



Wooden penological buildings designated as important cultural properties and the story of how Abashiri Prison contributed to Hokkaido's development

Welcome to the Abashiri Prison Museum

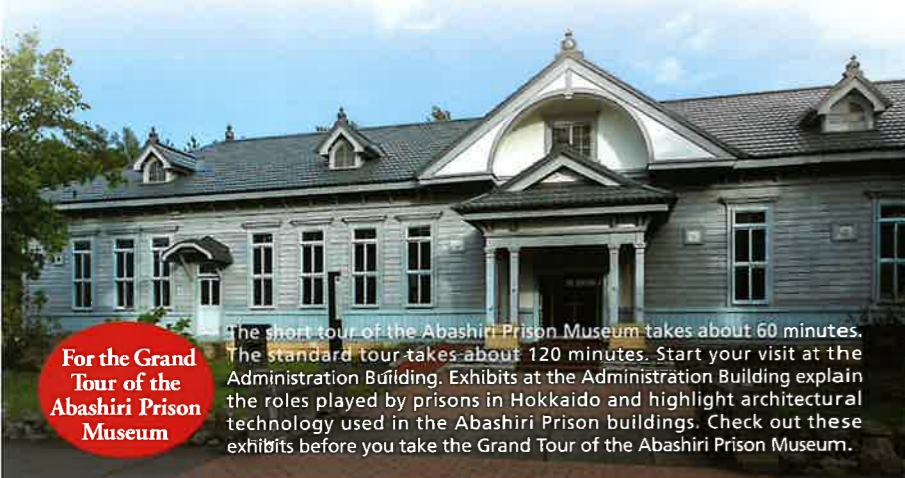
The prisons in Hokkaido played an important role in the development of Hokkaido.

When we think about reclamation in Hokkaido, we think of *tondenhei* (farmer-soldiers) and other settlers. Much less is known about how prison laborers laid the foundation for Hokkaido's modern development.

Just after the Meiji Restoration of 1867, it became an urgent task of the Japanese government to swiftly develop Hokkaido in response to the threat of Russia's southward expansionist policy. But in Japan, confusion reigned, from rebellions by former samurai. Many political prisoners and ideological offenders were imprisoned. The government established prisons in Hokkaido for the purpose of holding these prisoners as laborers. Abashiri Prison was established in 1890 as a branch prison of Kushiro Prison. 1,200 prison inmates were mobilized to build the central road between Abashiri and Asahikawa. They built 163 km of road in just 8 months. Prison inmates were responsible for reclaiming farmland and building roads and railroads through Hokkaido.

The Abashiri Prison Museum is a valuable entity that tells the story of Hokkaido's early modern development.

Take a grand tour of wooden penological buildings that have been standing in a harsh natural environment for more than a century.



For the Grand Tour of the Abashiri Prison Museum

The short tour of the Abashiri Prison Museum takes about 60 minutes. The standard tour takes about 120 minutes. Start your visit at the Administration Building. Exhibits at the Administration Building explain the roles played by prisons in Hokkaido and highlight architectural technology used in the Abashiri Prison buildings. Check out these exhibits before you take the Grand Tour of the Abashiri Prison Museum.

Museum shop and café space

Prison-themed souvenirs and related limited-edition books can be purchased at the museum shop. A café space stands next to the museum shop.



Exhibit section and library



Café space



Museum shop

Kangoku Cafeteria

Meals at Kangoku Cafeteria are modeled on those served at the modern Abashiri Prison. Items on our menu also include a Japanese-style hamburger steak of "Abashiri Prison wagyu beef". Enjoy the meals!



Prison lunch A



Prison lunch B



[Access]

- From Memambetsu Airport
 - Car: 20 min. ● Bus: 25 min. (to JR Abashiri Sta.)
- From JR Abashiri Sta. (about 4 km)
 - On foot: about 40 min. ● Car: about 7 min.
- Bus
 - Abashiri Tourism Sites Circuit Bus
 - Get off at the Abashiri Prison Museum stop (Note: Service runs in only certain seasons.)
 - Bihoro-bound scheduled buses
 - Get off at the "Tentozan-iriguchi" stop.

Note: The current timetable is available at the website of Abashiri Bus Co., Ltd.

Abashiri Bus
TEL 0152-43-4101 <http://www.abashiribus.com/>



Abashiri Prison Museum

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Abashiri Prison Museum



The Abashiri Prison Museum opened in 1983 as an outdoor museum where 25 historical buildings of the original Abashiri Prison are conserved and exhibited.

The relocated and restored buildings were constructed between the late 19th century and the early 20th century, and are the oldest existing wooden penological buildings in the world.

In 2016, eight of the relocated and restored buildings were designated as national important cultural properties and six were registered as tangible cultural properties.

Eight buildings designated as national important cultural properties

In 2016, eight of the buildings that were relocated and restored here from the original Abashiri Prison were designated as national important cultural properties.

[Important cultural property] The original Abashiri Prison: Buildings of the Futamigaoka Branch



Relocated and restored
Year of Completion: 1896
Year of Relocation: 1999
Area: 1,933m²



The Futamigaoka Branch was established on hilly land in western Abashiri. Aiming to be self-sufficient in food, the inmates planted, tended and harvested crops. The Administration Building, the Prison House, the Lecture Hall and Cafeteria, the Prisoner Chaining/Unchaining Spot and the Kitchen were linked with corridors. Together these are designated as a national important cultural property.

[Important cultural property] The Administration Building of the original Abashiri Prison



Relocated and restored
Year of Completion: 1912
Year of Relocation: 1988
Area: 500m²

The outer wall, painted blue and gray, and the dormer on the roof characterize the Administration Building, which has the architectural style typical of Meiji government buildings. This building was the Administration Building of the Abashiri Prison until 1987. It housed the warden's office, a meeting room and staff offices.

Registered tangible cultural properties

Six buildings in the museum are listed as tangible cultural properties: the Back Gate, constructed in 1919 from bricks that the prison inmates fired in the brick factory within the prison; the Brickwork Punishment Chamber, constructed in 1912; and four Guard Hut stations. The Guard Huts were used as lookout stations.



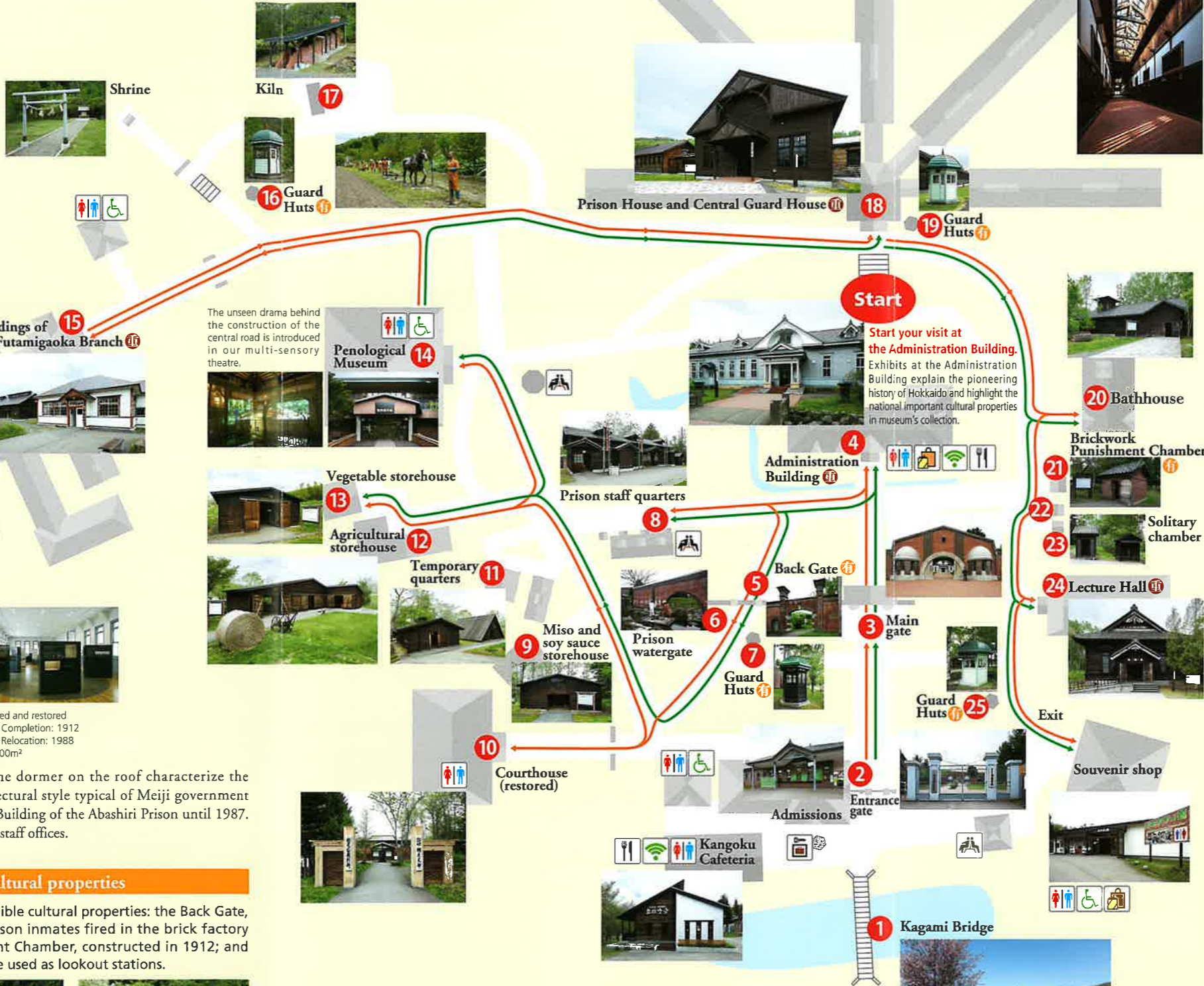
Back Gate



Brickwork Punishment Chamber



Guard Huts



- Important cultural property
- Registered tangible cultural property
- Standard tour (about 120 min.)
- Short tour (about 60 min.)
- Toilets
- Restroom for the disabled
- Rest area
- Coin-operated lockers
- Cafeteria
- Shop
- Wi-Fi

[Important cultural property] Prison House and Central Guard House of the original Abashiri Prison



Relocated and restored
Year of Completion: 1912
Year of Relocation: 1985
Area: 3,333.72m²

At the centre of the radial five-winged prison house is an octagonal guardhouse. It allows the entire prison to be seen from a single vantage. The 226 cells, consisting of communal cells and solitary confinement, could house 700 prisoners. The high skylights in the corridors add to the beauty of the building. The vertical bars of the prison house were arranged so that the inside of each cell could not be seen from the facing cell.

This was used as the prison house of Abashiri Prison for the 72 years from 1912 to 1984.

[Important cultural property] The Lecture Hall of the original Abashiri Prison



Relocated and restored
Year of Completion: 1912
Year of Relocation: 1981
Area: 404.87m²

The Lecture Hall was built for the purpose of providing mental and moral instruction and religious salvation to prison inmates. The Japanese-style exterior contrasts sharply with the Western-style interior. The wide, pillar-free space is designed with walls that are wooden up to waist height and are a plaster-like white material at heights above that. Reliefs decorate the moldings above the chandeliers.



Kagami Bridge ('mirror bridge') was so named because the river under it reflects light like a mirror. The idea was for prisoners to see their reflections in the river and reflect on their lives.