

Hokkaido Winter Explorer



trip highlights

Witness Hokkaido's magnificent red-crowned cranes in their spectacular winter habitat

Explore the snow-covered forests and volcanic landscapes of Akan-Mashu National Park

Discover Ainu culture and experience a traditional dance and music performance

Snowshoe through Shiretoko National Park to the frozen Furepe Waterfall

Experience Lake Akan, Lake Mashu and the geothermal landscapes surrounding Mount Ito

Relax in traditional onsen accommodation and enjoy delicious regional Japanese cuisine



Trip Duration	7 days	Trip Code: HKW
Grade	Introductory	
Activities	Adventure touring, Guided snowshoeing	
Summary	7 day trip, 5 nights onsen ryokan or Japanese-style hotel, 1 night western style hotel	

welcome to World Expeditions

For over 50 years, we've been creating high-quality, expedition-style adventures for active travellers with a curious spirit. From our very first trek in the mountains of Nepal to pioneering remote routes across all seven continents, our journeys are built for those who want to truly explore – not just visit.

At the heart of what we do is a simple philosophy: take the paths less travelled.

This means travelling with care, supporting local communities, minimising our impact, and unlocking experiences that most travellers will never have.

If you're ready to go further and dig deeper, we invite you to join us on the Hokkaido Winter Explorer, a journey that captures the essence of a unique adventure.

why travel with World Expeditions?

On this winter journey through eastern Hokkaido, we combine our adventure travel experience with the expertise of trusted local partners to showcase the region at its most spectacular. Explore the frozen landscapes of Akan-Mashu and Shiretoko, search for Hokkaido's remarkable winter wildlife, experience guided snowshoeing, discover Ainu culture and stay in carefully selected Japanese accommodation with traditional onsen and regional cuisine. With key arrangements organised in advance and experienced local guides leading the winter activities, you can enjoy the freedom of self-guided travel while benefiting from the support and expertise of World Expeditions.



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the trip

Experience the pristine winter landscapes of eastern Hokkaido on this seven-day journey combining the freedom of self-guided travel with selected locally guided winter experiences. Travel through snow-covered forests and volcanic landscapes, encounter Japan's iconic red-crowned cranes, explore beautiful Lake Akan and Lake Mashu, and discover the culture of Hokkaido's indigenous Ainu people. Guided winter experiences take you into landscapes transformed by deep snow, including forest walks around Lake Akan and snowshoeing through Shiretoko National Park to the frozen Furepe Waterfall. Between adventures, relax in traditional onsen accommodation and enjoy regional Japanese cuisine. Combining independent travel with carefully selected guided experiences, this trip offers an easy and immersive way to discover Hokkaido at its wildest and most atmospheric.

at a glance

DAY 1	ARRIVE IN KUSHIRO
DAY 2	RED-CROWNED CRANES AND AKANKO ONSEN
DAY 3	EXPERIENCE THE BEAUTY OF LAKE AKAN
DAY 4	LAKE MASHU AND SNOWSHOEING
DAY 5	JOURNEY TO THE SHIRETOKO PENINSULA
DAY 6	SNOWSHOEING IN SHIRETOKO NATIONAL PARK
DAY 7	DEPART HOKKAIDO

additional deposits required

In addition to the World Expeditions deposit, you will also be required to pay accommodation deposits. These are non-refundable and included in the total deposit payable on booking. We recommend you take out travel insurance at the time of booking.

what's included

- 6 breakfasts and 5 dinners (Please inform us when booking if you have any special dietary requirements)
- 6 nights accommodation in hotels and Japanese-style inns
- Pre-booked transfers and train tickets for intermediate journeys as specified in the itinerary
- Traditional Ainu dance performance
- Three winter experiences with trained local instructors
- Snowshoe and walking pole hire for the included snowshoe activities where required
- Detailed day-by-day itinerary and traveller information
- Emergency telephone support in Japan

Local cash payments are becoming increasingly popular with many operators in the adventure travel industry. The policy seems to benefit the tour operators, more than the local economies or travellers, as it avoids local taxes and transfers the cost and risk of cash handling to travellers. In accordance with our Responsible Travel practices we have chosen a policy not to ask for such payments.

what's not included

- International and domestic flights
- Visa fees (if applicable)
- Airport transfers
- Travel Insurance (compulsory)
- Personal expenses

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trip dates

Daily departures 1 December – 17 March

fast facts

Countries Visited:
Japan

Visas:
Please check visa requirements with your reservations consultant*

Vaccinations:
Please consult a travel vaccination specialist for up to date information

Private Groups:
Private group options are available for this trip*

Singles:
Single travellers must pay a single supplement on this trip.

Leader:
This journey is unescorted

Advice for people with limited mobility
This trip is not suitable for people with limited mobility.

*Ask our staff for more information

- Meals and drinks not listed as included
- Luggage transfer
- Transportation costs not indicated in the program - NOTE: local bus fares payable directly at your own cost in cash in Yen
- A supplement will apply if you are travelling solo or book a single room
- Any local entrance fees unless otherwise stated
- Any items not listed as included

detailed itinerary

DAY 1 Arrive in Kushiro

Arrive at Kushiro Airport and make your own way by airport shuttle bus to central Kushiro for your first night in Hokkaido. Located on the island's eastern Pacific coast, Kushiro provides an ideal starting point for exploring the wild landscapes of eastern Hokkaido. Depending on your arrival time, there may be an opportunity to explore the city and sample some of the region's excellent cuisine. Fresh seafood is a particular highlight, with Kushiro's traditional robatayaki grill restaurants providing a memorable introduction to local flavours.

Accommodation: Western-style hotel
meals: D

DAY 2 Red-crowned cranes and Akanko Onsen

This morning, visit a nature reserve to observe Hokkaido's magnificent red-crowned cranes, or tancho, against a beautiful winter backdrop. These elegant birds are particularly renowned for their elaborate courtship dances. You'll also visit a nearby museum to learn more about their biology and conservation. Continue into Akan-Mashu National Park and arrive at Akanko Onsen, situated beside beautiful Lake Akan. This region is also home to Hokkaido's largest Ainu community. After dinner, experience a traditional Ainu dance and music performance and gain an introduction to the culture of Hokkaido's indigenous people. Traditional Ainu dance is recognised as UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Accommodation: Onsen ryokan or Japanese-style hotel
meals: B,D

DAY 3 Experience the Beauty of Lake Akan

Head into the winter landscape surrounding Lake Akan for a guided forest experience with a knowledgeable local guide. Spend approximately three to four hours exploring atmospheric snow-covered forest, looking for native birdlife and experiencing the remarkable stillness of Hokkaido in winter. The activity is suitable for beginners and provides an immersive introduction to the region's natural environment. In the afternoon, visit Akanko Ainu Kotan Village to learn more about Ainu history, traditions and culture before returning to your onsen accommodation for a second night.

An optional guided cross-country skiing experience may also be available, depending on seasonal conditions.

Accommodation: Onsen ryokan or Japanese-style hotel
meals: B,D

DAY 4 Lake Mashu and Snowshoeing

Travel by pre-arranged private transfer to magnificent Lake Mashu, a spectacular crater lake set within the caldera of an ancient volcano and renowned for its

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thoughtful travel

Our World Expeditions adventures are grounded in a deep commitment to regenerative travel, going beyond minimising harm to actively restoring and enriching the places we visit. We partner closely with local communities, ensuring that our trips support cultural preservation, fair livelihoods, and community-led initiatives. Each expedition is designed to protect and regenerate natural ecosystems through low-impact practices, climate action, and education that fosters respect for biodiversity. We prioritise meaningful connections between travellers and place, encouraging a sense of stewardship that lasts well beyond the journey. By embedding sustainability into every layer of our operations, we aim not only to explore the world responsibly but also to leave it healthier, more resilient, and more vibrant for future generations.

trip grading Introductory

The theme behind most of our trips is active holidays and the fitter you are, the more easily you will adjust and enjoy yourself. On a trekking trip such as this you need to be in general good health and moderately fit. The grading overall would be introductory with some "moderate" activity. Before departure aerobic-type exercise, which increases your breathing, is an obvious advantage. We recommend that for about two to three months prior to departure you try to exercise most days for 30 - 45 minutes or aerobic type activity.

exceptionally clear water. Spend part of the day snowshoeing through the surrounding winter landscape, reaching areas that are difficult to access on foot during the snowy season. If conditions prevent snowshoeing, an alternative sightseeing tour around the lake will be arranged, including an opportunity to see the sulphur-rich volcanic landscape of Mount Ito and its numerous fumaroles. Continue to Kawayu Onsen, renowned for its geothermal waters, for an overnight stay in a traditional onsen ryokan. Depending on arrangements, accommodation may alternatively be in an Ainu-run inn overlooking Lake Kussharo.

Accommodation: Onsen ryokan

meals: B,D

DAY 5 Journey to the Shiretoko Peninsula

Continue north by local train and bus towards Utoro Onsen, enjoying views towards the Sea of Okhotsk as you approach the remote Shiretoko Peninsula. Meaning "end of the land" from the Ainu words sir etok, Shiretoko is one of Japan's great wilderness regions and supports an exceptional diversity of wildlife. Between late January and March, drift ice travelling south from Siberia may be visible along the coastline, while winter birdlife can include the impressive Steller's sea eagle. After arriving in Utoro, there may be time to visit the Shiretoko World Heritage Centre and, weather permitting, see the dramatic Oronkoiwa rock formation. Settle into your accommodation and enjoy its onsen baths and regional cuisine.

Accommodation: Onsen ryokan or Japanese-style hotel

meals: B,D

DAY 6 Snowshoeing in Shiretoko National Park

Today is one of the highlights of the journey as you join a local guide for a snowshoe adventure through Shiretoko National Park. Walk through primeval forest towards the frozen Furepe Waterfall, enjoying sweeping views towards the Shiretoko mountain range and across the Sea of Okhotsk. Wildlife sightings are possible along the way, including Yezo deer, red foxes, squirrels and white-tailed or Steller's sea eagles.

The snowshoe walk covers approximately 6km / 3.7 miles and takes around 5½ hours. No previous snowshoeing experience is required, and snowshoes, walking poles and return transportation from your accommodation are provided.

If snow conditions prevent snowshoeing, an alternative guided exploration by private vehicle will be arranged. Return to your onsen accommodation for your final evening in Hokkaido.

Accommodation: Onsen ryokan or Japanese-style hotel

meals: B,D

DAY 7 Depart Hokkaido

After breakfast, travel independently by local bus and train towards Abashiri. If your onward flight departs later in the day, you may have time to visit the Museum of Northern Peoples and learn more about the Ainu and other indigenous peoples of the northern regions. Continue by local bus, 30 minute journey to Memanbetsu Airport, where your journey concludes. The airport has domestic connections to destinations including Sapporo, Tokyo, Nagoya and Osaka.

NOTE: This itinerary may be subject to change due to weather, snow conditions and local circumstances.

meals: B

This itinerary is subject to change with any change in Community regulations as well as Governmental changes and natural circumstances beyond our control.

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adventure travel

By its very nature adventure travel involves an element of the unexpected. In remote and developing countries do not expect standards you are used to at home. Remote areas are sometimes unpredictable and itineraries may be altered. To get the most out of your adventure it is important that you are flexible, positive and eager to take on all the challenges that arise. If you are uncertain about your suitability for this trip we recommend that you speak with your consultant or travel agent.

important note

These trip notes represent the most current information for this itinerary, and may supersede any information on our website, including but not limited to the itinerary and price. The itinerary should be seen as a guide only. This itinerary may change at any time due to inclement weather, forces of nature and other circumstances beyond our control.

country information

Japan is a captivating blend of deep-rooted tradition and cutting-edge modernity. Stretching from the snowy mountains of Hokkaido in the north to the subtropical islands of Okinawa in the south, the country offers a remarkable diversity of landscapes, cultures and experiences. In the cities such as Tokyo, Kyoto and Osaka you'll find a dynamic mix of futuristic architecture, vibrant street life and refined aesthetics. In contrast, rural Japan reveals a quieter side: forested hills, wooden temples, rice paddies and traditional villages that reflect centuries of cultural continuity.

Japan's history spans thousands of years, shaped by powerful feudal clans, shoguns, emperors and a long period of isolation before opening to the world in the 19th century. The country's heritage is preserved in ancient castles, Buddhist temples, Shinto shrines, and traditional arts such as calligraphy, tea ceremony and Noh theatre. Despite rapid post-war modernisation, Japan maintains a strong connection to its past with cultural traditions still playing a central role in daily life. Visitors will experience a society that values respect, harmony and detail, with omotenashi (hospitality) at the heart of every guest encounter.

Food is another highlight of any journey from regional specialities and street-side ramen to some of the world's most refined cuisine, meals are crafted with seasonality, balance and presentation in mind. With an efficient transport network, including the famous Shinkansen (bullet trains), travel between regions is smooth and comfortable. Japan's blend of natural beauty, cultural depth and modern energy offers travellers a rewarding and richly layered experience.

climate

Winter in eastern Hokkaido transforms the region into a spectacular landscape of deep snow, frozen lakes and snow-covered forests. From December to March, conditions are cold and generally dry, with crisp days well suited to snowshoeing and exploring the winter wilderness. In Kushiro, typical daytime temperatures range from around -1 to 3°C (30–37°F), with overnight temperatures commonly falling to -10 to -5°C (14–23°F); inland and exposed areas can be considerably colder. Travellers should be prepared for snow, ice, strong winds and rapidly changing conditions. These colder months also provide some of Hokkaido's most memorable experiences, from frozen lakes and winter wildlife to the possibility of drift ice around Shiretoko, complemented by warming regional cuisine and traditional onsen after a day outdoors.

a typical day

This self-guided winter journey combines independent travel with guided outdoor experiences, sightseeing and time to relax at traditional onsen accommodation. Days generally begin with breakfast before travelling by pre-arranged transfer or public transport to the next destination, with plenty of time to enjoy Hokkaido's snow-covered forests, frozen lakes, wildlife and volcanic landscapes. Three winter experiences are led by experienced local guides and are suitable for beginners, including forest walking and snowshoeing. The most active day is in Shiretoko National Park, with approximately 6km / 3.7 miles of snowshoeing over around 5½ hours through primeval forest to the frozen Furepe Waterfall. No previous snowshoeing experience is required, and snowshoes and walking poles are provided. Winter weather and snow conditions can affect activities, and alternative sightseeing arrangements may be made where necessary. Evenings are generally spent relaxing at a traditional ryokan or Japanese-style hotel, often with the opportunity to enjoy an onsen followed by dinner.

Meals on this trip – Most included meals feature traditional Japanese cuisine with an emphasis on seasonal and regional ingredients. Vegetarian meals can generally be requested in advance; however, fish and seafood are common in Japanese cooking and dashi (fish-based stock) is widely used in soups, sauces and other dishes. Vegan, coeliac and strict gluten-free diets can be difficult to accommodate and cannot always be guaranteed. Please advise us of any dietary requirements or allergies at the time of booking so these can be assessed in advance.

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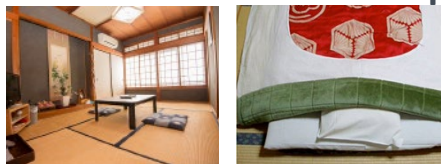
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dietary requirements

Meals on this journey are predominantly Japanese cuisine, with a strong focus on seasonal and regional ingredients. Many of the accommodations are smaller, locally operated inns and ryokan that take pride in their traditional set menus. As these menus are carefully prepared in advance and often reflect local specialties, flexibility for personal food preferences can be limited. Tips are not required when dining in Japan. Vegetarian and vegan diets – Meat-free meals can generally be requested if advised at the time of booking. Meals without fish and seafood may also be possible, although these ingredients are widely used in Japanese cooking. In particular, dashi is a traditional stock commonly made from kombu seaweed and dried fish such as bonito, and is used extensively in soups, sauces, vegetables and stews. If you follow a vegetarian diet, please advise whether you are able to accept small amounts of dashi. Vegan meals are more difficult to provide, particularly in smaller and more remote inns, and cannot always be guaranteed. Gluten-free diets – While wheat is not a major component of many traditional Japanese dishes, it is found in noodles, tempura, breaded foods and fu, while smaller amounts of gluten are present in commonly used ingredients such as soy sauce and miso. For this reason, coeliac and strict gluten-free diets can be difficult to cater for and cannot be guaranteed. It is essential that you advise us of all dietary requirements and food allergies at the time of booking. Some dietary needs are less commonly catered for in Japan, particularly in rural Hokkaido, and accommodation choices may need to be considered before arrangements are confirmed. In more remote locations, alternatives may be limited, unavailable or attract an additional cost, and in some cases travellers may need to carry supplementary food. We cannot guarantee a completely allergen-free environment, including peanut-free meals. Travellers with severe or life-threatening allergies should carry all necessary medication and be capable of self-administering it if required. Please discuss any significant dietary requirements or allergies with us before booking so we can determine whether they can be accommodated on this itinerary.

accommodation on the trip



Accommodation on this journey combines traditional Japanese inns and onsen accommodation. Western-style hotel rooms generally include private bathroom facilities, while traditional ryokan feature tatami matting and futon bedding and offer an opportunity to experience classic Japanese hospitality. Many of the ryokan have communal onsen baths, which are typically separated by gender. Some properties also offer ensuite bathrooms. Twin rooms are more common than double rooms in Japan, and double rooms remain subject to availability. Accommodation generally provides essential amenities including towels, toiletries and hairdryers, while traditional inns often provide a lightweight yukata robe. Kettles or hot-water facilities are also commonly available, although amenities may vary between properties. Tea is widely provided, while coffee may not be available at all properties.

Compulsory single room supplement for solo travellers at hotels are payable upon booking.

Tattoos

When it comes to tattoos, it is important to note that attitudes can vary significantly among different accommodations. While many places have become more open and accepting of tattoos in recent years, some properties still maintain strict policies regarding visible tattoos. In certain cases, guests with tattoos may be asked to cover them or, in some instances, they may be denied entry to onsen or communal bath facilities altogether. To ensure a smooth and comfortable experience, we kindly ask that you let us know in advance if travellers have any visible tattoos when booking the tour. This will allow us to make all the necessary arrangements, including the

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possibility of arranging alternative accommodations with private ensuite facilities if access to the onsen is restricted.

pre and post tour accommodation

Please notify your Reservations Consultant of your pre tour accommodation details - this must be a hotel with a staffed reception desk. This is required for our local Japan partner to courier your Information pack including route notes, topographical maps and transport tickets, which will be available at check-in.

what you carry

In your daypack you will need to carry warm clothing, a rainjacket, water bottle, valuables and personal items such as sunscreen, lip balm etc.

equipment required

Specialist gear required include walking boots and day pack (a comprehensive gear list is provided in the pre-departure information provided on booking).

luggage

Luggage transfer is not included in the trip price. Japan's efficient takuhaibin or Takkyubin courier services can be used to forward larger luggage between destinations, typically for approximately JPY2,500–3,000 per bag per transfer. Travellers should carry a suitable daypack containing any clothing, personal items and overnight essentials required between luggage transfers.

vehicles & safety

During the course of your trip, you will use public transport which is all payable direct in cash in local currency, Yen. Please ensure you have some spare change in the local currency to cover this. Private transfers as specified in the itinerary are included.

visas

The following passport holders can travel to Japan for up to 3 months without a visa:

Australia

New Zealand

USA

UK (6 months)

Canadian

If you are travelling on any other type of passport we would request that you contact us, or your travel agent, to check the visa requirements.

Please bear in mind that visas may be required for countries you are visiting en route or transiting through on the way to your destination. It is important that you check the requirements of all countries you will visit. Visa costs and requirements do change regularly so we suggest you check with your travel agent or World Expeditions reservations consultant. It is your responsibility to obtain all necessary visas.

webinars & events

Catch a Webinar – Live or On Demand - to learn more about a particular trip. Make sure the trip you choose is right for you. Watch them live, so you can ask our presenters a question, or catch the recording later at your leisure and watch it On Demand. Visit our website or keep an eye on our newsletter for upcoming presentations.

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private groups

The adventures that you see on our website are just a starting point. We operate many of our trips, which means we can be flexible and create an itinerary to suit your interests and dates. Talk to our team, you'll be surprised how much more affordable it can be when you get a group of friends, colleagues, a club – you name it, to travel with you!

subscribe to our e-newsletter

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social networking

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YOUTUBE: World Expeditions

Subscribe to our channel at [youtube.com/worldexpeditions](https://www.youtube.com/worldexpeditions)

Share the love

Use the hashtag #WorldExpeditions on your best travel photos and videos to be featured.

trip availability

We operate small group adventures, which means availability is always worth checking early. Check trip availability online or call our team who might be able to dig a little deeper for you to find what you want, when you want.

Many adventures require services that, if not available at the time you book (like an internal flight or permit) could mean the trip is unavailable. So, book early to avoid missing out on your dream adventure.

how to book

Check trip availability and book your tour online, or call or visit one of our offices. To book a trip, you will need to complete a Booking Form (online or request a PDF) and pay a non-refundable deposit. Please note that when booking our tours to not confirm any additional arrangements until all services related to your tour are confirmed by your dedicated Reservations Consultant.