Tour Code
JP10

ADVENTURESABROAD

Japan 'Spirit of the North'

Hokkaido & Tohoku Explored

14 days

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Day 1 Arrival in Sapporo

Today we arrive in Sapporo, the largest city on the northern Japanese island of Hokkaido -- a place shaped by vast wilderness, volcanic landscapes, fertile farmland, and a cultural heritage unlike anywhere else in Japan. Hokkaido was the last of Japan's main islands to be settled in the modern era, and that relative youth gives Sapporo an energy that is open, confident, and refreshingly unhurried.

The city is a vibrant metropolis with a practical elegance -- broad avenues laid out on a grid, parks at its centre, mountains visible on the horizon. As the host of the 1972 Winter Olympics, Sapporo has long drawn visitors for its snow and outdoor life, but it rewards those who look deeper: a rich food culture rooted in dairy, seafood, and ramen; a craft brewing tradition dating to the Meiji era; and a warmth of welcome that sets the tone for the days ahead.

We settle in this evening and prepare for two weeks of discovery through Japan's remarkable north.

Overnight in Sapporo.

Included Meal(s): Dinner

Day 2 Sapporo City Touring

This morning we head south to the Sapporo Art Park, set within a forested hillside in the city's Minami district. The park combines indoor galleries devoted to Hokkaido artists with an outdoor sculpture garden where more than 180 works are scattered along wooded walking trails — bronze and stone encountered at a pace that suits the surroundings. It is an unhurried and genuinely pleasurable introduction to the city's creative life.

We then make our way back into the city centre, where Odori Park — the long green spine dividing Sapporo's grid — provides a natural setting for lunch. The park's elms and ginkgos offer colour in both spring and autumn, and those joining us in early May may find cherry blossoms still lingering along its length. The Sapporo TV Tower frames the view to the east.

After lunch a brief stop at the Sapporo Clock Tower, the city's most recognisable landmark and a survivor from the Meiji-era agricultural college that preceded the modern city, is followed by a walk through the campus of Hokkaido University. The famous poplar boulevard is a particular pleasure in autumn colour, and the campus carries a quiet intellectual energy that speaks to Hokkaido's history as a place of deliberate reinvention.

Our afternoon brings us to the Sapporo Beer Museum, the oldest brewery in Japan, housed in a landmark red-brick building from the Meiji era. We explore the story of Hokkaido's most celebrated export before a well-earned tasting — and this evening we remain at the brewery for dinner, a fitting close to a day that has moved from art to history to the particular pleasures of Hokkaido's table.

Overnight in Sapporo.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Sapporo - Furano

Today we leave the city behind and head south toward the Furano Valley, with a morning stop at Moerenuma Park — the remarkable landscape artwork conceived in its entirety by Japanese-American sculptor Isamu Noguchi, whose glass pyramids, sculpted hills, and open spaces reward unhurried exploration. Built on a former landfill on the city's eastern edge, it is one of Sapporo's finest and least-expected pleasures.

From Moerenuma we continue into the Furano Valley, one of Hokkaido's most celebrated agricultural landscapes. Rolling hills backed by the Tokachi Mountain Range frame a patchwork of farms and fields that has made this region Japan's larder — a place where volcanic soil, cold winters, and long summer days produce ingredients of extraordinary quality.

Our first stop is Farm Tomita, the most famous farm in Hokkaido and the property that put Furano on the map. Established in 1903 and still family-run, the farm's 29 hectares encompass fourteen distinct garden areas whose character shifts beautifully with the seasons — flowers, colour, and fragrance in different combinations depending on when you visit, always framed by the snowcapped Tokachi Mountains. The farm's dried flower hall, distillery, and heritage buildings tell the story of how this one family kept Hokkaido's agricultural traditions alive through the decades.

After lunch at the farm we visit the Furano Cheese Factory, where Hokkaido's celebrated dairy tradition is explored through the craft of small-batch production.

Spring note: Guests travelling with us in May will visit Shikisai-no-Oka in place of Farm Tomita — a hillside farm (hopefully) offering beautiful seasonal flower displays at a time when Tomita's lavender is not yet in bloom. The Cheese Factory visit follows as usual.

Overnight in Furano.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 Furano to Asahikawa via Biei

This morning we head north through the Biei plateau, a landscape of gently curved hills and farmland that has become one of Hokkaido's most photographed regions — and in October, one of its most spectacular.

Our first stop is the Tokachi Volcano Interpretive Centre, which tells the geological story of the Daisetsuzan volcanic system with unexpected depth and clarity — one of those quiet finds that generates more conversation than many headline attractions.

From there we continue to Shirogane and the Blue Pond -- one of those rare natural phenomena that exceeds its reputation. The vivid turquoise water, the result of aluminium hydroxide suspended in the outflow from a hot spring barrier, shifts in tone with the light and the season. In October, bare silver birches and larches stand reflected in the still surface, adding a contemplative quality quite different from the summer experience.

Above Biei, we board the Asahidake Ropeway for our ascent into Daisetsuzan National Park, Hokkaido's volcanic heart and the largest national park in Japan. The cable car lifts us above the treeline into a high alpine world of steaming vents and open ridgelines. In mid-October the upper mountain is at its most dramatic -- early snow is possible at the summit, and the contrast with the coloured valleys below is striking. We break for lunch at the Sugatami Restaurant at the ropeway's upper station, with views that earn their keep.

Spring note: Guests travelling with us in May may find the upper mountain affected by late-season snow. Should conditions limit our ropeway visit, we will adjust the day's programme accordingly.

After the ropeway we make our way to Shikisai-no-Oka, the sweeping panoramic flower gardens that cascade across a hillside above Biei. Fifteen hectares of cultivated colour -- salvias, marigolds, dahlias, and more -- set against the Tokachi Mountain backdrop make this one of the most photographed viewpoints in Hokkaido. A tractor ride covers the full expanse for those who want to take it all in at once. We then make our way into Asahikawa for the evening.

Overnight in Asahikawa.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Asahikawa: Gardens, Craft and Ainu Culture

We begin the morning with a visit to Ueno Farm, an English-style garden reimagined for Hokkaido's climate by the designer Sayuki Ueno -- the same eye behind the celebrated gardens at Farm Tomita in Furano. Known locally as the Gnomes' Garden, it is one of the seven great gardens of the Hokkaido Garden Highway, with a winding path of white birches, a symmetrical Mirror Border, and small hidden details that reward an unhurried stroll. It is a gentler, more intimate garden experience than the grand agricultural landscapes of Furano -- proof that Hokkaido's horticultural tradition has more than one register.

From there we visit the Otokoyama Sake Museum, where sake's thousand-year role in Japanese culture and ceremony is explored alongside the craft of its regional production. A short video available in English tells the story of sake making, and tastings are available for those who

wish. The museum draws its water from a famously pure local source -- your Tour Leader will point out where you can fill a bottle to take away.

After lunch we make our way to the Kawamura Kaneto Ainu Museum, a small, deeply personal institution founded by a man who devoted his life to preserving what colonisation and assimilation had nearly erased. The collection of artifacts, tools, and ceremonial objects is remarkable, and the context it provides -- of a people whose animist traditions, language, and relationship with the natural world survived against considerable odds -- gives the rest of our time in Hokkaido a richer frame. As part of our visit we take part in a traditional mouth harp experience, learning something of the sounds and performance traditions that have carried this culture's spirit through the generations.

We end the afternoon at Baihodo, a quietly remarkable shop run by a third-generation owner that functions as a collective showcase for artisans from across Hokkaido. In a region where craft traditions run deep, this is one of the finest places to encounter them -- unhurried, carefully curated, and entirely without the feel of a tourist stop.

Overnight in Asahikawa.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Asahikawa to Lake Shikotsu

After breakfast we begin our journey south toward Shikotsu-Toya National Park, one of Hokkaido's finest protected landscapes. The drive takes us through the broad agricultural plains of central Hokkaido — a working landscape of farms and quiet roads that offers its own pleasures at a pace the coach makes easy.

Spring note: Guests travelling with us in May will pass the Takikawa Nanohana Fields en route — a sweeping expanse of yellow canola blossom that is one of Hokkaido's most exuberant spring spectacles, and now confirmed accessible by coach.

On arrival at Lake Shikotsu we break for lunch before boarding a glass-bottom boat for a crossing of one of Japan's deepest and clearest lakes. The caldera waters here are among the most transparent in the country, and the boat reveals the lake floor and its submerged volcanic formations with striking clarity — a perspective on Hokkaido's geological character that rewards the short time on the water. Please note that sailings may be cancelled in poor weather conditions; should this occur, we will visit the Lake Shikotsu Visitor Centre or Salmon Park Chitose as an alternative.

The afternoon is unhurried. We check in to our onsen resort on the lake shore, with time to settle in, take the air, and explore the surroundings at our own pace before dinner. Hokkaido's onsen resorts have a character distinct from the traditional ryokan of southern Japan — built for accessibility and comfort, with communal baths fed by natural hot springs and a hospitality that is warm without being formal. It is an authentically Japanese experience, and a welcome one after several days of active touring.

Overnight at Lake Shikotsu.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Lake Shikotsu to Noboribetsu via Showa Shinzan

After breakfast we depart the lake shore and head south toward Noboribetsu, with stops that take us deeper into Hokkaido's volcanic interior.

Our first stop is Fukidashi Park in Kyogoku, where an extraordinary volume of spring water — among the largest natural springs in Japan — emerges cold and crystal-clear from the base of the mountains. It is a place of quiet natural drama, and the water is considered among the finest in the country.

We continue to the Silo Observatory at Lake Hill Farm, a working dairy farm whose hilltop vantage point offers sweeping views across the pastoral landscape of central Hokkaido — a reminder that between the volcanic spectacles and the caldera lakes, this is also a land of extraordinary agricultural richness.

We then make our way to Showa Shinzan, one of Japan's most extraordinary geological events made permanent. Between 1943 and 1945, a series of earthquakes and eruptions caused a lava dome to rise from a farmer's wheat field, transforming flat agricultural land into a steaming 400-metre volcanic cone within the span of two years. The farmer, Masao Mimatsu, documented the entire emergence in meticulous daily

sketches — an act of quiet scientific devotion that has become as celebrated as the mountain itself. Alongside it, the Usuzan Ropeway carries us above the treeline for views across the volcanic landscape and, on clear days, out to the bay beyond — a panorama that puts the scale of Hokkaido's geological restlessness into vivid perspective.

We continue to our hotel in Noboribetsu, a town that has built its entire identity around its extraordinary thermal resources — and delivers on that promise.

Overnight in Noboribetsu.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Noboribetsu to Hakodate

We make an early start this morning with a visit to Jigokudani — Hell Valley — before beginning our drive south. Steam rises from cracked earth, sulphurous pools bubble at the surface, and the colours of the mineral-stained rock shift from ochre to rust to pale grey. Japan sits on the Pacific Ring of Fire, and Jigokudani makes that fact immediate and undeniable. A boardwalk system allows us to move through the valley safely, with the heat and smell of the earth a constant companion.

After breakfast we board our coach for the drive southwest to Hakodate, a journey through southern Hokkaido's quieter landscapes. Hakodate occupies a narrow peninsula between two bays and has a history unlike any other city in Japan — one of the first ports opened to foreign trade in 1854, it absorbed Western influences early and kept them, giving its historic districts an architectural character found nowhere else on the island. On arrival we break for lunch near Goryokaku before the afternoon's touring.

The afternoon brings us to Goryokaku, the remarkable star-shaped fortress built in 1864 — Japan's first Western-style fort, designed along European principles of defensive geometry. We ascend the Goryokaku Tower for the aerial view that reveals the pentagonal plan in full.

Spring note: For guests travelling with us in May, this view is something else entirely — the fortress's cherry trees are among the most celebrated in Hokkaido, (hopefully) ringing the moat in pink at peak blossom.

We descend to walk the grounds and visit the beautifully restored Hakodate Magistrate's Office within the walls. As the day winds down we stroll through the Kanemori Red Brick Warehouses district on the waterfront — a cluster of late 19th-century trading houses whose red brick facades have softened gracefully into the harbour setting, and a good introduction to the layered history of this city, which we will explore further tomorrow.

Overnight in Hakodate.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Hakodate: History, Coast and the City from Above

The morning begins at leisure, with time to explore the Hakodate Morning Market on your own — a sprawling network of stalls and small restaurants within walking distance of our hotel, selling the catch of the day alongside Hokkaido produce. With around 250 vendors operating from early morning, it is best experienced without a schedule.

After regrouping, we make our way to Cape Tachimachi, the dramatic headland on the southern tip of the Hakodate peninsula where the Pacific Ocean and the Tsugaru Strait meet. The cape's basalt cliffs and open sea views have a raw, elemental quality, and the walking here is easy but genuinely rewarding.

We then spend time in the Motomachi district, Hakodate's most atmospheric neighbourhood, where the city's 19th-century foreign settlement left a permanent mark on the streetscape. Western-style consulates, a Russian Orthodox church, a Chinese memorial hall, and Japanese merchant houses occupy the same hillside — an unlikely but genuine cosmopolitan legacy. The Former Soma Family Home, one of the finest surviving merchant residences in Hokkaido, offers a glimpse into how Hakodate's trading families lived at the height of the port's prosperity.

As the afternoon light begins to soften, we make our way to the Mt Hakodate Ropeway for the ascent to the 334-metre summit. The city's distinctive shape, pinched between its two bays, emerges below in silhouette as the harbour lights begin to come on, revealing one of Japan's most celebrated views in the making. It is a moment that earns its reputation.

Please note: for tomorrow's train journey, luggage will be forwarded to our Aomori hotel. You will need a day bag for the train.

Overnight in Hakodate.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 10 Hakodate, Hokkaido - Bullet Train to Aomori, Honshu

After an early breakfast we transfer to Shin-Hakodate-Hokuto Station and board the Shinkansen for the crossing to Honshu. The journey to Shin-Aomori takes approximately one hour, passing beneath the Tsugaru Strait through the Seikan Tunnel — the longest railway tunnel in the world, connecting two islands beneath an ocean strait. It is a remarkable piece of engineering, and the transition from Hokkaido to Honshu has a satisfying sense of arrival in a new chapter.

On arrival in Aomori we visit the Sannai-Maruyama Archaeological Site, one of the largest and best-preserved Jomon period settlements in Japan. The Jomon people lived here for roughly 1,500 years, from around 3,900 to 2,200 BCE, and the scale of what has been excavated — longhouses, storage pits, a monumental six-pillar structure whose purpose remains debated — speaks to a sophistication that overturns easy assumptions about prehistoric Japan. Lunch follows at the site.

The afternoon brings us to the Nebuta Museum WA RASSE, home to a permanent collection of the spectacular illuminated floats central to Aomori's Nebuta Festival, one of Japan's great summer celebrations. Our visit is timed to include both the large-screen film presentation and the live Nebuta music performance and hands-on experience — an encounter with one of Japan's most exuberant folk traditions that lands with full force even outside of festival season.

Overnight in Aomori.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 11 Oirase Gorge & Lake Towada

Today we travel into the Towada-Hachimantai National Park for one of Tohoku's most celebrated natural experiences.

We begin at Lake Towada, a double-caldera lake sitting 400 metres above sea level, its surface a deep and still blue ringed by forested ridges. We take a boat ride on the lake, reading the landscape from the water and appreciating the scale of the caldera that contains it. The sculptor Kotaro Takamura's bronze Maiden of the Lake stands on the shore near the boat landing — one of Japan's most reproduced public sculptures, and considerably more affecting in its actual setting than any photograph suggests. Lunch follows near the lake shore.

From the lake we descend into the Oirase Gorge, which follows the course of the Oirase River for fourteen kilometres through a primeval beech and maple forest, with a walking trail running alongside the water the entire way. In mid-October this is among the finest autumn colour walks in Japan — the canopy closes overhead in shades of amber, scarlet, and gold, the river tumbles over a series of falls and rapids beside the path, and the scale of the forest muffles the world outside completely. We walk a selected section at a comfortable pace, with the coach available for those who prefer shorter stretches. The trail is largely flat and well-maintained throughout.

We return to Aomori in the late afternoon.

Spring note: Guests travelling with us in May may find that time allows for a visit to Hirosaki Castle, among the most celebrated cherry blossom destinations in the country. Your Tour Leader will advise on the day, blossoms-permitting.

Please note: for tomorrow's train journey, your main luggage will be forwarded to our hotel in Tokyo. You will need a day bag for the train and the afternoon's touring in the capital.

Overnight in Aomori.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 12 Aomori - Shinkansen to Tokyo: Cooking Class & City Touring

After breakfast we transfer to the station and board the Shinkansen for Tokyo, a journey of approximately three hours south through the Tohoku region. The bullet train is fast and supremely comfortable, and the passing landscape — rice fields, river valleys, and occasional distant peaks -- offers its own quiet pleasures as Japan's north gives way to its centre.

On arrival in Tokyo we join our chef for a hands-on Japanese cooking class -- a relaxed, participatory session in which we prepare a selection of dishes together before sitting down to enjoy what we've made. It is a convivial way to spend an early afternoon in the city, and a meal that carries its own satisfaction.

From there we make our way to Meiji Shrine, the forested Shinto sanctuary dedicated to Emperor Meiji and Empress Shoken, whose reign from 1868 to 1912 transformed Japan from feudal isolation to modern nation. The shrine is reached through one of Tokyo's largest stands of urban forest -- a deliberate enclosure of calm within one of the world's most densely populated cities, and a striking first encounter with the capital.

This evening is yours at leisure -- after a substantial midday meal, Tokyo's extraordinary range of neighbourhood restaurants makes a light supper on your own terms one of the pleasures of the day. Your Tour Leader can help you plan your evening.

Overnight in Tokyo.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 13 Tokyo: Edo to the Present

We begin the morning at the Edo-Tokyo Museum in Ryogoku, which reopened in 2026 after a four-year renovation. The building is a landmark in its own right — its elevated form modelled on the raised-floor rice storehouses of the Edo period, rising to the same height as Edo Castle itself. Inside, four centuries of Tokyo's history unfold through reconstructed streetscapes, full-scale replicas and immersive projections, tracing the shogunal city of the 17th century through the Meiji transformation, the 1923 earthquake, the firebombing of the Second World War, and the extraordinary reconstruction that followed. For anyone who has followed the last two weeks, this museum provides the frame that makes sense of everything.

We remain in Ryogoku for lunch. The Edo Noren complex, housed in the historic station building and centred on a full-sized replica sumo ring, gathers some of Tokyo's most distinctive local foods in an atmosphere that evokes the district's long identity as the home of sumo. Oversized wrestlers in traditional yukata are a genuine feature of these streets.

Our afternoon takes us to Asakusa, Tokyo's oldest district and site of Senso-ji, the capital's most ancient temple. The approach through the Kaminarimon gate is busy in the way Asakusa has always been — a place of popular pilgrimage, street food and theatrical energy dating back to the Edo period. The backstreets beyond reward those who wander.

After around ninety minutes in Asakusa the coach returns to the hotel for those ready to rest before our farewell dinner. For those with energy remaining, Shibuya is a short taxi ride southwest — a district of entirely different character, where the famous scramble crossing sits at the centre of one of Tokyo's most kinetic neighbourhoods. Your Tour Leader will be happy to accompany anyone who wishes to continue. We gather this evening for our farewell dinner.

Overnight in Tokyo.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 14 Departure

Departure from Tokyo.

ITTE RASSHAI/BON VOYAGE!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast