

Hot Springs & History

7 Day Self-Guided Tour



With a perfect blend of urban excitement and off-the-beaten track exploration, this adventure takes you from the peaks of Hakodate to the dramatic landscapes of Shikotsu-Toya National Park, including vast caldera lakes and fuming craters.

[View Departure Dates & Prices](#)

[View Gallery](#)

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Hot Springs & History

7 Day Self-Guided Tour



Contents

About the Tour.....	3
About Shikotsu-Toya National Park & Hakodate.....	3
Tour highlights.....	3
Who is this tour for?.....	3
Itinerary at a glance.....	4
Accommodation.....	4
What's included.....	5
What's not included.....	5
Travel style.....	5
When do you run this tour?.....	6
Why travel self-guided in Hokkaido?.....	6
Getting around by public transport is fun and green.....	6
You are the guide.....	6
...but you are not alone!.....	6
How to book this tour?.....	7
Travel Insurance.....	7
Travel to the Starting Point.....	8
Tour map.....	9
Day-to-Day Itinerary.....	10
Day 1 - Arrive in Sapporo.....	10
Day 2 - Travel to Lake Shikotsu & Explore Lake Shikotsu.....	11
Day 3 - Travel to Shiraoi & Visit Upopoy National Ainu Museum.....	12
Day 4 - Travel to Noboribetsu Onsen & Hike the Hell Valley.....	13
Day 5 - Travel to Lake Toya & Hike on Nakajima Island.....	14
Day 6 - Travel to Hakodate & Hike Mt. Hakodate.....	15
Day 7 - Depart Hakodate.....	16
Preparing For Your Tour.....	17
SIM Card.....	17
Translation.....	17
Navigation.....	17
Weather.....	18
Staying Safe While Hiking.....	18
Cash.....	18
Our recommended reading.....	19
Elevation profiles.....	20

Hot Springs & History

7 Day Self-Guided Tour



About the Tour

Start	Finish	Grading	Season
Sapporo	Hakodate	Relaxed Hiking	May, Jun, Sep & Oct

About Shikotsu-Toya National Park & Hakodate

Shikotsu-Toya National Park lies close to Sapporo and is home to a number of spectacular caldera lakes and steaming active volcanoes. The volcanoes concentrated in the region have of course given rise to several natural hot springs, meaning that it is popular among domestic Japanese visitors for its many resorts. But as well as the warm hot springs, it is also home to rich forests, fascinating geological hikes and incredible wildlife.

The other focus of this tour is Hakodate, which to this day remains one of Hokkaido's largest and most important cities. Even by Japanese standards, it has a rich, multinational history, inexorably linked with foreign commerce, trade, culture and diplomacy. Today, its seamless blending of new with old makes it a popular place to live and visit. You could spend hours exploring this historic town alone on foot, but for outdoor lovers there are plenty of light hikes and coastal walks to explore too!

Tour highlights

- Discover the natural wonders of Toya-Usu UNESCO Global Geopark, shaped by years of volcanic activity.
- Get up-close-and-personal with the history and culture of the Ainu people at the Upopoy National Ainu Museum.
- Walk through an extinct volcanic crater and soak in the waters of Noboribetsu Onsen.
- Hike up Mt. Hakodate and enjoy spectacular views over an historic city.

Who is this tour for?

- Active travelers who enjoy walks averaging 8 km (5 mi) with up to 600 m (1969 ft) elevation gain.
- 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.

Hot Springs & History

7 Day Self-Guided Tour



Itinerary at a glance

Day	Activities	Km	Miles	Meals ¹
1	Arrive in Sapporo	4.7	2.9	- ▾
2	Travel to Lake Shikotsu & Explore Lake Shikotsu	1.8	1.1	B, D ▾
3	Travel to Shiraoi & Visit the Upopoy National Ainu Museum	-	-	B ▾
4	Travel to Noboribetsu Onsen & Hike the Hell Valley	3.2	2.0	B, D ▾
5	Travel to Lake Toya & Hike on Nakajima Island	3.3	2.0	B, D ▾
6	Travel to Hakodate & Hiking on Mt. Hakodate	5.2~8.3	3.2~5.2	B ▾
7	Depart Hakodate	-	-	B ▾

Accommodation

Day	Type	Location	Ensuite Toilet	Ensuite Shower	Onsen	Laundry
1	Hotel ▾	Sapporo	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Hotel ▾	Lake Shikotsu	✓		✓	✓
3	Hostel ▾ ²	Shiraoi				✓
4	Ryokan ▾	Noboribetsu Onsen	✓		✓	
5	Hotel ▾	Lake Toya	✓	✓	✓	✓
6	Hotel ▾	Hakodate	✓	✓		✓

We may change the facility options if our preferred accommodation is unavailable.

¹ B = Breakfast, L = Lunch, D = Dinner

² We will arrange a private room with shared facilities at the hostel. If you would like to guarantee an en-suite room at a different accommodation in Shiraoi, an accommodation upgrade is available for an extra charge.

Hot Springs & History

7 Day Self-Guided Tour



What's included

- 6 nights accommodation
- 6 breakfasts and 3 dinners
- Daily cue sheets to help you get around using public transport
- Full English speaking phone support

What's not included

- Transportation costs
- Airfare
- Travel insurance
- Personal expenses
- Drinks with included meals

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).

Hot Springs & History

7 Day Self-Guided Tour



When do you run this tour?

This tour is available on set dates in May, 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.

Hot Springs & History

7 Day Self-Guided Tour



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.

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 a 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.

Hot Springs & History

7 Day Self-Guided Tour



Travel to the Starting Point

The starting point for this self-guided tour is Sapporo, Hokkaido's capital city. By air, you can reach Sapporo via a flight to New Chitose Airport. There are multiple flights a day from both Tokyo Haneda and Narita Airport, operated by JAL, ANA and a number of low-cost airlines.

There are also plenty of flights daily between New Chitose and Osaka's Kansai and Itami Airports, again with multiple airlines. For other regional airports in Japan, flights may be limited to just a few departures a day with major carriers JAL and / or ANA. Please check with the airline of your choice.

From New Chitose Airport, you can take a train directly to JR Sapporo Station (40 mins, 1,230 yen per person).

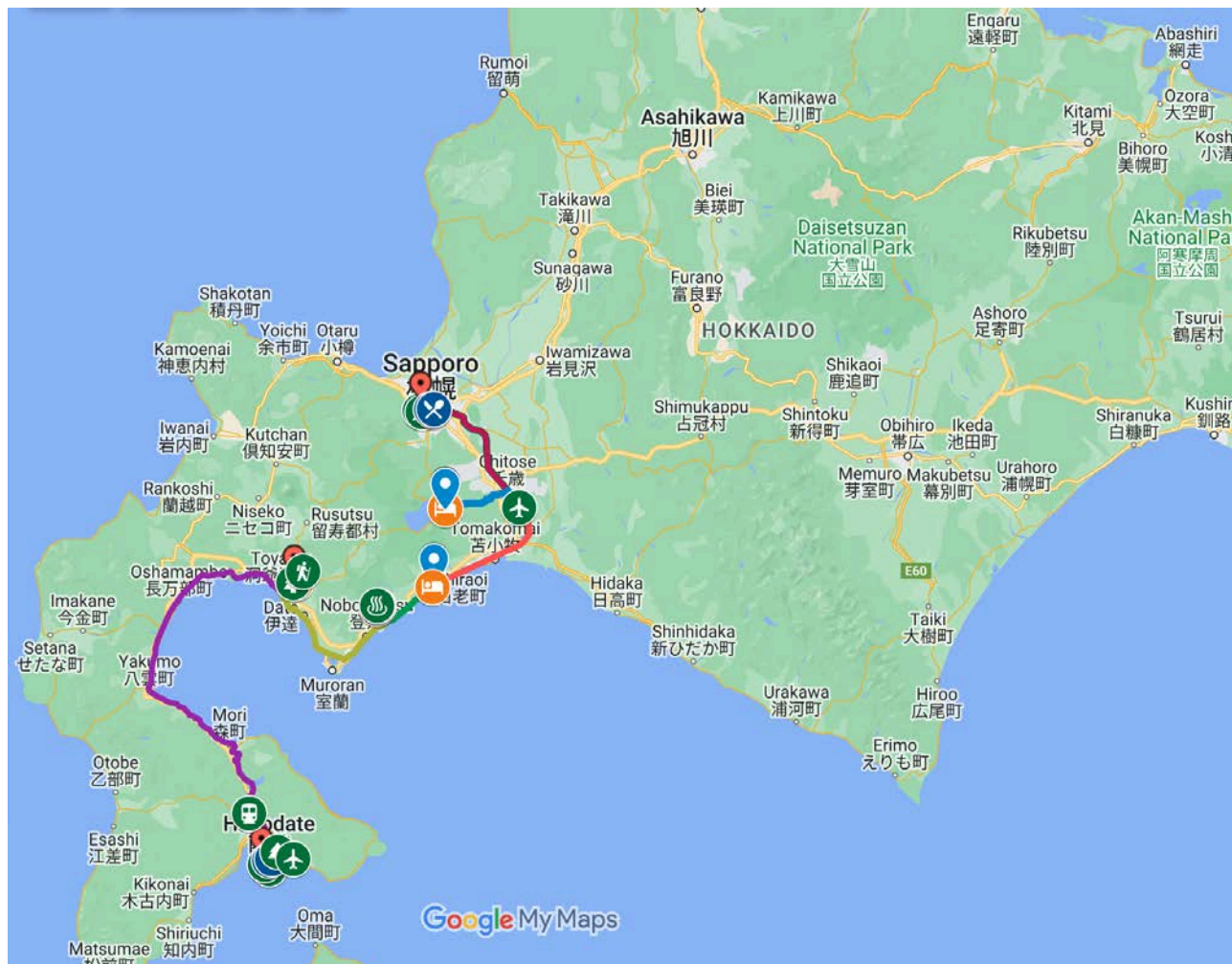
If you are combining two or more of our self-guided tours or a self-guided tour with a guided tour and you need to get to Sapporo from Wakkanai, Asahikawa or Kushiro, we will provide the necessary information on public transport between the cities. You are welcome to make your own hotel arrangements 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.

Hot Springs & History

7 Day Self-Guided Tour

Tour map

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



Hot Springs & History

7 Day Self-Guided Tour

Day-to-Day Itinerary

Day 1 – Arrive in Sapporo

Welcome to Sapporo, Hokkaido's bustling capital! If you arrive with some time to spare, we recommend taking the opportunity to explore the city.

We recommend that you take the subway to Maruyama-Koen for a day of urban exploration. After a short walk (1 km / 0.6 mi) from the subway station you will reach [Hokkaido-Jingu](#), the largest Shinto shrine in Hokkaido.



Take in the serene atmosphere of the shrine before starting your hike of [Mt. Maruyama](#) (3.7 km / 1.6 mi). The trail to the summit of Mt. Maruyama takes you through old-growth forests that coexist next to the urban sprawl of Hokkaido's capital city. After your hike, take the subway back into town and check into your hotel.

For dinner, our recommendation is to explore the [Ramen Yokocho Alley](#) in Susukino, [Tanukikoji Shopping Arcade Street](#), or [Noren Yokocho](#) near [Nijo Seafood Market](#). You will have countless options ranging from ramen stalls, sushi bars, izakaya bars and more!

Meals	Hike	Ascent	Travel	Accommodation
–	4.7 km 2.9 mi	180 m 590 ft	See "Travel to the Starting Point"	Hotel in Sapporo

Hot Springs & History

7 Day Self-Guided Tour



Day 2 – Travel to Lake Shikotsu & Explore Lake Shikotsu

This morning you'll take a local train to Chitose, where you will transfer to a bus bound for [Lake Shikotsu](#), the crown-jewel of Shikotsu-Toya National Park. This stunning caldera lake is surrounded by active volcanoes and, as a result, is home to some fantastic hot springs. Upon arrival, you will drop off your luggage at your accommodation and enjoy lunch before an afternoon of hiking. For lunch, we highly recommend *Shikotsu-ko Chippu* (Kokanee Salmon), which was introduced into Lake Shikotsu over 100 years ago and has since become a local delicacy. There are a number of other lakeside restaurants offering ramen, curry and western food as well.



This afternoon, we recommend that you spend some time walking along the lakeshore. The [Visitor Centre](#) is a great place to learn about the history, flora and fauna around the lake. From the visitor centre, there is a pleasant footpath that follows the lakeside and crosses over the oldest train bridge in Hokkaido, the [Yamasentetsu Bridge](#), which was once part of a railway line made to deliver cargo between the city of Tomakomai and Lake Shikotsu. The hike continues to Yacho-no-Mori, a small forest that hosts many native tree species and birdlife. The trail loops around and back to the visitor centre. The visitor centre also makes a great place to seek shelter on rainy days if you need to wait for a shower to pass!

After your walk, you'll return to your inn to check in and enjoy dinner. In the evening, wind down with a soak in the hot springs at your accommodation.

Meals	Walk	Travel	Accommodation
B, D	1.8 km 1.1 mi	Train (¥1,040 / 0h29m) Sapporo Station → Chitose Station Bus (¥1,140 / 0h44m) Chitose Station → Lake Shikotsu	Hotel at Lake Shikotsu

Hot Springs & History

7 Day Self-Guided Tour

Day 3 – Travel to Shiraoi & Visit Upopoy National Ainu Museum

After breakfast at your hotel, you'll say *sayonara* to Lake Shikotsu and board the bus back to Chitose. From Chitose, you'll continue onwards via train to the seaside town of Shiraoi.

Shiraoi is a coastal town home to a number of prominent Ainu sites as well as the [Upopoy National Ainu Museum](#), dedicated to preserving Ainu heritage and culture. Here you'll be able to learn about the indigenous people who lived in Hokkaido long before it became a part of modern Japan.



The museum is also home to three different restaurants, where you can enjoy Japanese meals with Ainu influence, as well as some more traditional Ainu options. The museum is a short walk from the station and offers coin lockers on site to store your luggage while you explore the museum.

Please note that the Upopoy Museum is closed on Mondays, so to ensure you can visit, avoid starting this tour on a Saturday.

After an afternoon at the museum, return to your accommodation to check in and consider trying Shiraoi-Gyu, a delicious wagyu beef and local speciality.

Meals	Travel	Accommodation
B	Bus (¥1,120 / 0h47m) Lake Shikotsu → Minami Chitose Station Train (¥2,370 / 0h31m) Minami Chitose → Shiraoi	Hostel ³ in Shiraoi

³ We will arrange a private room with shared facilities at the hostel. If you would like to guarantee an en-suite room at a different accommodation in Shiraoi, an accommodation upgrade is available for an extra charge.

Hot Springs & History

7 Day Self-Guided Tour



Day 4 – Travel to Noboribetsu Onsen & Hike the Hell Valley

After breakfast, you'll board a local train to Noboribetsu Station and transfer to a bus bound for Noboribetsu Onsen, home to [Noboribetsu Hell Valley](#). Here, the remains of a volcanic crater await. Upon arrival, drop off your luggage at your inn and enjoy lunch at one of the many restaurants nearby.

After lunch, you'll take off on a 3.2km (1.9 mile) walk through the Noboribetsu Hell Valley. A wooden walkway is built atop the crater, allowing you to walk through the sulphuric landscape and take in the otherworldly atmosphere. From the Hell Valley, you'll hike north towards [Oyunuma](#), a lake formed above a volcanic crater that spews out sulphuric gas. The bottom of the lake is as hot as 130°C (266°F), with blue-grey water on the surface reaching highs of 50°C (122°F). The waters of Oyunuma flow out into the Oyunuma River, which form a natural [ashiyu](#) (foot bath) where you can soak your feet in the flowing river. In the evening, return to your hotel for dinner and relax in the famous hot spring waters of Noboribetsu.



Meals	Hike	Ascent	Travel	Accommodation
D	3.2 km 2.0 mi	148 m 485 ft	Train (¥470 / 0h09m) Shiraoi Station → Noboribetsu Station Bus (¥350 / 0h26m) Noboribetsu Station → Noboribetsu Onsen	Ryokan in Noboribetsu Onsen

Hot Springs & History

7 Day Self-Guided Tour



Day 5 – Travel to Lake Toya & Hike on Nakajima Island

This morning you will board the bus back to Noboribetsu Station to catch a train bound for Toya Station. From Toya Station, you'll transfer to a local bus to reach the famous [Lake Toya](#).

After dropping off your luggage at your accommodation, you'll catch a ferry to the island of [Nakajima](#) for a leisurely hike. Other than the well-maintained trails, museum, and dock, Nakajima is untouched by humans, making it an oasis for wildlife... except for Hokkaido's brown bears, which do not live on the island! Phew!



The ferry to Nakajima takes roughly 25 minutes, and once on Nakajima, you are free to explore the hiking trail on the island. Please note that the trail gate closes at 4 pm and the last entry time is 2:30 pm, so make sure you give yourself ample time to enjoy hiking and return to the jetty. We recommend hiking out-and-back to an open meadow at Daiheigen (3.3 km/2 mi return), where you may have the chance to see Mt. Yotei in the distance on a clear day.

The museum on the island is home to a plethora of information about its history, as well as a small café with light meal options that makes for a great place to pass the time until the next ferry.

After taking the ferry back to the mainland, the rest of the day is yours to enjoy as you like. Enjoy a walk along the lakeside or unwind at a café before heading back to your hotel for dinner and a soak in the natural hot springs.

If the weather is not suitable for a hike, we recommend checking out the [Lake Toya Visitor Centre](#). Here, you can learn all about Lake Toya's volcanic past, including a recent, powerful eruption that took place in 2000. The museum also educates about the local flora and fauna.

Meals	Hike	Ascent	Travel	Accommodation
B, D	3,3 km 2.0 mi	130 m 426 ft	Bus (¥350 / 0h26m) Noboribetsu Onsen → Noboribetsu Station Train (¥3060 / 0h44m) Noboribetsu Station → Toya Station Bus (¥340 / 0h23m) Toya Station → Toyako Onsen	Hotel at Lake Toya

Hot Springs & History

7 Day Self-Guided Tour



Day 6 – Travel to Hakodate & Hike Mt. Hakodate

This morning you'll wave goodbye to Shikotsu-Toya National Park as you board a train bound for Hakodate, one of Hokkaido's oldest cities. As one of the first international port towns after Japan's long period of isolation, Hakodate is home to historic embassies and churches from around the world. It has become a haven for food enthusiasts and architecture lovers. You'll have ample time today and tomorrow to take in everything the city has to offer.



In the afternoon, you'll take the city tram to the end of the line at [Yachigashira Station](#), a roughly 15 minute walk from [Cape Tachimachi](#), where you'll be greeted by a panorama of the Tsugaru Strait, the small stretch of ocean that separates Honshu from Hokkaido. On a clear day you'll be able to see Aomori Prefecture across the bay.

After enjoying the view, head to the nearby trailhead for [Mt. Hakodate](#) for a climb up to the top where you'll have some free time to explore the fortress ruins near the summit. A nice option is to head over to the viewing platform as the sun starts to set, but do keep in mind that the popular sight can attract some very large crowds! Mt. Hakodate is home to some fine dining options at the summit, but there's no shortage of restaurants to choose from after you take the ropeway back down to the city.

Meals	Hike	Ascent	Travel	Accommodation
B	5.2~8.3 km 3.2~5.2 mi	350~462 m 1148~1516 ft	Bus (¥340 / 0h31m) Toyako Onsen → Toya Station Train (¥6520 / 1h55m) Toya Station → Hakodate Station Streetcar (¥230 / 0h14m) Hakodate Station → Yachigashira Streetcar (¥210 / 0h06m) Jyujigai → Hakodate Station Ropeway (¥1200 / 0h03m) Mt. Hakodate Summit → Hakodate	Hotel in Hakodate

Hot Springs & History

7 Day Self-Guided Tour



Day 7 – Depart Hakodate

Congratulations on completing this self-guided tour of Hokkaido! Our tour arrangements end with breakfast this morning, after which you'll be free to enjoy the city at your own pace, visiting the places that interest you the most.

Consider an early lunch at the renowned [Hakodate Morning Market](#), or perhaps [Hakodate Jiyuichiba](#) for a slightly quieter and more local atmosphere. Both have a wonderful selection of fresh seafood so why not enjoy a bowl of *kaisen-don* (sashimi-topped rice bowl) for an early lunch? Alternatively, drop into one of Hakodate's many trendy bakeries and enjoy a morning picnic in [Goryokaku](#), an old, star-shaped fortress that today is a popular park in the centre of Hakodate. There are plenty of places to sit around the park under the shade of the many cherry trees. At the centre of the park, there is also the historic Hakodate Magistrate's Office, an administrative building that opened at the end of Japan's period of feudal isolation and served as one of Japan's very first diplomatic posts.

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

Meals			
B			

Hot Springs & History

7 Day Self-Guided Tour



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.

Hot Springs & History

7 Day Self-Guided Tour



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://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.

Hot Springs & History

7 Day Self-Guided Tour



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](#)

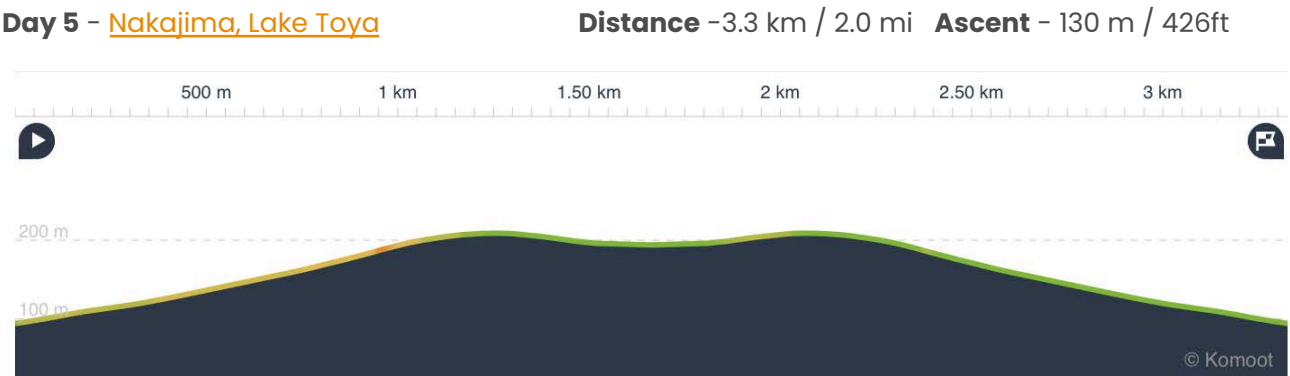
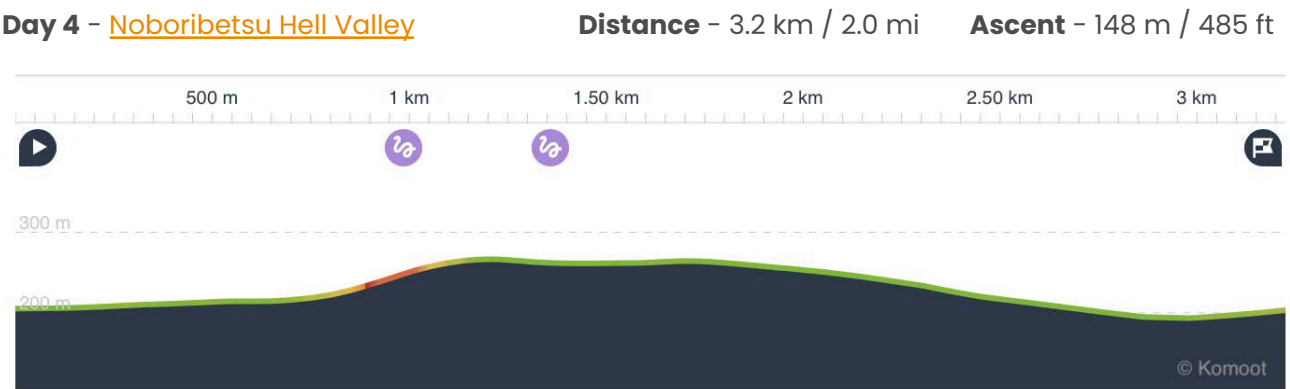
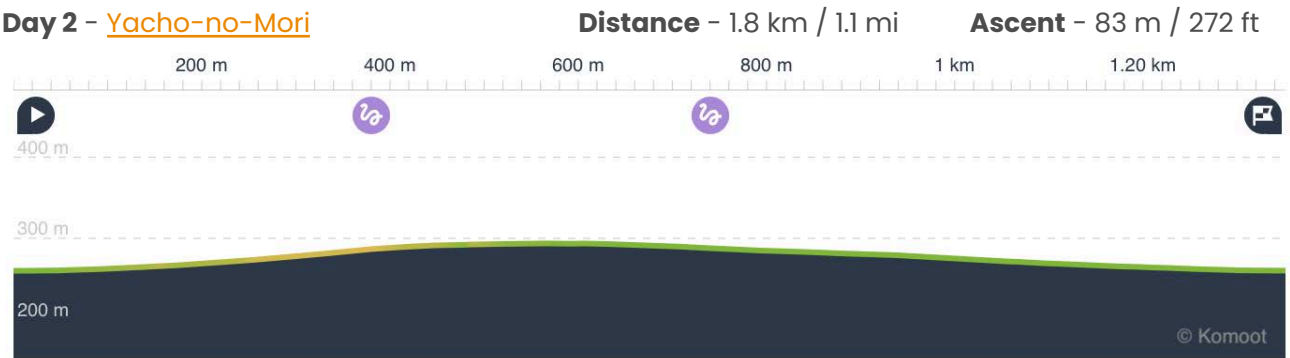
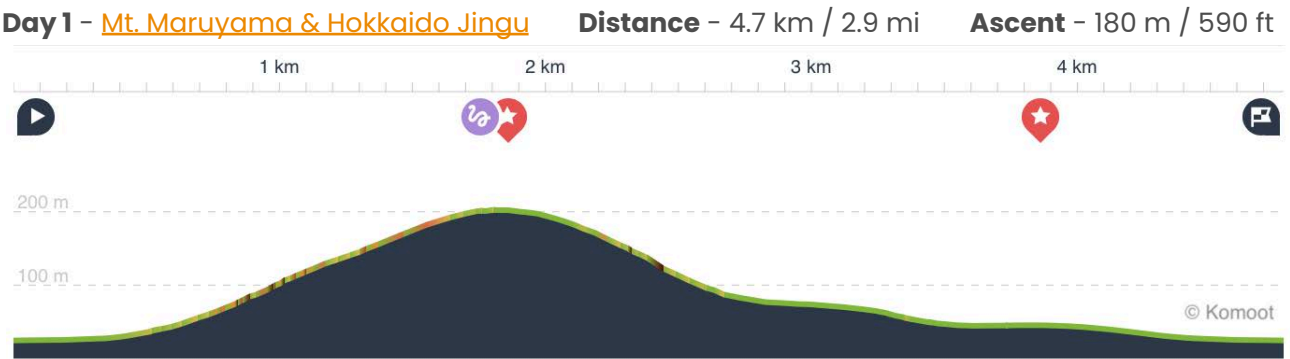
[The Ainu, from a Hokkaido local's perspective](#)

Hot Springs & History

7 Day Self-Guided Tour



Elevation profiles



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7 Day Self-Guided Tour



Day 6 - [Mt. Hakodate](#)

Distance - 5.2 ~ 8.3 km / 3.2 ~ 5.2 mi Ascent - 350 ~ 462 m / 1148 ~ 1516 ft

