

# Eastern Wilderness

## 7 Day Self-Guided Tour



Discover the breathtaking highlights of eastern Hokkaido with this self-guided itinerary, designed to immerse you in the beauty of both the Akan–Mashu and Shiretoko National Parks. Enjoy exciting walks, spot fascinating wildlife, and interact with friendly locals.

[\*\*View Departure Dates & Prices\*\*](#)

[\*\*View Gallery\*\*](#)

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### About the Tour

| Start   | Finish  | Grading        | Season              |
|---------|---------|----------------|---------------------|
| Kushiro | Kushiro | 2, Easy Active | Jun, Sep, Early Oct |

### About Akan-Mashu & Shiretoko National Parks

Hokkaido's far east region is often described as the last unexplored frontier of Japan. The area is an ideal place to get in touch with mother nature and observe the flora and fauna unique to Hokkaido. On this tour, you will travel through two National Parks found in eastern Hokkaido; Akan-Mashu - home to caldera lakes - and the wild Shiretoko Peninsula. The latter is also designated as a UNESCO Natural World Heritage Site. During the journey, you will also have the opportunity to discover local treasures, including the cuisine enjoyed by local fishermen and the culture of Hokkaido's indigenous Ainu people, who have lived here in harmony with nature, surviving as hunter-gatherers, long before Japanese colonists arrived.

### Tour highlights

- Take in the spectacular views of caldera lakes in the Akan-Mashu National Park.
- Watch wildlife from a cruise in the Shiretoko National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
- Enjoy a more personal journey with numerous excursions led by local, knowledgeable guides.
- Experience first-hand the indigenous culture of the Ainu at Lake Akan Kotan.

### Who is this tour for?

- Active travellers who enjoy walking for 3 to 5 hours a day.
- Curious travellers who enjoy a mix of activities, sightseeing and learning about the regions they visit.
- Adventurous travellers who enjoy rural hospitality, staying in Japanese style accommodations with natural hot springs on site.
- Independent travellers who like being their own guide and touring at their own pace.

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### Itinerary at a glance

| Day   | Activities  | Km  | Miles | Meals <sup>1</sup> |
|-------|---|-----|-------|--------------------|
| Day 1 | Arrive in Kushiro, Hokkaido<br>Airport Bus from Kushiro to Lake Akan                      | -   | -     | D ▾                |
| Day 2 | Guided walking tour of Lake Akan<br>Explore Lake Akan at leisure                          | 4.5 | 2.8   | B, D ▾             |
| Day 3 | Visit Lake Mashu<br>Hike Mt. Iozan to Kawayu Onsen  | 2.6 | 1.6   | B, D ▾             |
| Day 4 | Canoeing in the Kushiro Wetlands<br>Afternoon at leisure                                  | -   | -     | B, D ▾             |
| Day 5 | Travel to Utoro Shiretoko<br>Guided hiking of Shiretoko Five Lakes                        | 3.1 | 1.9   | B, D ▾             |
| Day 6 | Nature Cruise off Utoro Coast<br>Travel to Rausu Shiretoko                                | -   | -     | B, D ▾             |
| Day 7 | Whale-Watching Cruise off Rausu Coast<br>Travel to Kushiro<br>Arrangements end in Kushiro | -   | -     | B ▾                |

### Accommodation

| Day | Type                  | Location        | Ensuite Toilet | Ensuite Shower | Onsen | Laundry |
|-----|-----------------------|-----------------|----------------|----------------|-------|---------|
| 1   | Ryokan ▾ <sup>2</sup> | Lake Akan       | ✓              | ✓              | ✓     | ✓       |
| 2   | Ryokan ▾              | Lake Akan       | ✓              | ✓              | ✓     | ✓       |
| 3   | Ryokan ▾              | Kawayu Onsen    | ✓              | ✓              | ✓     | ✓       |
| 4   | Ryokan ▾              | Kawayu Onsen    | ✓              | ✓              | ✓     | ✓       |
| 5   | Hotel ▾               | Utoro Shiretoko | ✓              | ✓              | ✓     | ✓       |
| 6   | Lodge ▾               | Rausu Shiretoko | ✓              | ✓              |       |         |

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

<sup>1</sup> B = Breakfast, L = Lunch, D = Dinner

<sup>2</sup> Ryokan is a traditional Japanese inn.

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### What's included

- 6 nights accommodation
- 6 breakfasts and 6 dinners
- Guided walking tour at Lake Akan
- Private taxi from Lake Akan to Kawayu Onsen
- Private taxi from Kawayu Onsen to the canoeing location
- Private taxi from Kawayu Onsen to Utoro Shiretoko
- Guided walking tour of Shiretoko Five Lakes
- Nature Cruise off Utoro Shiretoko
- Nature Cruise off Rausu Shiretoko
- Daily cue sheets to help you get around using public transport
- Full English speaking phone support

\*In the event that any experiences included have to be cancelled due to inclement weather, we will do our best to reschedule. If rescheduling is not possible, a refund for the cancelled experience(s) will be processed back to you after your tour's conclusion.

### What's not included

- Transportation costs (for buses, trains etc not listed as included)
- Airfare
- Travel insurance
- Personal expenses
- Drinks with included meals

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### Travel style

Going self-guided means being your own boss– you have complete control over the day's schedule, from what to eat to how long to spend at a destination. This tour is therefore perfect for independent travellers who love the flexibility that comes with travelling alone. It also makes a great self-guided extension to any of our more involved guided tours!

You will travel by public transport on this tour. Hokkaido is a fairly vast land with most residents relying on cars and much of the infrastructure has been built with this in mind. While this means that more intensive trailheads are a little out of reach of public transport, there are still a number of very accessible, leisurely day and loop hikes that can be reached by train, bus or taxi ([Read our guide to using public transport in Hokkaido](#)). Our self-guided tours showcase the very best of these smaller routes.

Being your own boss does of course mean that you must take responsibility for yourself to a certain degree. This includes making sure you have enough funds on you to pay for public transport and meals, getting yourself from A to B in a timely manner, keeping on top of train and bus timetables and looking after your own luggage.

A luggage transfer service is not included in this tour, so you will need to carry it with you when travelling. Between hikes, we recommend that you leave your luggage either with your accommodation front desk or at coin lockers in stations. You can also use [Yamato's](#) amazing luggage-forwarding service to send larger, more bulky luggage ahead to other destinations (though note that this is not a same-day service – please allow up to 72 hours for your luggage to arrive).

### When do you run this tour?

**This tour is available in June, and from September to early October.** Many of the activities in the itinerary are not possible during winter.

July to August is the busiest time of year for tourism in Hokkaido and many of the prime destinations become overcrowded. Taking this tour in the quieter months allows you to enjoy the area's natural beauty without the crowds and to also have more intimate experiences with your hosts, local guides and local residents. We believe that the levels of tourism seen in peak season are unsustainable.

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### Why travel self-guided in Hokkaido?

#### Getting around by public transport is fun and green

Hokkaido is the northernmost prefecture in Japan and also has the lowest population density. The island of Hokkaido is full of vast, scenic landscapes which you can take in while enjoying a slow ride on local trains and buses. Finding the right bus stops and paying the correct fares in coins can be challenging if you do not speak the language. However, we believe that travelling alongside local people makes for a fun adventure. People from Hokkaido can be shy when it comes to speaking English, but they are warm at heart and are willing to help visitors in any way they can.

#### You are the guide...

Travelling independently allows you to enjoy freedom and flexibility during the day. Although we pre-arrange your accommodation (and some activities with guides) as well as suggest things to do and places to see, what you actually do during the day is up to you. You are your own guide, deciding where to go, what to eat and what to do during the day. You are free to set your own daily schedule. **Having a smartphone equipped with a local SIM is indispensable**, as it will serve as your capable assistant, helping you with navigation and translation ([Read our guide on how to set up your phone for travel in Hokkaido](#)).

#### ...but you are not alone!

We are here to support you throughout the planning process and while you are travelling. We make reservations for the accommodations with included meals as described. We will arrange dinner with hotels where dining out is not an option, especially in remote villages. Activities that require bookings in advance will be arranged by us.

We provide daily cue sheets and vouchers for each day. The cue sheets provide information about the details of public transport you need to take each day; where and what time the bus or train departs and arrives, and how much it costs. The vouchers are to be handed in to receptionists or guides at check-in, just to avoid any confusion or lost-in-translation moments. In an emergency, we are just a phone call away– whether you've missed your transport, gotten lost or are unwell. You can travel independently with the peace of mind that you have a local friend ready to help you out if things don't go quite to plan.

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### How to book this tour?

Please make an enquiry at least 90 days prior to the date you'd like to start travelling with us. We will confirm the availability of accommodation and experiences and send you a link to our online sign up form, where we will ask for the information of all 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 can accept payment via wire-transfer from local banks in a number of countries including but not limited to the US, UK, Australia, and Singapore. Payment will be made in your own currency via Wise (Wise's transaction fees will apply).

For credit card payment, 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](#).

### Is the website price final?

Our prices displayed on our website for our self-guided tours are the base rate. **The final price is subject to availability of accommodation and high season surcharges may apply.** We will confirm the final price before you make the deposit payment.

### Travel Insurance

All guests joining our tours are required to have travel insurance. Please make sure you have 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.



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### Travel to the Starting Point

If you are flying into Kushiro Airport (KUH) from Tokyo on the first day, please make sure you reserve an early morning flight that arrives at KUH with enough time for you to transfer to your accommodation at Lake Akan and enjoy a leisurely dinner.

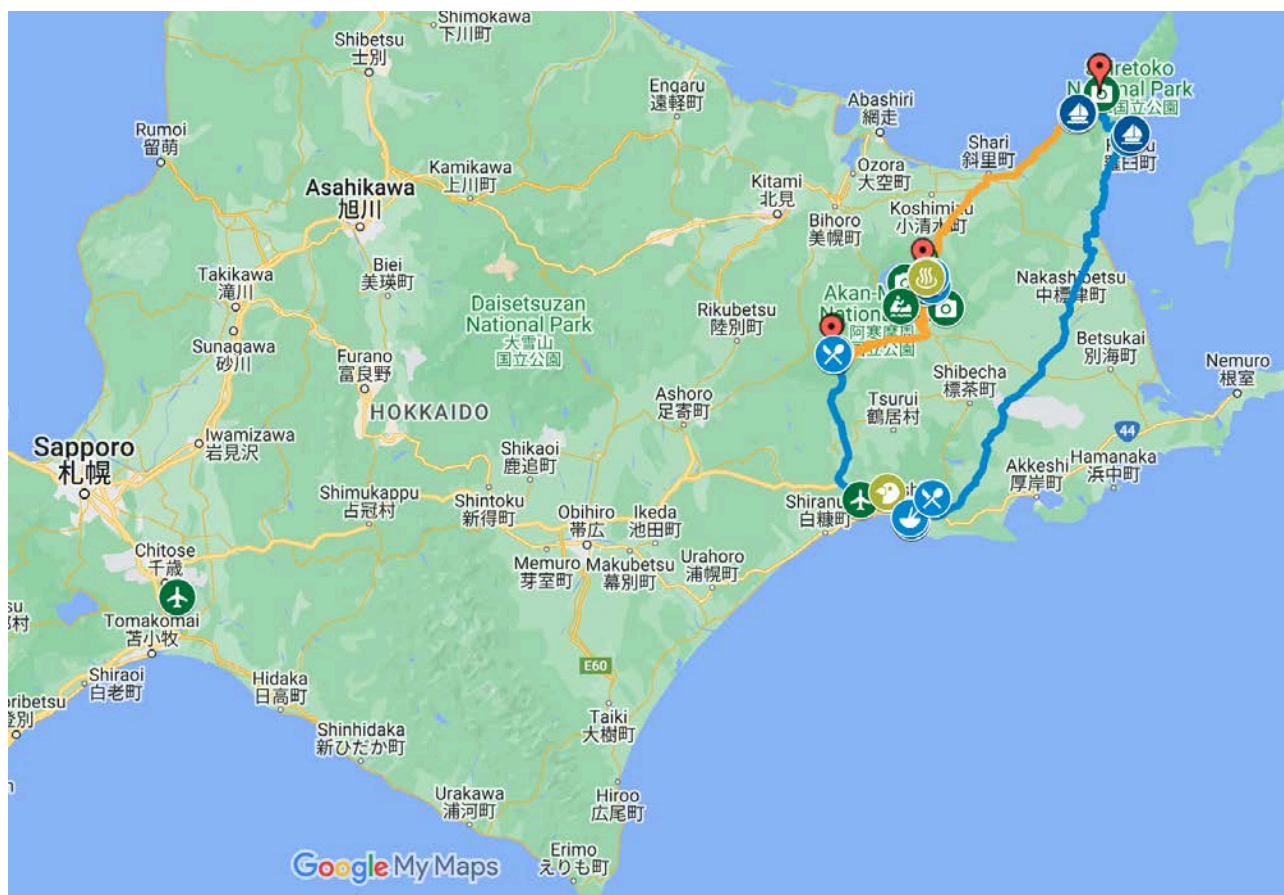
On the first day of your tour, you will need to catch the airport express bus from Kushiro Airport to Lake Akan. Please check Day 1 of the itinerary for more information.

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

If you are combining two or more of our self-guided tours or a self-guided tour with a guided tour and you need to get to Kushiro from Sapporo, Asahikawa or Wakkaknai, we will provide the necessary information on public transport between the cities. You are welcome to make your own hotel arrangements between tours, or you can ask us to make the arrangements for you. In this case, we will get a quote for the cost of any extra accommodation and add the cost to your travel packages.

### Tour map

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



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### Day-to-Day Itinerary

#### Day 1 – Arrive in Kushiro, Airport Bus from Kushiro to Lake Akan

*Irankarapte!* Welcome to Kushiro, the gateway to Eastern Hokkaido.

Upon arrival at the airport, you will need to catch an express bus directly to Lake Akan. The bus departs from the airport five times a day. The bus departure times are designed to line up with flights arriving from Tokyo throughout the day so please choose the one that matches best with your flight schedule.

A reservation is not required to board the bus. You will need to pay the fare on the day (¥2190 per person). You can purchase a ticket for the journey from ticket machines at Kushiro Airport. Journey time to Lake Akan is 1hr 15mins.

Upon arrival at the Lake Akan Bus Centre, the last stop, you'll be able to make your way to your accommodation, which is a 5-10 minute walk from the Bus Centre. After checking in, the rest of the day is at your leisure to rest and enjoy the hot springs at your accommodation. A delicious dinner will be served at your accommodation this evening.

| Meals | Activity | Travel  | Accommodation       |
|-------|----------|---|---------------------|
| D     | -        | <b>Bus (¥2190 / 1h15m)</b><br>Kushiro Airport → Lake Akan | Ryokan at Lake Akan |

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### Day 2 – Guided walking tour of Lake Akan & Explore Lake Akan at Leisure

After breakfast this morning, you'll have ample chance to stretch your legs on an insightful walking tour of a nearby forest, guided by a local Ainu. The walking tour starts at 9:45 am, giving you a leisurely window to make it to the [Ainu Theatre Ikoro](#), where the tour starts.



The 1.5 hour walking tour will finish just before lunch, which gives you the opportunity to enjoy lunch and a walk around the [Akan Ainu Kotan](#) high street, home to a number of souvenir shops run by Ainu families. There are even some shops with English speaking staff who will be glad to share their culture with visitors, as well as restaurants serving traditional Ainu food, rare even within Hokkaido.

Your afternoon is at leisure, but if you're looking for a few extra walks then we recommend enjoying a leisurely walk to bokke, a spot where you can see the bubbling mud on the shore of Lake Akan. The trail begins behind the Akankohan Eco-museum Center, on the eastern shore of Lake Akan. Keep your eyes peeled for squirrels, woodpeckers and other wildlife during the walk!

The Ainu Theatre Ikoro offers performances at night. The traditional dance performance starts at 8:00 pm (30 mins, ¥1500) and the cultural performance– a fusion of Ainu performance with modern art and music– starts at 9:00 pm (30 mins, ¥2200). Neither show requires an advance booking, but it is recommended during weekends and holidays.

| Meals | Walk              | Travel | Accommodation       |
|-------|-------------------|--------|---------------------|
| B, D  | 4.5km / 2.8 miles | -      | Ryokan at Lake Akan |

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### Day 3 – Visit Lake Mashu & Hike Mt. Iozan to Kawayu Onsen

This morning, a taxi will pick you up at 10:00 am for a day of excursion in Akan–Mashu National Park. You can load your luggage into the taxi and your taxi driver will take you to Lake [Mashu Caldera](#) for the first stop. On a clear day, you'll be greeted by an expansive view of Lake Mashu, known as one of the clearest lakes in the world, as well as the Kussharo Caldera, which is home to the fuming [Mt. Iozan](#).



From the Lake Mashu No. 1 Observation Platform, you'll travel by taxi to the No. 3 Observation Platform to enjoy the lake from a different perspective. After you've enjoyed panoramas of the lake, your driver will take you to Mt. Iozan, Sulphur Mountain.

Mt. Iozan is a bubbling active volcano coated with bright, yellow sulphur. You can enjoy an easy walk on a well-maintained path from Mt. Iozan to the Kawayu Visitor Centre (2.6km / 1.6 miles).

You'll meet your taxi driver again at the visitor centre, who will take you to the last stop of the day– Sunayu Onsen on the shores of Lake Kussharo. This is your reward for all your walking today! This beach has hot springs flowing beneath its sand. Dig around to make your own foot bath and enjoy relaxing on the lake shore for a while before heading to your accommodation for tonight, bidding farewell to your friendly driver.

After dinner at your accommodation tonight, relax in the hot spring waters at your hotel, but be sure to remove any jewellery before bathing, as the sulphuric waters of the hot spring will turn them black!

| Meals | Hike              | Travel  | Accommodation          |
|-------|-------------------|---|------------------------|
| B, D  | 2.6 km / 1.6miles | <p><b>Taxi (¥0 / 1h00m)</b><br/>Lake Akan → Lake Mashu</p> <p><b>Taxi (¥0 / 0h15m)</b><br/>Lake Mashu → Mt. Iozan</p> <p><b>Taxi (¥0 / 0h10m)</b><br/>Kawayu Visitor Centre → Sunayu Onsen</p> <p><b>Taxi (¥0 / 0h10m)</b><br/>Sunayu Onsen → Accommodation</p> | Ryokan in Kawayu Onsen |

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### Day 4 - Canoeing on the Kushiro River

After an early breakfast at your hotel this morning, a taxi will pick you up at 8:30 am to take you to the meeting point for a relaxed canoeing experience on the Kushiro River, which feeds into the Kushiro Wetlands.

You will meet your guide on the shores of Lake Kussharo, where they will paddle you down the Kushiro River in a Canadian canoe. As the pristine waters convey you down the river to Biruwa Bridge, take in the tranquil atmosphere and keep an eye peeled for wild birds, such as the Grey Heron and Crested Kingfisher - you may even spot some deer grazing by the riverbed!



After your canoeing experience ends, your canoe guide will drop you off at the accommodation in Kawayu Onsen. The rest of the day is at your leisure. There are a few great lunch options in Kawayu Onsen township. Enjoy the afternoon relaxing and bathing in hot springs until dinner at your accommodation!

| Meals | Canoeing  | Travel   | Accommodation          |
|-------|-----------|--|------------------------|
| B, D  | 2.5 Hours | <b>Taxi (¥0 / 0h20m)</b><br>Kawayu Onsen → Kushiro River | Ryokan in Kawayu Onsen |

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### Day 5 – Travel to Utoro Shiretoko & Guided walking tour of Shiretoko Five Lakes

This morning you will make the long journey from Kawayu Onsen to the Shiretoko Peninsula, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and Japan National Park. We have simplified this journey for you by arranging a taxi to take you the whole way. The taxi will pick you and your luggage up at Kawayu Onsen at 10:00 am and will drive you straight to Utoro’s Roadside Station at 12:00 pm.



Surrounded by the Sea of Okhotsk and covered in enormous mountains, the Shiretoko Peninsula is home to a plethora of wildlife ranging from Brown Bears and Japanese Deer to Sperm Whales and Dall’s Porpoises. Over the next two days you’ll have a chance to explore Shiretoko by land and by sea, but before you get to exploring, be sure to grab lunch at the Utoro Roadside Station.

After you have enjoyed lunch, a local guide will pick you up from the [Michi-no-Eki Roadside Station in Utoro](#) at 1:15 pm and together you will head to [Shiretoko Five Lakes](#), a habitat for Japan’s biggest land mammal, the Brown Bear. Today’s hike aims to take you past all five lakes. However, some sections of the trail may be closed due to bear activity. When this happens, your guide will reroute you if possible or you may have to abandon the walk for your safety.

On a clear day, the Shiretoko Mountain range will be laid out in front of you in a stunning panorama. During your hike, your luggage will be kept in the guide’s car and after the tour they will drive you to your accommodation, where you will stay for the next two nights.

| Meals | Hike                  | Travel   | Accommodation            |
|-------|-----------------------|--|--------------------------|
| B, D  | 3.1 km /<br>1.9 miles | <b>Taxi (¥0 / 2h00m)</b><br>Kawayu Onsen → Shiretoko Utoro | Hotel in Utoro Shiretoko |

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### Day 6 – Nature Cruise off Utoro Coast & Travel to Rausu Shiretoko

This morning you will board a boat at 10:00 am for a morning excursion along the coast.

What you'll really want to look out for this morning are brown bears, Japan's largest land mammal and a creature of significant cultural importance to the Ainu, who revere it as *kim'un kamuy* (God of the mountains). You'll see them roaming along the shoreline on the prowl for food and, depending on the season, possibly some bear cubs in tow!



After returning to land, board a local bus at 3:10 pm to cross over the famous Shiretoko

Pass into the town of Rausu, on the opposite side of the Shiretoko Peninsula. Make sure you are on time for this bus– they are very infrequent! Rausu is a thriving fishing village known throughout Japan for its seafood, particularly Atka Mackerel and kelp.

After arriving in Rausu, head to your accommodation and check in. You'll have the afternoon to enjoy the town at your own pace. Tonight's meal will be a seafood dinner at your accommodation.

| Meals | Activity         | Travel   | Accommodation            |
|-------|------------------|--|--------------------------|
| B, D  | Cruise (2 hours) | <b>Bus (¥1380 /0h50m)</b><br>Utoro Onsen → Rausu | Lodge in Rausu Shiretoko |

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### Day 7 - Whale-Watching Cruise off Rausu Coast & Travel to Kushiro

Today is the last day of your tour. You can ask your accommodation to look after your luggage while you enjoy one last nature-watching cruise departing at 9:00 am. The coast of the Shiretoko Peninsula is home to a deep ocean trench, making it a popular habitat for Sperm Whales and Dall's Porpoises and today's cruise may offer you a chance to catch a glimpse of them, as well as marine bird life unique to the region. Flesh-footed Shearwaters, Northern Fulmars and Pomarine Skuas are all birds you can expect to see at this time of year.



The cruise will take you back to land at around 11:30 am, so we recommend enjoying an early lunch in Rausu. As it's salmon run season, we highly recommend taking the chance to enjoy salmon roe rice bowls, which will be as fresh and delicious as you can get at the time of year!

After lunch, all that is left is to make your way to Kushiro. Congratulations for completing this self-guided tour of Hokkaido! You can catch a local bus from Rausu to Kushiro. The bus ride is roughly 3 hours and 40 minutes, so be sure to stock up on snacks and drinks to tide you over until you reach Kushiro. We recommend catching the 1:00 pm bus from Akan Bus's Rausu office, as the next one is not until 4:40 pm!

If you have some extra time to spare before leaving Kushiro, consider visiting the [Kushiro City Museum](#) or a walk along the Kushiro River to reflect upon your trip. If you are interested in learning about the conservation of wildlife including rare species of birds, consider visiting the [Kushiro Marsh Wildlife Conservation Centre](#). The two facilities are out of town and beyond walking distance. As there is no local bus operating in the area, your transportation options will be limited strictly to taxis.

Make sure that you have left nothing behind in Hokkaido before heading to the airport.  
*Itterasshai!*

| Meals | Activity           | Travel  | Accommodation |
|-------|--------------------|---|---------------|
| B     | Cruise (2.5 Hours) | <b>Bus (¥4,940 /3h40m)</b><br>Rausu → Kushiro | -             |



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### Recommended apps

#### Google Maps

[Apple](#) | [Android](#)

This is an excellent free app for navigating your way around local areas. It is also very useful for finding places to eat and reviewing the opening hours and English support of such institutions. In a pinch, you can also use Google Maps to orient yourself should you become lost. This is why we strongly advise investing in a data SIM to use during your time in Hokkaido.

#### Google Translate

[Apple](#) | [Android](#)

English-speakers in Japan are fewer than you might think, especially in rural Hokkaido. Fortunately, Google Translate's reputation has improved in recent years thanks to developments in AI technology and this free app is now considered an essential travel tool. While it of course cannot compare to a human interpreter, it is quite useful for reading signage, menus and other basic information. Thanks to the new Google Lens feature, you can simply hold your smartphone camera up to text and the phone will translate it for you on the spot! It also has a text-to-speech function– very handy when you need to ask locals around you for help, directions or your food order!

#### Windy.com

[Apple](#) | [Android](#)

Windy.com is a weather app recognised by the World Meteorological Association and highly recommended for outdoor activities such as hiking. It offers detailed and real-time looks at the weather that pre-installed or free weather apps simply cannot. This app will allow you to see weather fronts coming in before they arrive– essential in Hokkaido's mountains, where the weather can change on a dime– and to give you the time you need to reroute or decide to call it a day. The basic app is free, but you can upgrade to a premium version to see more options.

#### Yr.no

[Apple](#) | [Android](#)

This is another fantastic free weather app, developed by the Norwegian Meteorological Institute. It uses slick animations to simulate the day's weather conditions so that you can get a feel of how the sky above you may change throughout the day! It also shows you nearby webcams to help you get a feel of the weather where you may be going. Of course, it also contains other essential information about the day's weather, such as wind direction, the likelihood of rain, UV index and more. It also has a handy alert system that you can set up to send you push notifications of the day's weather when you wake up!

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### Our recommended reading

[What to pack for Hokkaido?](#)

[A Local's Guide to Using Public Transport in Hokkaido](#)

[Hiking Safely in Hokkaido](#)

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

[How to Set Up Your Phone for Travel in Hokkaido](#)

[Vegan & Vegetarian in Hokkaido](#)

[Hokkaido Wildlife Guide](#)

[Hokkaido Travel Tips & Common Questions](#)

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