

Ainu Homes—From Pit Dwellings to *Cise*

Ainu lived in pit dwellings until around the thirteenth century, when they started building houses (*cise*). Pit dwellings were dark, with the entrance as the only light source, but were well-insulated against the cold. These homes were typically square or rectangular, and dug about one meter deep. Support poles held up a thatched roof that rose several meters in the center and sloped to the ground. Inside, a central hearth provided warmth, a cooking space, and a place for smoking food.

The air inside the pit dwellings was smoky and humid, and the gradual transition to houses (*cise*) is believed to have been motivated by a desire for better living conditions. The *cise* were similar to houses on Honshu (Japan's main island), with the addition of a central hearth for warmth. Some Ainu in colder areas, such as Sakhalin, maintained pit dwellings for winter, then moved to *cise* near their fishing grounds in the warmer months.