

Experience

Akanko

# Ainu Culture Booklet

vol.3



# Lake Akan Native Red Salmon

The Lake Akan Native Red Salmon Festival ~Kapatcep Nomi~ is held in early summer when the red salmon fishing season begins. The festival aims to raise awareness that red salmon is native to Lake Akan and includes a kamuynomi (prayer ceremony) to express gratitude to all the deities of Lake Akan's natural environment.

## Ritual Shaved Wood (Inaw)



## Altar (nusasan)

### Ainu Ritual Implements: inaw

Made by carving willow or dogwood with a small knife to create frilled shavings resembling tassels. Inaw are offerings to various kamuy (nature deities) and are placed at the nusasan altar. The most important inaw are engraved with the itokpa (family crest) of the person who made them.



### Ceremonial Drinking Vessels

Sake is an essential part of kamuynomi and is called tonoto in the Ainu language. The vessel used to store tonoto for kamuynomi is called a sintoko, and the bowl used to pour the sake is called a tuki. During the ceremony, an ikupasuy (a sacred sake ladle) is used to share the sake with the deities and participants. These drinking vessels were obtained through trade with the wajin (Japanese people) and were usually treasured as valuable ornaments.

## Sake Vessel (sintoko)

# Festival ~Kapatcep Nomi~

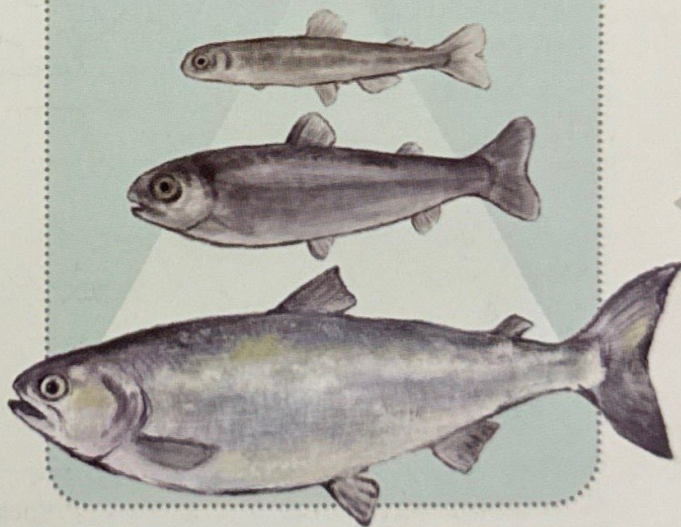


## Ainu Worship Gesture "onkamuy"

The Ainu male worship gesture is called onkamuy. It is a way to express gratitude to the deities and is performed not only in ceremonies, but also during dedicatory dances.

## Ecology of the Red Salmon

Red salmon is a freshwater fish of the salmon family, which can grow up to about 50 cm in length and is an endemic species that inhabits Lake Akan. Native to Lake Akan in Japan, it has been transplanted to Lake Shikotsu and lakes in Yamanashi Prefecture. In Ainu, the red salmon is called kapatcep, meaning "thin fish."



## Lake Akan Red Salmon Festival ~Kapatcep Nomi~

- Date: First Saturday of July (Planned)
- Location: Special Event Venue in Akan Lakeside Parking Area



\* During kamuynomi, do not cross in front of or walk behind the nusasan, as it is the path of the deities. Also, do not step on the citarpe, or the patterned mat.

Red salmon is available for purchase at the Akan Lake Fisheries Cooperative.



### Akanko Fisheries Cooperative

2-7-2 Akanko Onsen, Akan-cho, Kushiro City, Hokkaido 085-0467  
TEL.0154-67-2750 FAX.0154-67-2830  
<https://www.akan-gyokyo.com/>



# ekasi & huci

## (Respected Elders / Grandfather, Grandmother)

Ainu men who are knowledgeable about rituals, the Ainu language and cultural practices, skilled in craftsmanship, and highly respected are called ekasi (respected elderly man), while women with similar qualities are called huci (respected elderly woman) to express reverence.

**A ekimnekuwa**  
(Walking Stick)

A stick used when entering the mountains.

**B konci**  
(Head Covering)

A hood worn as protection against the cold when going hunting in the fields and mountains.

**C tampakuop**  
(Tobacco Pouch)

A pouch used to store tobacco and smoking tools, typically tied to the waist.

**D tasiro**  
(Mountain Knife)

A versatile blade always carried during mountain hunting.

**E cepkeri**  
(Salmon Skin Shoes)

Durable shoes made from salmon skin, designed to protect against wind and water.

**F menokomakiri**  
(Women's Small Knife)

A small knife carried by women when gathering wild plants or for self-defense.

**G maetare**  
(Apron)

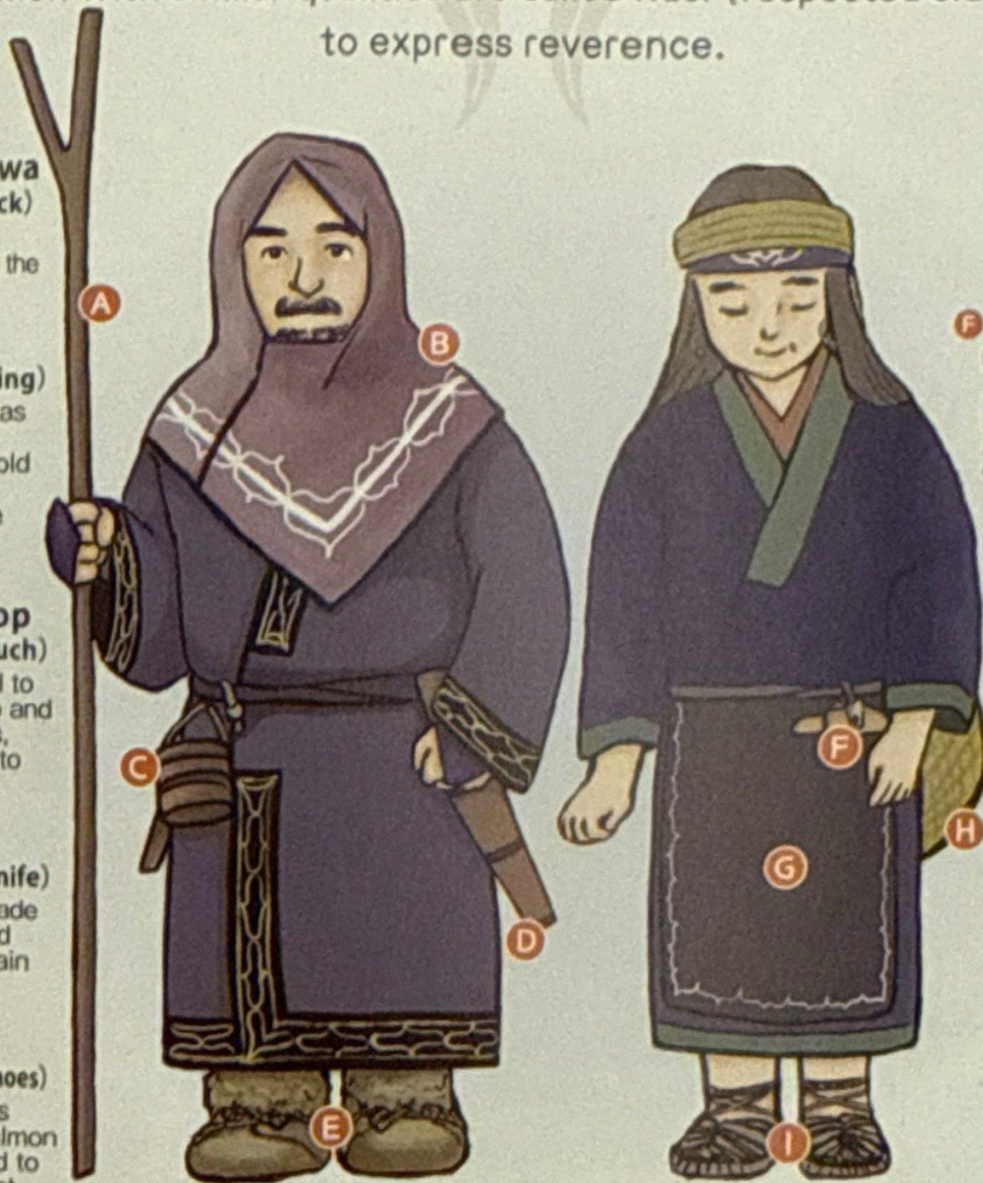
Workwear worn by women when threshing grain.

**H saranip**  
(Woven Bag)

A bag made by weaving tree bark or plant vines, used to carry collected wild plants.

**I situkeri**  
(Grape Vine Shoes)

Summer shoes made by weaving grape vines.



**ekasi**

(Respected Elderly Man)

**huci**

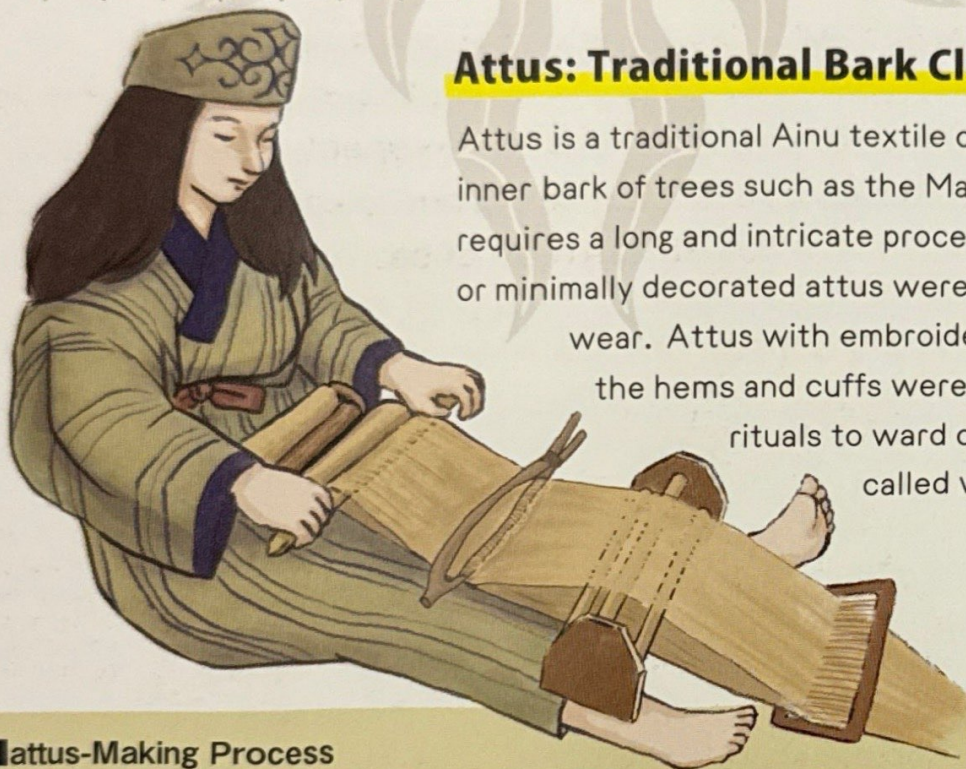
(Respected Elderly Woman)

### Cultural Inheritance Through Male and Female Lines

Ainu cultural traditions have been passed down through gendered inheritance: itokpa (family crests) from father to son, and ponkut (sashes) from mother to daughter. However, due to assimilation policies\* and other factors, many Ainu have lost these cultural traditions.

\*Assimilation policies: Policies implemented around the Meiji period that aimed to restrict Ainu culture and integrate the Ainu into Japanese society.

# Ainu Clothing & Food



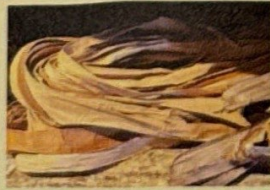
## Attus: Traditional Bark Cloth Garment

Attus is a traditional Ainu textile crafted from the inner bark of trees such as the Manchurian Elm. It requires a long and intricate process to create. Plain or minimally decorated attus were used for daily wear. Attus with embroidered patterns on the hems and cuffs were worn during rituals to ward off evil spirits, called wenkamuy.

### ■ attus-Making Process



In early spring, when the bark contains the most moisture, it is peeled off the tree. The bark is soaked in hot springs to soften.



The inner bark is cleaned and separated into thin layers.



The layers are cut into uniform strands and twisted into thread.



The threads are woven into fabric, then left to rest for one to two years before being sewn into garments.

## Enjoying Nature's Blessings Through Ainu Culture

The Ainu developed methods to preserve and make full use of seasonal foods. Rataskep is a dish made by boiling dried pumpkin, beans, and other ingredients together. Sito are dumplings made from millet or rice. Sayo is a watery porridge that can be enjoyed with cipor (fresh fish roe).

### Examples of Ainu Dishes



rataskep  
(Mixed Ingredients)



sito  
(Dumplings)



sayo  
(Porridge)

# Ainu Patterns



Ainu patterns combine elements such as the morewnoka (spiral pattern) and the aiusinoka (bracket pattern), with distinct characteristics varying by region and household.

Ainu patterns are a valuable cultural heritage passed down from parents to children.

However, in some cases, this tradition has been lost, leaving some Ainu unable to trace their ancestral designs.

At the Akan Ainu Consulin on Lake Akan, initiatives are in place to ensure the proper use of Ainu patterns and Ainu culture as a whole.

## Basic Patterns



**ayusmorew**  
(Spiral with Thorns)



**utasa**  
(Intersecting)



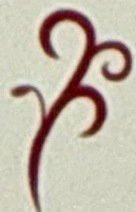
**sikkewnumorew**  
(Horned Spiral)



**ayus**  
(With Thorns)



**sik**  
(Eye/Star)



**punkar**  
(Plant Vines)



**morew**  
(Spiral)



For inquiries regarding Ainu patterns or Ainu culture, please contact:



General Incorporated Association Akan Ainu Consulin

1F, Akan Ainu Craft Center, 4-8-3 Akanko Onsen,

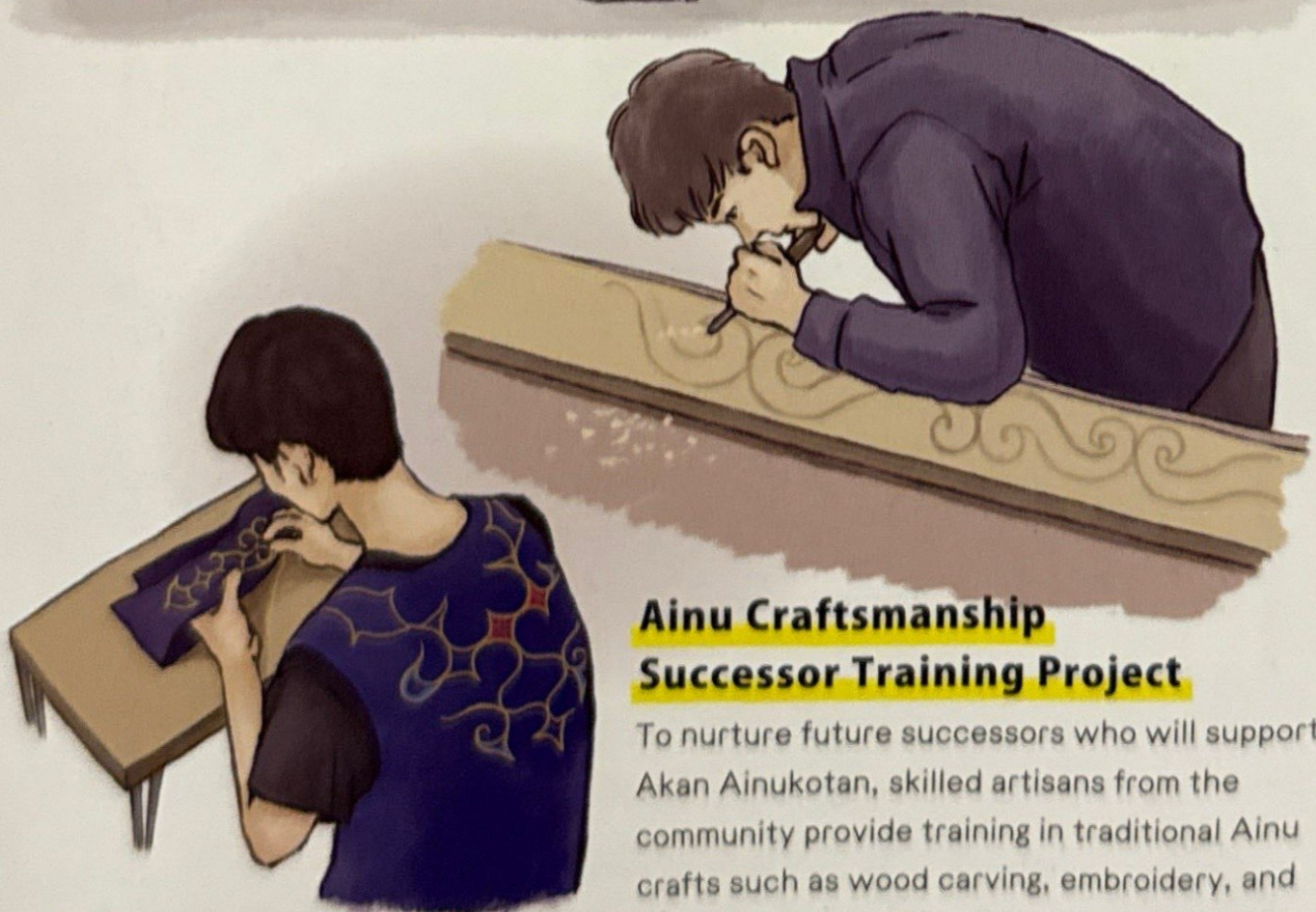
Kushiro City, Hokkaido 085-0467

TEL.0154-65-8973 FAX.0154-65-8985 <https://a-ainucon.com/>



# Akan Ainu Craft Center Harikiki

A facility dedicated to passing down  
Ainu craftsmanship to the next generation.  
The name Harikiki comes from the Ainu language,  
meaning "to work hard" or "to make an effort."  
At Harikiki, visitors can observe training sessions held as part of the  
Ainu Craftsmanship Successor Training Project.



## **Ainu Craftsmanship Successor Training Project**

To nurture future successors who will support  
Akan Ainukotan, skilled artisans from the  
community provide training in traditional Ainu  
crafts such as wood carving, embroidery, and  
weaving. At Harikiki, these future successors  
diligently refine their skills every day.

# Ainu Music

The Ainu people, who have lived in harmony with nature, express the changing seasons through songs and dances.

They primarily sing and dance using hand claps and vocal rhythms.

Close friends and family may also sing about their emotions in the moment. Brewing tonoto, a sacred ritual sake, has traditionally been a women's role.

During the straining process, they sing the tonotosoropa sake-straining song.



## Tonoto soropa (Lyrics)

Tonoto soropa Sirari Sikonunpa

~ Tonoto Menoko Siraki Ka Isamu

A Ho Hoiyo

~ Icari Kotererekere

This song is sung while straining tonoto. Afterward, people dance to bring joy to the icari, or the deity of the straining basket, expressing gratitude and hoping for delicious tonoto.

Experience Ainu culture firsthand through music and traditional dance:

Contact  
Information

Akanko Ainu Theater [Ikoro]

4-7-84 Akanko Onsen, Akan-cho, Kushiro City, Hokkaido 085-0467

TEL.0154-67-2727

<https://www.akanainu.jp/about/ikoro>



# Ainu dance

At ceremonies such as kapatcepnomi and celebrations, everyone joins in the dance.

Among the traditional dances, or rimse, is the emsirimse, or the sword dance, where men face each other and cross swords as they dance.

Some dances were inspired by observing nature, while others incorporated items acquired through trade.

## A Special Dance Performed by Ekasi elder men: tapkar

Tapkar is a ritual stamping dance performed by elder men—ekasi—to demonstrate their dignity. It is sometimes danced alone or with a few others, including elder women—huci. The dance is characterized by deep, rumbling vocalizations, with some performers dancing vigorously and others more solemnly.



## Purification Ritual Dance: tafsa

Tafsa is a ritual dance performed with a broom-like object made by attaching bamboo leaves and pine needles to a willow branch. The dance involves sweeping motions toward the sky and ground to dispel evil spirits. In the final scene of the Akan Yukar "Lost Kamuy" performance at the Akanko Ainu Theater Ikor, men appear on stage holding a tafsa.



### Akanko Ainu Theater Ikor 2025-2026 Performance Schedule

A Cultural Hub  
for Lake Akan Ainu  
Traditions

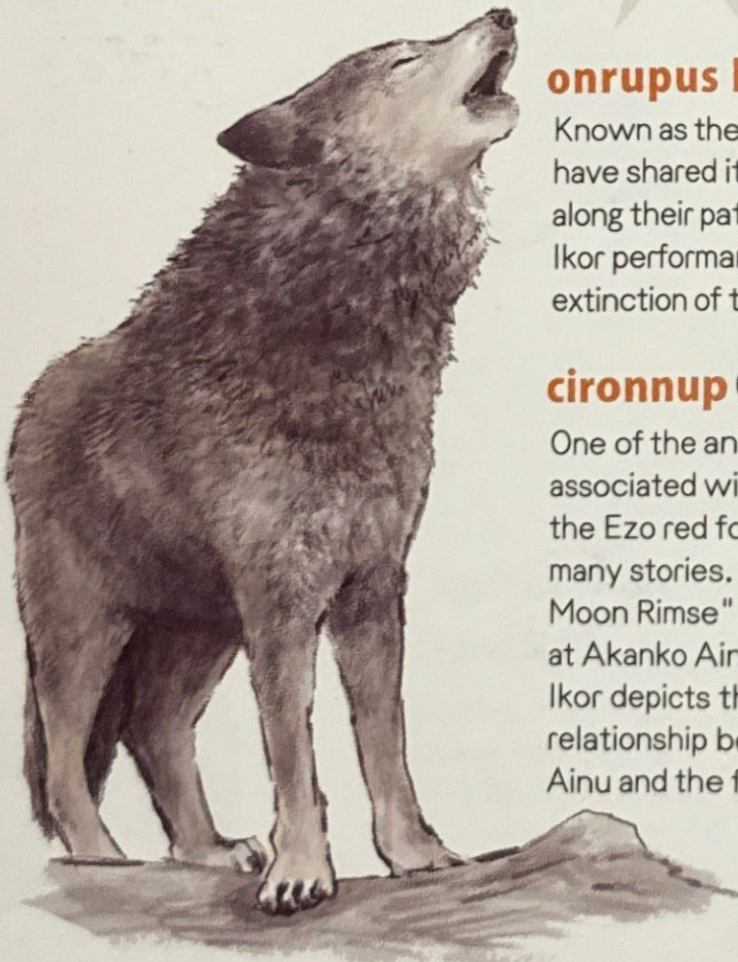


|             | 2025.4/27-10/31        | 2025.11/1-2026.4/25    |
|-------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| 11:00-11:30 | Traditional Ainu Dance | —                      |
| 13:30-14:00 | Traditional Ainu Dance | —                      |
| 15:00-15:30 | Full Moon rimse        | Full Moon rimse        |
| 20:00-20:30 | Traditional Ainu Dance | Traditional Ainu Dance |
| 21:00-21:30 | Lost Kamuy             | Lost Kamuy             |

# Animals Associated with the Ainu

The Ainu people, who have lived in deep connection with nature, believed that they must respect all things in the universe, or they would face hardships in life.

This reverence for nature has been passed down through generations. The Ainu refer to natural elements, plants, and animals as kamuy (deities), and their yukar (myths) have been passed down to the present day.



## **onrupus kamuy** (Wolf)

Known as the "hunting deity," onrupus kamuy is said to have shared its prey with humans and even guided them along their paths. The title of the Akanko Ainu Theater Ikor performance "Lost Kamuy" represents the forced extinction of this sacred wolf.

## **cironnup** (Ezo Red Fox)

One of the animals closely associated with the Ainu, the Ezo red fox appears in many stories. The "Full Moon Rimse" performance at Akanko Ainu Theater Ikor depicts the relationship between the Ainu and the fox kamuy.



## **cakcakkamuy** (Eurasian Wren)

This small bird, known for its wisdom and bravery, is the protagonist of a yukar in which it stands up to a mighty bear with the help of the forest birds and samaykurkamuy. The story has been published as a picture book and performed as a puppet play.

### **Little Kamuy and Slow Kamuy**

Illustration by KOBO Taro  
Written by KUSUNOKI Tsubame, Akanko Onsen  
Ainu Culture Promotion Executive Committee

Based on the story "The Tale of the Wren Kamuy" from YAMAMOTO Tasuke's "Kamuy Yukar: Ainu-rakkur Den. (Tale of Ainu-rakkur)" This tale follows the Eurasian wren (tiny kamuy) and samaykurkamuy (slow kamuy) as they confront a fierce bear.



# Lake Akan Ainu Kotan

The Akanko Onsen area was once a gathering place for the Ainu, who came here for hunting grounds and bark processing.

The present-day Ainu Kotan developed as a place where Ainu from regions such as Bihoro, Kushiro, Kussharo, and Asahikawa gathered, crafting and selling souvenirs to make a living. Various regional traditions blended together in Lake Akan, creating a unique local culture.



Lake Akan Ainu Kotan  
"The Town of Creators"  
- Akanko Onsen  
Website



前田 光子  
MAEDA Mitsuko

## Akan's Hapo

The first head of Maeda Ippoen, MAEDA Masana, began logging the forests around Lake Akan to create horse pastures. However, he later shifted from "cutting down the mountain" to "appreciating the mountain," choosing to protect the beautiful forests. His granddaughter, MAEDA Mitsuko, became the third head of Maeda Ippoen. Dedicated to preserving nature forever, she donated her entire fortune and established the Maeda Ippoen Foundation in 1983.

Seeing the hardships faced by the Ainu in Lake Akan, she donated land in 1960 for free, enabling them to build homes and shops where they could craft and sell folk goods to sustain themselves. Grateful for her kindness, the Ainu of Lake Akan lovingly called Mitsuko Maeda Hapo, or "mother."

# AKAN MAP



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Illustrator: INOUE Ayako Publication Date: March 2025

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\*The Ainu language used in this pamphlet follows the orthography passed down by the Ainu people of the Lake Akan region. The Ainu language may vary by region.