

Eastern Wilderness

7 Day Self-Guided Tour



Discover the breathtaking highlights of eastern Hokkaido with this self-guided itinerary, designed to immerse you in the beauty of both the Akan–Mashu and Shiretoko National Parks. Enjoy exciting walks, spot fascinating wildlife, and interact with friendly locals.

[**View Departure Dates & Prices**](#)

[**View Gallery**](#)

Prepared by [Adventure Hokkaido LLC.](#)

Travel Agency Licence No. 2-789

Email: info@adventure-hokkaido.com

Tel: +81-50-3528-8243

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About the Tour

Start	Finish	Grading	Season
Kushiro	Kushiro	Easy Multi-Activity	Jun, Sep, Early Oct

About Akan-Mashu & Shiretoko National Parks

Hokkaido's far east region is often described as the last unexplored frontier of Japan. The area is an ideal place to get in touch with mother nature and observe the flora and fauna unique to Hokkaido. On this tour, you will explore two National Parks in eastern Hokkaido: Akan-Mashu, with its stunning caldera lakes, and the untamed Shiretoko Peninsula—a UNESCO Natural World Heritage Site. Throughout your journey, you'll discover local treasures, from traditional fishermen's cuisine to the rich culture of Hokkaido's indigenous Ainu people, who lived as hunter-gatherers in harmony with nature long before Japanese settlers arrived.

Tour highlights

- Take in the spectacular views of caldera lakes in the Akan-Mashu National Park.
- Watch wildlife from a cruise in the Shiretoko National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
- Enjoy a more personal journey with numerous excursions led by local, knowledgeable guides.
- Experience first-hand the indigenous culture of the Ainu at Lake Akan Kotan.

Who is this tour for?

- Active travelers who enjoy a mix of outdoor activities including walking and canoeing, lasting up to 5 hours.
- Curious travellers who enjoy a mix of activities, sightseeing and learning about the regions they visit.
- Adventurous travellers who enjoy rural hospitality, staying in Japanese style accommodations with natural hot springs on site.
- Independent travellers who like being their own guide and touring at their own pace.

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Itinerary at a glance

Day	Activities	Km	Miles	Meals ¹
Day 1	Arrive in Kushiro, Hokkaido Travel to Lake Akan	-	-	D ▾
Day 2	Ainu Cultural Tour at Lake Akan Explore Lake Akan at Leisure	4.5	2.8	B, D ▾
Day 3	Visit Lake Mashu Hike Mt. Io to Kawayu Onsen	2.6	1.6	B, D ▾
Day 4	Canoeing on the Kushiro River Afternoon at Leisure	-	-	B, D ▾
Day 5	Travel to Utoro Shiretoko Nature Walking Tour of Shiretoko Five Lakes	3.1	1.9	B, D ▾
Day 6	Nature Cruise off Utoro Coast Travel to Rausu Shiretoko	-	-	B, D ▾
Day 7	Whale-Watching Cruise off Rausu Coast Travel to Kushiro Arrangements end in Kushiro	-	-	B ▾

Accommodation

Day	Type	Location	Ensuite Toilet	Ensuite Shower	Onsen	Laundry
1	Hotel ▾	Lake Akan	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Hotel ▾	Lake Akan	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	Ryokan ▾ ²	Kawayu Onsen	✓	✓	✓	✓
4	Ryokan ▾	Kawayu Onsen	✓	✓	✓	✓
5	Hotel ▾	Utoro Shiretoko	✓	✓	✓	✓
6	Lodge ▾	Rausu Shiretoko	✓	✓		

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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What's included

- 6 nights accommodation
- 6 breakfasts and 6 dinners
- Guided Ainu cultural tour at Lake Akan
- Private transfer from Lake Akan to Kawayu Onsen
- Private transfer from Kawayu Onsen to the canoeing location
- Guided canoeing on the Kushiro River
- Private transfer from Kawayu Onsen to Utoro Shiretoko
- Guided nature tour of Shiretoko Five Lakes
- Private transfer from Utoro to Rausu Shiretoko
- Daily cue sheets to help you get around using public transport
- Full English speaking phone support

What's not included

- Transportation costs (for buses, trains etc not listed as included)
- Nature cruise off Utoro Shiretoko
- Nature cruise off Rausu Shiretoko
- Airfare
- Travel insurance
- Personal expenses
- Drinks with included meals

*Nature cruises are booked by Adventure Hokkaido but not paid in case of cancelled trips.

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Travel style

Going self-guided means being your own boss– you have complete control over the day's schedule, from what to eat to how long to spend at a destination. This tour is therefore perfect for independent travellers who love the flexibility that comes with travelling alone. It also makes a great self-guided extension to any of our more involved guided tours!

You will travel by public transport on this tour. Hokkaido is a fairly vast land with most residents relying on cars and much of the infrastructure has been built with this in mind. While this means that more intensive trailheads are a little out of reach of public transport, there are still a number of very accessible, leisurely day and loop hikes that can be reached by train, bus or taxi ([Read our guide to using public transport in Hokkaido](#)). Our self-guided tours showcase the very best of these smaller routes.

Being your own boss does of course mean that you must take responsibility for yourself to a certain degree. This includes making sure you have enough funds on you to pay for public transport and meals, getting yourself from A to B in a timely manner, keeping on top of train and bus timetables and looking after your own luggage.

A luggage transfer service is not included in this tour, so you will need to carry it with you when travelling. Between hikes, we recommend that you leave your luggage either with your accommodation front desk or at coin lockers in stations. You can also use [Yamato's](#) amazing luggage-forwarding service to send larger, more bulky luggage ahead to other destinations (though note that this is not a same-day service – please allow up to 72 hours for your luggage to arrive).

When do you run this tour?

This tour is available on set dates in June, September, and October. Having fixed start dates allows our small team to provide the level of support, planning and troubleshooting we'd like. July and August see a peak in tourism around Hokkaido, with many prime destinations becoming crowded. Travelling during the quieter months means you'll have more opportunity to experience the peace present in our natural environment and make better connections with the locals as they are not overwhelmed by visitors. We believe this is key to making tourism sustainable for all.

Why travel self-guided in Hokkaido?

Getting around by public transport is fun and green

Hokkaido is the northernmost prefecture in Japan and also has the lowest population density. The island of Hokkaido is full of vast, scenic landscapes which you can take in while enjoying a slow ride on local trains and buses. Finding the right bus stops and paying the correct fares in coins can be challenging if you do not speak the language. However, we believe that travelling alongside local people makes for a fun adventure. People from Hokkaido can be shy when it comes to speaking English, but they are warm at heart and are willing to help visitors in any way they can.

You are the guide...

Travelling independently allows you to enjoy freedom and flexibility during the day. Although we pre-arrange your accommodation (and some activities with guides) as well as suggest things to do and places to see, what you actually do during the day is up to you. You are your own guide, deciding where to go, what to eat and what to do during the day. You are free to set your own daily schedule. **Having a smartphone equipped with a local SIM is indispensable**, as it will serve as your capable assistant, helping you with navigation and translation ([Read our guide on how to set up your phone for travel in Hokkaido](#)).

...but you are not alone!

We are here to support you throughout the planning process and while you are travelling. We make reservations for the accommodations with included meals as described. We will arrange dinner with hotels where dining out is not an option, especially in remote villages. Activities that require bookings in advance will be arranged by us.

We provide daily cue sheets and vouchers for each day. The cue sheets provide information about the details of public transport you need to take each day; where and what time the bus or train departs and arrives, and how much it costs. The vouchers are to be handed in to receptionists or guides at check-in, just to avoid any confusion or lost-in-translation moments. In an emergency, we are just a phone call away– whether you've missed your transport, gotten lost or are unwell. You can travel independently with the peace of mind that you have a local friend ready to help you out if things don't go quite to plan.

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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**](#).

Travel Insurance

All guests joining our tours are required to have travel insurance. Please make sure you have 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.

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Travel to the Starting Point

If you are flying into Kushiro Airport (KUH) from Tokyo on the first day, please make sure you reserve an early morning flight that arrives at KUH with enough time for you to transfer to your accommodation at Lake Akan and enjoy a leisurely dinner.

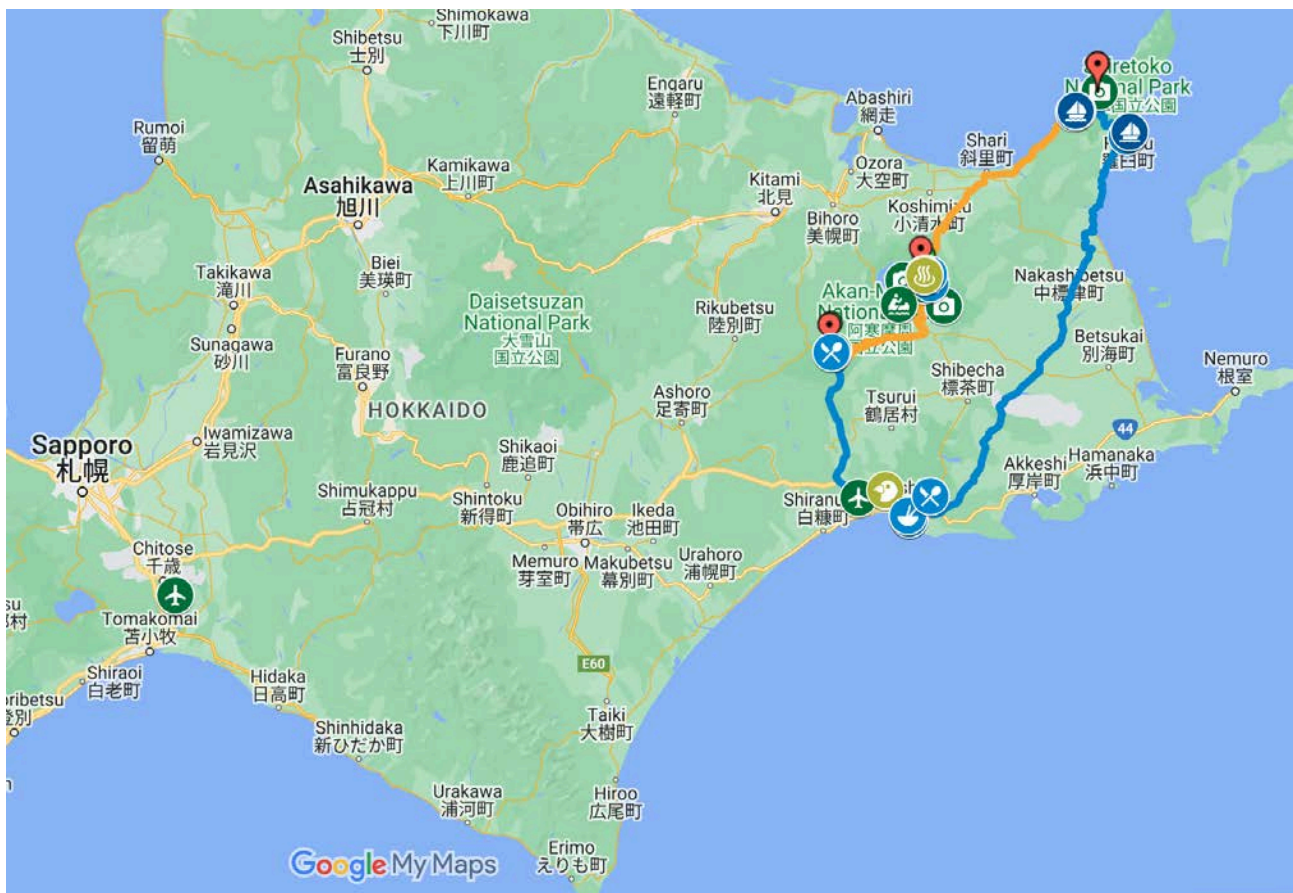
On the first day of your tour, you will need to catch the airport express bus from Kushiro Airport to Lake Akan. Please check Day 1 of the itinerary for more information.

You can search train timetables in English on [Japan Transit Planner website](#).

If you are combining two or more of our self-guided tours or a self-guided tour with a guided tour and you need to get to Kushiro from Sapporo, Asahikawa or Wakkakai, we will provide the necessary information on public transport between the cities. You are welcome to make your own hotel arrangements between tours, or you can ask us to make the arrangements for you. In this case, we will get a quote for the cost of any extra accommodation and add the cost to your travel packages.

Tour map

To view the route on Google My Maps, [click here](#).



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Day-to-Day Itinerary

Day 1 – Arrive in Kushiro, Travel to Lake Akan

Irankarapte! Welcome to Kushiro, the gateway to Eastern Hokkaido.

Upon arrival at the Kushiro airport, you will need to catch an express bus directly to Lake Akan. The bus departs from the airport five times a day. The bus departure times are designed to line up with flights arriving from Tokyo throughout the day so please choose the one that matches best with your flight schedule.

A reservation is not required to board the bus. You will need to pay the fare on the day. You can purchase a ticket for the journey from ticket machines at Kushiro Airport. Journey time to Lake Akan is 1hr 15mins.

Upon arrival at the Lake Akan Bus Centre, the last stop, you'll be able to make your way to your accommodation, which is a 5-10 minute walk from the Bus Centre. After checking in, the rest of the day is at your leisure to rest and enjoy the hot springs at your accommodation. A delicious dinner will be served at your accommodation this evening.

Meals	Activity	Travel	Accommodation
D	-	Bus (¥2,190 / 1h15m) Kushiro Airport → Lake Akan	Hotel at Lake Akan

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Day 2 – Ainu Cultural Tour & Explore Lake Akan at Leisure

After breakfast this morning, you'll join an insightful Ainu cultural walking tour (1.5 hours, up to 3 km / 1.9 mi) that starts at mid-morning from the [Ainu Theatre Ikor](#). Your Ainu guide will lead you through the forest near Lake Akan, sharing personal stories of growing up in the Ainu village and teaching you about how the Ainu people have traditionally lived in harmony with the local plants and wildlife.



After the tour finishes just before noon, you can explore the [Akan Ainu Kotan](#) high street, home to a number of souvenir shops run by Ainu families. There are even some shops with English speaking staff who will be glad to share their culture with visitors, as well as restaurants serving traditional Ainu food, rare even within Hokkaido.

Your afternoon is at leisure, but if you're looking for a few extra walks then we recommend enjoying a leisurely walk to [Bokke](#) (1.5 km / 0.9 mi loop trail), a spot where you can see the bubbling mud on the shore of Lake Akan. The trail begins behind the [Akankohan Visitor Centre](#), on the eastern shore of Lake Akan. Keep your eyes peeled for squirrels, woodpeckers and other wildlife during the walk!

The Ainu Theatre Ikoro offers performances at night. The traditional dance performance starts at 8:00 pm (30 mins, ¥1,500) and the cultural performance – a fusion of Ainu performance with modern art and music – starts at 9:00 pm (30 mins, ¥2,200). Neither show requires an advance booking, but it is recommended during weekends and holidays.

Meals	Walk	Travel	Accommodation
B, D	4.5 km / 2.8 ml	–	Hotel at Lake Akan

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Day 3 – Visit Lake Mashu & Hike Mt. Io to Kawayu Onsen

This morning, a taxi will pick you up for a day of excursion in Akan–Mashu National Park. You can load your luggage into the taxi and your taxi driver will take you to [Lake Mashu Caldera](#) for the first stop. On a clear day, you'll be greeted by an expansive view of Lake Mashu, known as one of the clearest lakes in the world, as well as the Kussharo Caldera, which is home to the fuming [Mt. Io](#).



From the Lake Mashu No. 1 Observation Platform, you'll travel by taxi to the No. 3 Observation Platform to enjoy the lake from a different perspective. After you've enjoyed panoramas of the lake, your driver will take you to Mt. Io, Sulphur Mountain.

Mt. Io is a bubbling active volcano coated with bright, yellow sulphur. You can enjoy an easy walk on a well-maintained path from Mt. Io to the [Kawayu Visitor Centre](#) (2.6 km / 1.6 mi).

You'll meet your taxi driver again at the visitor centre, who will take you to the last stop of the day – [Sunayu Onsen](#) on the shores of Lake Kussharo. This is your reward for all your walking today! This beach has hot springs flowing beneath its sand. Dig around to make your own foot bath and enjoy relaxing on the lake shore for a while before heading to your accommodation for tonight, bidding farewell to your friendly driver.

After dinner at your accommodation tonight, relax in the hot spring waters at your hotel, but be sure to remove any jewellery before bathing, as the sulphuric waters of the hot spring will turn them black!

Meals	Hike	Travel	Accommodation
B, D	2.6 km 1.6 ml	Taxi (¥0 / 1h00m) Lake Akan → Lake Mashu Taxi (¥0 / 0h15m) Lake Mashu → Mt. Io Taxi (¥0 / 0h10m) Kawayu Visitor Centre → Sunayu Onsen Taxi (¥0 / 0h10m) Sunayu Onsen → Accommodation	Ryokan in Kawayu Onsen

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Day 4 – Canoeing on the Kushiro River

After an early breakfast at your hotel this morning, your canoe guide will pick you up and drive you to the starting point of your canoeing experience on the Kushiro River, which feeds into the Kushiro Wetlands.

At Lake Kussharo, you'll board a Canadian canoe where your guide will do all the paddling, allowing you to fully relax and enjoy the journey down the Kushiro River to Biruwa Bridge. Take in the tranquil atmosphere and keep an eye peeled for wild birds, such as the Grey Heron and Crested Kingfisher – you may even spot some deer grazing by the riverbed!



After your canoeing experience ends, your canoe guide will drive you back to your accommodation in Kawayu Onsen. The rest of the day is at your leisure. There are a few great lunch options in Kawayu Onsen township. For those seeking an active afternoon, you can rent bicycles from Kawayu Visitor Centre (open 10:00 am to 4:30 pm, last rental at 3:00 pm, closed Wednesdays). Otherwise, simply enjoy relaxing and bathing in the hot springs until dinner at your accommodation!

Meals	Canoeing	Travel	Accommodation
B, D	2.5 hours	Guide's Vehicle (¥0 / 0h20m) Kawayu Onsen → Kushiro River	Ryokan in Kawayu Onsen

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Day 5 – Travel to Utoro Shiretoko & Nature Walking Tour of Shiretoko Five Lakes

This morning, you'll set off on a scenic three-hour taxi journey from Kawayu Onsen to the Shiretoko Peninsula, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and Japan National Park. Your driver will collect you and your luggage directly from your hotel in Kawayu Onsen. We've arranged a special sightseeing taxi to make the most of your travel day, taking you all the way to Utoro in Shiretoko with stops at notable attractions along the route. You'll enjoy brief visits to picturesque locations, including the spectacular Oshinkoshin Waterfall, before arriving at Utoro's Roadside Station around midday.



Surrounded by the Sea of Okhotsk and covered in enormous mountains, the Shiretoko Peninsula is home to a plethora of wildlife ranging from Brown Bears and Japanese Deer to Sperm Whales and Dall's Porpoises. Over the next two days you'll have a chance to explore Shiretoko by land and by sea, but before you get to exploring, be sure to grab lunch at the Utoro Roadside Station.

After you have enjoyed lunch, a local guide will pick you up from the [Michi-no-Eki Roadside Station in Utoro](#). Together you will head to [Shiretoko Five Lakes](#), a habitat for Japan's biggest land mammal, the Brown Bear. This nature walking tour takes you on a gentle-paced journey past the five lakes, with your guide making frequent stops to share fascinating insights about the unique ecosystem, flora, and fauna of this special place. To ensure everyone can enjoy the experience fully, the trail is managed so that groups don't overtake each other. Please note that some sections of the trail may be closed due to bear activity – in such cases, your guide will either reroute the walk or, if necessary, abandon the walk for your safety.

On a clear day, the Shiretoko Mountain range will be laid out in front of you in a stunning panorama. During your nature walk, your luggage will be kept in the guide's car and after the tour they will drive you to your accommodation.

Meals	Hike	Travel	Accommodation
B, D	3.1 km 1.9 ml	Taxi (¥0 / 3h00m) Kawayu Onsen → Shiretoko Utoro	Hotel in Utoro Shiretoko

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Day 6 – Nature Cruise off Utoro Coast & Travel to Rausu Shiretoko

This morning, you'll board a boat for a two-hour excursion along the coast.

What you'll really want to look out for this morning are Brown Bears, Japan's largest land mammal and a creature of significant cultural importance to the Ainu, who revere it as *kim'un kamuy* (God of the mountains). Brown Bears are seen roaming along the shoreline on the prowl for food and, depending on the season, possibly some bear cubs in tow!



After your return to land, a private taxi will pick you up in the early afternoon from your hotel in Utoro. You'll take a scenic drive over the famous Shiretoko Pass to Rausu on the opposite side of the peninsula. At the pass's summit, you'll find yourself at the base of Mt. Rausu. If the mountain isn't shrouded in clouds, your driver can stop briefly for photos of the magnificent views. The journey to Rausu takes less than an hour.

Rausu is a thriving fishing village renowned throughout Japan for its seafood, particularly its Atka mackerel and kelp. Upon arrival, you'll check in to your accommodation and have the evening free to explore the town at your leisure. Your dinner will be a seafood feast served at your accommodation.

Meals	Activity	Travel	Accommodation
B, D	Cruise (2 hours)	Taxi (¥0 / 0h50m) Utoro → Rausu	Lodge in Rausu Shiretoko

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Day 7 – Whale-Watching Cruise off Rausu Coast & Travel to Kushiro

Today is the last day of your tour. You can ask your accommodation to look after your luggage while you enjoy one last nature-watching cruise departing.

The coast of the Shiretoko Peninsula is home to a deep ocean trench, making it a popular habitat for Sperm Whales and Dall's Porpoises and today's cruise may offer you a chance to catch a glimpse of them, as well as marine bird life unique to the region. In June departures, killer whales (orcas) are also commonly sighted.



The cruise will take you back to land before noon, so we recommend enjoying an early lunch in Rausu. If it's salmon run season, we highly recommend taking the chance to enjoy salmon roe rice bowls, which will be as fresh and delicious as you can get at the time of year!

After lunch, all that is left is to make your way to Kushiro. Congratulations for completing this self-guided tour of Hokkaido! Take a local bus from Rausu to Kushiro. The bus ride is roughly 3 hours and 40 minutes, so be sure to stock up on snacks and drinks to tide you over until you reach Kushiro. We recommend catching the 1:00 pm bus from Akan Bus's Rausu office, as the next one is not until 4:40 pm!

If you have some extra time to spare before leaving Kushiro, consider visiting the [Kushiro City Museum](#) or a walk along the Kushiro River to reflect upon your trip. If you are interested in learning about the conservation of wildlife including rare species of birds, consider visiting the [Kushiro Marsh Wildlife Conservation Centre](#). The two facilities are out of town and beyond walking distance. As there is no local bus operating in the area, your transportation options will be limited strictly to taxis.

Make sure that you have left nothing behind in Hokkaido before heading to the airport.
Itterasshai!

Meals	Activity	Travel	Accommodation
B	Cruise (2.5 hours)	Bus (¥4,940 / 3h40m) Rausu → Kushiro	-

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Preparing For Your Tour

Exploring unfamiliar territory is one of the thrills of self-guided travel. While Adventure Hokkaido is here to support you, you'll be navigating streets and mountains, browsing restaurant menus, and finding your own way day-to-day. Here are our tried-and-tested tips for overseas travellers visiting Hokkaido.

SIM Card

Having access to the internet is indispensable for this tour. It will allow you to look up information and get in touch with us if needed. Many of the apps we recommend below rely on an internet connection. There are a number of data sim options when visiting Japan, see our [blog on setting up your phone for travel](#) for more details.

Translation

English is still not widely spoken in Japan, especially in rural Hokkaido. Fortunately, **Google Translate's** ([Apple](#) | [Android](#)) performance has improved in recent years thanks to developments in AI technology and this free app is now an essential travel tool. The **Google Lens** feature allows you to simply hold your smartphone camera up to text and the phone will translate it for you on the spot! While it of course cannot compare to a human interpreter, it is quite useful for reading signage, menus and other basic information. It also has a text-to-speech function— very handy for getting to know (or getting help from) the locals!

Navigation

For day-to-day navigation around town, **Google Maps** ([Apple](#) | [Android](#)) works well in Hokkaido. The QR codes in the cue sheets provided link directly to Google Maps, making navigation effortless.

However, Google Maps isn't ideal for hiking. We recommend **Gaia GPS** ([Apple](#) | [Android](#)) for trail navigation—it's the app many of our guides trust. It offers excellent English-language topographic maps and easily imports the GPX route data we provide. The only downside is that saving the maps to be viewed offline requires a paid upgrade.

For a fully offline alternative, try **Organic Maps** ([Apple](#) | [Android](#)). While the hiking maps aren't as detailed as Gaia's and urban navigation isn't as current as Google Maps, the complete offline functionality makes this free and open-source offshoot of Maps.me perfect for remote adventures.

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Weather

The weather in the mountains is often quite different to town and we find that most general purpose weather forecasts underestimate the wind and cold at altitude. Make sure you check a mountain-specific forecast. We find [Metoblue.com](https://www.metoblue.com) (also available as an app [Apple](#) | [Android](#)) to be reliable in the mountains here. Pay close attention to the temperature and wind speeds and make sure you pack a spare warm layer – better to have it and not need it than not have it and need it! Finally, you don't have to do all the activities in full. Turn back early if conditions are unsuitable – remember, it's supposed to be fun!

For general weather during your trip we also recommend [Yr.no](#) ([Apple](#) | [Android](#)). The [short term rain forecast](#) from Japan's Meteorological Agency is a great guide for if you should expect to get wet while out and about.

Staying Safe While Hiking

On top of navigating the route and making sense of the weather forecast, you are also responsible for keeping yourself safe while hiking. The hazards on Hokkaido's hiking trails include exposure to the weather, poison ivy, bears, hornets and the trails themselves – they can be quite rough. We recommend having a read of our [blog on staying safe while hiking in Hokkaido](#). While experienced hikers will be familiar with much of the advice, take note of what might be different here compared to where you may have hiked before. We are all hikers ourselves, so feel free to ask any specific questions you have!

Cash

Finally, Japan is still a cash culture. Cards and smartphone payments are seldom accepted, especially in the more rural parts of Hokkaido that you will be exploring. You can withdraw cash using international cards from ATMs at 7-Eleven and Lawson convenience stores, as well as Japan Post Office ATMs. Make sure you always have ¥20,000 – ¥30,000 with you, which will be enough to cover your daily expenses for a few days between ATMs.

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Our recommended reading

[What to pack for Hokkaido?](#)

[A Local's Guide to Using Public Transport in Hokkaido](#)

[A Local's Guide on What to Expect When Staying in Hokkaido](#)

[A Local's Guide to Eating Out in Hokkaido](#)

[A Local's Guide to Buying Medicine in Hokkaido](#)

[How to onsen \(like a local!\)](#)

[Hiking Safely in Hokkaido](#)

[Hokkaido Wildlife Guide](#)

[The Ainu, from a Hokkaido local's perspective](#)