

Discovering the magic of Hokkaido – Japan's hidden island gem

Friday 15 July, 2022

What do you know about Hokkaido? With its world-famous "Niseko" powder snow high up in the mountains, you're probably aware that it's one of the best places on Earth for skiing and snowboarding. Perhaps you've had a taste of the delicious Sapporo beer served in British pubs and bars. Or is it the incredibly fresh and diverse seafood that gets you going?

Hokkaido is rightly famous for these qualities, but they're far from the only attractions on Japan's most northerly – and most unique – island. From spectacular wilderness and national parks – including plenty of glorious and unusual wildlife – to its unique indigenous culture, Hokkaido shows a completely different side to the Japan you thought you knew. And now that coronavirus measures are letting up all over the world, there's never been a better time for travellers to experience the unspoiled charms of this magical island.

Hokkaido is known for its dramatic transitions between the seasons. It's gorgeous in the spring, with a gentle, refreshing climate. The late-blooming cherry blossoms that throng that star fort at Hakodate make for one of the most famous sights in all Japan, while the night-time view from the nearby Mt Hakodate is considered one of the three best after-dark overlooks in the world.

It gets warmer during the summer, but without the same heat and humidity of southern Japan. This is the best season for adventurers to pay a visit to Shiretoko Peninsula and Kushiro Marsh, two of UNESCO's World Natural Heritage Sites. Here you can witness Hokkaido's phenomenally rugged wilderness, and, if you're lucky, catch some of its magnificent wildlife, including the iconic red-crowned crane, the fierce local bears gambolling in the surf, and even orcas, porpoises, whales and other majestic sealife.

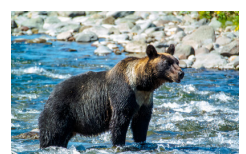
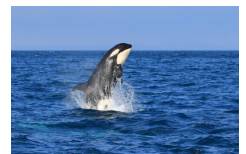
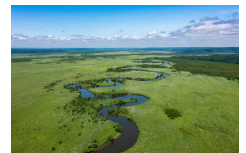
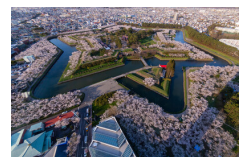
Autumn is a time for admiring the rich canopy of red, brown, and gold leaves that fill the countryside. These give way in winter to a thick carpet of delicate snow all across the island. There's a snow festival in the capital city of Sapporo every year, and that's not far from the mountains – and their many fantastic ski resorts. Niseko is one such town. It's home to the best powder snow in the world, but each one of Hokkaido's resorts have perfect conditions that make them worth the trip for winter sports fanatics (and the après-ski sushi in natural outdoor hot springs doesn't hurt!).

Hokkaido specialises in adventure tourism and eco-tourism: guests can expect everything to be provided on a sustainable basis in a way that revolves around the local economy. In 2021, Hokkaido was scheduled to be the first Asian city to host Adventure Travel World Summit (ATWS), but it was held online due to Covid-19 Pandemic. In 2023, face-to-face Adventure Travel World Summit (ATWS) is scheduled to go ahead in Hokkaido.

The history of Hokkaido dates back more than 15,000 years, to a time of hunter-gatherers known as the Jomon Period. It was in these ancient times that unique cultures such as the Jomon and the Okhotsk (who came across the sea from Siberia) first developed. There's still an ethnically distinct indigenous culture on Hokkaido to this day: the Ainu people. They have their own language, arts and culture, living and coexisting with nature in a unique way of life. A new National Ainu Museum opened in Shiraoi in 2020, the perfect place to learn all about these fascinating people.

If you want to learn more about this magical island, the Hokkaido Tourism Desk is here to help! We're celebrating our second year in London, so please don't hesitate to get in touch with any questions, queries or tour requests. We'd be delighted to let you know more about the many charms of this Japanese paradise.

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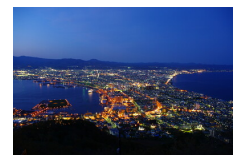
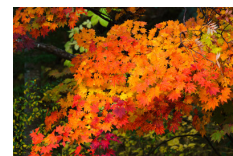
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