

What are Totem Poles?

Totem poles are tall wooden structures carved with images of animals, people, and symbols. They are made by Indigenous peoples of the Pacific Northwest Coast of North America, like the Haida and Tlingit tribes.

Where Do They Come From?

Totem poles originated from the cultures living along the coast, especially in places like Canada and parts of the United States. They have been created for many generations, often telling important stories about families, history, and beliefs.

What Do They Represent?

Each figure carved into a totem pole has a special meaning. They can represent:

- **Clan or Family Lineage:** Some totem poles show the history of a family or clan, highlighting important ancestors or events.
- **Animals:** Animals like eagles, bears, and whales are often featured, each symbolizing different traits or stories.
- **Spiritual Beliefs:** Many totem poles have images that are important to the spiritual beliefs of the people who made them.

How are Totem Poles Made?

Making a totem pole is a big project! Here are the steps:

1. **Choosing a Tree:** The maker often selects a tall, straight tree, usually a cedar, because it's easy to carve and lasts a long time.
2. **Designing:** Before carving, the artist plans the design. They may sketch it on paper or draw it on the tree.
3. **Carving:** Using tools like chisels and chainsaws, the artist carefully carves the designs into the wood.
4. **Painting:** Once the carving is finished, the pole is often painted with bright colors to make the designs stand out.
5. **Raising the Pole:** Finally, the totem pole is raised in a special ceremony, sometimes with dancing and storytelling.

Why Are Totem Poles Important?

Totem poles are more than just art; they are historical and cultural symbols. They help teach and preserve the history, beliefs, and stories of Indigenous cultures. Visiting places with totem poles can be a great way to learn about these fascinating traditions!