A Journey into the History and Culture of Hokkaido
Hokkaido has had a different history from that of the rest of Japan. In sharp contrast to Japan’s mainland, where a farming-based culture thrived from early on, Hokkaido maintained Jomon culture characterized by hunting and fishing until about 2,000 years ago, which was then followed by Ainu culture. Ezo (known today as Hokkaido) was originally inhabited by the Ainu people, but increasing numbers of Wajin (Japanese people from mainland Japan) moved to settle in the region. Around 150 years ago, the new Meiji Government started land reclamation in Hokkaido as part of the nation’s modernization policy. During Hokkaido’s development, many advanced techniques were introduced from Western countries. Today, the heritage of these techniques remains not only in Hokkaido but also in the daily lives of local residents.

Hokkaido Museum is a showcase of Hokkaido’s history, nature and culture. The exhibition starts with full skeletal reconstructions of two types of elephants that once lived in Hokkaido – the Naumann’s elephant that came from mainland Japan (south of Hokkaido) and the mammoth that came from the continent through Sakhalin (north of Hokkaido). Like these elephants, people also traveled between mainland Japan and Hokkaido and between the continent and Hokkaido. The museum highlights the history of Hokkaido over the past 1.2 million years and the culture of the indigenous Ainu through specimens and dioramas. It also offers hands-on exhibits where visitors can touch fossils and learn the Ainu language through games.

Hokkaido Museum – a showcase of Hokkaido’s history, nature and culture

Hokkaido Museum
Atsubetsu-cho Konopporo 53-2, Atsubetsu-ku
TEL: 011-898-0466
URL: http://www.hm.pref.hokkaido.lg.jp/en/

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Hokkaido Museum – a showcase of Hokkaido’s history, nature and culture

The History of Hokkaido

Paleolithic Culture
Jomon Culture
Post-Jomon Culture
Satsumon Culture
Ohtokyo Culture

Year
13,000 B.C.
300 B.C.
300 A.D.
500 A.D.
700 A.D.
800 A.D.
1200 A.D.
1600 A.D.
1900 A.D.

The History of Japan

Paleolithic
Jomon
Yayoi
Kofun
Asuka
Heian
Kamakura
Muromachi
Edo
Meiji
Taisho
Showa
Heisei

A major source of detailed information on Hokkaido's history

Akarenga – A portal site for information on Hokkaido’s history and culture
http://www.akarenga-h.jp/en/
The origin of Japan's soul – inheriting the prehistoric spirit –

Jomon culture thrived in Japan for over 10,000 years from about 15,000 years ago to around 2,000 years ago. It was an exceptional prehistoric culture in world history characterized by the absence of major conflicts among people and their harmonious coexistence with nature. People in those days, called the Jomon people, lived in permanent settlements with livelihoods supported by hunting, fishing and gathering (rather than agriculture). Graves, shell mounds and other sites from the period of Jomon culture have produced the remains of people and funerary objects as well as artifacts associated with rituals and ceremonies. The Jomon people – hunter-gatherers who had to depend on nature for their livelihoods – believed that everything in the natural world had a spirit and lived with high levels of environmental adaptation. The ethos of the Jomon people has been passed down to the Ainu (as shown by their religious beliefs) and the Japanese as a whole.

Learning about the ethos of the Jomon people

### Footprints – mementoes of deceased children

Clay tablets with infant footprints were unearthed at an archeological site from around 6,500 years ago. It is believed that the tablets were created as mementoes of deceased children and buried along with their parents when they passed away.

### Lacquerware techniques still in use today

Lacquerware, a traditional craft produced in Japan, developed into art during the Jomon period.

### Manifestation of the artistic qualities of the Jomon people

Clay figurine – a national treasure

Many unglazed clay figurines represent women. This hollow clay figurine, designated as a national treasure, was unearthed at a grave from around 3,500 years ago. Nicknamed Kokkū, it measures 41.5 centimeters high and 20.1 centimeters wide, still in use today.

### Sites for send-off rituals for souls

Shell mounds from 5,000 B.C. to 3,500 B.C. have yielded graves with human skeletons and former sites for rituals involving animals that included deer skull arrangement, in addition to shells, fish bones, marine mammal bones and other remains. The Kitakogene Shell Mound is thought to have been a site for send-off rituals for the souls of people, other living beings and objects.

### Hands-on Jomon Culture programs

Comma-shaped bead making and other hands-on programs are available. They last for approximately 30 minutes to an hour. For more information about A and B, contact the Hakodate Jomon Culture Center and the Kitakogene Shell Mound Information Center, respectively.

<table>
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Reasons for the preservation of the ethos of Jomon culture in Hokkaido

Post-Jomon culture
Continued practice of the livelihoods of hunting, fishing and gathering rather than farming

Around 2,000 years ago, Yayoi culture, characterized by paddy rice cultivation and bronze and iron casting, spread from western Japan to the northeastern Tohoku region. The culture failed to reach Hokkaido, where while affected by the culture of mainland Japan, Jomon culture developed into post-Jomon culture, which did not involve farming. Post-Jomon culture ultimately evolved into Satsumon culture, but Okhotsk culture emerged instead in the Sea of Okhotsk coastal areas. It is thought that Okhotsk culture gradually merged with Satsumon culture, which ultimately developed into Ainu culture.

Sites from the Jomon culture to Ainu culture periods

The Tokoro Site is one of Japan’s largest archaeological settlements featuring sites from the period of Jomon culture to that of the Ainu culture. Pit dwellings from over 1,000 years ago remain in the settlement in the form of hollows in the ground surface. The site is important for learning about the relationships between Satsumon culture and Okhotsk culture.

The ethos of the Jomon people that was passed to the Ainu

The Ainu believe that everything in the world has a spirit. They revere as kamuy the things and phenomena that surpass human capabilities, such as fire, water, animals, plants, everyday implements and weather conditions. The Ainu are considered to have passed down to today the ethos that is also common to the Jomon people.

Okhotsk culture introduced from the norther region

By the time post-Jomon culture began to come to an end about the 5th century, people from Sakhalin and other northern places settled in the Sea of Okhotsk area in Hokkaido. These people with northern cultures, referred to as Okhotsk people, were known as a maritime people. They engaged in fishing and hunting of whales, seals and other marine animals. Their bear cult and other customs are said to have affected Ainu culture, which includes bear spirit-sending ceremonies.

Spread of Okhotsk culture

Abashiri Moyoro Hot Pot

A local hot pot featuring seafood from the Sea of Okhotsk that is served in a pot likened to Okhotsk pottery

List of restaurants serving Moyoro Hot Pot

URL: http://www.abakanko.jp/food/moyoronaabe.html

Enquiries: Abashiri Tourist Association

Jomon archaeological sites in Hokkaido

A website featuring initiatives toward the UNESCO World Heritage inscription of Jomon archaeological sites

Official website for Jomon Archaeological Sites in Hokkaido and Northern Tohoku

URL: http://jomon-japan.jp/en

Learning about archaeological sites in Hokkaido

A website featuring Jomon sites and observation facilities in 27 municipalities in Hokkaido

Hokkaido Liaison Committee for Municipalities with Jomon Sites

URL: http://www.jomon-town.org/site/
A Journey into the History and Culture of Hokkaido
北海道の歴史文化と旅

Indigenous Ainu culture

Ainu concepts and culture inherited from the prehistoric times – living in harmony with nature –

The nature-embracing Ainu culture originated with the spirituality of Jomon people, and contrasted significantly with that of Japan’s Wajin mainlanders. Ainu communities in the Middle Ages engaged in trade with people from ancient China (for silk garments) and Japan’s main island of Honshu (for lacquerware). Later, Wajin settlers in Ezo (as Hokkaido was then known) secured a monopoly on trading rights and increasingly dominated the scene both politically and economically. In 1869, the Meiji government gave Ezo the new name of Hokkaido and implemented policies that would force the Ainu to assimilate into Wajin society. However, the unique beliefs and lifestyles of the region’s indigenous Ainu people survive today.

Understanding of the spiritual world of the Ainu

The Ainu had a deep reverence for natural resources beneficial to people (such as flora and fauna) and forces beyond human control (such as fire, water and meteorological phenomena), viewing them as kamuy, or deities. At a very important ceremony called iomante, the spirits of gods that had visited the human world in the form of bears were returned to the divine realm (known as kamuy moshiro). Such spirit-returning ceremonies were also held when tools reached the end of their usable life and on various other occasions.

Records of the Ainu bear ceremony

The museum in Hokkaido University’s Botanic Garden was opened in 1877 as a temporary Sapporo museum facility by the Hokkaido Development Commission. Northern People Museum in the garden exhibits Ainu and other cultural properties collected mostly from the 1880s to the 1930s.

Examples of present-day Ainu culture

Traditional Ainu dance

(UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage)

Ainu song and dance were born from relations between Ainu people and the various forms representing deities in the natural environment around them, such as animals and plants. These art forms have been developed and passed down through generations of Ainu.

Mukkur

This is a traditional Ainu musical instrument, known today as a Jew’s harp or a mouth harp. They were used in and around Eurasia.

Ainu patterns

These indigenous patterns had a variety of designs featuring spirals, parenthetic shapes and other forms. The former two basic elements can be combined to create a limitless number of designs. The Ainu believed that these patterns protected them from evil and disease.

Place names and the Ainu language

Around 80 percent of place names in Hokkaido are derived from Ainu-language terms, most describing terrain characteristics and locations.

Psirikanoka (nationally designated sites of scenic beauty)

Psirikanoka (meaning “beautiful form” in the Ainu language) is a name assigned to places of scenic beauty associated with Ainu folklore, ancient traditions, places of prayer and language. A total of 10 locations in Hokkaido have been designated as Psirikanoka sites.

Psirikanoka website

### Hands-on learning about Ainu culture

**Interactive learning about Ainu lifestyles and culture**

This outdoor museum includes a reproduction of a traditional Ainu village and provides visitors with opportunities to watch and try traditional Ainu dance, mukkur (Jew’s harp) playing and traditional handicrafts. An indoor part of the museum features Ainu lifestyles by highlighting food, clothing, housing and aspects of everyday living, serving as a base for exchanges with indigenous people worldwide.

**Traditional Ainu production techniques**

The museum displays Ainu folk craft works designated as important tangible folk cultural properties. The region’s traditional Ainu craft items, including Nibutani ita (wooden trays) and Nibutani attu (textiles made from bark fibers), are the only items of their kind in Hokkaido to have received traditional craft industry designation from the Japanese government.

**Ainu theater performances**

Lake Akan Ainu Theater Ikor in Ainu Kotan is used as a venue for performances of traditional Ainu dance, the Iomante Fire Festival and Ainu puppet shows. The Ainu Folk Memorial Museum highlights the lifestyles and culture of these indigenous people. There are also folk craft shops and a restaurant serving Ainu cuisine.

### Assimilation of northern people’s wisdom and techniques

Hokkaido people were influenced by Eurasia. This museum features the cultures of northern peoples around the world, including those of northern Europe, the Russian Maritime Province, Siberia and Alaska as well as Ainu culture and Okhotsk culture. Peoples are classified by food and clothing, and their housing is classified by theme.

### Information on a resource promoting awareness of Hokkaido Ainu culture

The Foundation for Research and Promotion of Ainu Culture website

URL: [http://www.frpac.or.jp/english/index.html](http://www.frpac.or.jp/english/index.html)

This website provides detailed information on modern Ainu culture and on the history and ancient culture of these indigenous people (including language, performing arts and beliefs). An Ainu mukkur performance is also featured (appropriate PC audio capability required).

Hokkaido Museum (See page 2)


Hakodate City Museum of Northern Peoples


Sapporo Ainu Culture Promotion Center(Sapporo Pirka Kotan)


Tomakomai City Museum


Obihiro Centennial Museum

URL: [http://www.ocv.ne.jp/~hyakunen/english.html](http://www.ocv.ne.jp/~hyakunen/english.html)

Kushiro City Museum


Makubetsu Tourism & Local Products Association


Noboribetsu Bear Park/Yukura-no-sato


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*Hands-on learning about Ainu culture*
Ezo – the secret behind Japan’s success

Numerous Wajin (Japanese mainlanders) began to settle in southern Hokkaido around the 14th century, building strongholds in places such as Kaminokuni, Hokuto, Matsumae and Hakodate (as they are known today) and establishing their influence. In the early modern Edo period, the shogunate adopted a closed-door policy that limited trade with other parts of the world, and the Matsumae Domain, which controlled Ezochi (as Hokkaido was previously known), monopolized the right to trade there. In the 18th century, increased output of herring, salmon, kelp and other marine products in Ezo den helped to build the prosperity of Esochi, Matsumae and Hakodate, as these items were shipped from the ports there. In particular, Esochi (the terminus for Sea of Japan shipping routes) thrived so much that it was popularly said to be even busier than Edo in May. The herring fertilizer carried by Kitamaebune vessels was used for the cultivation of cotton and other plants, and thus contributed to Japan’s industrial development. Dried herring and kelp were transported to Kyoto and elsewhere, and became essential elements of traditional Japanese dietary culture.

**Kitamaebune shipping routes**

Kitamaebune cargo vessels

From the latter half of the 18th century to the 19th century, kitamaebune cargo vessels sailed the Sea of Japan between Osaka and Ezo. They carried herring meal fertilizer, kelp and other products from Ezo to the Honshu mainland, and transported rice, sake and other commodities from Honshu to Ezo.

**A mountain stronghold of Wajin crossing the sea to settle in Ezo**

The Matsumae clan (which controlled the Matsumae Domain) was originally a family of Wajin who moved to Ezo in the 15th century. The Matsumae clan ruled over Ezo in an extended period from the time when these early settlers built a stronghold near the Amano River in today’s Kaminokuni Town to the Meiji Restoration. Artifacts from the time can still be seen in southern Hokkaido.

**Landscapes enjoyed by Ainu and Wajin 500 years ago**

The ancestors of the Matsumae clan built a stronghold on a site known as Katsuyamadate halfway up Mt. Iou in the latter half of the 15th century. Its location on a three-terraced slope stirs the imagination regarding what people of the time might have looked out at from there. Wajin and Ainu graves stand together behind the site.

**Hokkaido’s only castle**

This Matsumae Domain structure is Japan’s northernmost castle and the only one in Hokkaido with a keep. Its Matsumae Park location is a popular cherry blossom-viewing spot known for producing Hokkaido’s earliest blooms of the season.
Esashi – even busier than Edo in May

Herring is a harbinger of spring in Japan. Esashi was once a major source of herring during this season, and people flocked there on kitamaebune boats to buy it. Reminders of Esashi’s heyday can still be seen in the town.

Kamome Island and its favorable natural harbor

Kamome Island, which is 20 meters above sea level and has a circumference of 2.6 kilometers, was once responsible for much of Esashi’s prosperity in its role as a base for herring fisheries and trade involving kitamaebune vessels. This beautiful islet is designated as a special region of Hiyama Prefectural Natural Park.

A place as busy as Edo in Ezoichi

Inishie Road was created to carry on the history of Esashi, which once thrived on herring fisheries and trade. The Historic Nakamura Residence (a wholesale shop for kitamaebune vessels and a designated national important cultural property), the Yokoyama Residence and various other valuable structures are located along the route.

Time-honored Esashi Oiwake folk song

The Esashi Oiwake Kaikan museum highlights Esashi Oiwake folk song, which is a globally known form of entertainment today. The museum offers live performances and lessons to visitors interested in this style of singing and displays ornately decorated floats at the town’s Ubagami-Daijingu Festival.

Nishin soba – an Esashi specialty

Herring Day

Nishin soba is a dish of hot buckwheat noodles topped with salty-sweet dried herring simmered in sugar and soy sauce. It is a specialty of Esashi – a town that once thrived on herring fisheries and trade involving kitamaebune vessels. In the town, the 24th day of each month is designated as Herring Day. Esashi Sightseeing Convention Association

Sightseeing

Samurai warriors’ last battle

Goryokaku Fort was built to help defend Japan’s northern border and control Ezoichi after the opening of Hakodate Port in 1854. Goryokaku was the site of the Battle of Hakodate between forces of the new Meiji government and those of the former shogunate.

A reminder of the last days of samurai fighting

Goryokaku Fort was Japan’s first Western-style structure of its kind, and was built in 1864 to help protect Japan’s northern frontiers. The Hakodate Magistrate’s Office (an administrative institution of the shogunate) was later relocated here. The star-shaped European-style structure served as a base for forces of the former shogunate in the Battle of Hakodate. The present Hakodate Magistrate’s Office is the result of a restoration completed in 2010.

A local landmark overlooking the star-shaped fort

Goryokaku Tower’s observatory commands striking views of Mt. Hakodate, the Tsugaru Strait and the star-shaped Goryokaku Fort. The observatory’s exhibition space provides opportunities to learn about historical events including the opening of Japan by U.S. Navy Commodore Matthew C. Perry and the Battle of Hakodate.
The legacy of foreign advisors and technicians – American and Japanese pioneers in pursuit of a dream

Following the Meiji Restoration, the Japanese government renamed Ezo as Hokkaido and established the Hokkaido Development Commission. To bring American technology to Hokkaido, the Commission’s Deputy Director General and later Director General, Kiyotaka Kuroda recruited former U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Horace Capron and other American experts in agriculture, civil engineering, mining and other fields, and launched Hokkaido’s development under their guidance. With their American frontier spirit and their ambition and enthusiasm for Hokkaido’s development, these American experts made great contributions during their relatively short stay in the region. The relationship between Japan and the U.S. was characterized by friendships between people of the two countries as equals, and particularly between scholars and engineers. This was in contrast to the relationships linking major powers and their colonies in other parts of Asia in those days. The advanced agricultural technologies and developmental concepts that were brought to Hokkaido as a result influenced the region’s industry, culture and lifestyles.

Major American experts who worked for the Hokkaido Development Commission

Horace Capron
Former U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Horace Capron served as an advisor to the Hokkaido Development Commission on Hokkaido’s development as a whole.

William S. Clark
William S. Clark spent a year teaching at Sapporo Agricultural College. His parting words to his Japanese students – “Boys, be ambitious!” – are well known.

Edwin Dun
Edwin Dun, a veterinarian, gave guidance in agriculture and livestock farming, and introduced Western agricultural methods suitable for Hokkaido’s climate.

Benjamin S. Lyman
Benjamin S. Lyman, a geologist and mining engineer, published the first comprehensive geological map in Japan, “A Geological Sketch Map of the Island of Yesso, Japan” and discovered a coal deposit in the Horonai region.

*Of the 78 foreign experts hired by the Hokkaido Development Commission, the number of Americans was the largest with 48 (accounting for 70 percent of the total).

Map of facilities in central Sapporo during the pioneering era

Black font: contemporary buildings
Blue font: buildings relocated for restoration or reproduced

Map of central Sapporo (1889)

Map possessed by the Sapporo Municipal Central Library (partially revised)
Central Sapporo, a place representing Horace Capron’s guidance

The starting point of Hokkaido’s modernization

Kita 3-jo-dori Avenue extending eastward from the Red Brick Building (near the Former Hokkaido Development Commission Sapporo Office Building) was lined with factories for government projects in the latter half of the 19th century, when the Hokkaido Development Commission spearheaded the region’s land reclamation efforts. The avenue is also called Kaitakushi-dori (Hokkaido Development Commission) Avenue.

Brewery opened by the Hokkaido Development Commission

Sapporo Factory commercial complex, located at the eastern end of Kaitakushi-dori Avenue, is the former site of the brewery opened in 1876 by the Hokkaido Development Commission. The brick building reminiscent of those days remains at the site.

Bronze statues representing the friendship that led efforts for Hokkaido’s development

Odori Park in central Sapporo divides the area into north and south sections. The park’s open space in the 10-chome area features bronze statues of Hokkaido Development Commission Director General Kiyotaka Kuroda and Horace Capron.

Following the footsteps of Dr. William S. Clark

Contributions to the spread of Western agricultural methods

The Sapporo Agricultural College Model Barn was established under the tutelage of Dr. Clark as a model facility for livestock farming in Hokkaido. A total of nine remaining buildings, including the Model Barn (Japan’s oldest Western-style agricultural building) and the Corn Barn, were collectively designated as an Important Cultural Property in 1969.

A clock that has been ticking since Hokkaido’s pioneering era

The Sapporo Clock Tower was built in 1878 as a drill hall of Sapporo Agricultural College based on advice from the college’s first Vice Principal, Dr. William S. Clark. The design of this wooden structure was typical of that found in the U.S. during its pioneering years. The clock tower includes an exhibition room showcasing its history.

The place known for the phrase “Boys, be ambitious!”

Designated as a historic site, Former Shimamatsu Communication Station was used for transportation, accommodation and postal affairs during the Meiji era. It is also where Dr. William S. Clark, on his way back to the U.S., called out to his Sapporo Agricultural College students, “Boys, be ambitious!”

Legacy of Edwin Dun in Sapporo

Learning about the life of Edwin Dun

The Edwin Dun Memorial Museum showcases his achievements and the history of Sapporo’s development. The museum building is a reconstruction of the cattle ranch office he established for the Hokkaido Development Commission. The adjacent Edwin Dun Memorial Park has a bronze statue of Dun in his youth.

Bust of Dr. William S. Clark at Hokkaido University

The bust of Dr. William S. Clark at Hokkaido University is a popular tourist destination.
Historical Village of Hokkaido
– outdoor museum featuring the landscapes of Hokkaido in its pioneering era

Historical Village of Hokkaido is an outdoor museum opened in Nopporo Forest Park to mark the centennial anniversary of Hokkaido’s foundation. It houses historical buildings relocated from across Hokkaido for restoration or reproduced to highlight the industry, lifestyles and culture in the area’s pioneering years (Meiji era [1868–1912], Taisho era [1912–1926] and early Showa era [1926–1989]). The museum holds events for visitors to experience the culture in those days, such as making rice – the dietary staple of the Japanese – did not work out as expected in Hokkaido due to its cold snowy winters. However, local farmers never gave up and slowly turned the wilderness into fertile farmland, thanks to the early introduction of advanced Western agricultural techniques under the bold land reclamation policy initiated by the Meiji government.

One of Hokkaido’s attractions for tourists from other countries is the Beautiful rural landscapes supported by different types of land demarcation – grid-pattern farmland developed in the Konsen, Okhotsk, and Kutsunai plains and rice terraces and fields developed in mountainous areas. The cultivation of rice – the dietary staple of the Japanese – did not work out as expected in Hokkaido due to its cold snowy winters. However, local farmers never gave up and slowly turned the wilderness into fertile farmland, thanks to the early introduction of advanced Western agricultural techniques under the bold land reclamation policy initiated by the Meiji government.

A major source of information on Hokkaido’s pioneering era

Resource centers for learning about the history and lifestyles of Tondenhei farmer-soldiers

The barracks and administrative buildings of the Tondenhei, which were relocated for the village. (Photos courtesy of the Hokkaido Tondenhei Museum)

Historic Site: Kotoni Tondenhei Village Site and Barracks

Historic Site: Kotoni Tondenhei Village Site and Barracks

Residential Unit

This local history museum showcases the history and lifestyles of Tondenhei farmer-soldiers in today’s Yubetsu Town in eastern Hokkaido.

Resource centers for learning about the history and lifestyles of Tondenhei farmer-soldiers

Early Hokkaido
– developed by samurai

Amid the colonial expansion of Western powers into Asia, the Japanese government faced the urgent task of reclaiming Hokkaido to protect the country. To promote the settlement of Japanese mainlanders in Hokkaido, the government established a settlement policy known as the Tondenhei farmer-soldier system, under which settlers were tasked with developing and defending the nation’s northern frontier. Many of the farmer-soldiers who initially settled in Hokkaido were former samurai warriors with no experience of farming. This was partly because the system was also intended to recruit such warriors whose livelihoods had been lost to the Meiji Restoration. Tondenhei farmer-soldiers’ duties were to engage in farming primarily and to be mobilized as soldiers in case of emergency. Their settlement and land reclamation efforts began in Sapporo and gradually spread across Hokkaido.
The Rural landscape of Hokkaido – 130 years of effort

One of Hokkaido’s attractions for tourists from other countries is beautiful rural landscapes supported by different types of agriculture (e.g., paddy rice, upland crop and dairy farming) combined with a vastness not found in rural areas elsewhere in Japan. The development of these landscapes was made possible thanks to the early introduction of advanced Western agricultural techniques under the bold land reclamation policy involving the Tondenhei farmer-soldier system and other initiatives undertaken by the Meiji and subsequent governments. Other factors that helped develop the landscapes include the untiring efforts made by local residents to use the vast land area to ensure a stable food supply.

Grid-pattern land areas for settlers – the starting point of large-scale farming in Hokkaido

What draws attention in Hokkaido’s rural landscapes is expansive farmland neatly divided into a grid pattern. The land demarcation was based on that for Tondenhei farmer-soldier villages by the Hokkaido Development Commission and subsequently spread across Hokkaido when land was uniformly demarcated for settlements. In particular, farmland in the Konsen, Oshokotsu, Tokachi and Kamikawa regions was developed on the basis of this type of land demarcation.

Beautiful rural landscapes developed by agriculture that took advantage of natural terrains

Rural landscapes in Biei and Furano – tourist destinations popular among overseas tourists – are based on reclaimed land in hilly areas rather than in plains. When land reclamation began in the Meiji era, slopes and other challenging terrains were left uncultivated due to their inferior conditions for farming. However, the untiring efforts of local residents turned the wilderness into fertile farmland, creating today’s beautiful rural landscapes that are in harmony with natural surroundings.

The Ishikari Plain – transformation into a leading rice-producing area

The cultivation of rice – the dietary staple of the Japanese – did not work out as expected in Hokkaido due to its cold snowy winters. However, local farmers never gave up on rice cultivation. The area’s wilderness was steadily developed into increasing areas of paddy rice fields centering around the Ishikari Plain and the Kamikawa Basin. A hundred and several decades of years later, the region developed into one of Japan’s leading rice-producing areas.

Biei is popular for its beautiful landscape of undulating hills. Don’t miss the Taku-shin-kan photo gallery showcasing beautiful rural landscapes in Biei.

The observation platform affording sweeping views of the Ishikari Plain provides visitors with an opportunity to see three types of farms – those for paddy rice, upland crop and dairy farming.
Hokkaido – a 130-year miracle – it all began with coal

Coal mining in Hokkaido played an essential role in Japan’s industrialization. The Hokkaido Development Commission launched a mining project at the government-operated Horonai Coal Mine in 1879, and three years later opened the Horonai Railway to carry its output to the port in Otaru. The Commission also built a series of government-run textile mills, paper mills and other production facilities, and Hokkaido’s development turned into a major national project. New mines were developed and railroads were extended across various parts of Hokkaido over the 11 years following the launch of the coal mining project. Consequently, Muroran thrived as a coal shipping port on a par with the major Otaru Port, and witnessed the start of iron manufacture using coal. The development of coal mines supported progress in inland areas, where roads were built, rivers were improved for flood control and other elements of infrastructure were developed. Hokkaido used to be an undeveloped island inhabited only by indigenous Ainu people and a small number of Wajin (Japanese people from mainland Japan), but evolved to support a population of 5.5 million in only 130 years. Hokkaido’s modernization is owed to industrial development based on coal mining.

Tracing the history of industry

Coal mining in the Sorachi region supported Japan’s industry over a long period from the nation’s modernization to its post-war reconstruction. The numerous coal mine heritage resources found here afford a glimpse into the history of modernization in Hokkaido.

A one-stop information center for coal mine heritage resources

The center provides information on coal mine heritage resources in the Sorachi region. It highlights the history of local mines with a showcase of related equipment and other exhibits including photographs, films and publications. Guided tours of coal mine heritage sites are also offered (reservations required).

A chance to see real black gold

Mikasa Geopark is Japan’s only facility of its kind where coal beds can be viewed. The headframe of the former Kushunbetsu Coal Mine’s Nishiki Mine Pit in the park’s Open-air Museum area is the oldest of Hokkaido’s remaining shaft towers. The geopark also contains a minehead connected to the underground mine pit.

Experiencing the past and the present with a hike on an old coal mine site

The old Horonai Coal Mine site is now a landscape park where the facility’s substation, the oldest minehead in Hokkaido and other structural elements can still be seen today. Surrounded by mountains, the park provides outstanding opportunities for photography and walks in a natural environment.

Joseph Crawford – the Father of Hokkaido Railroads

American railroad civil engineer Joseph Crawford made a significant contribution to the development of railroads in Hokkaido. Coal mined in Horonai was originally slated to be transported by rail up to the Ishikari River and then along the river to Otaru on the Sea of Japan. However, the railroad was instead extended to carry coal all the way from Horonai to Otaru Port via Sapporo on Crawford’s advice. Had it not been for his input, Sapporo might not be the city it is today.
Following the coal-shipping routes in olden times

The old Horonai Railway connected Otaru and Horonoi, both of which have railway museums. They are ideal places for a day of family activities (including a steam locomotive ride) and for learning about the history of railways.

A ride through verdant surroundings on a Torokko tram

Visitors can ride a Torokko tram along the disused Horonai Railway (2.8 km). A variety of trains are displayed outdoors both at the old Mikasa Station near the start point of the Torokko Railway and at Mikasa Railway Museum at its terminus. In summer, rides on a steam locomotive are provided.

Steam locomotives – a development as historic as that of shinkansen trains

This museum in the compound of the old Temiya Station (the start point of the Horonai Railway) showcases exhibits on Hokkaido’s railroad history. In summer, visitors can take a ride of around 20 minutes on the US-made Iron Horse steam locomotive.

Walking and cruising along Otaru Canal

The canal is lined with 1920s warehouses that have been turned into restaurants and cafés. A canal cruise here is a must on any visit to the city.

Time-honored industries – a magnet for visitors

The industries that have continued since the area’s pioneering days have continued to build on their history, creating a new kind of appeal matching the times.

The Muroran Factory Night View – one of the Seven Best Factory Night Views in Japan

Iron manufacture began in Muroran during the Meiji era (1868 – 1912). Having thrived on the iron and steel industry, the city is today home to factories of varying sizes, including steelworks run by Nippon Steel & Sumitomo Metal Corporation and the Japan Steel Works, Ltd. These factories along the bay create spectacular night views, and bus tours highlighting these sights are popular among visitors.

Candles illuminating a century of Muroran history

The Western wooden structure here used to be Former Muroran Branch of Mitsubishi Limited Partnership Company, where coal quality was analyzed and procedures for coal shipment were undertaken. Constructed in 1915, this city landmark is still used as an office building (although for a different company) and is open for tours. It also serves as a candle museum today.
Useful information for a journey into the history and culture of Hokkaido

Good Day Hokkaido
Website featuring tourist information about Hokkaido (information on tourist destinations and events across Hokkaido, travel plans, etc.)
◆ URL: http://www.visit-hokkaido.jp [EN]

JNTO Tourist Information Offices
List of tourist information offices with multilingual staff
........................................................................... Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO)

Must-have Handbook for Driving in Hokkaido
A handbook for a safe, comfortable and pleasant car trip in Hokkaido (basic rules and manners, rental cars, traffic rules, driving on winter roads, how to deal with problems, etc.)
◆ URL: http://www.hkd.mlit.go.jp/topics/toukei/chousa/h20keikaku/handbook.html [EN]
........................................................................... Hokkaido Regional Development Bureau, Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism

Drive Hokkaido – Basic knowledge of traffic safety
Information for driving safely in Hokkaido (safety-minded driving, basic rules and manners, driving on winter roads, what to do in a traffic accident, major road signs and traffic lights in Japan, etc.)
◆ URL: http://www.pref.hokkaido.lg.jp/ks/dms/saftydrive/ [EN]
........................................................................... Hokkaido Government

Northern Road Navi – Road and Traveler Information in Hokkaido
Hokkaido road information (road maps, information on driving, information on roads and mountain passes (blizzards), information on winter roads, travel time and distance searches, etc.)
◆ URL: http://northern-road.jp/navi/ [EN]
........................................................................... Civil Engineering Research Institute for Cold Region (CERI), Public Works Research Institute (PWRI)

JR Hokkaido
General information (timetables, route maps, fares, etc.)
◆ URL: http://www.jrhokkaido.co.jp [EN]
........................................................................... Hokkaido Railway Company

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