the Etchuya Ryokan, a traditional inn founded in 1877. Although the inn had appeared in English-language guidebooks since the early 1900s, the owners thought a modern luxury hotel would be more appealing to international guests. After visiting European-style hotels in Kobe and Yokohama, they commissioned a four-story building in Art Deco style, distinguished by two columns of bay windows down the center of the facade. The triangle motif of the Etchuya Ryokan is repeated in stained glass windows and carved on the stone lintel above the main entrance.

Ten years after it opened, the Etchuya Hotel was requisitioned by the Japanese army as an officers' club, then, at the end of World War II, it was taken over by U.S. forces for accommodations. After the American occupation ended in 1952, the building served as a company dormitory for a time before it was reopened in 2019 as the Unwind Hotel. Many of the original features have been preserved, including the front facade and some of the stained-glass windows. The Etchuya Ryokan is still in business, on the same block.