

## Hokkaido Hotspots

*Journey to northernmost Japan to explore the pristine scenery and fascinating culture of Hokkaido.*



### Day 1 – Arrive in Tokyo

You will be met by our airport representative on arrival in Tokyo. They will escort you to the train/shuttle bus that will take you to your hotel in the city centre.

The rest of the day is at leisure. If arriving in the morning, we can arrange for a guided afternoon tour taking in some of Tokyo's highlights, though you may prefer to explore the city at leisure or relax in your hotel.

### Day 2 – Tokyo (B)

Today is a chance for you to get a real feel for Tokyo, Japan's sprawling capital. Accompanied by a local guide, you'll explore the city's central highlights, from the classical architecture of Asakusa, Tokyo's traditional "low" town, to the towering high rises of Omotesando.

Your first stop is Meiji Jingu, Tokyo's most famous shrine. Set within a huge 200-acre park in the heart of the city, and surrounded by beautiful gardens, Meiji is in many ways Tokyo's defining landmark.

From Meiji, take a stroll down Takeshita Street (Harajuku), a popular teen hangout, to Omotesando. This lengthy promenade is famous the world over and houses Tokyo's most fashionable stores and boutiques, as well as many of its most striking buildings, such as the iconic department store, Omotesando Hills.



A short subway ride will take you from the modernist sheen of Omotesando, with its imposing tower blocks and stylized glass-and-metal facades, to the narrow alley ways and wooden shopfronts of Asakusa.

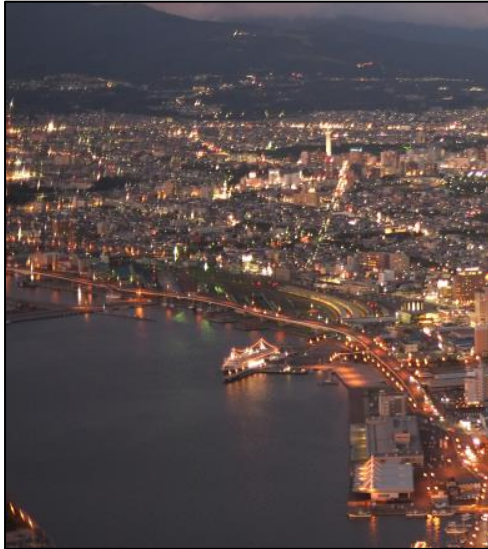
The heart of Tokyo's *shitamachi*, or old town, Asakusa is the city's traditional entertainment district, as well as the original home of Kabuki theatre. Though badly damaged during the bombing raids of the 1940s, it houses some fascinating historical monuments, foremost among them Sensoji, Tokyo's oldest and largest Buddhist temple. Take the time to wander through Asakusa's lantern-lit lanes and tour its ancient temples before continuing to Ueno.

Your final stop for the day is Ameyokocho, a bustling market set beneath the railway lines in Ueno district. The site of Tokyo's largest black market in the years following WWII, this lively market street is filled with stalls and stands selling exotic foods, antiques and eccentric gifts. The market tends to wind down in the late afternoon, making it a good time to visit.



NB. The order of your Tokyo tour may change depending on the location of your hotel. There's a huge amount to see in Tokyo and you can't possibly hope to cover everything in a day – let your guide know if you have any particular interests and they'll adjust your itinerary to suit.





### **Day 3 – Tokyo to Hakodate**

Depart Tokyo this morning on the Shinkansen line to Hakodate, Hokkaido. Opened in 2016, the Hokkaido Shinkansen line takes just 4 hours to carry you from Tokyo to Japan’s northernmost island!

The train arrives into Shin Hakodate Hokuto Station, from where you can catch the Hakodate Liner to Hakodate Central Station.

On arrival in downtown Hakodate, transfer to your centrally located hotel.

The rest of the day is at leisure. After dinner, we recommend taking a trip by ropeway to the summit of Mount Hakodate to take in the night view – considered to be among the best in Japan.

### **Day 4 – Hakodate Bay Area & Onuma Park (B)**

Explore Hakodate and the surrounding region with the aid of a knowledgeable local guide.

Hakodate is an old harbour city with a rich maritime history. As the first Japanese port to open itself to overseas trade, it is notable for its congenial blend of European and Japanese architecture, much of it dating back to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, as well as its distinctive cuisine.

You’ll have the chance to learn more about the latter this morning as you explore the morning vegetable and seafood market. Your guide will collect you from your hotel for the start of the walking tour. Take the time to explore the market, marvelling at the variety of seafood on offer, and sampling some of the local specialities, such as shio (squid ink) ramen!

After the market tour, catch the train to Onuma Park, 28km north of Hakodate (45 mins). Onuma is known for its beautiful lakeland and mountain scenery. Spend the rest of the morning exploring on foot or by bike the scenic spots around Lakes Onuma and Konuma (on a clear day, the view of Mt Komagatake reflected in the water of the lakes is wonderful!), before returning to the city for lunch in the bay area.



After lunch, embark on a walking tour of Hakodate’s downtown bay area, where you’ll discover seafood restaurants, old brick warehouses and souvenir stores. Not far from here, at the base of Mount Hakodate, you’ll find the 19 sloping streets of Motomachi, home to many of the city’s most distinctive

buildings, including the Old British Consulate, the Russian Orthodox Church, and Higashi-Hongan-ji Buddhist Temple.



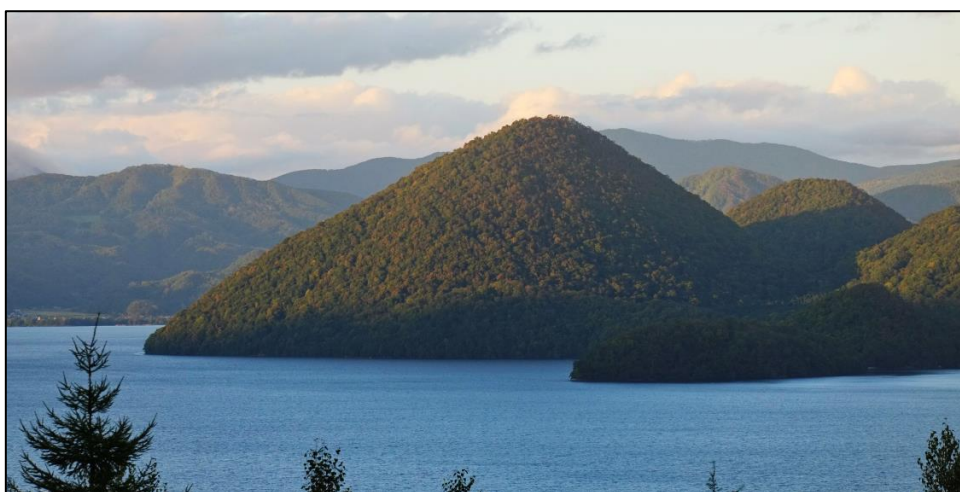
Finally, take the tram to Goryokaku Park, the site of a huge moat-enclosed citadel in the shape of a star. Built at the end of the Edo era, the fort once housed the Hakodate magistrate's office (now a museum), but today it's a public park that is free to enter. End the day with an elevator ride to the top of the 107m high Goryokaku Tower for a bird's eye view of the park. In the Sakura season, when the park blooms with cherry blossoms, the view is just wonderful!

### Day 5 - Hakodate to Shikotsu-Toya National Park (B, L, D)

Meet with your guide after breakfast and set off by car for Shikotsu-Toya National Park (180kms; 3 hours).

Shikotsu-Toya is Hokkaido's most visited national park, and with good reason, for it offers some of the most beautiful scenery to be found anywhere on the island. Lake Toya and Lake Shikotsu, large caldera lakes formed by volcanic activity, form the central attractions of the park, and are surrounded by popular walking trails.

After lunch at a local restaurant, explore the area around Lake Toya and Mt. Usu, an active volcano overlooking the lake on one side and the ocean on its other. You might like to start with a visit to the Usu Volcano Science Museum, whose exhibitions detail the eruptions of 1977 and 2000, before travelling to the top of the mountain by ropeway to take in the marvellous views of the lake, the ocean and of Mt. Usu's crater.





Late afternoon, drive to Toyako Onsen, on the shore of Lake Toya, where you stay tonight in a local ryokan. After checking in, enjoy a traditional kaiseki dinner, followed by a soak in the hot springs.



## Day 6 - Shikotsu-Toya National Park (B, D)

Continue your explorations of Shikotsu-Toya National Park with guide and private vehicle.

Your first stop is Noboribetsu Onsen, an area famous for its volcanic activity and hot springs. Enjoy a walk among the hot steam vents and sulphurous streams in Jigokudani, or “Hell’s Valley”. From Jigokudani, it’s a short hike to Oyunuma, a steamy, sulphurous pond where the surface water temperature can be as hot as 50°C.

In the afternoon, hop back in the car and travel to the Shiraoi Ainu open-air museum, where you can explore a simulacrum of a traditional Ainu village, complete with thatched houses and displays on Ainu folk culture and traditions.

Late afternoon, return to your ryokan for a kaiseki dinner. You’ll say goodbye to your guide and driver on your return to the ryokan, as they won’t be accompanying you to Sapporo tomorrow.

## Day 7 - Shikotsu-Toya to Sapporo (B)

Catch the morning train from Toyako Onsen to Sapporo (two hours), the capital of Hokkaido and Japan’s fifth largest city, arriving late morning. After dropping your luggage off at your hotel in the city centre (check-in will be later), the rest of the day is free for you to explore the city at leisure.

Start with Odori Park, a long boulevard that cuts through the heart of downtown Sapporo. At the eastern end of the promenade stands the Sapporo TV Tower, commanding a bird’s-eye view of the city and surrounding area from its observation deck. It’s well worth taking the elevator to the observatory for a marvellous view of the city and its surrounds—though you may prefer to return in the evening for a view of the city lights.

A couple of blocks away from the TV Tower is the Clock Tower. Built in 1878, Sapporo’s clock tower isn’t a grand monument but rather a simple wooden building in the American mid-western style, notable for being the oldest building in the city and for its 135 year old clock face. Situated incongruously amidst the skyscrapers and shopping malls of central Sapporo, it has a quiet charm and houses a fascinating display on Sapporo’s early history.

To end the day, we recommend a visit to the Sapporo Beer Museum, where you can sample Japan’s most famous brew, or to Susukino, Sapporo’s lively night life district. For dinner, try Ramen Street, famous across Japan for its multitude of ramen restaurants.



## Day 8 - Sapporo / Otaru Day Trip (B)

Today is free for you to explore Sapporo and its surrounds. We recommend a pleasant day trip to Otaru, 45 minutes north-west of Sapporo by train (the JR train departs regularly and is covered by your JR Pass).

The small, romantic port city of Otaru is steeped in history. Like Hakodate and Sapporo, Otaru was an early centre of industry on the island, and a notable trading and fishing port. It served as the terminus for Hokkaido's first railway station, connecting it with Sapporo and other developed cities.

This era of early industry is still visible in Otaru's canal and port area, with its restored stone and brick warehouses, and its old Herring mansions, built in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century by Otaru's wealthy fishermen.

Start your exploration of Otaru with the central canal area, whose old warehouses have been converted to shops and sushi restaurants. From here, continue to Sakaimachi Street, a beautifully-preserved merchant street lined with boutique stores, galleries and cafes – take the time to visit the music box museum and glass workshop. When ready, return to Sapporo by train.



NB. Don't leave Otaru without stopping for lunch at one of its sushi restaurants, said to be among the very best in Japan!

## Day 9 - Sapporo - Furano (B, L)

Enjoy a change of pace today as you head inland to Furano, an old farming town famous for its purple lavender and snow fields – and its changeable weather!



Furano is 3 hours by train from Sapporo. Set off early so as to arrive around noon, giving you time to drop your luggage off at your hotel in the town centre and then explore.

Furano is best visited in the summer months (mid-June to mid-August), when the lavender fields bloom a beautiful purple; or in the deep winter, when the hills are coated in snow and Furano transformed into one of Japan's most popular skiing destinations.

Start your tour with a visit to Furano's famed winery, where you'll be able to sample the wine and enjoy a lunch made from locally-sourced ingredients. Afterwards, we recommend a stop at the Furano Cheese Factory, famous across Japan for its fine cheeses (depending on the time of your visit, you can join a butter-making lesson.)

End the day with a visit to Furano's sister town of Biei (45 minutes by bus), which, like Furano, is famous for its beautiful flower fields.



After a day of sightseeing, head back to your hotel in Furano. Evening at leisure.

## Day 10 - Furano to Daisetsuzan (B, D)

Depart Furano this morning on the train to Kamikawa, changing at Asahikawa – this journey takes approx. 2 hours and is covered by your JR Pass. On arrival at Kamikawa, catch the bus to Sounkyo ('Cloudy Gorge').

Sounkyo is a small hot spring resort situated in the north of Daisetsuzan National Park. It serves as a popular base from which to explore the mountains, with ropeway access to one of the tallest peaks, Kurodake.

Japan's largest national park, Daisetsuzan ('Mountains of Big Snow') is a vast wilderness of volcanic peaks, crystal clear lakes and coniferous forest. It extends for some 2,200 sq km – making it almost as large as the entire Okinawa archipelago – and contains some of Japan's most stunning mountain scenery.

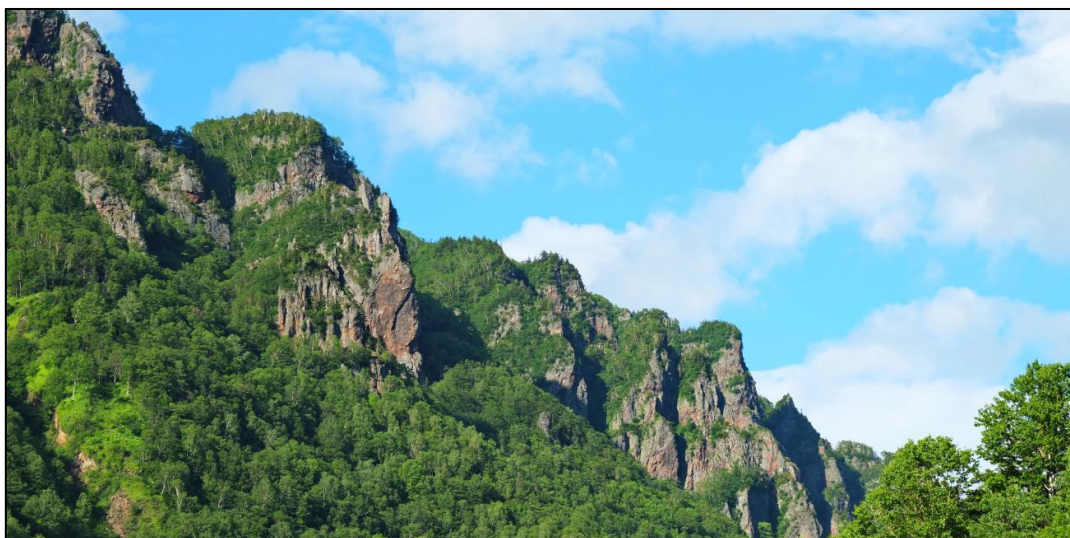
On arrival in Sounkyo, check into a ryokan in the centre of town. Depending on your arrival time, you might like to start your exploration of Daisetsuzan's scenic spots this afternoon. There are several short afternoon hikes that start from Sounkyo, including a forest and waterfall trail.



Be sure to return to your ryokan in time for dinner, typically served around 7pm.

## Day 11 - Daisetsuzan (B, D)

We recommend at early start to take the ropeway to the top of Mt. Kurodake for some light trekking. It's a relatively easy climb of one hour from the ropeway station to the top of the mountain. On a clear day, the views from Kurodake's summit extend over the Daisetsuzan range – during the autumn, when the leaves turn golden, the views are particularly stunning (typically, from mid-Sept to mid-Oct).



From Kurodake's summit, hiking trails connect you to other peaks, including Asahidake (Daisetsuzan's tallest peak), though you'll need a full day to explore this far. Shorter hikes of around 2 hours will take you to the rim of the Ohachidaira caldera (the Ohachidaira circuit route is a moderate walk that can be completed in half a day, if the weather is fine). When you've explored enough, return to Souunkyo via the ropeway.



NB. It can be very cold in the Daisetsuzan Mountains, even in the summer, so do remember to bring warm, waterproof clothing with you. Please also ensure that you make a note of the last ropeway service and arrive back in Souunkyo in good time.

### Day 12 - Departure (B)

Travel by bus and train to Asahikawa Airport, two hours from Souunkyo, where you catch the flight to Tokyo. In Tokyo, connect with your international flight home.

#### Price Guide:

The cost of this itinerary is from **£2,995 per person**, based on twin/double accommodation. For more information, or if you would like to enquire about a tailor-made holiday combining part or all of the above itinerary, please [contact us](#).

#### Includes:

- Twin accommodation with breakfast
- Meals as outlined in itinerary
- Meet and greet at the airport
- 14-day JR Pass
- PASMO Transport Pass (Tokyo)
- English-speaking guide for tours in Tokyo (day 2), Hakodate (days 3-4), Shikotsu-Toya (day 5)
- All entrance fees and public transportation fees during guided days

#### Excludes:

- International flights – please ask us for a quote
- Visas
- Personal travel insurance
- Personal expenses and tips
- Travel expenses and entrance fees during self-guided days
- Lunch and dinner to own account unless stated otherwise in itinerary