

Japan's Far East

7 Day Wild Winter Tour



A winter odyssey in Japan's eastern frontier, touring through two national parks in eastern Hokkaido. Be mesmerised by the extraordinary snow-kissed landscapes, the unique wildlife experiences, and the warmth of hot springs on this winter tour in Japan.

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About the Tour

Start	Finish	Grading	Season
Abashiri	Kushiro	2, Easy Active	Jan & Mar

About Japan's Far East

Hokkaido's far east region is often described as the last unexplored frontier of Japan. This region is popular for wildlife and outdoor lovers in the summer. It is also renowned internationally in winter as a bird-watching destination.

On this tour, we will visit some of Hokkaido's beautiful national parks: Akan-Mashu and Kushiro Shitsugen National Park. We take in beautiful winter landscapes while hiking at our favourite locations, such as the shore of Lake Kussharo - a volcanically active area that serves as a sanctuary for migratory Whooper Swans.

You don't have to be an experienced skier or snowboarder to enjoy Hokkaido's famous snowy winter. We will use snowshoes to hike through the snowy landscape, allowing anyone to enjoy Hokkaido's winter scenery.

Tour highlights

- Explore native forest surrounding Lake Kussharo, a winter home to Whooper Swans.
- Experience a volcanic landscape - from deep blue caldera lakes to active sulphur vents.
- Stay at Yoroushi Onsen, sometimes visited at night by large Blakiston's Fish Owls.
- Discover a variety of wildlife on the Notsuke Peninsula, registered as a Ramsar site.
- Visit a Red-crowned Crane sanctuary in Tsurui to observe Japan's most symbolic bird.

Who is this tour for?

- Active travellers who enjoy walking for 2 hours a day.
- Curious travellers who enjoy a mixture of activities and sightseeing and learning about the regions they visit.
- Winter hikers and snow lovers interested in hiking in snow with the help of snowshoes (no prior experience required).
- Adventurous travellers who enjoy rural hospitality, staying in Japanese style accommodations with natural hot springs on site.

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Itinerary at a glance

Day	Activities	Meals ¹
1	Meet your group in Abashiri City	D ▾
2	Explore Lake Kussharo, Akan–Mashu National Park	B, L, D ▾
3	Explore Lake Mashu, Akan–Mashu National Park	B, L, D ▾
4	Nature walking at Notsuke Peninsula	B, L, D ▾
5	Visit the Tsurui Ito Red-crowned Crane Sanctuary	B, L, D ▾
6	Canoeing on Kushiro Shitsugen Wetland	B, L, D ▾
7	Farewell in Kushiro City	B ▾

Accommodation

Day	Type	Location	Ensuite Toilet	Ensuite Shower	Onsen	Laundry
1	Hotel ▾	Abashiri	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Ryokan ▾ ²	Kawayu Onsen	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	Ryokan ▾	Yoroushi Onsen	✓		✓	✓
4	Ryokan ▾	Yoroushi Onsen	✓		✓	✓
5	Hotel ▾	Tsurui	✓	✓	✓	✓
6	Hotel ▾	Kushiro	✓	✓	✓	✓

We may change the facility options if our preferred accommodation is unavailable.

¹ B = Breakfast, L = Lunch, D = Dinner

² Ryokan is a traditional Japanese inn.

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Travel style

This tour includes a series of active experiences that while easygoing will still allow you to experience the great outdoors and work up a bit of a sweat! We will be outdoors in subzero temperatures for up to 4 hours at a time before returning to the van and travelling to the next stop. While it is cold outside, it will be warm in the van and indoors. This makes it easy to warm back up, but makes good layering important - make sure you check the packing list. Your luggage will stay in our van, freeing you up to enjoy the day's adventure with only a light day pack. There is also a focus on the region's wildlife and you will have multiple chances to catch a glimpse at some of Hokkaido's incredible migratory winter creatures.

Adverse weather

While we try to organise everything, mother nature is out of our control. If the weather is too bad to safely hike or snowshoe (such as during a snowstorm) we will travel to the next inn in our support vehicle. Along the way we will still stop at local restaurants and visit indoor facilities, so you can still experience the charm of the area while travelling safely and comfortably.

What's included

- 6 nights accommodation on a twin share basis
- 6 breakfasts, 5 lunches and 6 dinners
- Guided canoeing tour at Lake Toro
- Snowshoes & poles rental
- All transport as described in the itinerary
- English speaking local guide(s)

What's not included

- Airfare
- Travel insurance
- Personal expenses
- Drinks with included meals

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When do you run this tour?

We run this tour in the winter months, January and March. Winter is a magical time of year in Hokkaido, and the only time of year when you can see many migratory species. Snowfall is of course weather-dependent and we can never be sure exactly when it will fall, but it is a safe bet that by early January, Hokkaido will be blanketed in its characteristic pure white snow. Temperatures by the end of the month also start to get low enough that you have a chance of encountering beautiful natural phenomena like rime ice in the early mornings.

What makes Hokkaido's winter special?

The Snow

Every winter, cold winds from Siberia pick up moisture as they cross the Sea of Japan before dropping it as snow on Hokkaido. The snow falls as big, light snowflakes, the kind you see in the movies, blanketing the landscape in white. If the snows fall thick enough before our tour, then many of the routes we will explore can be done by snowshoe rather than on foot. Hiking in the snow, you will feel like you are in a private snow globe; the sense of stillness and solitude is hard to describe without experiencing it for yourself.

The Wildlife

While Brown Bears are tucked away in hibernation, many other animals are active throughout winter - Mountain Hares and Red Foxes leave a network of footprints behind as they search for food, Japanese Deer joust with each other in the coastal reeds and Red-crowned Cranes soar overhead. Seeing the animals against a stark white background is a striking winter image.

Hot Springs & Warm Welcomes

It may be cold outside but step into one of Hokkaido's many cosy restaurants or lodges, and you are greeted with a warm local welcome. Tuck into a bowl of world-famous Hokkaido ramen or a local hot pot. Later, strip off and slip into a steaming hot spring to warm up your body and soothe your tired muscles. For a truly unique winter experience, brave the dash through the snow to the "rotenburo" outdoor pool.

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How to book this tour?

We will send you a link to our online sign up form, where we ask for the travel information of all the members travelling with you.

Once we receive this, we will send you an invoice for your tour deposit, which is JPY 50,000 per person. **We will confirm your booking upon receipt of your deposit payment.**

The deposit is treated as a part of the tour price. Payment of the balance will be reminded by email, which is generally 5 weeks prior to the tour departure date.

We accept payment via Wise or Flywire. We will send you payment links, which you can use to send payment directly to ourselves (you don't need to create a Wise or Flywire account to send the funds). When paying via Wise, payment is available in Japanese Yen only, and you must pay any currency exchange or transfer fees by yourself.

For credit card payment or domestic bank transfer converted to your own currency, we use Flywire, which will incur an additional transaction fee of 1.5%.

By paying for a deposit or full amount, you confirm that you have read, understand and agree to these [Terms and Conditions](#).

What does the Minimum Number mean?

This is a mixed group tour and **we accept bookings for this tour from one person up**. However, our scheduled group tours require a minimum number of bookings for us to guarantee the departure of the tour, and to offer the tour at the price quoted. **The minimum number of booked guests to guarantee this tour is four people.**

If you book with less than four people, we will hold your place on the tour and wait for another group to join the tour. If the number of guests has not reached the minimum number by 60 days prior to departure, we will give you the option to cancel or to upgrade to a private departure. If you choose to cancel, we will refund the amount in Japanese Yen that you have paid us. You're welcome to check with us at any time about the status of bookings.

Please be advised that we will not be liable to compensate for any inconvenience or incidental expenses that might have incurred to you, including airline tickets.

Single Supplement

Our tours are priced on a twin share basis. Those travelling by themselves will need to pay an additional supplement for use of a single room. If you are happy to share a room with another guest - of the same gender - then let us know at the time of booking. If we match you with another solo traveller then we can discount the single supplement for both of you.

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Travel Insurance

All guests joining our tours are required to have travel insurance. Please make sure you have a valid travel insurance, covering the kind of activities you are undertaking during our tour, cancellations, loss of personal belongings, and any unforeseen circumstances while travelling.

Travel to the Meeting Point

We will meet at 6:00 pm at our hotel in Central Abashiri. The closest airport is Abashiri Memanbetsu (MMB) and you can fly directly there from Tokyo Haneda (HND), Tokyo Narita (NRT), Sapporo New Chitose (CTS) and Sapporo Okadama (OKD).

From Abashiri Memanbetsu Airport, airport shuttles depart for central Abashiri with the arrival of every domestic flight. The shuttle takes 26 mins from the Airport to JR Abashiri Station, and costs ¥920 per person. Our hotel is within walking distance of the station.

Alternatively, you can take a JR train from Sapporo to Abashiri if you prefer. It takes 5.5 hours and costs just over ¥10,000 for a non-reserved seat.

You can search train timetables in English on [Japan Transit Planner website](#).

Tour map

To view the route on Google My Maps, [click here](#).



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Day to Day Itinerary

Day 1 - The group assembles in Abashiri City

We will meet at our hotel at 6:00 pm near JR Abashiri Station in Abashiri, the largest city on Hokkaido's eastern Sea of Okhotsk coast. Once everyone is gathered, we will set off for dinner in downtown Abashiri. Over dinner, we will get to know each other and introduce the program for our upcoming adventure. For those who aren't used to walking on icy roads, we will introduce you to the penguin-walking technique!

Meals	Accommodation
D	Hotel in Abashiri

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Day 2 – Explore Lake Kussharo, Akan–Mashu National Park

After breakfast at our hotel, we embark on a scenic journey along the Sea of Okhotsk coast to Lake Tofutsu. This remarkable wetland, a designated Ramsar site, offers opportunities to observe sea eagles and various migratory birds in their natural habitat.



Following lunch in Abashiri, we'll head to the Bihoro Pass, which offers breathtaking panoramic views of Lake Kussharo below. Here, we'll have our first opportunity to try on snowshoes, preparing for our afternoon adventure.

The highlight of our day takes place at Wakoto Peninsula, where we'll enjoy a snowshoe excursion or regular walk, depending on snow conditions. As we make our way to the peninsula's tip, we'll discover fascinating steam vents that demonstrate the area's volcanic activity. This leisurely walk offers both stunning views of Lake Kussharo and insights into the region's distinctive geological features.

Before heading to our accommodation, we'll visit Mt. Io, an active volcano known for its impressive sulphur vents and otherworldly landscape.

We'll spend the night in Kawayu Onsen, a town renowned for its therapeutic hot springs. The town's name literally translates to "hot spring river", and you'll have the opportunity to experience these healing waters during your stay.

Meals	Activity	Duration	Accommodation
B, L, D	Walking	2 - 3 hrs	Ryokan in Kawayu Onsen

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Day 3 – Explore Lake Mashu, Akan–Mashu National Park

After enjoying breakfast at our hotel, we'll begin our day with a peaceful snowshoe excursion through the forest behind Kawayu Visitor Centre. This pristine forest is predominantly composed of old-growth Sakhalin Spruce, offering a serene winter landscape typical of Eastern Hokkaido.



Our next destination is the Lake Mashu No.1 Observatory, where we'll take in the breathtaking views of this mystical caldera lake. Lake Mashu is renowned for its extraordinary clarity and deep blue waters, though it's often shrouded in mist, adding to its mysterious allure.

If time allows and the group is keen, we will also then make a stop at Suigo Park in Teshikaga town. A number of waterfowl, including the majestic Whooper Swan, make the park home for winter giving us the chance to see both these seasonal waterfowl and many other small birds flying amongst the trees.

In the afternoon, we'll enjoy another snowshoe adventure north of Lake Mashu, where we'll walk along a tranquil stream fed by spring water originating from the lake. Even in subzero temperatures, the stream remains unfrozen, providing a vital water source for birds and wildlife. We'll trek through lush forests of Sakhalin Fir while looking for animal tracks along the way.

Our day concludes at Yoroushi Onsen, our accommodation for the night. This exceptional ryokan is famous not only for its excellent hot springs but also for its unique location alongside a river where the rare Blakiston's Fish Owl, the world's largest owl species, occasionally visits to feed in the evening.

Meals	Activity	Duration	Accommodation
B, L, D	Walking	4 - 5 hours	Ryokan in Yoroushi Onsen

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Day 4 - Explore Notsuke Peninsula, a Ramsar site

Notsuke Peninsula is Japan's largest sand spit extending over 26 km into the Sea of Okhotsk. Registered by the Ramsar Convention, the peninsula is of ecological significance to the migrating birds and wildlife of Hokkaido.



After breakfast at our accommodation in Yoroushi Onsen, we will drive for over an hour to the Notsuke Peninsula. We will explore the area on foot and hopefully see some of Hokkaido's iconic land mammals such as

Japanese Deer and Red Foxes. After the walk, we will return to our hotel at Yoroushi Onsen where we can again relax in the river side hot-springs and have another chance of seeing the rare Blackiston's Fish Owl.

Meals	Activity	Duration	Accommodation
B, L, D	Walking	2 - 3 hours	Ryokan in Yoroushi Onsen

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Day 5 - Visit the Red-crowned Crane Sanctuary in Tsurui

This morning we will head back inland and slowly make our way to Tsurui. The drive passes through beautiful rolling farmland. If time allows, we will stop off for an early lunch just outside Tsurui.

Tsurui is famous for its role in the recovery of the Red-crowned Crane population. The number of cranes has rebounded to almost 2000 after dropping to less than 20 in the early 1900s. The Tsurui Ito Red-crowned Crane Sanctuary has played a big part in this by feeding the cranes over winter, when their natural food sources are scarce. We will spend some time at the Sanctuary watching the cranes feed and socialise.



Tsurui isn't just about cranes- after the sanctuary we will head out to explore the surrounding area and try to track down eagles feeding along the rivers and owls sleeping in the forest. We will return to Tsurui in time to catch the cranes flying back to their evening roost before heading to our hotel.

Meals	Activity	Duration	Accommodation
B, L, D	Walking	1 - 2 hours	Hotel in Tsurui

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Day 6 - Explore Kushiro-Shitsugen National Park

If you do not mind getting up early, we'd like to take you to a place called Otowa Bridge before sunrise (about 6:30 am) to see the cranes along the Setsuri River. The river is a popular nesting site for the Red-crowned Cranes and the bridge provides a spectacular sighting of the birds before their departure to the day's feeding sites.

We return to our hotel for breakfast and leave for Lake Toro, where we will wrap up warm and enjoy a canoeing adventure through the Kushiro wetland. Taking to the water in sub-zero temperatures may seem unusual, but it gives us a unique perspective of the winter landscape. The trees lining the river bank are beautifully covered in snow and ice, offering unique photography opportunities from the water.



This particular location is a habitat for Common Kingfishers and Crested Kingfishers. After 1.5 hours of canoeing, we will warm up in a nearby cafe for lunch. On our way to Kushiro, we'll stop by a wetland observatory to take in the vastness of Kushiro Shitsugen and wrap up our journey. We will celebrate the completion of our tour over dinner in downtown Kushiro.

Meals	Activity	Duration	Accommodation
B, L, D	Canoeing	1.5 hours	Hotel in Kushiro

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Day 7 – Farewells in Kushiro

The tour finishes after breakfast today. We will drive you to Kushiro Airport or JR Kushiro Station in the morning. From Kushiro Airport (KUH), there are direct flights to Sapporo New Chitose (CTS), Tokyo Haneda (HND), and Osaka Kansai (KIX).

Meals			
B			

Our recommended reading

[Hokkaido Wildlife Guide](#)

[A Local's Guide to Snowshoeing in Hokkaido](#)

[Layer Up! How to Dress for Hokkaido's Winter](#)

[What to pack for Hokkaido?](#)

[How to onsen \(like a local!\)](#)

[Vegan & Vegetarian in Hokkaido](#)

[Hokkaido Travel Tips & Common Questions](#)

[The Ainu, from a Hokkaido local's perspective](#)