

# Japan's Far East

## 7 Day Wild Winter Tour



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

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Prepared by [Adventure Hokkaido LLC](#).

Travel Agency Licence No. 2-789

Email: [info@adventure-hokkaido.com](mailto:info@adventure-hokkaido.com)

Tel: +81-50-3528-8243

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### About the Tour

Start	Finish	Grading	Season
Abashiri	Kushiro	Relaxed Winter Adventure	Jan & Mar

### About Japan's Far East

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

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

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

### Tour highlights

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

### Who is this tour for?

- Active travellers who enjoy walking for 3 hours a day.
- Curious travellers who enjoy a mixture of activities and sightseeing and learning about the regions they visit.
- Winter hikers and snow lovers interested in hiking in snow with the help of snowshoes (no prior experience required).
- Adventurous travellers who enjoy rural hospitality, staying in Japanese style accommodations with natural hot springs on site.

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### Itinerary at a glance

Day	Activities	Meals <sup>1</sup>
1	Meet your group in Abashiri	D ▾
2	Explore Lake Kussharo, Akan–Mashu National Park	B, L, D ▾
3	Explore Lake Mashu, Akan–Mashu National Park	B, L, D ▾
4	Explore Notsuke Peninsula & Pogawa Historical Forest Park	B, L, D ▾
5	Hike near Yoroushi Onsen & Visit the Red-crowned Crane Sanctuary in Tsurui	B, L, D ▾
6	Explore Kushiro–Shitsugen National Park	B, L, D ▾
7	Farewells in Kushiro	B ▾

### Accommodation

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

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

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

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

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### Travel style

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

Your guides are with the group throughout. Having a guide lead the way means you can relax and take in the scenery. They are also there to provide context on the local landscape and help navigate the dishes served in the evenings.

### Adverse weather

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

### What's included

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

### What's not included

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

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### When do you run this tour?

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

In February, we run a [modified version of this tour](#) that takes in drift ice that lines the Sea of Okhotsk coastline.

### What makes Hokkaido's winter special?

#### The Snow

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

#### The Wildlife

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

#### Hot Springs & Warm Welcomes

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

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### How to book this tour?

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

Once we receive this, we will send you a payment link 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 for both options, and you must use one of the payment links provided by us.

**Wise payments** are available in Japanese Yen only and require you to have a Wise account (Wise-to-Wise transfer only). You must pay any currency exchange or transfer fees yourself.

**Flywire payments** allow credit card payment or domestic bank transfer converted to your home currency. Credit card payments via Flywire incur an additional service charge of 1.5%, while domestic bank transfers via Flywire do not incur this service charge.

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

### What does the Minimum Number mean?

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

If you book with less than four people, we will hold your place on the tour and wait for another group to join the tour. If the number of guests has not reached the minimum number by 60 days prior to departure, we will give you the option to cancel or to upgrade to a private departure.

If you choose to cancel, we will refund the amount in Japanese Yen that you have paid us. You're welcome to check with us at any time about the status of bookings.

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

### Single Supplement

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

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### Travel Insurance

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

### Travel to and from the tour

#### Getting to Abashiri

We will meet at 6:00 pm at our hotel near Lake Abashiri.

The closest airport is Abashiri Memanbetsu (MMB), with direct flights to and from Tokyo Haneda (HND), Sapporo New Chitose (CTS) and Sapporo Okadama (OKD). Airport shuttles depart for Abashiri with the arrival of every domestic flight. The journey to Yobito Station Bus Stop (the closest stop to our hotel) takes approximately 15 minutes from the airport with the fare just under JPY 700.

You can also take a JR train from Sapporo to Abashiri if you prefer. It takes 5.5 hours and costs just over JPY 10,000 for a reserved seat. From Abashiri Station, you can transfer to a local train or bus to Yobito Station, costing JPY 320 or JPY 460 for the train or bus respectively. You can search schedules and fares in English on [Japan Transit Planner website](#).

Our hotel is 1 km from Yobito Station. The hotel offers a courtesy shuttle service which needs to be reserved in advance. **Please let us know if you would like us to book a seat for you.**

Alternatively, a taxi from the airport directly to the hotel will cost around JPY 4,500–5,000. From Abashiri Station to the hotel will cost around JPY 3,000.

#### Onward travel from Kushiro

On the last day, after breakfast at our accommodation in Kushiro, we will drop you off at either Kushiro Station at around 8:30 am or Kushiro Airport at around 9:10 am. If you need to catch an earlier flight, we can help you book a taxi to get you there, but an earlier drop off is not possible as it prevents the whole group from having breakfast.

If you are staying in Kushiro for extra nights, we can also drop you off at your hotel in central Kushiro that morning, either side of 8:30–9:10 am depending on the group's drop-off requirements.

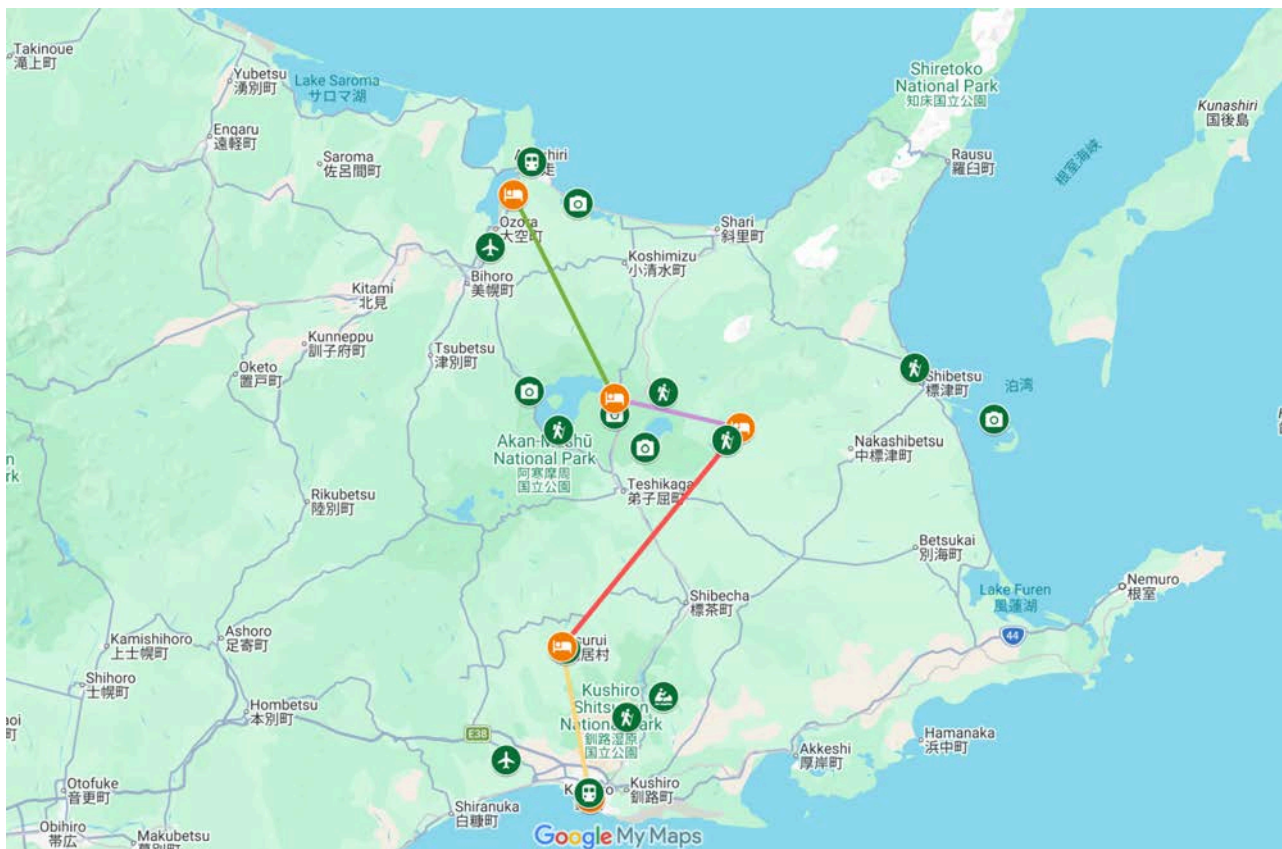
The closest airport is Kushiro Airport (KUH) with direct flights to and from Sapporo Chitose (CTS), Sapporo Okadama (OKD) and Tokyo Haneda (HND).

If you would prefer to travel over land, there are regular trains between Kushiro and Sapporo via Obihiro. The journey takes around 4.5 hours and costs just over JPY 10,000 including the seat reservation – there is no un-reserved seating on this service.

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## Tour map

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



## Day to Day Itinerary

### Day 1 - Meet your group in Abashiri

We will meet at our hotel at 6:00 pm near Lake Abashiri in Abashiri, the largest city on Hokkaido's eastern Sea of Okhotsk coast.

Dinner will be at the hotel and we will spend some time introducing the programme for our upcoming adventure and getting to know each other.

Meals	Accommodation
D	Hotel in Abashiri

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

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



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

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

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

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

Meals	Activity	Duration	Accommodation
B, L, D	Wildlife Spotting	2 hours	Ryokan in Kawayu Onsen
	Walking	2 – 3 hours	

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### Day 3 - Explore Lake Mashu, Akan-Mashu National Park

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



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

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

In the afternoon, we'll head to the north side of Lake Mashu for a snowshoe adventure. Here, we'll follow a tranquil stream to Kaminoko Pond, which is fed by spring water originating from the lake. Even in subzero temperatures, the stream remains unfrozen, providing a vital water source for birds and wildlife. We trek through the pristine Sakhalin Fir forest, while looking for animal tracks in the snow.

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

Meals	Activity	Duration	Accommodation
B, L, D	Snowshoeing	4 - 5 hours	Ryokan in Yoroushi Onsen
	Wildlife Spotting	2 hours	

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### Day 4 - Explore Notsuke Peninsula & Pogawa Historical Forest Park

After breakfast at our accommodation in Yoroushi Onsen, we'll drive an hour to Notsuke Peninsula, Japan's largest sand spit, extending over 26km (16mi) into the Sea of Okhotsk. Registered as a Ramsar site, the peninsula is a significant home for wildlife, especially migratory birds.



We'll drive along the peninsula searching for wildlife, jumping out of the van to get a better look when we can. As well as the White-Tailed Eagles and wintering Stellar's Sea Eagles, we have the opportunity to see iconic Hokkaido mammals such as Japanese deer and red foxes. After our walk, we'll enjoy lunch at Notsuke Peninsula.

In the afternoon, we'll visit Pogawa Historical Forest Park in Shibetsu Town. Shibetsu is renowned for its salmon fishing. The salmon catch first brought people here 10,000 years ago, and we will experience this history at the Karikariusu archaeological site. The site overlooks the Shibetsu Wetland and the area is home to many bird species. We'll snowshoe for about two hours through this area to explore the forest and streams feeding the wetland.

In the late afternoon, we'll return to our inn at Yoroushi Onsen, where we can relax in the riverside hot springs and have another chance to see the rare Blakiston's fish owl.

Meals	Activity	Duration	Accommodation
B, L, D	Wildlife Spotting	2.5 hours	Ryokan in Yoroushi Onsen
	Snowshoeing	2 hours	

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### Day 5 - Hike near Yoroushi Onsen & Visit the Red-crowned Crane Sanctuary in Tsurui

This morning, before heading back inland toward Tsurui, we'll hike up Mt. Moan—just 15 minutes from Yoroushi Onsen. From the summit at 357m (1,200ft), on clear days we can enjoy sweeping views of the vast Konsen Plateau and the lattice-pattern windbreak forests, designated as Hokkaido Heritage. The Mt. Moan hike takes approximately 3 hours. The mountain is very exposed, so if conditions are too “wintery”, we will spend time exploring the sheltered forests instead.



After our hike, we'll continue to Tsurui, where we'll stop for lunch. Tsurui is famous for its role in the recovery of the Red-crowned Crane population. The number of cranes has rebounded to almost 1,900 after dropping to less than 20 in the early 1900s. The Tsurui Ito Red-crowned Crane Sanctuary has played a big part in this by feeding the cranes over winter, when their natural food sources are scarce. We will spend some time at the Sanctuary watching the cranes feed and socialise.

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

Meals	Activity	Duration	Accommodation
B, L, D	Snowshoeing	3 hours	Hotel in Tsurui
	Wildlife Spotting	2.5 hours	

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### Day 6 - Explore Kushiro-Shitsugen National Park

If you don't mind getting up early, we'd like to head out before sunrise (about 6:30 am) to see the cranes along the Setsuri River. The river is a popular nesting site for the Red-crowned Cranes and Otowa Bridge provides a spectacular view of the birds both roosting in the river and flying out in search of breakfast.



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

This particular location is a habitat for Kingfisher, Waterfowl and Eagles. After 1.5 hours of canoeing, we will warm up in a nearby cafe for lunch.

Following lunch, we'll hike up to Yumegaoka Observatory near Lake Takkobu. The hike is 4.6km return (2.9mi), and the observatory provides a spectacular view of Kushiro Wetland from above, allowing us to see how vast the wetland really is. This serves as a fitting finale—the last outdoor activity we'll do together as a group. We will celebrate the completion of our tour over dinner in downtown Kushiro.

Meals	Activity	Duration	Accommodation
B, L, D	Wildlife Spotting	1.5 hours	Hotel in Kushiro
	Canoeing	1.5 hours	
	Hiking	3 hours	

### Day 7 - Farewells in Kushiro

The tour finishes after breakfast today. We can drop you off at either Kushiro JR Station or Kushiro Airport between 8:30 am and 9:10 am.

Meals	
B	

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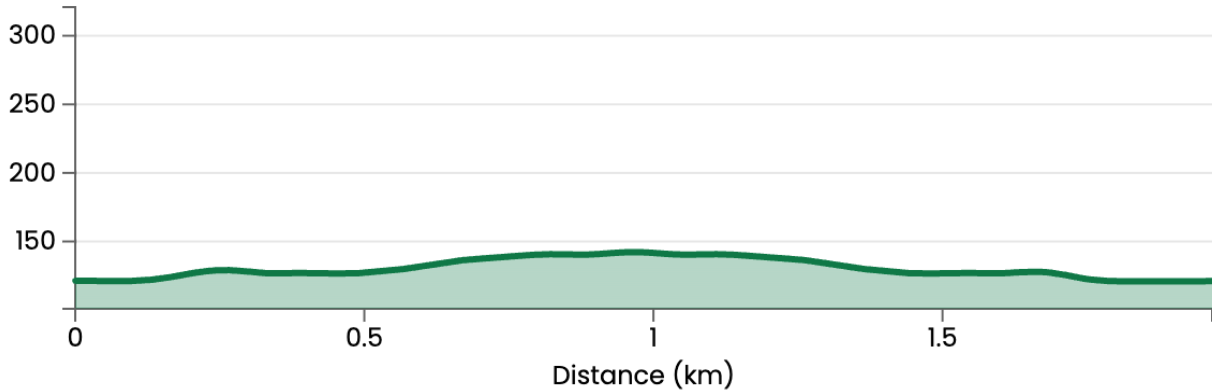
## Elevation Profiles

**Day 2** - Wakoto Peninsula

**Distance** - 2 km / 1.2 mi

**Ascent** - 50 m / 163 ft

Elevation (m)

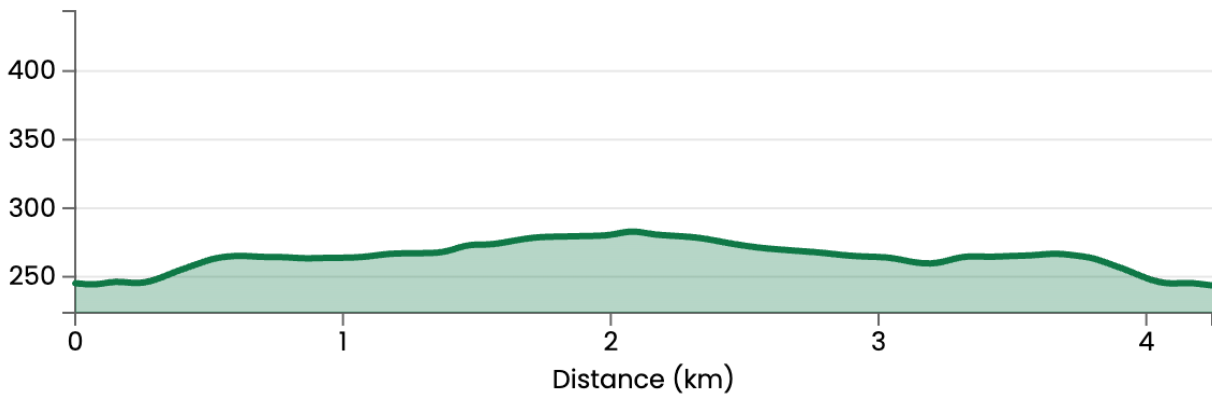


**Day 3** - Kaminoko Pond

**Distance** - 4.2 km / 2.6 mi

**Ascent** - 66 m / 217 ft

Elevation (m)

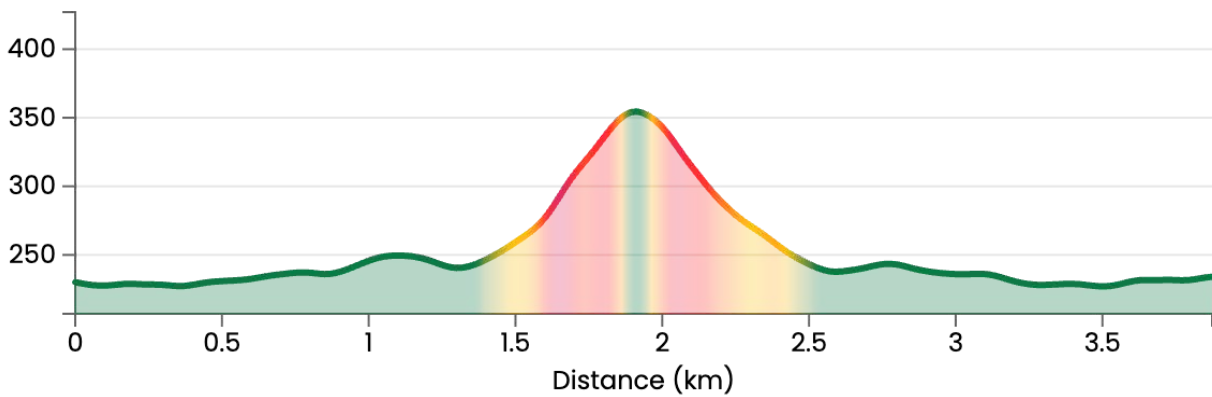


**Day 5** - Mt Moan

**Distance** - 3.9 km / 2.4 mi

**Ascent** - 231 m / 758 ft

Elevation (m)

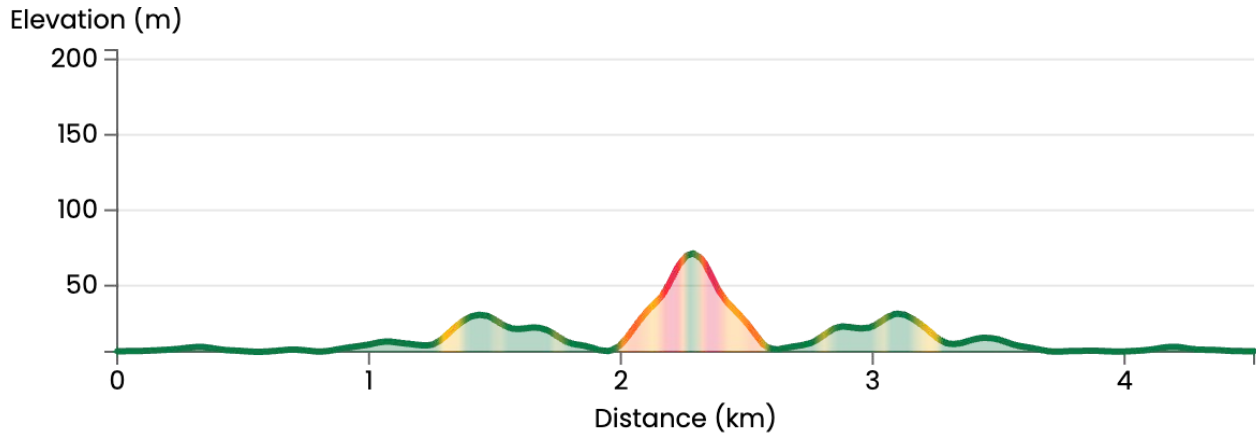


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**Day 6** - Yumegaoka Observatory    **Distance** - 4.5 km / 2.8 mi    **Ascent** - 215 m / 705 ft



### Our recommended reading

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

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

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

[Hokkaido Wildlife Guide](#)

[How to Onsen \(Like a Local!\)](#)

[What to pack for Hokkaido?](#)

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

[Going Gluten Free in Hokkaido](#)

[Vegan & Vegetarian in Hokkaido](#)