

## Prayers for Kamuy: The Indigenous Ainu of Shiranuka Viewers' Voices

This program showed a variety of traditional culture and art of the Ainu, especially those in Shiranuka. I am interested in how the Ainu knit stitch patterns on fabric and kimono. I also enjoyed various dances that were performed both indoors and outdoors. In addition, this program featured traditional food of the Ainu and it looked delicious. I was curious about Ainu children in school and how they mingle with other Japanese citizens. Are they always proud to be part of the Ainu? In conclusion, this program gave me more knowledge about the Ainu. (From Indonesia)

This program offers a good primer to the Ainu culture. It is sad to hear that speaking the Ainu language was once prohibited, with the language serving as the lifeblood of any culture and important if it is to survive and passed on to the next generation. It is a relief to know that their culture is now being preserved and promoted. The center established for the Ainu is a good idea. The bamboo instrument played at the beginning is similar to a bamboo instrument some of our indigenous tribes play – it made me think that at some point in history, the Ainu and these particular Filipino tribes might have interacted in some way, or are probably even related to each other. (From the Philippines)

This episode was something I had been looking forward to. I have always wanted to learn more about the Ainu, and that is just what I got to do. I was pleased to see where they came from and how they went about their daily lives in modern society. But what got my attention the most was the language. I had never heard the native language of the Ainu, hearing it was unexpected and interesting. I liked seeing how they pray to their deities for protection and bounty. Something else that stood out to me was the food and clothing. Ainu culture seems to be very deep and close to nature. I enjoyed how harmoniously they live with nature, especially the respect and reverence they show it. (From Kenya)

This program was very eye-opening because I had very little knowledge of the indigenous people of Japan. I thought it was very interesting to learn different aspects of the Ainu culture. It's upsetting to know that so many indigenous groups around the world have been oppressed like that and know they struggle to maintain their traditions and customs and pass them on to new generations so that they are not forgotten. I thought it was really shocking to know that the Japanese government had banned people from speaking their native language. My favourite part was seeing the whale dance by the beach. I thought it was really inspiring that even though so many years have passed the Ainu people still thank the stranded whale for saving them from starvation. I think the work of Ainu Culture Preservation Society is very important and it was nice to see all the efforts being put in place

to organize events, ceremonies and be open and inviting with the community. I quite enjoyed seeing foreigners learning about the culture and taking part in different activities and trying local food. I think this is something I would also enjoy to do.

(From New Zealand)

I thought navigator Mayumi Takada was good for the program as she was down to earth and wasn't afraid to interact and get involved with the people she encountered. I liked the look of the actual town Shiranuka and I would have liked to have seen a little more of this location. Overall a good program that brought new information to me and provided yet another aspect to Japan, a country that fascinates me with its incredible beauty, art, culture, and above all its friendly people who are so innovative and yet seem to be gentle with a fantastic sense of humor. I enjoy learning new things and for me, this was thirty minutes well spent on a short voyage of discovery.

(From Ireland)

I adore traditional dances and I would have watched them for hours, they express a strong bond with Nature that only natives can have. It was also fascinating learning about the significance and the meaning of the embroidered works. I'm sure they also narrate stories and I would like to know more about them. It was nice also to see how Japanese and Ainu descendants are now cooperating to preserve and promote Ainu culture, all together. I expect to find more program like this one, I hope they will be produced and aired soon.

(From Italy)

It was nice to learn about Shiranuka. I think it's really good that Ainu descendants have been allowed to preserve their culture whilst also being Japanese. Some countries do not allow such cultural diversity. It was interesting to learn how Japanese and Ainu cultures are similar and also different, as in with the kimonos. As someone who works in a creative industry, I enjoyed learning about the symbolism in Ainu art. I liked seeing the different festivals and learning what they represented.

(From the UK)

The introduction of Shiranuka, its location, the history of the Ainu and their lands were helpful in understanding the context of their culture and extent of what has been lost. I appreciated that the program did not shy away from mentioning the role of Japanese governmental policies in the cultural subjugation of the Ainu in the past. The most interesting part of the program was the work of Ureshipa Chise community center and the events centered around it. I do some embroidery as a hobby, so it was particularly exciting to see examples of traditional textile arts and embroidery techniques, as well as to learn about their symbolism. Etsuko Isobe was an excellent ambassador of the culture preservation society, and to me the strongest part of the program was visiting her in her home, and seeing ordinary life of a person of Ainu heritage.

(From Ukraine)

This program was undoubtedly interesting and informative for me personally. The producers did a great job, attended all their events, taking interviews with good questions. I was a little uncomfortable constantly reading subtitles because I did not have time to read and watch the video at the same time. I think this program was useful not only for us foreigners who watch it but also for all Japanese people in general. I find there is a lot in common between Ainu and Kazakh culture. The patterns on their clothes have a meaning like in our tradition. In our culture these patterns are called OYU. (From Kazakhstan)

I was particularly moved by one of Isobe's statements, "The Ainu are filled with love. This is what I want to pass on." Hopefully this aspect of Ainu culture will remain strong for future generations. There were other charming moments throughout the program, such as the traditional whale dance, with the dancers dressed in beautiful Ainu garments singing together as they danced around the center. The design of Ainu garments is quite unique to this culture, with interesting geometric patterns embroidered into the fabric of the clothes, giving the robes a significantly different look compared to Japanese kimonos. The foreigners and Japanese dancing at the beat of Ainu music together with the performers seemed like they were really enjoying themselves. (From Spain)

To learn more about Hokkaido is especially interesting for me since it is close to Russia. It is interesting to know how a small city with a small population lives in areas remote from the capital. Their history reminded me of the situation of the Indians on the American continent; it is pleasant to realize that Japan has the energy and funds to preserve the Ainu culture. (From Russia)

I was really looking forward to seeing this program and it did not disappoint. I've had an interest in the Ainu culture and people since first learning about them as a child in the '70s. The indigenous peoples of the world have often been the victims of so-called "civilization" in the US, Australia, Canada, China (with the assimilation of Tibet and the ethnic Tibetans). Having lived in Alaska for many years, I found many similarities between it and Hokkaido. I really like that the Ainu have such a close relationship with nature, honoring a spiritual aspect in all of it, something common to indigenous peoples everywhere. I was delighted when the non-binding resolution by the Japanese government to recognize the Ainu people as indigenous to Japan was formalized into law last year. I loved the story about the Isobe's memories of her grandmother. (From the US)

I enjoy learning about the indigenous people in other countries. There are so many ethnic groups and people throughout all the countries of the world. The dances of the Ainu people are very unique. I'm glad the culture and beliefs the Ainu have kept together all this time is still alive and well. The facility is great in that it also doubles as a dance theater as well as a historical museum. The patterns of the kimonos were different than those I've seen by other tribes. A little more modern feeling with a link to their past. I really enjoyed the whale dance that tells the story of a famine and how the gods supplied a whale to the starving population. It's like seeing history moments being shown to you for the first time.

(From the US)

This episode about the Ainu in Hokkaido was extremely educational and informative. Prior to this episode I really didn't know much about the Ainu people other than them being indigenous to Japan and highly persecuted in the past. It was very interesting to receive their personal version of events as well as learning about their culture and tradition. The fact that the information received in this program came directly from current Ainu people's point of view helped to make all of the information the viewer received significantly more personal and relevant. Watching this episode was quite inspirational for me because it showed a people who are keeping themselves empowered and keeping their traditions alive in as many ways as they can for future generations.

(From Canada)