

Touring the Many Landmarks of Otaru

From the Unspoilt Landscapes of Shukuzu to the Microcosm of Modern Architecture

Okusawa' s Waterworks Facility and Brewery

Otaru is known for its delicious water. In 1914, the Okusawa Dam and water purification plant were built upstream on the Katsunai River to make tap water. Construction was difficult and took 6 years from the beginning of construction to the completion of the dam. The dam is not built with the usual reinforced concrete, but was what is known as an earthen dam, made from tamped down clay and gravel. Water is pulled from the intake tower that appears to float in the middle of the reservoir and distributed to the purification plant. In 1985 the reservoir was selected as one of the one hundred modern waterworks systems of Japan, but leaks in the dam wall were found in 2011, and the dam ceased operation. Presently, it is up for consideration to be transformed into an educational facility where people can learn about how modern waterworks operate.

Another side of Okusawa involves the Kitano Homare Sake Brewery, located midstream on the Katsunai River, which utilizes the quality water there. It is comprised of several brewery buildings that date back to 1902 when the brewery was first opened, including the warehouse where the sake is stored. On the hills across the river is Wakoso (built in 1922), the residence for the CEO of the brewery. The Art Deco design and geometric patterns of the building emphasizes the class that the merchants of Otaru possessed in their days of prosperity. The Noh stage (relocated to present day Otaru Park in 1926) that was constructed in the inner court of the residence of Ken Okazaki, a businessman who also flourished around the same time, was also an example of elegant taste and architecture.