

Japan's Far East

9 Day Wildlife & Adventure Tour



An intrepid journey covering the three National Parks in Eastern Hokkaido. Experience the best of our outdoors, wildlife & culture on this multi-day guided hiking, canoeing & wildlife tour.

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About the Tour

Start	Finish	Grading	Season
Kushiro	Kushiro	Easy Multi-Activity	May to Oct

About Japan's Far East

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, we travel through all three National Parks found in eastern Hokkaido; the wild Shiretoko Peninsula, Akan-Mashu - home to caldera lakes - and the marshy Kushiro Shitsugen Wetland national park. Shiretoko National Park is also designated as a UNESCO Natural World Heritage Site.

During the journey, we will also introduce you to 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

- Venture deep into Japan's Far East region, home to three national parks: Kushiro-Shitsugen National Park, Akan-Mashu National Park, and Shiretoko National Park.
- Search for Brown Bears, seabirds and marine mammals off the Rausu coast on a wildlife cruise.
- Take in the contrast between serene caldera lakes, Lake Akan and Lake Mashu, and active volcanoes.
- Learn about the Ainu, Hokkaido's indigenous people, directly from the people themselves.

Who is this tour for?

- Active travelers who enjoy a mix of outdoor activities including walking and canoeing, lasting up to 5 hours.
- Curious travellers who enjoy a mixture 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.

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Itinerary at a glance

Day	Activities	Meals ¹
1	Meet in Kushiro & Transfer to Nemuro via Cape Kiritappu	D ▾
2	Canoe on Bettoga River & Walk the Shunkunitai Sand Dunes	B, L, D ▾
3	Walk Pogawa Historical Forest Park, Transfer to Rausu & Nature Cruise	B, L, D ▾
4	Nature Cruise in Rausu & Transfer to Utoro via Shiretoko's Waterfalls	B, L, D ▾
5	Walk amongst the Shiretoko Five Lakes	B, D ▾
6	Walk to Mt. Io, Canoe on Kushiro River & Transfer to Lake Kussharo	B, L, D ▾
7	Transfer to Lake Akan & Walk with Akan Ainu	B, L, D ▾
8	Explore Kushiro-Shitsugen National Park & Transfer to Tsurui	B, L, D ▾
9	Transfer to Kushiro & Farewells	B ▾

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

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Accommodation

Day	Type	Location	Ensuite Toilet	Ensuite Shower	Onsen	Laundry
1	Hotel ▾	Nemuro	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Hotel ▾	Nemuro	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	Lodge ▾	Rausu Shiretoko	✓	✓		
4	Hotel ▾	Utoro Shiretoko	✓	✓	✓	✓
5	Hotel ▾	Utoro Shiretoko	✓	✓	✓	✓
6	Lodge ▾	Lake Kussharo	✓	✓	✓	✓
7	Hotel ▾	Lake Akan	✓	✓	✓	✓
8	Hotel ▾	Tsurui	✓	✓	✓	✓

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

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! Although not as active as some of our other tours, you will still need to make sure you have the right clothes and footwear to deal with possible changes in the elements and several hours on your feet. 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 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, such as a typhoon or sudden storm, 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.

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What's included

- 8 nights accommodation on a twin share basis
- 8 breakfasts, 6 lunches and 8 dinners
- Guided canoeing tour on Bettoga River
- Marine wildlife watching cruise in Rausu
- Brown Bear watching cruise in Rausu
- Admission to Shiretoko Five Lakes
- Guided canoeing tour on Kushiro River
- Guided walking & Ainu culture tour at Lake Akan
- Ainu cultural show at Lake Akan Ainu settlement
- All transport as described in the itinerary
- English speaking local guide(s)

What's not included

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

When do you run this tour?

We run this tour from May to October, and any time during these months is the perfect time to visit! This is one of the prime seasons for wildlife watching in eastern Hokkaido and for outdoor activities that will offer you a chance to see said wildlife! Brown Bears are well awake after hibernation in May and roam the peninsula throughout the tour's season. The highlight is the salmon run in September, when the hungry bears sit at the mouth of rivers and try to snap up lively salmon as they begin their upstream journey. If we are lucky, we may catch a glimpse of one from the sea on our wildlife cruise! There is also a variety of marine wildlife to see during the tour's full run, including Orcas during the months of June-July. That's even before we get talking about the marvellous scenery, which starts off as lush and green from May through to August, turning to dazzling oranges, reds and yellows in September and October.

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Why Adventure in the World of Hokkaido's Wildlife?

Unique & Diverse Species

Once connected to the Sakhalin Peninsula, Hokkaido is today separated from mainland Japan by the Tsugaru Strait, also known as Blakiston's Line. This is a unique point in the world where the local ecosystem shifts from Asian species to Eurasian. As such, Hokkaido is home to a number of flora and fauna that can only be found here in the whole of Japan! Its location just south of Siberia also makes it a migratory spot for many birds and aquatic mammals.

A Spiritual Connection

Eastern Hokkaido is a region that remains an important residential and spiritual ground for the indigenous Ainu. Many have set up shops, restaurants and workshops in the area to introduce Japanese to their way of life. The Ainu have a deep connection to the wildlife in Hokkaido, believing them to be gods and guardians. The large Brown Bear, for example, is deeply respected and revered by the Ainu as a god of the mountains. The Orca is thought of as the guardian of the oceans, and the Blakiston's Fish Owl is the protector of Ainu villages. Seeing these animals up close and in their natural habitats will imbue you with the same sense of awe and respect that the Ainu have for them and will give you a deeper connection with this land.

The Great Outdoors

The abundance of wildlife here in Eastern Hokkaido makes it quite easy to spot. In fact, you are very likely to see more deer than people on a visit! However, it's one thing to see animals from afar and quite another to see them at close-quarters engaging in natural behaviours. This is only possibly by journeying off the beaten path, straight into their habitat. On our tours, you'll not only watch the wildlife but you'll also have the chance to hike, canoe and walk through their world and see them in situations and areas that most tourists may not.

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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 is the minimum number of people for this tour?

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 Kushiro Station at 1:30 pm on the first day. We recommend that you arrive in Kushiro the day before departure to easily meet your group on the tour's first day.

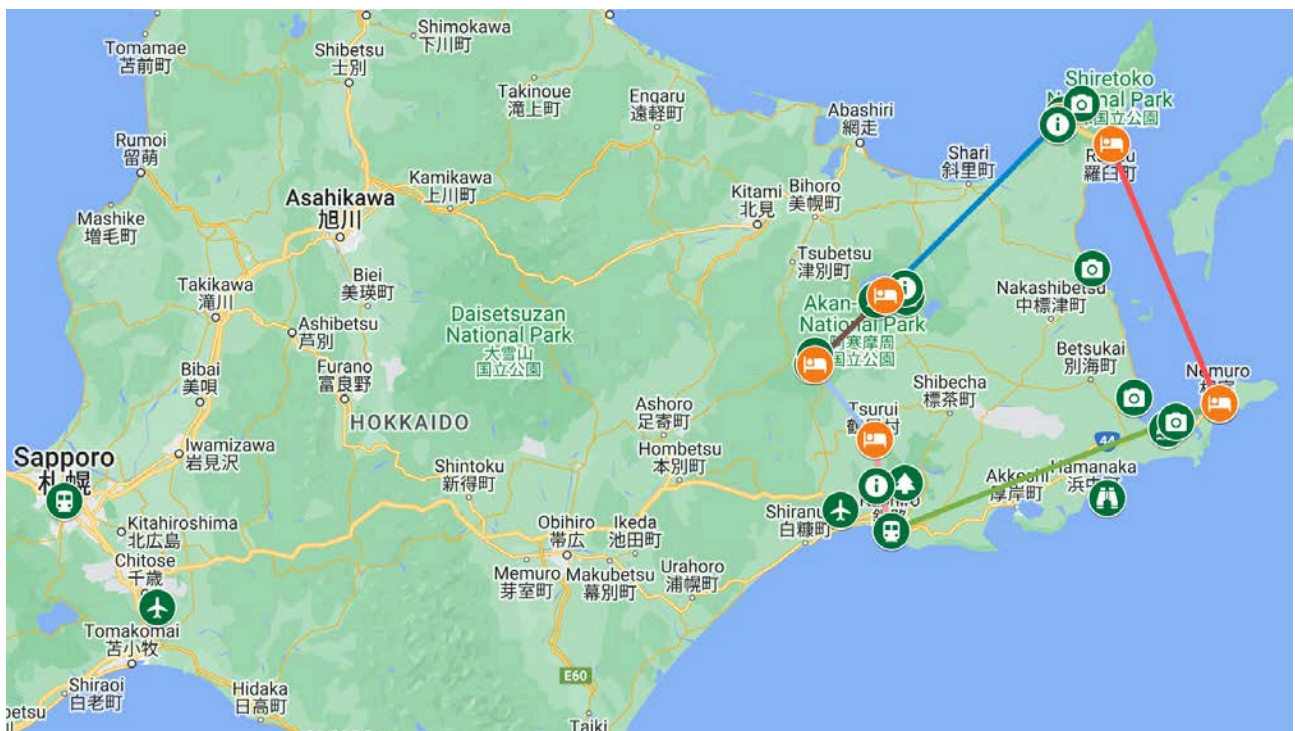
If you are flying into Kushiro Airport (KUH) from Tokyo on the first day, please make sure you reserve an early morning flight that arrives at KUH before 12:30 pm, which will allow us to pick you up from the airport on the day. If you are arriving earlier, there is an airport shuttle bus for downtown Kushiro scheduled to connect with all incoming flights, departing within 10 to 25 mins of arrival. The bus costs 950 yen per person, and it takes 45 mins to Kushiro Station.

An alternative to flying is to travel by train (Japan Railway, abbr. JR). There are trains 6 times a day between Sapporo and Kushiro. The best connecting train to join this tour is the 8:52am Sapporo departure, arriving at Kushiro at 1:20 pm. The cost is 10,320 yen for a reserved seat. Upon booking, please let us know your travel plans, and we will confirm in detail where and what time we will meet on the first day.

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 – Meet in Kushiro & Transfer to Nemuro via Cape Kiritappu

Welcome to Hokkaido! After the group gathers in Kushiro city, we'll set off to our first destination, Cape Kiritappu, chatting and getting to know each other along the way. The journey time is about 1.5 hours.

After we reach Kiritappu, we'll have the option to head to the nearby cape where we will see if we can catch sight of Sea Otters floating on the waves below. The otters are quite the adorable sight and, in the right season (the summer months of June – July), you might be lucky enough to catch sight of a baby otter curled up on its mother's tummy!

We'll enjoy a group meal in Nemuro this evening, where our guide will also talk us through the upcoming tour.



Meals	Activity	Distance	Accommodation
D	–	–	Hotel in Nemuro

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Day 2 – Canoe on Bettoga River & Walk the Shunkunitai Sand Dunes

Today we have an easy morning as we'll take a short drive inland towards Lake Furen for canoeing on Bettoga River.

The river flows into Lake Furen, carving its way through both wetland and forest. Such a diverse environment makes it a draw for all kinds of wildlife and we'll enjoy spotting them as we float peacefully through the wetland, experiencing the ecosystem up close.



After we enjoy canoeing, we'll enjoy a local lunch before heading over to Shunkunitai sand dunes and the brackish lake, Lake Furen, both part of the Ramsar Convention, a 20 min drive away. This important ecological area is home to many species of wild birds. It is also the one place in Hokkaido where spruce trees grow so close to the ocean— usually they are found inland only!

After exploring the wetlands, we return to Nemuro to enjoy a local seafood dinner together in town.

Meals	Activity	Duration	Accommodation
B, L, D	Canoeing	2 hours	Hotel in Nemuro

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Day 3 – Walk Pogawa Historical Forest Park, Transfer to Rausu & Nature Cruise

After an early breakfast, we will head to Rausu on the eastern side of the Shiretoko Peninsula. Enroute, we can stop off at Pogawa Historical Grassland to stretch our legs with a short stroll.

When we reach Rausu, we'll head to port to board a whale-watching cruise. The ocean on this side of the Shiretoko Peninsula features a deep trench, making it an ideal home for marine mammals such as Sperm Whales and Dall's Porpoises. We will head offshore to try and spot these sea mammals and sea birds.

Back on dry land we will head to an informative visitor centre in Rausu where we'll be able to learn more about the region's fascinating ecosystem. Afterwards, we will check in to our accommodation and enjoy a delicious meal prepared with local ingredients.



Meals	Activity	Duration	Accommodation
B, L, D	Nature Cruise	2.5 hours	Lodge in Rausu Shiretoko

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Day 4 – Nature Cruise in Rausu & Transfer to Utoro via Shiretoko's Waterfalls

This morning we travel 30 minutes up the coastline to the end of the road, where we will board a small fishing boat. The smaller boat lets us hug the shoreline where we may spot Brown Bears searching for food along the water's edge or high up on the cliffs. After our 2.5 hour cruise is finished, we will return to Rausu for lunch.



After lunch, we will take a short 1 km (0.6 mi) return walk through the forest by the visitor centre we visited yesterday to either Kumagoe Waterfall or, if you are a little tired out today, we can take a dip in Kumanoyu Hot Springs instead, a wild hot spring overlooking the Rausu River, lovingly maintained by locals.

We'll then hop in the car and make our way through the Shiretoko Pass— the only public road linking both sides of the peninsula. The road is only open in the snow-free months and the views from the top are beautiful.

Once we reach the Utoro side, we will head to Furepe Waterfall, where we can enjoy a short, 2 km (1.2 mi) walking course through the heart of Shiretoko grasslands to a viewpoint where you can look out over the falls from above. On the way we may see local wildlife like Japanese Deer and various species of birds. We'll then check in to our accommodation in central Utoro before we enjoy a delicious evening meal.

Meals	Activity	Duration / Distance	Accommodation
B, L, D	Nature Cruise & Walking	2.5 hours 3 km / 1.9 mi	Hotel in Utoro Shiretoko

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Day 5 – Walk amongst the Shiretoko Five Lakes

Surrounded by the Sea of Okhotsk, most of the Shiretoko Peninsula has been preserved as a National Park since 1964 and was also designated as a Natural World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 2005.

Approximately 7,000 people live on the peninsula, but their homes are concentrated in two towns: Utoro on the western side, and Rausu on the eastern side. The rest of the peninsula remains untouched and is a habitat for wildlife, such as Brown Bears, Japanese Deer, Red Foxes and Eurasian Red Squirrels. Needless to say, the area's marine and bird life is also rich in diversity.



This morning, we will explore Shiretoko on foot, walking amongst the Shiretoko Five Lakes. The area is home to a large population of brown bears. We will aim to complete the entire walkway and to visit all five of the lakes, unless the walkway is closed due to a bear sighting on the trail.

In the afternoon you are free to explore the town of Utoro, or relax in your hotel. We recommend stopping by the Shiretoko World Heritage Centre to learn more about what makes Shiretoko's ecosystem unique, walking up to Miharashi bridge for ocean views, or both! We will regroup in the evening for dinner in town/at our hotel.

Meals	Activity	Duration	Accommodation
B, D	Walking	3 km / 1.9 mi	Hotel in Utoro Shiretoko

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Day 6 – Walk to Mt. Io, Canoe on Kushiro River & Transfer to Lake Kussharo

After breakfast, we travel on to Kawayu Onsen. In Japanese, *kawa* means river and *yu* means hot water and, true to its name, there is a hot water river running through the centre of the village. We will hike to the source of the thermal springs that feed the river, Mt. Io, on an easy 2.5 km / 1.6 mi trail from Kawayu village.



A young and active volcano, Mt. Io is constantly jettisoning steam from its fumaroles, providing spectacular views. Hokkaido's indigenous Ainu people named this mountain *Atosanupuri*, which means "naked mountain" due to no vegetation growing on its slopes.

Returning from the hike, we'll spend a little time at the nearby Visitor Centre before we return to our vehicle and head for the starting point of our canoeing adventure on the Kushiro River, which feeds into the Kushiro Wetlands. We will jump on our Canadian canoes on the shores of Lake Kussharo and start floating leisurely down the pristine waters until we reach the Biruwa Bridge. This area is a habitat for wild birds, including the Grey Heron and Crested Kingfisher, which are occasionally seen while paddling down the river.

After canoeing, we will drive a short distance to our accommodation nestled in the woods near Lake Kussharo. We will enjoy a meal and hot spring bathing at our accommodation tonight.

Meals	Activity	Distance	Accommodation
B, L, D	Walking & Canoeing	2.5 km / 1.6 mi 2.5 hours	Lodge in Lake Kussharo

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Day 7 – Transfer to Lake Akan & Walk with Akan Ainu

After a relaxed start, enjoying home cooked breakfast and watching the wildlife on the porch, we'll drive 1 hour to Lake Akan. On arriving at the lakeside town, we will take a stroll through a protected forest that takes us to lake views and bubbling volcanic mud called *bokke*.

We'll then be treated to an Ainu lunch at a local cafe, where we can appreciate the cuisine of the Ainu.



In the afternoon we will meet up with a local Ainu guide who will tell us folklore stories, explain the culture and customs of Ainu as we walk through the woods. The Ainu worship wildlife and it is enlightening to learn about how they have lived in harmony with nature for centuries.

After dinner at our accommodation, we can experience the musical side of Ainu culture at a performance at the Lake Akan Ainu Kotan. We have the opportunity to watch two performances, the first features traditional dance and song. Like many other indigenous cultures, the Ainu did not have forms of writing; their folklore is deeply embedded in song and dance. The second performance is contemporary. This modern performance was created with much thought and discussion by the local community, blending traditional Ainu arts with modern choreography and production. It tells the story of how wolves were wiped out from Hokkaido – continuing the long tradition of passing on Hokkaido's natural history through creative performance.

Meals	Activity	Distance	Accommodation
B, L, D	Walking	2.5 km / 1.6 mi	Hotel at Lake Akan

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Day 8 – Explore Kushiro-Shitsugen National Park & Transfer to Tsurui

On our last full day, we will take this opportunity to explore the beautiful Kushiro-Shitsugen National Park.

We'll begin by heading to Cape Kirakotan after breakfast. The cape is considered to be the inner sanctum of Kushiro-Shitsugen National Park and its tip is designated as a National Natural Monument. It is a beautiful network of rivers and spring water latticing the marshland. Being such a heavily-protected area, visitors are not allowed to enter the marshland here without prior special permission. We are fortunate enough to have been granted this, and so we will be able to enjoy a beautiful 5 km (3.1 mi) walk to the tip of the cape. Along the way, we may see deer and, of course, the graceful Red-crowned Crane, whose numbers have surged back from the brink thanks to local conservation efforts. In fact, this area was the first place the crane was spotted in Japan after it was thought to have gone extinct, so it is something of a sacred ground for fans of the bird!



We'll then drive to the nearby village of Tsurui to enjoy a local lunch before heading to our next destination, Onnenai. We'll stop by an informative visitor centre to learn more about Kushiro-Shitsugen National Park before we head out to enjoy a walking course. There are several course options, from 0.5 km up to 3 km (0.3 mi – 1.9 mi), and we will choose one based on the weather and the group's preferences on the day. There are a number of beautiful wildflowers that you can enjoy along the way in spring and summer and in autumn, the marsh is ablaze in beautiful colours.

After enjoying the walk, we will make our way to Tsurui, where we'll check into our last hotel. We'll enjoy a group meal in the hotel's wonderful restaurant to celebrate the end of our tour and reflect on all we've achieved.

Meals	Activity	Distance	Accommodation
B, L, D	Walking	8 km / 4.9 mi	Hotel in Tsurui

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Day 9 – Transfer to Kushiro & Farewells

We will say goodbye to our hosts and then drive 45 mins to Kushiro City to complete the tour. We can drop you off at either Kushiro Airport from around 9:00 am or Kushiro Station at 9:30 am at the earliest.

Meals			
B			

Our recommended reading

[Hokkaido Wildlife Guide](#)

[Hokkaido Guide Stories – Japan's Far East](#)

[What to pack for Hokkaido?](#)

[Preparing for Your First Hokkaido Adventure Holiday](#)

[A Local's Guide on What to Expect When Staying in Hokkaido](#)

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

[Vegan & Vegetarian in Hokkaido](#)

[Hokkaido Travel Tips & Common Questions](#)

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