

2 The Traditional Culture and Ways of Life of the Ainu



An Old Ainu Home Restored

The dwelling exhibited here is a historical residence that has been restored under the instruction of Yaichiro Hama (1916-91), who was born and raised in Shiraoi, Iburi, Hokkaido. The restoration was slightly scaled down to suit the height of the museum's ceilings. Items exhibited here include actual and restored items used as part of the Ainu daily life between 100 and 200 years ago. Today, the Ainu do not necessarily live in a similar fashion, but there are people who are working to learn and convey traditional techniques as well as others who are attempting to use these in modern times.

Diet

The traditional diet of the Ainu is based on foods obtained by hunting in the hills, fishing in the rivers and seas, foraging in fields and forests for plants and nuts, and farming the lands. Fishers and hunters relied on thorough knowledge of their prey, crafting traps to capture salmon and trout in the rivers or brownbear and Hokkaido sika deer in the hills. The Ainu cultivated their own foxtail millet and Japanese millet, and also used rice, salt, and miso which were obtained from the Wajin. These resources were carefully used to avoid waste - for example, the meat and fat of a brown bear became food, while the pelt became furnishings or trade goods.

Clothing

The traditional garments of the Ainu were made of materials such as animal hides, fish skins, or cloth woven from the fibers of tree bark or grass stalks. When cotton became available through trade, the Ainu began to decorate clothes with cotton cloth strips or thread, and produce clothes primarily made of cotton. These traditional clothes are no longer worn in contemporary daily life. However, it is becoming more common to see traditional Ainu clothing at ceremonies and during song or dance presentations at events.

Beliefs

According to the beliefs of the Ainu, a spirit dwells within every being in this world. These spirits are respected as Kamuy, and can be found in the animals and plants nature provides, the fire, water, and tools that are indispensable in daily life, or even things beyond human control, such as weather or epidemics. Ainu belief holds that this world exists due to the interaction and relationship between Kamuy and human beings. This belief is related to the Ainu awareness of how to protect themselves, their families and their health.

Dwelling

The dwelling exhibited here is a former residence that has been restored under the instruction of Mr. Yaichiro Hama (1916-91), who was born and raised in Shiraoi, Iburi, Hokkaido. The restoration was slightly scaled down to suit the height of the museum's ceilings. The hearth occupies the center, and there are places designated for sitting, sleeping, and keeping valuables or ritual tools. It is said that the hearth coals were never allowed to go cold. Over time, the fire warmed the earth, and the walls and roof reeds acted as insulation, sheltering the inhabitants from Hokkaido's cold winters.



Dugout Canoe and Marek

This dugout canoe was actually used many years ago in the Chitose region. These canoes were used to fish on rivers or as a mode of transport to cross rivers. Exhibited inside the canoe is a gaff-like spear called a marek, which was used to catch salmon and other fish individually. The monitor shows a video clip of a dugout canoe and marek being used to catch fish.



Touching Fabric Used in Traditional Ainu Garments

Fabric woven from the bark of Manchurian elm is one of the materials used by the Ainu people to make traditional garments. Here, you can touch and feel the finish of the actual fabric. You can also look over the fabric to observe how the embroidery seen on Ainu traditional garments was attached.