

SAMURAI TOURS

Adventures in Discovering Traditional Japan

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Hokkaido Self Guided



14 Days/13 Nights

Hokkaido Self Guided

Tour Overview

Experience more of Hokkaido on the Hokkaido Self Guided tour. The northernmost of the main islands, Hokkaido is Japan’s last frontier. It is a natural wonderland of mountain ranges, deep caldera lakes, active volcanoes, numerous thermally-heated mineral springs and virgin forests. The attitudes of the inhabitants are akin to those of the pioneers of the American West, but still unmistakably Japanese.

📍 Destinations

Sapporo, Abashiri, Genseikaen, Shiretoko, Lake Akan, Sounkyo Onsen, Furano, Noboribetsu Onsen, Lake Toya, Hakodate, Tokyo

Tour Details

Although Hokkaido comprises about 20% of the total land area of Japan, it only accounts for 5% of the nation’s population. Hokkaido is a natural wonderland of mountain ranges, deep caldera lakes, active volcanoes, numerous thermally-heated mineral springs and virgin forests.

You’ll enjoy Sapporo, Hokkaido’s largest city and host to the 1972 Winter Olympics, with its many

fine restaurants and the secluded beauty of the Shiretoko National Park. You will have the opportunity to explore the soaring mountain ranges of Sounkyo Gorge in the middle of the beautiful Daisetsuzan National Park; visit Noboribetsu Onsen, one of Japan’s largest and most popular hot springs resorts; and walk along the rim of an active volcano at Lake Toya. Explore the morning market of Hakodate where you can try the local specialties of crab, sea urchin or squid, and learn about Hokkaido’s original inhabitants, the Ainu, whose culture almost disappeared until recent efforts of restoration. You will also be able visit the Akan International Crane Center where research is being done to bring the cranes back from the brink of extinction.

Available March through November

Tour Highlights

- ✔ Walk from Magome to Tsumago Along the Nakasendo Highway
- ✔ Matsumoto Castle
- ✔ Daio Wasabi Farm
- ✔ Overnight in Kamikochi Valley
- ✔ Tateyama Alpine Route with Overnight at the base of Mt Tateyama
- ✔ Jigoku-dani Snow Monkey Park
- ✔ Three Separate Rides on Shinkansen (Bullet Train)
- ✔ Four Kaiseki-style Dinners

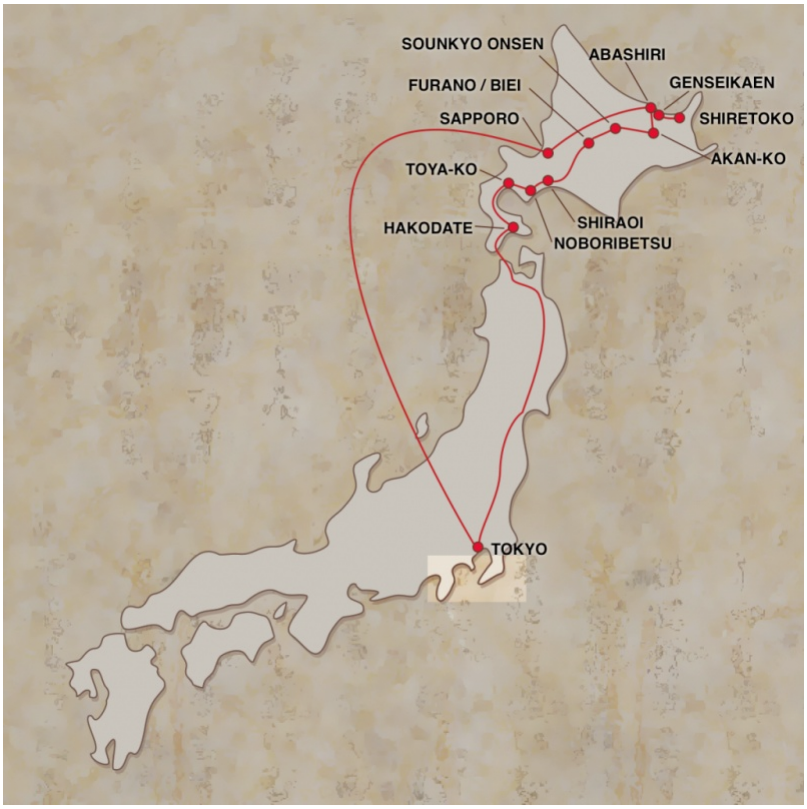
Tour Inclusions

- ✔ Travel Guard Gold Policy (for American tour members only)
- ✔ Reserved Seat Train Tickets on all Inter-City Travel
- ✔ Meeting service at the arrival airport
- ✔ Sending service to the appropriate train station
- ✔ Baggage transfer from city to city
- ✔ Electronic version of Tour Handbook and Japanese History
- ✔ 8 Hours with a guide

Tour Exclusions

- ✖ International airfare is NOT included.
- ✖ A printed itinerary is not included
- ✖ Alcoholic beverages, soft drinks and desserts are NOT included

Map



Tour Destinations

Tokyo

Sapporo

Abashiri

Shiretoko National Park

Lake Akan

Sounkyo Onsen

Furano - Farm Tomita Lavendar Farm

Noboribetsu Onsen

Lake Toya

Hakodate

Itinerary

Day 1 Arrive in Hokkaido

Arrive at New Chitose Airport. You will travel on your own by local train to Sapporo. No meals included.

Travel: 1-1/2 Hour

Day 2 Tour Sapporo

After breakfast, you will meet with the licensed, English-speaking guide who will have your baggage transfer forms, train tickets, and JR Hokkaido 4 Day Flex Pass vouchers. The guide will assist you with the exchange of your JR 4 Day Flex Pass, and transferring your main luggage to Abashiri. You will then tour Sapporo with the guide. There is no pre-defined itinerary, as the guide will adjust the itinerary based on your preferences and interests. You can visit the JR Sapporo Tower where you will be able to get a bird's eye view of Sapporo, the largest city on Hokkaido and the host of the 1972 Winter Olympics. You may want to tour the Hokkaido Historical Museum where you can discover the rich history of Hokkaido, including Hokkaido's original inhabitants, the Ainu. Here you can discover how the taming of the wilds of Hokkaido was very similar to the settling of the American West. You can choose to explore the Hokkaido Historical Village Open Air Museum where many buildings from around Hokkaido, both modern and traditional, have been relocated. Perhaps tour the original Sapporo Beer Brewery and sample the many freshly-brewed beers, or visit the Sapporo Botanical Garden, established in 1886 by Hokkaido University, and a wonderful place for a picnic lunch. In the garden you will find a small preserved virgin forest which shows how Sapporo once looked, as well as a small alpine garden and greenhouse. In the evening, you can have dinner at the Sapporo Beer Garden, located next to the original Sapporo Beer brewery where you can try the local specialty of grilled lamb, cooked yourself at the table. Breakfast at the hotel and lunch with the guide is included.

Travel: 4 Hours

Day 3 Travel to Abashiri; Tour Abashiri

Today you will travel by express train to Abashiri. Pick up your rental car and travel to the hotel. After checking in and retrieving your main luggage, you can enjoy the baths before you have dinner. Breakfast at the hotel and dinner at the ryokan included.

Travel: 5 1/2 Hours

Day 4 Tour Abashiri; Travel to Genseikaen; Tour Genseikaen; Travel to Utoro Onsen

Today is free to explore Abashiri on your own. We recommend starting the day by touring the Abashiri Prison Museum. Abashri Prison was initially constructed in the late 19th century, but the prison gained national fame through yakuza movies in the 1960's, and became known as the Alkatraz of Japan. The museum illustrates the daily life of prisoners and has more than a dozen buildings and structures from the old prison. You can also visit the Hokkaido Museum of Northern Peoples where you will get your first exposure to the Ainu culture, as well as other similar cultures of the northern hemisphere. If you are traveling in the wintertime you can also visit the Ryuhyo Drift Ice Museum. Every winter ice flows from Russia collide with northeastern Hokkaido. This museum documents science behind the ice flows and also introduces some of the animal life living

below the ice. After spending time in Abashiri, you will travel to Shiretoko, stopping at Genseikaen on your way. The Genseikaen natural flower garden with its carpet of colorful flowers is located in the sand hills facing the Sea of Okhotsk, and is part of the Abashiri National Park. Here you will be able to stroll among the sand hills and flowers, and even along the beach. To finish the day, you will will continue your drive to Utoro Onsen, the gateway to Shiretoko National Park, where you will be staying for the next two nights. Breakfast and dinner at the ryokans included.

Travel: 2 Hours

Day 5 Tour Shiretoko National Park

Today is free to explore the remote and beautiful Shiretoko National Park. Shiretoko is an ancient Ainu word meaning “edge of the world”. Here you can board a sightseeing boat for a scenic cruise along the coast of the Shiretoko peninsula where you will see the 300-foot rocky cliffs bordering the ocean with cascading waterfalls, and a snowy mountain range as a backdrop. You can also go to the national park for some excellent short hikes with scenic beauty and abundant wildlife including deer, bear, and foxes. Breakfast and dinner at the ryokans included.

Travel: TBD

Day 6 Travel to Lake Akan

Today you will travel to Akan-ko (Lake Akan). Along the way you can stop at Bihoro Pass where you can get a bird’s eye view of a large caldera lake (weather permitting, of course). You can also stop at Lake Kussharo, where you can dig down into the sandy beach to find thermally-heated sand, or just relax in one of the hot, mineral water foot baths. After that, you can visit Iozan with its many sulfur vents coated yellow from the years of exposure to the steam. You can also stop at Lake Masshu, considered by many to be one of Japan’s most beautiful lakes because of its clear, deep-blue water. After arriving at Akan-ko and checking in, you can attend an authentic Ainu Dance Demonstration at the Ainu Village. Breakfast and dinner at the ryokans included.

Travel: 4 Hours

Day 7 Tour Lake Akan

Today is free to enjoy scenic Akan-ko. You can take a sightseeing boat cruise around Akan-ko where you will stop to see Marimo, the unique globe-shaped algae that only grows in Akan-ko. We also suggest visiting the Ainu Village with its many souvenir shops and restaurants selling authentic Ainu cuisine. You can also visit the nearby Akan International Crane Center. Cranes are thought to live a thousand years, so they hold a special place in Japanese culture. It was once thought that the cranes were extinct, however a handful were found about 60 years ago, and locals have made great efforts to bring them back from the brink of extinction. Breakfast and dinner at the ryokans included.

Travel: N/A

Day 8 Travel to Sounkyo Onsen; Tour Sounkyo Onsen

Today you will travel to Sounkyo Onsen. Sounkyo Onsen is located in a scenic narrow gorge that is flanked by 100-meter high forested cliffs. Before arriving in Sounkyo Onsen, you can first stop at Ginga no Taki and Ryusei no Taki waterfalls, cascading down the cliffs. After arriving at Sounkyo Onsen, we suggest taking the gondola and chairlift to the top where, weather permitting, you will get an excellent view of Kurodake (the volcano) and the surrounding mountain peaks and ranges. Breakfast and dinner at the ryokans included.

Travel: 2 1/2 Hours

Day 9 Travel to Furano; Tour Farm Tomita; Travel to Nobboribetsu Onsen

In the morning you will travel to the Furano District of Hokkaido where you can visit Farm Tomita. Here you will be able to enjoy the vast flower fields and lavender gardens, and try specialty sweets like lavender ice cream. After touring the FuranoDistrict you will drive to Noboribetsu Onsen where you will drop off the rental car. Breakfast and dinner at the ryokan included.

Travel: 5 Hours

Day 10 Noboribetsu Onsen

Today is free to explore the Noboribetsu Onsen area. You can enjoy the many hot springs, or walk around Jigokudani (Hell Valley) where you will find many steam vents and thermally heated pools and small geysers. Breakfast and dinner at the ryokan included.

Travel: N/A

Day 11 Travel to Lake Toya; Tour Lake Toya

Before leaving Noboribetsu you will prepare your luggage to transfer to Tokyo and will travel with an overnight bag only. You will travel by express train and bus to Lake Toya, one of the largest and deepest volcanic caldera lakes in Japan. After checking in to the ryokan, we recommend visiting Usu-zan and Showa-shin-zan, both active volcanoes located at Lake Toya. You can take a cable car to the top of Usu-zan which last erupted in 2000. Here you can walk around the rim of the volcano through the barren, moon-like landscape. Afterwards, we recommend exploring Showa-shin-zan. In 1944, a surprised wheat farmer found Showa-shin-zan growing out of his field instead of wheat, and it has been growing larger ever since then. You may also want to visit the nearby Lake Toya Volcanic Museum. Amazingly, when Usu-zan last erupted in 2000, no one was killed. But there was a lot of damage from the eruption, and much of it is preserved at the museum and illustrates the sheer power of geothermal activity, and documents the volcano’s turbulent history. Breakfast and dinner at the ryokans included.

Travel: 1 1/2 Hours

Day 12 Travel to Hakodate; Tour Hakodate

After breakfast, you will travel by bus and express train to Hakodate. Hakodate was one of the first cities in Japan open to foreigners after the Meiji Restoration. After arriving in Hakodate, we recommend visiting the Goryo-Kaku, Japan’s first western-style fort. Built in 1864 by the Tokugawa Shogunate in the shape of a five-pointed star, it was designed to trap attackers in a deadly crossfire. You can also climb to the top of the Goryo-kaku tower next door to the fort, providing a view of the fort and the surrounding city. You can also visit the Moto-machi historic area. Overlooking the western bay at the foot of Mount Hakodate, there are numerous sloping streets lined with 19th century churches, consulates, shops and homes of the foreigners who first opened this area of Japan to commerce. In the evening, we recommend taking a cable car to the top of Mt. Hakodate where you can enjoy a panoramic view of Hakodate’s night lights. Breakfast at the ryokan included.

Travel: 2 1/2 Hours

Day 13 Tour Hakodate; Travel to Tokyo

In the morning you can visit the Hakodate Morning Market, where the sellers can prepare the specialties of Hakodate (crab, sea urchin and squid) fresh from their stalls for breakfast. In the afternoon you will board the new Hokkaido Shinkansen to return to Tokyo. You will retrieve your main luggage from the hotel in the evening. Breakfast at the hotel included.

Travel: 5 1/2 Hours

Day 14 Return Home

It’s time to say Sayonara (Goodbye). You will travel by express train to Narita Airport where you will fly home. Breakfast at the hotel included.

Travel: 1 Hour

Dates & Pricing

Low Season-
$3,739.00 (per person, based on double occupancy)
January 6 – February 28
June 16 – August 10
August 19 – August 31
November 16 – December 24

Regular Season-
$3,994.00 (per person, based on double occupancy)
March 1 – March 16
May 7 – June 15
September 1 – October 14

Peak Season-
$4,220.00 (per person, based on double occupancy)
March 17 – May 6 (Cherry Blossom & Golden Week)
August 11 – August 18 (Obon Holiday)
October 15 – November 15 (Fall Foliage)
December 25 – January 5 (New Years)

Add-On Tours

Our tours and tour itineraries are the best, but as the saying goes, “you can’t make everyone happy all of the time”. There may a specific destination or a specific experience you may want to include in your visit to Japan that may not be included your tour. Choose from our Add On tours to include your interests and make your Japan tour even better.

Click HERE **to view all of the Add-On Tours.**

Or, use the arrows to scroll though the recommended list of Add-On Tours for this tour.













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Inclusions

- Accommodations in standard, 3-star hotels including all taxes, fees and breakfast every morning (contact us about accommodation upgrades)
  - Sapporo: Western style hotel such as Keio Plaza Hotel Sapporo
  - Abashiri: Japanese style ryokan such as Hotel Abashirikoso
  - Shiretoko: Japanese style ryokan such as Shiretoko Daiichi Hotel
  - Akan-ko: Japanese style ryokan such as New Akan Hotel
  - Sounkyo Onsen: Japanese style ryokan such as Northern Lodge
  - Noboribetsu Onsen: Japanese style ryokan such as Daiichi Takimotokan
  - Toya-ko: Japanese style ryokan such as Sansui Hotel
  - Hakodate: Western style hotel such as Hakodate Comfort Hotel
  - Tokyo: Western style hotel such as Shinagawa Prince Hotel
- JR Hokkaido 4-Day Flexible Pass
- 7-day car rental, including CDW coverage
- Train ticket from Shinagawa Station to Narita Airport
- Addresses, phone numbers and maps of accommodations in both Japanese and English
- Full Day Tour with a licensed, English-speaking Japanese guide in Sapporo
- Emergency contact number in Japan
- Detailed, easy-to-follow directions from city to city
- Recommended train schedule including optional trains 2-3 hours before and 2-3 hours after the recommended trains
- Electronic version of itinerary
- Baggage transfer forms (we will provide the necessary forms in Japanese to transfer your main baggage ahead, allowing you the freedom of traveling light. The service provided will only work overnight, so you will need to travel with an overnight bag. The actual transfer fees are not included and will be paid by you at the time of transfer. These fees normally run between 1,250 Yen and 1,750 Yen)
- A copy of our “Gaijin on Getas” tour handbook (this is the same popular handbook our escorted tour members receive) which contains 150 pages of Japan travel tips, Japanese language tips, Japanese customs and etiquette and Japanese history to prepare you properly for your trip and allow you to enjoy Japan even more after you arrive.

What’s Not Included

- **Airfare is NOT included.** If you need assistance with airfare to/from Sapporo, please contact us
- Local transportation (subways, buses, taxis, etc.)
- All admission fees
- Lunches and dinners (except where noted)
- Desserts at any included meals
- Drinks other than water and tea at any included meals
- Baggage transfer fees (the fees are typically 1,250 to 1.750 yen per bag)
- A printed itinerary is not included

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Contact Samurai Tours

WEBSITE/EMAIL
www.samuraitours.com
info@samuraitours.com

USA CONTACT INFO
Toll-free: 1-866-316-SAMURAI
or 1-866-316-7268
Fax number: 720-210-5423

Samurai Tours
7900 East Union Ave, Suite 1100
Denver CO 80237

JAPAN CONTACT INFO
Call us: 075-361-7303

Samurai Tours
307 Yodokizu
Fushimi
Kyoto 613-0911 Japan

Kyoto-fu Chijitoroku Ryokogyo 3-576/
Japanese Travel Agency License:
Kyoto Prefecture #3-576

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