

Shikotsu-Toya

6 Day Winter Hiking Tour



Explore a land of ice and fire among the snow-capped volcanoes of Shikotsu-Toya National Park. Experience firsthand the fluffy snow, winter forests, white peaks, and frozen waterfalls of Sapporo's closest national park.

[View Departure Dates & Prices](#)

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About the Tour

Start	Finish	Grading	Season
New Chitose	Jozankei	Intermediate Winter hiking	Jan & Mar

About Shikotsu–Toya National Park

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. For us, however, it is not the resorts that we are interested in but the amazing landscape that makes this national park perfect for adventure travel. As well as the warm hot springs, it is also home to rich forests, fascinating geological hikes and incredible wildlife. In winter, mountain trails open up as snowshoeing routes that allow the adventurous to experience the unique sight of fiery volcanoes capped with Hokkaido’s magical snow and pure blue caldera lakes surrounded by white mountain rings.

Tour highlights

- Witness the power of the Earth as we take in views of active volcanoes and pass by steaming fumaroles.
- Travel beyond the trail using snowshoes to explore wintery forests, snow-covered mountains and ice free streams.
- Enjoy views of Lake Shikotsu, Japan’s northern most ice-free lake surrounded by snow capped peaks.
- Bathe in natural hot springs heated by volcanoes that dominate the landscape.
- Enjoy the sight of Hokkaido’s charming wildlife, such as Red Squirrel, Japanese Deer, Japanese Red Fox and migratory Whooper Swans.

Who is this tour for?

- Active travelers who enjoy uphill snowshoeing or hiking, averaging 6 km (3.7 mi) a day with elevation gains of up to 570 m (1,850 ft).
- 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	Km	Miles	Meals ¹
1	Meet your group and walk at Lake Utonai	2.3	1.4	D ▾
2	Hike up Mt. Monbetsu	8.7	5.4	B, D ▾
3	Hike to frozen waterfalls in Shiraoi or to Mt. Bakemono	5.3 / 7.4	3.3 / 4.6	B, D ▾
4	Hike up Mt. Usu	6.0	3.7	B, D ▾
5	Hike up Mt. Kokimobetsu	5.8	3.6	B, D ▾
6	Farewells in Jozankei	0	0	B ▾

Accommodation

Day	Type	Location	Ensuite Toilet	Ensuite Shower	Onsen	Laundry
1	Ryokan ▾ ²	Lake Shikotsu	✓		✓	
2	Hotel ▾	Kitayuzawa	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	Hotel ▾	Kitayuzawa	✓	✓	✓	✓
4	Ryokan ▾	Jozankei	✓		✓	✓
5	Ryokan ▾	Jozankei	✓		✓	✓

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

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

² Ryokan is a traditional Japanese inn.

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Travel style

This tour consists of a series of snow hikes from different trailheads around the region. Each hike takes about 4 hours – enough time to enjoy Hokkaido’s brisk winter without being in the cold for too long. We travel between locations in our van, where your luggage remains during the day. This allows you to explore with only a light day pack. After each hike, we transfer to our accommodation, which all feature *onsen* (hot springs) so you can rewarm and recover after a day in sub-zero temperatures.

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.

What is the hiking like on this tour?

This tour takes place in mid-winter when Hokkaido’s hiking trails are buried under snow. We use snowshoes when necessary to walk on top of the snow and explore wilderness areas beyond the summer trails. On well-trodden or wind-blown paths, we may instead hike in standard winter boots.

Snowshoeing is accessible to all and straightforward to learn, you can read our [introduction to snowshoeing](#) for an outline of what to expect. We will hike up to 8.7 km (5.4 miles) in a day. We have balanced some days with a lot of elevation gain – up to 570 m / 1,860 ft – with flatter days in the forest. Snowshoeing is physically more demanding than standard hiking, so take this into account when reviewing the distances and elevation profiles. If you are a reasonably fit walker who is happy spending the whole day on the trail, you will be able to complete these hikes comfortably.

Expect average temperatures between 0°C (32°F) and -10°C (14°F), though colder extremes are possible. While the air is frigid, the physical effort of snowshoeing or hiking warms you up quickly. If you dress only for the cold, you will overheat and perspire while moving; this moisture leads to a rapid chill once you stop. A versatile layering system is essential to stay dry and warm. Please consult the [packing list](#) to ensure you have the correct clothing for these conditions.

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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

- 5 nights accommodation on a twin share basis
- 5 breakfasts and 5 dinners
- Snowshoes & poles rental
- All transport as described in the itinerary
- English speaking local guide(s)

What's not included

- Lunches - Leaving these out gives us flexibility to either stop at convenience stores to pick up food to eat on the trail, or stop at restaurants if the weather isn't suitable for a picnic.
- Airfare
- Travel insurance
- Personal expenses
- Drinks with included meals

When do you run this tour?

We run this tour in both late January and early March. Winter is a magical time of year in Hokkaido, when the landscape becomes a beautiful pure white and the whole world seems silent and still. 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 late December, Hokkaido will be blanketed in its characteristic pure white snow, lingering until into March. Late January is typically the heart of winter, with cold temperatures and deep, fresh snow, making for fantastic snowshoeing and a chance of encountering beautiful natural phenomena like rime ice or even diamond dust in the early mornings. Early March is usually a little warmer, while there is still plenty of snow in the mountains. The snow is often more compacted than in January, which makes snowshoeing easier. The weather is also increasingly settled, with sunny days more common than in mid-winter.

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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. With the thick bush buried, we are free to explore the forests and mountains, with access to areas that may be more challenging or even completely out of our reach in summer. Hike in the snow, and 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, Red Foxes and Japanese Deer leave a network of footprints behind as they search for food and beautiful Whooper Swans nest around lakes, escaping Siberia's freezing temperatures. 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. Many of the accommodations we will use on this tour are completely Japanese-style with no ensuite shower in the rooms – because the facility would much rather you use their wonderful, natural hot spring baths! So after your hike, you can slip into a steaming hot spring to warm up your body and soothe your tired muscles, just as Japanese hikers do (and you may even meet a few of them in the bath yourself!). 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 Chitose

We will meet at **1:00 pm at JR Chitose Station** or **1:30 pm at New Chitose Airport**. Upon booking, please share your travel plans so we can confirm your specific meeting arrangements.

The closest airport is New Chitose Airport (CTS), with direct flights to and from a number of international airports and most major airports in Japan, including Tokyo Haneda (HND), Tokyo Narita (NRT), Osaka Itami (ITM), and Osaka Kansai (KIX).

Rapid Airport trains run regularly between CTS, Chitose, and Sapporo. The journey takes 6 minutes between CTS and Chitose Station (fare JPY 290) and 40 minutes between CTS and Sapporo Station (fare JPY 1,230). The journey between Chitose and Sapporo takes approximately 30 minutes and costs JPY 1,040.

You can search schedules and fares in English on [Japan Transit Planner website](#).

Onward travel from Jozankei

The tour finishes after breakfast in Jozankei.

For those traveling onwards to Sapporo, the hotel provides a courtesy shuttle service at 10:00am. Please note that the shuttle can fill up early at this time of year, so we recommend letting us know as soon as possible if you would like to travel on to Sapporo after our tour. There is also the "Kappa Liner" highway bus service with multiple departures during the day. The Kappa Liner also requires a prior reservation. Please let us know when you book and we can either book the shuttle for you or help you book the Kappa Liner. The liner costs JPY 1,400.

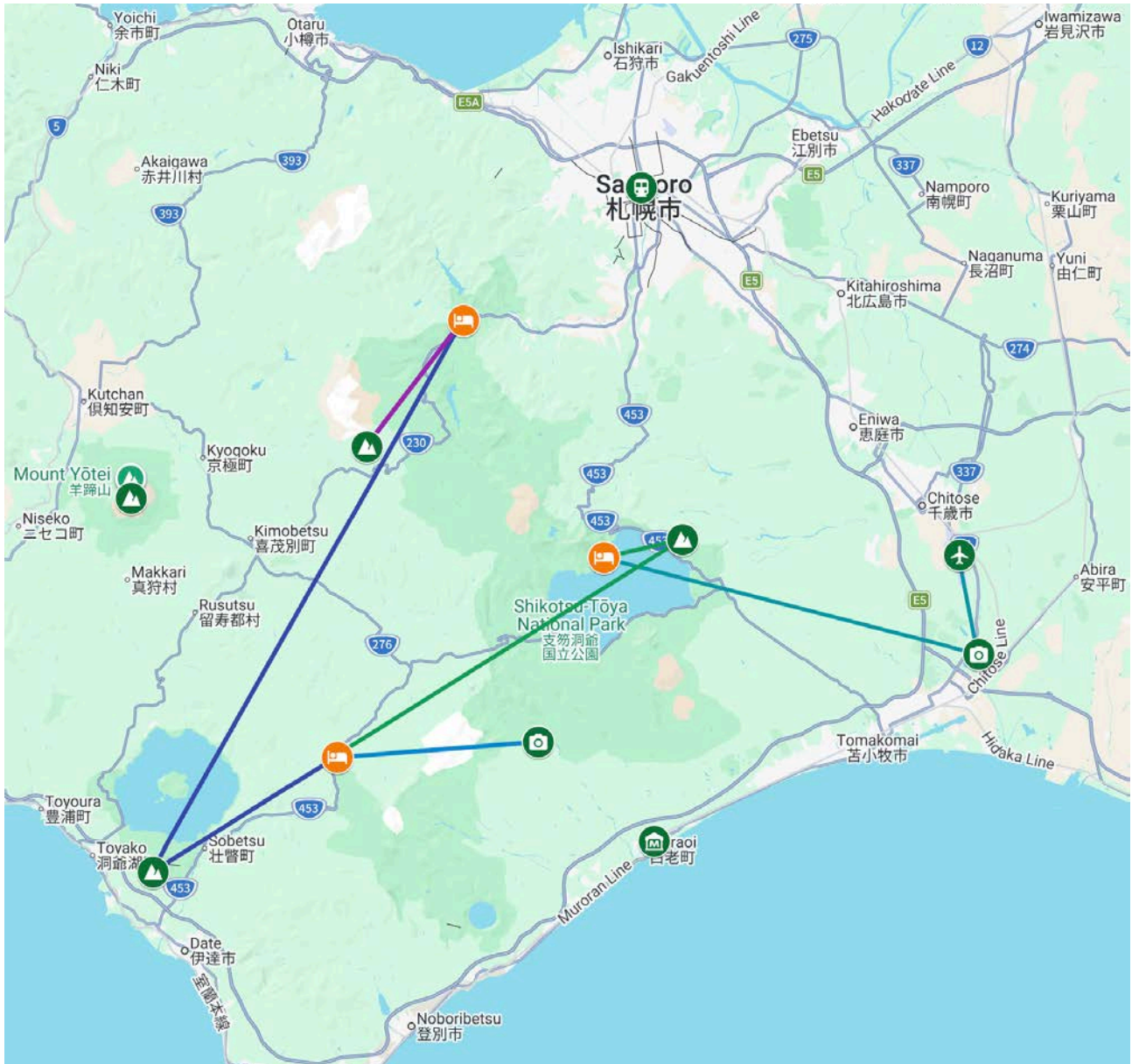
If you are planning on spending more time exploring Hokkaido's famous powder snow in the Niseko area, there are also buses heading to Niseko from Jozankei, departing at 09:00 and 10:30 am. These buses also require reservation and cost JPY 5,300.

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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 – Meet your group and walk at Lake Utonai

We will pick you up at 1:00 pm at JR Chitose Station or 1:30 pm at New Chitose Airport. Once we have met everyone, we will make our way to Lake Utonai, 15 minutes away, to get to know each other and get a feel for the winter conditions. We will head straight out for our first adventure, so please ensure you have eaten lunch before meeting the group.



Once at the lake, we will embark on a flat loop out to the lakeshore, giving you the chance to get used to walking on snow. Despite being sandwiched between New Chitose Airport and the port town of Tomakomai, Lake Utonai is an important wetland for migratory birds. If we are lucky, we may see some of these, including Whooper Swans, resting on the water.

After returning from our warm-up adventure, we will transfer to Lake Shikotsu, a deep caldera lake in the Shikotsu–Toya National Park, where we will stay for the night. Our accommodation features an amazing onsen (hot spring) with a lake view; you may even see some Japanese Deer strolling past as you soak. After warming up in the hot spring, we will enjoy a delicious dinner in the ryokan before retiring full and excited for the next day's adventure.

Meals	Hike	Ascent	Accommodation
D	2.3 km 1.4 mi	+ 0 m + 0 ft	Ryokan at Lake Shikotsu

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Day 2 – Hike up Mt. Monbetsu

Today we head for the mountains for our first peak of the tour: a steady climb up the 865 m (2840 ft) high Mt. Monbetsu. Having found our snowshoe legs on the flat yesterday, this is the perfect opportunity to experience a more sustained uphill walk.



After checking out, a little over 10 minute drive gets us to the trailhead. This is a very popular route among local snowshoers, offering a gentle gradient along a wide mountain road.

On the way up, we'll enjoy incredible views of Lake Shikotsu, Mt. Fuppushi and Mt. Tarumae, all of which are visible across the water. After crossing the tree line on a clear day, we can even see as far as the active volcano, Mt. Eniwa, in the distance.

The unobstructed views from Mt. Monbetsu mean there is little shelter near the top. If Hokkaido's wild winter weather makes conditions unfit for us to head to the summit, we will instead snowshoe on a different trail at lower altitudes near Lake Shikotsu.

If the weather looks promising, we will pick up supplies for a picnic lunch in advance to enjoy during the hike. Otherwise, we will have a late lunch after our descent at one of the restaurants in the village before transferring to our next accommodation, nestled away by a peaceful river in Kitayuzawa. As we are staying here for two nights, you can fully settle in and take advantage of the hotel's large outdoor bath, enjoying the crisp winter air whilst rewarming and soothing your body.

Meals	Hike	Ascent	Accommodation
B, D	8.7 km 5.4 mi	+ 568 m + 1,862 ft	Hotel in Kitayuzawa

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Day 3 – Hike to frozen waterfalls in Shiraoi or to Mt. Bakemono

One of the great things about winter in Hokkaido is how the blanket of snow buries the usually thick undergrowth. This allows us to travel beyond the usual trails and access places that are typically guarded by dense bush.

We have two options today and your guides will pick the best one depending on the weather and the season.



The first option is a secluded and sheltered valley 30 minutes drive from our hotel. The valley is home to some dramatic waterfalls which are frozen in place during winter, creating impressive ice columns. In contrast, the streams themselves stay unfrozen, letting us see signs of the wildlife that visit these scarce water sources, including Japanese Deer and Brown Dippers. This hike covers 7.4 km (4.6 mi) in two sections.

Our second option is Orofure Pass, a 30 minute drive in the other direction. From the pass, we follow an open ridgeline dotted with deciduous trees, where ice and snow cling to the branches and create delicate patterns right beside the trail as we pass. As we hike, we can soak in the wide-open views across the mountains of Shikotsu–Toya National Park. From our high point at Mt. Bakemono (1,070 m / 3,510 ft), we return back to our van at the pass, covering a total of 5.3 km (3.3 mi).

Depending on the weather, we will either have lunch out in the woods or at a local cafe. If we are having a picnic lunch, we will stop by a convenience store on the way to the trail head so you can buy food and snacks.

After our adventures, we return to our hotel for a second night, where we can fuel up again on a tasty meal and soak in the onsen, ready for tomorrow's mountain.

Meals	Hike	Ascent	Accommodation
B, D	5.3 / 7.4 km 3.3 / 4.6 mi	+ 217 / 440 m + 712 / 1,440 ft	Hotel in Kitayuzawa

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Day 4 – Hike up Mt. Usu

Today we head for an active stratovolcano: Mt. Usu, which sits on the rim of the Lake Toya caldera and is a true highlight of the region.

We drive 45 minutes to the southern side of the mountain, where we will hike through snow-covered old-growth forests. We will climb to the crater rim, where we are met with a spectacular view of the Pacific Ocean on one side and Mt. Usu's impressive steaming caldera on the other. Our route continues up



to the crater observatory, where we can safely observe the volcanic landscape from above. Afterwards, we will retrace our steps for a steady descent back through the forest.

We will have lunch on the mountain today, so we'll stop by a local convenience store on the way to the trailhead for you to purchase your lunch and snacks.

As the crater rim of Mt. Usu is exposed to the weather, we may swap this hike to Day 3 and do Day 3's waterfall hike on Day 4 instead. We will be flexible based on the weather forecast.

After descending, we will travel inland to Jozankei Onsen. Fun fact: although Jozankei is technically within Sapporo City, it is still part of Shikotsu–Toya National Park. Dinner will be served at our accommodation this evening. As always, don't forget to enjoy a soak in the hotel's onsen!

Meals	Hike	Ascent	Accommodation
B, D	6.0 km 3.7 mi	+ 434 m + 1,425 ft	Ryokan in Jozankei

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Day 5 – Hike up Mt. Kokimobetsu

This morning we will drive for about 30 minutes to the Mt. Kokimobetsu trailhead. The drive will take us over Nakayama Pass, which links Sapporo and the popular ski resort area of Niseko.

Today’s trail begins with a steep climb, then flattens out onto a beautiful, forested ridge where we can find magnolia trees amongst the winter canopy. As we push up the final steep section toward the summit at 970 m (3,182 ft), the forest transitions, and we find ourselves walking amongst hardy Erman’s Birch trees. Their pale bark against the white landscape is a classic Hokkaido scene.



Copious amounts of snowfall—some of the highest in Hokkaido—along with good access make Mt. Kokimobetsu a popular spot for local snow hikers and skiers. The views of Mt. Yotei, a local icon, from these upper slopes also add to the draw. The conical Mt. Yotei is also known as Ezo-Fuji due to its uncanny resemblance to Mt. Fuji (“Ezo” being the old Japanese word for Hokkaido).

Unsurprisingly, the mountain is at the mercy of the weather. If conditions make it unsuitable to head for the summit, we will instead explore the forests and streams that line the foot of the mountain.

As always, we will carry plenty of provisions with us for the day, but after our descent, we will stop by Roadside Station Nakayama Pass to warm ourselves up with some hot drinks and food. A visit to a Japanese Roadside Station is quite an experience in itself! We recommend exploring the facility to see what unusual local souvenirs, specialities and goods you can spot.

Afterwards, we will return to our base at Jozankei Onsen. Tonight, we will dine together to celebrate the completion of our tour.

Meals	Hike	Ascent	Accommodation
B, D	5.8 km 3.6 mi	+ 490 m + 1,608 ft	Ryokan in Jozankei

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Day 6 – Farewells in Jozankei

Otsukaresama desu! (Good job!) Our tour finishes after breakfast today, leaving you plenty of time for onward travel.

Have a safe onward journey! *Itterasshai!*

Meals	
B	

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](#)

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

[What to pack for Hokkaido?](#)

[Going Gluten Free in Hokkaido](#)

[Vegan & Vegetarian in Hokkaido](#)

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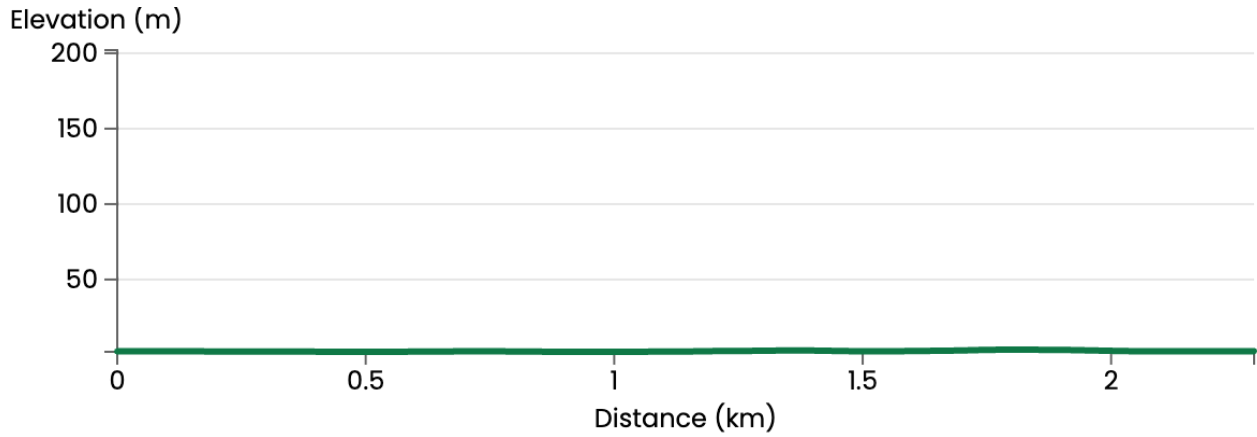
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Elevation profiles

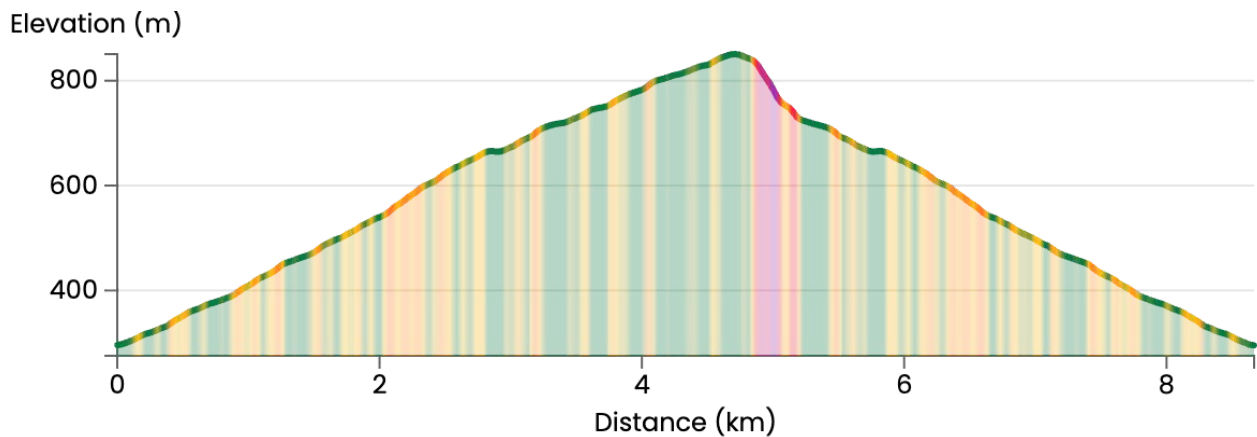
Day 1 - Lake Utonai

Distance - 2.3 km / 1.4 mi **Ascent** - 0 m / 0 ft



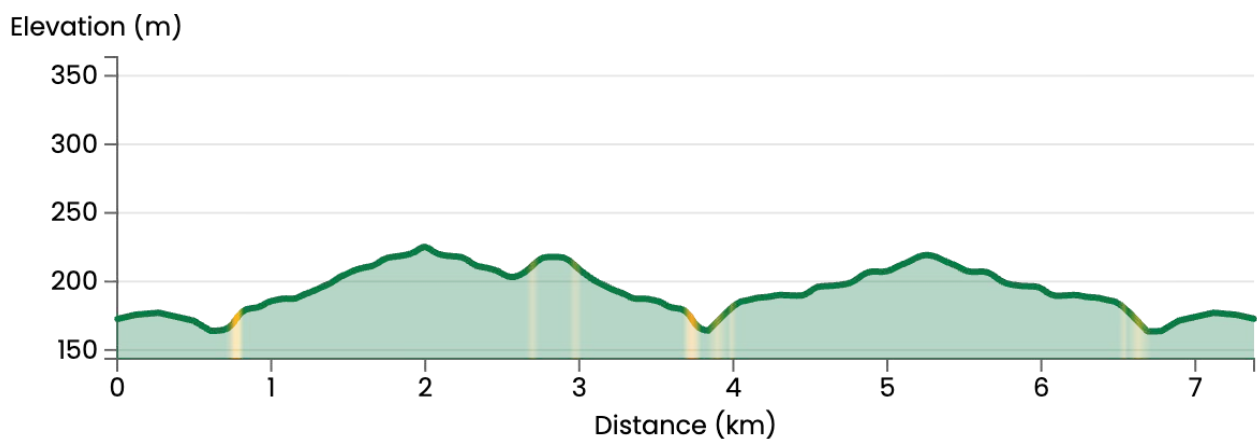
Day 2 - Mt. Monbetsu

Distance - 8.7 km / 5.4 mi **Ascent** - 568 m / 1,862 ft



Day 3 - Shiraoi Waterfalls

Distance - 7.4 km / 4.6 mi **Ascent** - 217 m / 712 ft

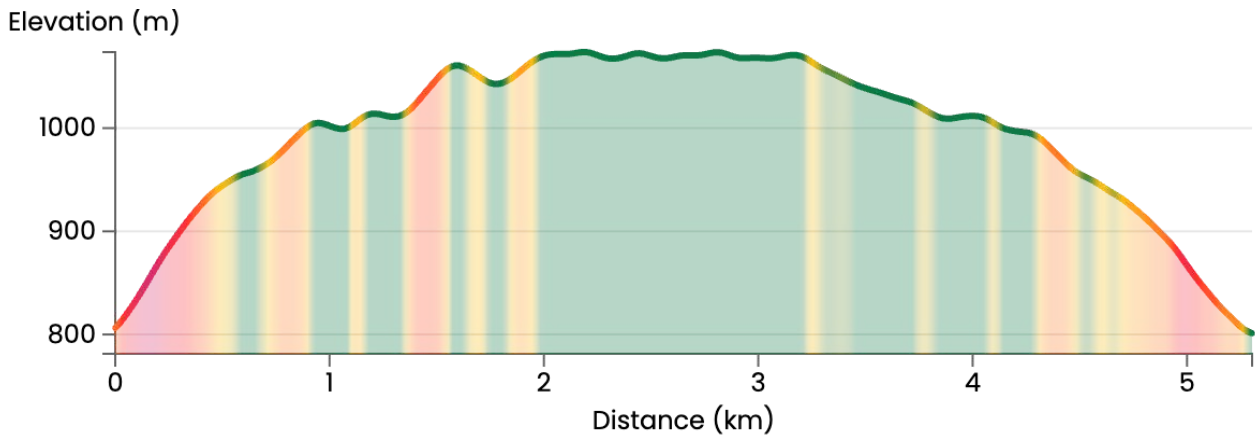


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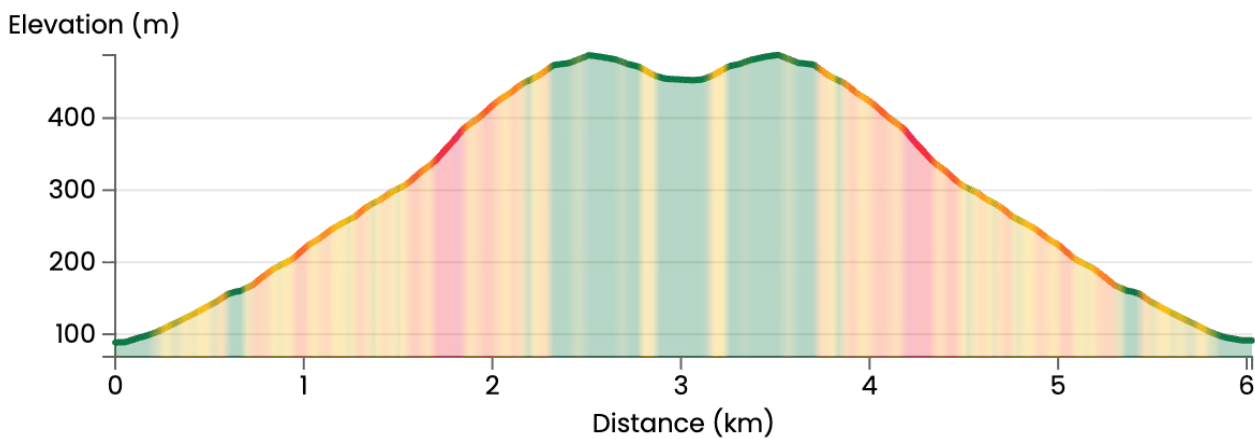
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Day 3 - Orofure Pass to Mt. Bakemono **Distance** - 5.3 km / 3.3 mi **Ascent** - 440 m / 1444 ft



Day 4 - Mt. Usu **Distance** - 6.0 km / 3.7 mi **Ascent** - 434 m / 1,425 ft



Day 5 - Mt. Kokimobetsu **Distance** - 5.8 km / 3.6 mi **Ascent** - 490 m / 1,608 ft

