

Touring the Many Landmarks of Otaru

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

The Prosperity of Otaru

From the end of the Meiji Period to the early years of the Showa Period, Otaru was one of the few flourishing port cities of Japan. Two of the main reasons for the increase in ships sailing in and out of Otaru were 1) the fact that through the signing of the peace treaty between Russia and Japan in 1905, Southern Karafuto became property of Japan, and 2) procuring fishing grounds in Kamchatka. The base for trade was the Horonai Railway, which was first laid by the pioneers between Temiya and Horonai (Mikasa) which opened in 1882 for the purpose of hauling coal, and later was developed and became the Hakodate Main Line (which opened in 1907), a major artery for travel in Hokkaido, with Sapporo Station as the central hub.

Many representatives of Japanese modern architecture came to Otaru and with the help and support of local construction workers and craftsmen, built railways, ports and added more buildings to the city of Otaru which was now the center of finance in Hokkaido.

Meanwhile, from the dawn of this new era until present day, Otaru has been the basis for the fishery and processing industry, continuously developing over the years. The earliest record of herring fishing dating back to 1740 (mid Edo Period), shows the dawning of Otaru (Matsumae Records - History of Otaru Vol.1).

The development of Otaru is woven together by its unique location and history of being at the forefront of a new era. Let us take a walk through the history and background of each historical landmark according to its district.