

Hot Springs & History

7 Day Self-Guided Tour



With a perfect blend of urban excitement and off-the-beaten track exploration, this adventure takes you from the peaks of Hakodate to the dramatic landscapes of Shikotsu-Toya National Park, including vast caldera lakes and fuming craters.

[View Departure Dates & Prices](#)

[View Gallery](#)

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About the Tour

Start	Finish	Grading	Season
Sapporo	Hakodate	2, Easy Active	Late Apr, May, Jun, Sep, Early Oct

About Shikotsu-Toya National Park & Hakodate

Shikotsu-Toya National Park lies close to Sapporo and is home to a number of spectacular caldera lakes and steaming active volcanoes. The volcanoes concentrated in the region have of course given rise to several natural hot springs, meaning that it is popular among domestic Japanese visitors for its many resorts. But as well as the warm hot springs, it is also home to rich forests, fascinating geological hikes and incredible wildlife.

The other focus of this tour is Hakodate, which to this day remains one of Hokkaido's largest and most important cities. Even by Japanese standards, it has a rich, multinational history, inexorably linked with foreign commerce, trade, culture and diplomacy. Today, its seamless blending of new with old makes it a popular place to live and visit. You could spend hours exploring this historic town alone on foot, but for outdoor lovers there are plenty of light hikes and coastal walks to explore too!

Tour highlights

- Discover the natural wonders of Toya-Usu UNESCO Global Geopark, shaped by years of volcanic activity.
- Get up-close-and-personal with the history and culture of the Ainu people at the Upopoy National Ainu Museum.
- Walk through an extinct volcanic crater and soak in the waters of Noboribetsu Onsen.
- Hike up Mt. Hakodate and enjoy spectacular views over an historic city.

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 ¹
1	Arrive in Sapporo	4.7	2.9	- ▾
2	Travel to Lake Shikotsu & Explore Lake Shikotsu	1.8	1.1	B, D ▾
3	Travel to Shiraoi & Visit the Upopoy National Ainu Museum	-	-	B ▾
4	Travel to Noboribetsu Onsen & Hiking in Noboribetsu Onsen "Hell Valley"	3.2	2.0	D ▾
5	Travel to Lake Toya & Hike the Meiji Shinzan Trail	4.8	3.0	B, D ▾
6	Travel to Hakodate & Hiking on Mt. Hakodate	5.2~8.3	3.2~5.2	B ▾
7	Depart Hakodate	-	-	B ▾

Accommodation

Day	Type	Location	Ensuite Toilet	Ensuite Shower	Onsen	Laundry
1	Hotel ▾	Sapporo	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Hotel ▾	Lake Shikotsu	✓	✓	✓	
3	Hostel ▾ ²	Shiraoi				✓
4	Ryokan ▾	Noboribetsu Onsen			✓	
5	Hotel ▾	Lake Toya	✓	✓	✓	
6	Hotel ▾	Hakodate	✓	✓		✓

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

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

² We will arrange a private room with shared facilities at the hostel. If you would like to guarantee an en-suite room at a different accommodation in Shiraoi, an accommodation upgrade is available for an extra charge.

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What's included

- 6 nights accommodation
- 5 breakfasts and 3 dinners
- Daily cue sheets to help you get around using public transport
- Full English speaking phone support

What's not included

- Transportation costs
- Optional guided tours
- Airfare
- Travel insurance
- Personal expenses
- Drinks with included meals

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).

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When do you run this tour?

This tour is available from late April to 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.

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.

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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.

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 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.

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Travel to the Starting Point

The starting point for this self-guided tour is Sapporo, Hokkaido's capital city. By air, you can reach Sapporo via a flight to New Chitose Airport. There are multiple flights a day from both Tokyo Haneda and Narita Airport, operated by JAL, ANA and a number of low-cost airlines. There are also plenty of flights daily between New Chitose and Osaka's Kansai and Itami Airports, again with multiple airlines. For other regional airports in Japan, flights may be limited to just a few departures a day with major carriers JAL and / or ANA. Please check with the airline of your choice. From New Chitose Airport, you can take a train directly to JR Sapporo Station (40 mins, 1150 yen per person).

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 Sapporo from Wakkanai, Asahikawa or Kushiro, 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.

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Day-to-Day Itinerary

Day 1 – Arrive in Sapporo

Welcome to Sapporo, Hokkaido’s bustling capital! If you arrive with some time to spare, we recommend taking the opportunity to explore the city.

We recommend that you take the subway to Maruyama-Koen for a day of urban exploration. After a short walk (1 km / 0.6 miles) from the subway station you will reach [Hokkaido-Jingu](#), the largest Shinto shrine in Hokkaido.



Take in the serene atmosphere of the shrine before starting your hike of [Mt. Maruyama](#) (3.7 km / 1.6 miles). The trail to the summit of Mt. Maruyama takes you through old-growth forests that coexist next to the urban sprawl of Hokkaido’s capital city. After your hike, take the subway back into town and check into your hotel.

For dinner, our recommendation is to explore the [Ramen Yokocho Alley](#) in Susukino, [Tanukikoji Shopping Arcade Street](#), or [Noren Yokocho](#) near Nijo Seafood Market. You will have countless options ranging from ramen stalls, sushi bars, izakaya bars and more!

Meals	Hike	Ascent	Travel	Accommodation
-	4.7 km 2.9 miles	180 m 590 feet	See “Travel to the Starting Point”	Hotel in Sapporo

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Day 2 – Travel to Lake Shikotsu & Explore Lake Shikotsu

This morning you'll take a local train to Chitose, where you will transfer to a bus bound for [Lake Shikotsu](#), the crown-jewel of Shikotsu-Toya National Park. This stunning caldera lake is surrounded by active volcanoes and, as a result, is home to some fantastic hot springs. Upon arrival, you will drop off your luggage at your accommodation and enjoy lunch before an afternoon of hiking. For lunch, we highly recommend *Shikotsu-ko Chippu* (Kokanee Salmon), which was introduced into Lake Shikotsu over 100 years ago and has since become a local delicacy. There are a number of other lakeside restaurants offering ramen, curry and western food as well.



This afternoon, we recommend that you spend some time walking along the lakeshore. The [Visitor Centre](#) is a great place to learn about the history, flora and fauna around the lake. From the visitor centre, there is a pleasant footpath that follows the lakeside and crosses over the oldest train bridge in Hokkaido, the [Yamasentetsu Bridge](#), which was once part of a railway line made to deliver cargo between the city of Tomakomai and Lake Shikotsu. The hike continues to Yacho-no-Mori, a small forest that hosts many native tree species and birdlife. The trail loops around and back to the visitor centre. The visitor centre also makes a great place to seek shelter on rainy days if you need to wait for a shower to pass!

After your walk, you'll return to your inn to check in and enjoy dinner. In the evening, wind down with a soak in the hot springs at your accommodation.

Meals	Walk	Travel	Accommodation
B, D	1.8 km 1.1 miles	Bus (¥970 / 0h29m) Sapporo Station → Chitose Station Bus (¥950 / 0h44m) Chitose Station → Lake Shikotsu	Hotel at Lake Shikotsu

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Day 3 – Travel to Shiraoi & Visit Upopoy National Ainu Museum

After breakfast at your hotel, you'll say *sayonara* to Lake Shikotsu and board the bus back to Chitose. From Chitose, you'll continue onwards via train to the seaside town of Shiraoi.

Shiraoi is a coastal town home to a number of prominent Ainu sites as well as the [Upopoy](#) National Ainu Museum, dedicated to preserving Ainu heritage and culture. Here you'll be able to learn about the indigenous people who lived in Hokkaido long before it became a part of modern Japan.



The museum is also home to three different restaurants, where you can enjoy Japanese meals with Ainu influence, as well as some more traditional Ainu options. The museum is a short walk from the station and offers coin lockers on site to store your luggage while you explore the museum.

After an afternoon at the museum, return to your accommodation to check in and consider trying Shiraoi-Gyu, a delicious wagyu beef and local speciality.

Meals	Travel	Accommodation
B	Bus (¥950 / 0h47m) Lake Shikotsu → Minami Chitose Station Train (¥2290 / 0h31m) Minami Chitose → Shiraoi	Hostel ³ in Shiraoi

³ We will arrange a private room with shared facilities at the hostel. If you would like to guarantee an en-suite room at a different accommodation in Shiraoi, an accommodation upgrade is available for an extra charge.

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Day 4 – Travel to Noboribetsu Onsen & Hiking in Noboribetsu “Hell Valley”

After breakfast, you’ll board a local train to Noboribetsu Station and transfer to a bus bound for Noboribetsu Onsen, home to [Noboribetsu Hell Valley](#). Here, the remains of a volcanic crater await. Upon arrival, drop off your luggage at your inn and enjoy lunch at one of the many restaurants nearby.



After lunch, you’ll take off on a 3.2km (1.9 mile) walk through the Noboribetsu Hell Valley. A wooden walkway is built atop the crater, allowing you to walk through the sulphuric landscape and take in the otherworldly atmosphere. From the Hell Valley, you’ll hike north towards [Oyunuma](#), a lake formed above a volcanic crater that spews out sulphuric gas. The bottom of the lake is as hot as 130°C (266°F), with blue-grey water on the surface reaching highs of 50°C (122°F). The waters of Oyunuma flow out into the Oyunuma River, which form a natural [ashiyu](#) (foot bath) where you can soak your feet in the flowing river. In the evening, return to your hotel for dinner and relax in the famous hot spring waters of Noboribetsu.

Meals	Hike	Ascent	Travel	Accommodation
D	3.2 km 2.0 miles	148 m 485 feet	Train (¥760 / 0h09m) Shiraoi Station → Noboribetsu Station Bus (¥350 / 0h26m) Noboribetsu Station → Noboribetsu Onsen	Ryokan in Noboribetsu Onsen

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Day 5 – Travel to Lake Toya & Hike the Meiji Shinzan Trail

This morning you will board the bus back to Noboribetsu Station to catch a train bound for Toya Station. From Toya Station, you'll transfer to a local bus to reach the famous [Lake Toya](#).



After dropping off your luggage at your accommodation, you'll hike the Meiji Shinzan Trail, which starts near the lakeside. This trail will take you up and around the volcanic crater on [Mt. Yosomi](#) (252m), also known as "Meiji Shinzan". Meiji Shinzan means "new Meiji mountain" in Japanese, on account of the fact that its recent eruption was in 1910, during Japan's Meiji Era.

Despite the relatively recent eruption, the crater on Mt. Yosomi is now covered in vegetation, creating quite a beautiful sight. The Mt. Yosomi eruption was also responsible for creating the hot springs that feed Lake Toya's resort today – so you're witnessing the "birthplace" of the Lake Toya hot spring resort!

Note that quite a lot of the trail is stone-paved, and the stones can be slippery when wet. Make sure you have hiking footwear for this trail!

If the weather is not suitable for a hike, we recommend checking out the [Lake Toya Visitor Centre](#). Here, you can learn all about Lake Toya's volcanic past, including a recent, powerful eruption that took place in 2000. The museum also educates about the local flora and fauna.

After returning from your hike, the rest of the day is yours to enjoy to your liking. Enjoy a walk along the lakeside or unwind at a cafe before heading back to your hotel for dinner and a soak in the natural hot springs.

Meals	Hike	Ascent	Travel	Accommodation
B, D	4.8 km 3.0 miles	249 m 816 feet	Bus (¥350 / 0h12m) Noboribetsu Onsen → Noboribetsu Station Train (¥2970 (reserved seat rate) / 0h40m) Noboribetsu Station → Toya Station Bus (¥340 / 0h24m) Toya Station → Toyako Onsen	Hotel at Lake Toya

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Day 6 – Travel to Hakodate & Hike Mt. Hakodate

This morning you'll wave goodbye to Shikotsu-Toya National Park as you board a train bound for Hakodate, one of Hokkaido's oldest cities. As one of the first international port towns after Japan's long period of isolation, Hakodate is home to historic embassies and churches from around the world. It has become a haven for food enthusiasts and architecture lovers. You'll have ample time today and tomorrow to take in everything the city has to offer.



In the afternoon, you'll take the city tram to the end of the line at [Yachigashira Station](#), a roughly 15 minute walk from [Cape Tachimachi](#), where you'll be greeted by a panorama of the Tsugaru Strait, the small stretch of ocean that separates Honshu from Hokkaido. On a clear day you'll be able to see Aomori Prefecture across the bay.

After enjoying the view, head to the nearby trailhead for [Mt. Hakodate](#) for a climb up to the top where you'll have some free time to explore the fortress ruins near the summit. A nice option is to head over to the viewing platform as the sun starts to set, but do keep in mind that the popular sight can attract some very large crowds! Mt. Hakodate is home to some fine dining options at the summit, but there's no shortage of restaurants to choose from after you take the ropeway back down to the city.

Meals	Hike	Ascent	Travel	Accommodation
B	5.2~8.3 km 3.2~5.2 ml	350~462 m 1148~1516 ft	<p>Bus (¥340 /0h21m) Toyako Onsen → Toya Station</p> <p>Train (¥5920 (reserved seat rate) /1h55m) Toya Station → Hakodate Station</p> <p>Streetcar (¥210 /0h12m) Hakodate Station → Yachigashira</p> <p>Streetcar (¥210 /0h06m) Jyujigai → Hakodate Station</p> <p>Ropeway (¥1200 /0h03m) Mt. Hakodate Summit → Hakodate</p>	Hotel in Hakodate

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Day 7 – Depart Hakodate

Congratulations on completing this self-guided tour of Hokkaido! Our tour arrangements end with breakfast this morning, after which you'll be free to enjoy the city at your own pace, visiting the places that interest you the most.

Consider an early lunch at the renowned [Hakodate Morning Market](#), or perhaps [Hakodate Jiyuichiba](#) for a slightly quieter and more local atmosphere. Both have a wonderful selection of fresh seafood so why not enjoy a bowl of *kaisen-don* (sashimi-topped rice bowl) for an early lunch? Alternatively, drop into one of Hakodate's many trendy bakeries and enjoy a morning picnic in [Goryokaku](#), an old, star-shaped fortress that today is a popular park in the centre of Hakodate. There are plenty of places to sit around the park under the shade of the many cherry trees. At the centre of the park, there is also the historic Hakodate Magistrate's Office, an administrative building that opened at the end of Japan's period of feudal isolation and served as one of Japan's very first diplomatic posts.

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

Itterasshai!

Meals			
B			

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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](#)

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Elevation profiles

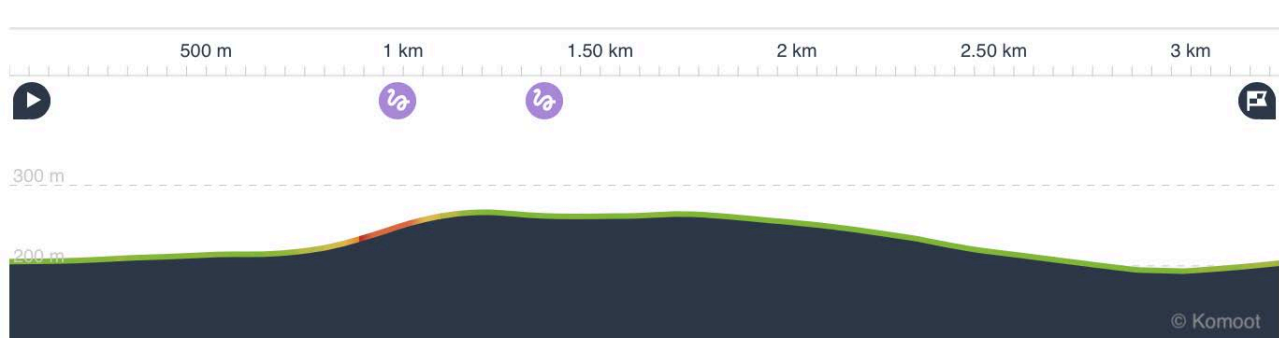
Day 1 - Mt. Maruyama & Hokkaido Jingu **Distance** - 4.7 km / 2.9 miles **Ascent** - 180 m / 590 ft



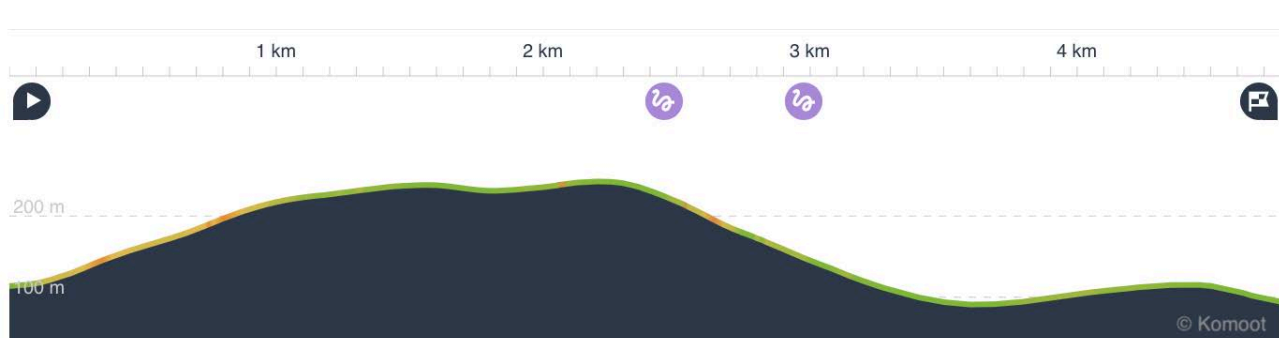
Day 2 - Yacho-no-Mori **Distance** - 1.8 km / 1.1 miles **Ascent** - 83 m / 272 ft



Day 4 - Noboribetsu Hell Valley **Distance** - 3.2 km / 2.0 miles **Ascent** - 148 m / 485 ft



Day 5 - Meiji Shinzan, Mt. Yosomi, Lake Toya **Distance** - 4.8 km / 3.0 miles **Ascent** - 249 m / 816 ft



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Day 6 -Mt. Hakodate, Sapporo

Distance - 5.2 ~ 8.3 km / 3.2 ~ 5.2 ml **Ascent** - 350 ~ 462 m / 1148 ~ 1516 ft

