

Northern Islands

7 Day Self-Guided Tour



Travel off the beaten track to the northern tip of Japan, home to Rebun and Rishiri islands. Explore the region's varied trails along rugged coastlines and clifftops. Refuel with seafood at local restaurants and hot spring soaks.

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About the Tour

Start	Finish	Grading	Season
Wakkanai	Wakkanai	4, Vigorous	Late May, Late Aug to Early Oct

About Rebun-Rishiri-Sarobetsu National Park

This tour is perfect for adventurers who dream of deep exploration into remote corners of Japan that most travellers would never have the opportunity to visit. Mountains meet the ocean on these unique islands.

The tour takes place in the Rishiri-Rebun-Sarobetsu National Park, which sits at the very top of Hokkaido and is the northernmost national park in Japan. The southern tip of Sakhalin Island (Russia) is only 40 kms / 25 miles away - this is as far north in Japan as you can get!

The islands have a distinct ecosystem with striking Siberia-like landscapes in close proximity to the ocean. Leave the sticky heat behind and enjoy some refreshing summer hiking in this subarctic region!

Tour highlights

- Hike along the cliff-lined coast of Rebun Island, where alpine flowers overlook the ocean.
- Challenge the 1,721 metre Mt. Rishiri, an extinct volcano floating in the Sea of Japan.
- Visit the northernmost point of Japan, where Sakhalin is visible on a clear day!
- Experience Japanese hospitality in one of the most remote corners of the country.

Who is this tour for?

- Active travellers who enjoy walking for 5 to 7 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 at Wakkanai airport (WKJ) or station	-	-	- ▾
2	Ferry to Rebun Island & Hike the Momoiwa Trail	6.0	3.7	B, D ▾
3	Hike the Capes Trail (Misaki-meguri Trail)	14.2	8.8	B, D ▾
4	Ferry to Rishiri Island	-	-	B, D ▾
5	Climb Mt. Rishiri	13.0	8.1	B, D ▾
6	Explore more of Rishiri Island	-	-	B, D ▾
7	Ferry to Wakkanai	-	-	B ▾

Accommodation

Day	Type	Location	Ensuite Toilet	Ensuite Shower	Onsen	Laundry
1	Hotel ▾	Wakkanai	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Hotel ▾	Rebun Island	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	Hotel ▾	Rebun Island	✓	✓	✓	✓
4	Hotel ▾	Rishiri Island	✓	✓	✓	✓
5	Hotel ▾	Rishiri Island	✓	✓	✓	✓
6	Hotel ▾	Rishiri Island	✓	✓	✓	✓

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

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

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What's included

- 6 nights accommodation
- 6 breakfasts and 5 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 in late May, and from late August to early October. Many of the activities in the itinerary are not possible during winter.

June to mid-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 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 closest airport to the starting point of this tour is Wakkanai Airport (AKJ). Central Wakkanai is easily accessible from the airport with local buses that are scheduled to match up with flights arriving from Sapporo and Tokyo. The one-way trip into town from the airport is 700 yen per person.

If travelling to Wakkanai from Sapporo, a more eco-friendly alternative to flying is to travel by train (Japan Railway, abbr. JR). There is only one direct train from Sapporo to Wakkanai per day (Limited Express "Soya") which leaves Sapporo Station at 7:30 am and arrives in Wakkanai at 12:40 pm. A one way ticket will cost 10,560 yen for a reserved seat. The journey is covered by the Japan Rail Pass. Later trains will require a change in Asahikawa, Hokkaido's second-largest city. You can see English train timetables on the [Japan Transit Planner website](#).

It is also possible to travel by express bus from Sapporo to Wakkanai. There are five departures a day.

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 Wakkanai from Sapporo, 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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Tour map

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



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Day-to-Day Itinerary

Day 1 - Arrive in Wakkanai

Irankarapte! Welcome to Wakkanai, the northernmost city in Hokkaido, and by extension, Japan!

Should you arrive in Wakkanai in time for lunch, what better than fresh, Hokkaido seafood? As a city by the sea, Wakkanai has a plethora of options for fresh seafood from sushi to robata-yaki - seafood grilled on an open flame.

Dinner is not included in your hotel reservation, but the hotel is located in a district full of local izakaya bars and small restaurants.

Meals	Activity	Travel	Accommodation
-	-	See "Travel to the Starting Point"	Hotel in Wakkanai

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Day 2 – Ferry to Rebun Island & Hike Momoiya Trail

This morning you'll head to the Wakkanai Ferry Terminal to catch the ferry to Rebun Island. "Rebun" means "Island far from Shore" in the native Ainu language, a fitting name as the ferry takes roughly 2 hours.

After you arrive, you'll leave your luggage in a coin locker at the ferry terminal, or with the hotel, and then take off for the trails. Today's hike is known as the Momoiya Trail and takes you across the southern half of the island.



There is a brief walk through the town of Kafuka to reach the trailhead at Reika-ji, a buddhist temple at the edge of town.

After about 45 minutes of moderate uphill hiking, you'll reach the lookout point for [Momoiya](#), which literally translates to "Peach Rock". The sight of Momoiya is one of the most popular views on the island due to its unique shape and massive size.

From Momoiya you'll head south towards [Motoji Lighthouse](#). The trail winds along the clifftops, flanked on one side by rolling hills and by the sea on the other. Depending on visibility, you'll be greeted with panoramic views of Mt. Rishiri and the surrounding ocean. From Motoji Lighthouse, the trail descends to the small settlement of [Shiretoko](#). From here you can catch a local bus back to the ferry terminal or make the journey on foot back to either the ferry terminal or the hotel where you left your luggage.

After your first day of hiking in Hokkaido, consider winding down in the hotel's hot spring after dinner.

Meals	Hike	Ascent	Travel	Accommodation
B, D	6 km / 3.7 miles	250 m / 820 ft	Ferry (¥2960 / 1h55m) Wakkanai → Rebun Island Bus (¥320 / 0h08m) Shiretoko → Rebun Ferry Terminal	Hotel on Rebun Island

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Day 3 – Hike Capes Trail, Rebun Island

This morning you will take a local bus bound for the northern tip of Rebun Island to hike the "Misaki-Meguri Trail". Literally meaning "touring the capes", this 14.2 km (8.8 mile) trail starts at Cape Sukoton and winds its way along the coast, over impressive seaside cliffs and through quaint fishing villages.



Before hiking, be sure to take in the view of Todo Island, one of the few breeding grounds of sea lions in Japan - but be careful of Cape Sukoton's notoriously strong winds!

From Cape Sukoton, the trail briefly follows a paved road before breaking away towards [Cape Gorota](#). From Cape Gorota you have a unique opportunity to see the trail you walked from Cape Sukoton to the north and get a sneak peek of where the trail is heading to the south. From here you'll be walking amongst a variety of alpine flowers, some of which are found only on Rebun Island.

The trail continues down towards Teppu, a small settlement home to a free restroom and a vending machine. From here it's only one more climb before the descent to the final cape on the trail, [Cape Sukai](#). There is a small shop selling souvenirs and hot foods, which make it the perfect spot to fill up before the walk back to the bus stop.

From Cape Sukai you will follow a paved road to reach the bus stop in the small village of [Funadomari](#). Funadomari is home to a few restaurants and a shop to pick up a drink or snacks before catching a return bus to Kafuka. The bay around Funadomari, as well as Cape Kaneda just north of Funadomari, are popular spots for viewing harbour seals as well.

Meals	Hike	Ascent	Travel	Accommodation
B, D	14.2 km / 8.8 miles	260 m / 853 ft	Bus (¥1240 / 0h49m) Rebun Ferry Terminal → Cape Sukoton Bus (¥950 / 0h44m) Funadomari Honcho → Rebun Ferry Terminal	Hotel on Rebun Island

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Day 4 - Ferry to Rishiri Island

This morning, you'll depart from Rebun Island and take a short ferry ride over to Rishiri Island. Today you have the flexibility to explore the island in a way that suits you best.

After leaving your luggage at your accommodation, you can explore the town of Oshidomari, including the walk up to [Cape Peshi](#), which looks out over the town. From atop Cape Peshi you'll be greeted by a panorama of the island, with the quaint town of Oshidomari contrasted against Mt. Rishiri in the background.



If you're up for a longer walk, consider taking a local bus to [Himenuma](#), a pond formed in 1917 when 3 smaller lakes were flooded with spring water to form one large lake.

While technically a man-made pond, the area is a treasure trove of plants and wildlife, with a well-maintained walkway surrounding it. If you're blessed with low winds, you'll be able to see Mt. Rishiri reflected perfectly in the pond as well.

To get back to town from Himenuma, you can return via bus or take the roughly 5.5km (3.4 mile) walk along the elevated cycling path back to town. The elevated cycling path was created as an escape route in case of a tsunami. Thanks to its height, walkers and cyclists can enjoy beautiful ocean views from a number of [viaducts](#) built over valleys.

Meals	Activity	Travel	Accommodation
B, D	-	Ferry (¥980 / 0h45m) Rebun Island → Rishiri Island	Hotel on Rishiri Island

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Day 5 – Climb Mt. Rishiri

Today you'll take on the challenge of the 1,721 m (5,646 ft) Mt. Rishiri, one of the 100 Famous Mountains of Japan. The trail starts off in the pristine (and bear-free!) forests of Rishiri Island. Within 10 minutes of walking from the trailhead, you'll pass by "[Kanro-Sensui](#)", flowing with natural spring water.

Once you reach the 5th Station, you'll be above the tree line and greeted by views of the ocean below. From here the trail gets much steeper as you climb towards Mt. Chokan, a sub-peak on the ridge. From Mt. Chokan the trail levels out for a bit, but the ridgeline is exposed and Mt. Chokan is a sensible point to turn around if the weather is bad. As you push on you will pass the shelter hut and start climbing once again. It's another steep climb to the summit, but once you pull through you'll be standing atop one of Japan's northernmost mountains. Enjoy the views from the summit and take your time returning to the trailhead.



For climbing Mt. Rishiri, please allow at least 11 hours, starting at the crack of dawn like local hikers do. It's best to aim to complete the hike well before sunset, as coming back late from the hike can upset locals or cause them worry. Your accommodation provides a courtesy shuttle at around 5am to the trailhead upon request. A lunch of rice balls (onigiri) can also be arranged with your accommodation as long as you request it the night before.

After your hike, congratulate yourself with a soak in the hot springs back at your inn.

Meals	Hike	Ascent	Travel	Accommodation
B, D	13 km / 8.1 miles	1440 m / 4725 ft	-	Hotel on Rishiri Island

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Day 6 – Explore More of Rishiri Island

Today is left relatively open-ended to give those who summited Mt. Rishiri a chance to rest and explore the island at a relaxed pace. Having a day in reserve also gives you a second chance to attempt the climb if the weather on the previous day was bad – the weather on the island is notoriously fickle!

If you are up for another morning of hiking, consider hiking up to [Mt. Pon](#), a hike that follows the same trail as yesterday but branches off to a much smaller summit, giving you the chance to enjoy the forests of Rishiri at a much slower pace. Along the way you'll once again pass the Kanro-Sensui spring, where you can fill up your water bottles with the island's famous spring water, known for its unique sweetness.

There is also the option to rent a car or a bicycle near the ferry terminal to loop around the island and visit some of the more remote sights, such as the scenic [Oatomari Swamp](#) or the [Senboshi-Misaki Park](#), a breeding ground for Black-tailed Gulls. The southern half of the island is also accessible via local buses, which offer a 1-Day Unlimited Pass to ride the bus as many times as you'd like for a set price.

Meals	Activity	Travel	Accommodation
B, D	-	-	Hotel on Rishiri Island

Day 7 – Travel to Wakkanai & Onwards

Congratulations on completing this self-guided tour of Hokkaido! Our tour arrangements end with breakfast at the hotel. Once you've eaten, you'll say goodbye to the island of Rishiri and take the earliest ferry back to the mainland. For those flying back to Tokyo, there is a bus that operates between the ferry terminal and Wakkanai Airport, stopping at Wakkanai Station along the way.

For travellers heading to Sapporo, you can take a direct highway bus from Wakkanai to Sapporo.

For those heading toward Asahikawa, you can take an express train from Wakkanai station directly to Asahikawa.

Please check you have left nothing behind in Hokkaido before you depart. *Itterasshai!*

Meals	Activity	Travel	Accommodation
B	-	Ferry (¥2660 / 1h40m) Rishiri Island → Wakkanai	-

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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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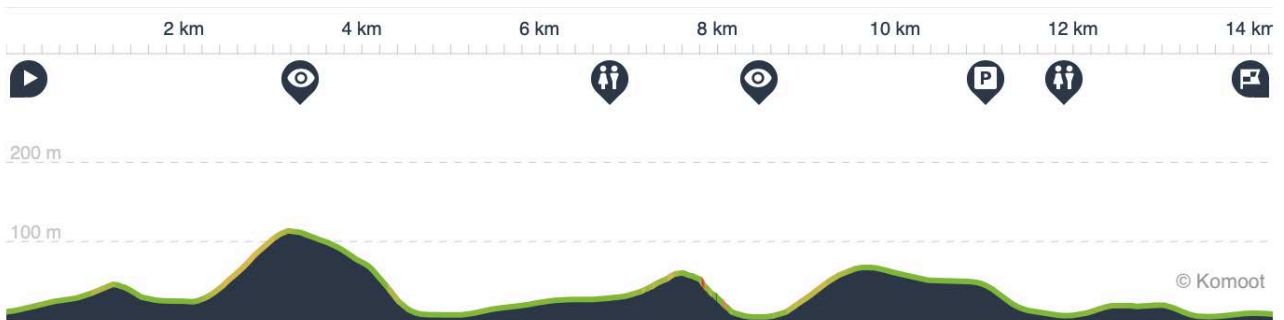


Elevation profiles

Day 2 - Momoiva Trail on Rebun Island **Distance** - 6 km / 3.7 miles **Ascent** - 250 m / 820 ft



Day 3 - Cape Trail on Rebun Island **Distance** - 14.2 km / 8.8 miles **Ascent** - 260 m / 853 ft



Day 5 - Mt. Rishiri **Distance** - 13 km / 8.1 miles **Ascent** - 1440 m / 4725 ft

