Tel: +44 113 8151904
Web: www.alpine-guides.com
Email: info@alpine-guides.com

Japan Ski touring Hokkaido

Legendary backcountry powder skiing in Hokkaido, Japan. Join us on a road trip around Hokkaido, the northern Island of Japan, ski touring and backcountry skiing in the best summits and resorts around the island. This is a true backcountry trip for experienced ski tourers, with a mix of lift assisted day touring and longer ski touring days, to reach some of the Island's famous volcano summits.

NB This is a dedicated backcountry trip for ski tourers looking for great powder. Some days will use some uplift, but several will be full day tours with a good amount of vertical ascent - ie it is not just a 'resort based skiing, with a bit of skinning' type trip – so you need to be fit enough and ready for some big climbs each day. Expect at least half the days to be 100% skinning.

Skiing in Japan

Extra Wide Skis are mandatory on this trip. With its legendary deep powder, endless forests and iconic volcanoes, Japan presents an exciting challenge for backcountry skiers. From the towering peaks of Daisetsuzan National Park to the secluded valleys of the Niseko region, Hokkaido provides a diverse array of ski touring opportunities for dedicated powder seekers. On this road trip style holiday, we base ourselves in 3 different areas in order to explore a wide diversity of terrain.

Discovering Japan

A ski holiday to Japan isn't only about the powder, but also about discovering the country's rich culture and hospitality. Hokkaido's onsens, or natural hot springs, offer a perfect way to relax and rejuvenate tired muscles after a day in the backcountry.

Finally, each evening we enjoy authentic Japanese cuisine, including steaming bowls of ramen, fresh seafood delicacies, and hearty hot pots, all sourced from local ingredients. With its combination of breathtaking scenery, challenging terrain, and warm hospitality, backcountry ski touring in Hokkaido promises an unforgettable adventure for those willing to venture off the beaten path.

Sample Itinerary

Subject to weather and snow conditions, the plan is as follows. Please note that this is a sample itinerary only - on trips like this, itineraries are always subject to change as the current snow, weather and avalanche conditions need to be taken into account. This is an essential part of safety planning for all backcountry skiing, so please be ready for changes as part of your trip.

Day 0-1

Flight from **the UK** to **Sapporo New Chitose Airport**, via Tokyo on an overnight flight.
Day 1 arrive, transfer to Niseko region. PM Evening briefing.

Days 2-5

Niseko area lift accessed skiing and backcountry. 4 days skiing - areas could include:

- Niseko United for lift accessed powder skiing and touring options.
- Rusutsu ski resort for storm skiing in the trees.
- Kokusai and Kiroro ski resorts for legendary quantities of snow and access to backcountry terrain.
- Mt Yotei. A stunning volcano known as the Fuji of Hokkaido. This summit is one of the finest ski peaks in Japan if the weather and conditions allow for the 1,600m ascent to the summit and the possibility of a ski into the crater. The lower mountain has excellent tree skiing for storm days.
- Shiribetsu. An excellent peak for ski touring with stunning views towards Mt Yotei.

Day 6-7

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For the second stage of our trip, we will spend two days based in the coastal town of Otaru, renowned for its seafood, historic canal and glassware. This provides an excellent base for accessing the nearby resorts of Kiroro, Kokusai and Teine, whilst still being within easy reach of many excellent touring destinations.

Days 8-10

Daisetsuzan National Park region. 3 days backcountry skiing - possible outings:

- Asahi Dake. The highest mountain in Hokkaido is accessed by a cable car with excellent touring options from the top of the lift to reach the summit or neighbouring peaks. The peak also has stunning volcanic fumaroles you can ski next to!
- Mt Tokachi. This volcanic peak has a large crater and fumarole you can ski up next to, as well as touring options up neighbouring peaks.
- Mt Furano. Another excellent peak with plentiful touring options.
- Mt Ashibetsu. This remote peak is a big day out and has stunning touring options.
- Furano ski resort.

Day 11

Return to Sapporo New Chitose airport for afternoon/evening flights home.

Fitness and Experience

Please do not underestimate the fitness and ski ability requirements for this trip - you need several weeks of previous touring experience and good quality powder skiing experience in order to join the trip, as you need to be able to ski all day in deep powder. If you haven't skied with us before, then a reference from a guide (or ski tour leader that we know) may be required. The trip includes 5-7 hour days with some steeper terrain, involving kick turns. Typically we'll be doing 1000-1400m of ascent a day – so you can expect to be skinning for 3-4 hours a day. **Please see our website Fitness Levels and Tech Levels as a further reference point (detailed on this trip's course page > Fitness and Experience section)** - you should be at **Fitness Level 3-4 and Tech Level 3-4** to enjoy this trip. If you need to top up your fitness before the trip and need some help, then please contact us, or check out the training advice page on our Knowledge Base: https://www.alpine-guides.com/ski/insider-knowledge-ski/

Special Kit Requirement - Wide Skis

You need to trust us on this one (ie it's obligatory!) – everyone must have a pair of wide powder skis on this trip, mounted with pin bindings. For a typical adult male, this means ~105mm+ underfoot (100+ for lighter skiers and 110+ for heavier skiers). In the local snowpack, on narrower skis the only way to keep moving is to lean back a long way all of the time (which we all know, is very difficult and tiring) – so for the safety and enjoyment of the whole group, we insist that everyone skis on suitably wide skis.

Recommended ski widths for different weight skiers on this trip:

- 50-65kg – 100+ recommended
- 70-85kg – 105mm+ recommended
- 85kg+ – 110mm+ recommended

Some good lightweight examples: Atomic Backland 109, Faction La Machine 3 or 4, Black Diamond Helio 115 etc

Guiding Team

All our Alpine programmes are staffed by IFMGA Mountain Guides working at a maximum ratio of 1:6 on the Japan Ski Touring Hokkaido trip. We work with a small team of guides who's profiles can be found on our website.

Course Briefing

The briefing will be in our accommodation on the first night of the trip. Your guide will do equipment checks, run through current conditions, the weather forecast and the general plan for the trip.

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Meeting Point

Our meeting point is **Sapporo New Chitose Airport at approx. 5pm on the day of arrival**, or Heathrow/Manchester/Tokyo airports, en route.

Included in the Price

- 9 days of guiding and all guides expenses
- 10 nights hotel accommodation in Japan including breakfast
- Transport in Japan during the trip

Not included in the Price (see below for further info)

- Lunches and drinks
- Evening Meals
- Flights to Hokkaido
- Insurance
- Equipment hire

Ski FAQ's

Can I recharge my phone in a hut? Can I leave my luggage in the hotel whilst on tour? Answers to questions like these and many more can be found on our Ski FAQ's page here: https://www.alpine-guides.com/ski/insider-knowledge-ski/ski-touring-faqs/

Evening Meals

We eat out locally each evening during the trip – just pay for your evening meal and drinks directly. Budget around £10-25* for an evening meal.

Lunches and Drinks

It's difficult to get some things like favourite energy bars, trail mix and cereal bars etc in Japan, so please bring enough of your favourite mountain snacks to last the trip. We can visit local shops to top up during the trip if required. £30* should cover this. Bringing a vacuum flask along with you is also a good idea on this trip.

Lift Passes

Uplift costs will depend on the exact itinerary, which will be tailored to make best use of weather and conditions during the trip. The maximum likely spend is ~ £200* depending on conditions and overall plan

Onsens

Budget £5-10 a day* for onsen (hot pool) visits – an almost daily ritual post ski touring!

The current **exchange rate** is approx **£1 sterling=213 Japanese Yen**. Both cards and cash are widely accepted..

Hotels and Accommodation

We stay at a range of traditional Japanese hotels and Onsens in the region, serving excellent local cuisine each evening, so you can enjoy the full cultural experience. Hot spas are a regular apres ski activity. Hotel rooms are provided on a twin sharing basis, but if you wish to book a single room please let us know and we will confirm availability.
Details of our partner hotels can be found on our Accommodation page:
https://www.alpine-guides.com/ski/planning-your-skiing-trip/accomodation/

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Flights

We will be flying to **Sapporo New Chitose Airport (CTS)** on Hokkaido. There are flights with various airlines from London and Manchester, including good options from BA (operated by Japan Airlines) and Cathay Pacific. If you would prefer to arrive in Hokkaido a day or two early to do some sightseeing and adjust to the new timezone, or stay in Hokkaido after your trip, this will open up more flight options. Use Sky Scanner to find the best deals.

Hokkaido is well served from all major international airports, usually with a change in Tokyo, for clients travelling from elsewhere besides the UK.

Please note the meeting and departure times at Chitose airport and ensure that your flights are appropriate. Onward transport will be in a private group minibus.

Week 1

Travel out: Departing the UK on Sat 16th Jan 2027, **arriving Chitose on Sunday 17th Jan**. Your guide will meet you in Manchester for flights out, or at **Chitose airport at 5pm**, ready for onward travel to Niseko.

Travel home: Your guide will drop you at Chitose airport at **12pm on Weds 27th Jan.** Fly from Chitose to the UK, departing from mid afternoon on Weds 27th, arriving in the UK on Thurs 28th Jan.

Week 2

Travel out: Departing the UK on Wednesday 27th Jan 2027, **arriving Chitose on Thursday 28th Jan**. Your guide will meet you at **Chitose airport at 5pm**, ready for onward travel to Niseko.

Travel home: Your guide will drop you at Chitose airport at **12pm on Sunday 7th Feb.** Fly from Chitose to the UK, departing from mid afternoon onwards on Sunday 7th, arriving in the UK on Monday 8th Feb.

NB Baggage Rules With BA, 23kg of skis and other baggage are allowed together in one hold bag, so a large double ski/snowboard bag is good for this. In addition, you are allowed up to 23kg hand luggage with BA.

Further travel information including flights, airport transfers, railways and channel crossings etc. can be found on the Travel Planning page of our website: https://www.alpine-guides.com/ski/planning-your-skiing-trip/travel-planning/

Travel During the Trip
The Guide will have a minibus for transport during the trip.

Japan FAQ's
Do I need a Visa? Uk and citizens of 72 other countries/regions do not need to apply for a visa - see visa exempt list here.
Is it a safe place to visit? Crime rates are generally low. The country is subject to earthquakes, but buildings are designed to withstand them.
Is the water safe to drink? The tap water is safe to drink.
What are the hotels like? Service standards in the hotels we use are on a par with western Europe – the staff are very friendly and helpful.
What about WIFI? Everywhere has wifi.
Mobile Phones? Check your carrier for roaming charges in Japan - if you regularly use data, then it may a good idea to buy an ESim or a local SIM card for the trip, in order to avoid high roaming charges.
I'm a Vegetarian – will this be a problem? You'll be Ok. Local restaurants serve vegetarian options - if you also eat fish, then there is a lot more choice.

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Insurance

For this trip you must have specialist travel insurance providing medical, emergency search/rescue and repatriation cover for the following activities: off piste skiing and ski touring, up to 3000m altitude. We also strongly recommend that you purchase cancellation cover, in case you are unable to attend your trip due to personal circumstances or injury. Please note you need to purchase Worldwide Cover for this trip.

Once we have confirmed that your trip is running, we strongly advise that you arrange your insurance immediately, so that you are covered for loss of course fees and other travel related costs if you need to cancel your holiday due to personal circumstances. Once you are insured, please email us the policy details, and carry a hard copy with you during the trip

More information, including advice for non-UK residents, can be found on the Insurance page of our website here https://www.alpine-guides.com/ski/planning-your-skiing-trip/insurance/

Equipment

A full kit list is enclosed. If you need to purchase skis, boots, or any other items of touring equipment, then please check out the advice articles on our Ski Knowledge Base: https://www.alpine-guides.com/ski/insider-knowledge-ski/

If you need to hire avalanche safety equipment please visit our Equipment Hire page for more info: https://www.alpine-guides.com/ski/planning-your-skiing-trip/equipment-hire/

Important - you need an extra wide set of skis for this trip! See 'Special Kit Requirement' notes above.

To purchase any items of specialist backcountry ski kit, we recommend you speak to Backcountry UK - they are a leading UK retailer of specialist touring gear and always give friendly and expert advice – https://www.backcountryuk.com

Weather and Conditions

Japan has a legendary powder snowpack, so expect plenty of snowy days during the trip. Temperatures are usually similar to the Alps at this time of year. It's essential to have a good versatile clothing system that can deal with warm periods of skinning, plus cold summits and any bad weather you might encounter.

Snow conditions in the area require a special mention: Japan is home to one of the best powder snowpacks in the world, so you need to be able to ski confidently and without making regular falls in truly bottomless snow. A set of extra wide powder skis are mandatory for everyone on the trip.

Itinerary Changes

Bad weather and high avalanche risk can sometimes alter the itinerary. This is unavoidable but we will do our best, within safe margins, to stick to the itinerary. Potential changes and variations on the standard tour are numerous but will avoid unsafe avalanche terrain/bad weather days. This may incur extra transport costs, but your guide will discuss the options with the group if this were to happen.

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Checklist

- Please make sure you have all of the following before leaving home!
- Proof of Covid Vaccination status
- Passport
- All Skiing Gear (Check kit list)
- Flight + Travel Tickets
- Personal Medications
- Camera + Spare Batteries
- Insurance Certificate
- Compeed &/or tape to stop blisters
- Bank Card + Dollars to exchange

What Next?

- Bookings can be made online via our website. A deposit of £600 per person is required to secure your place, with the balance due 8 weeks before the course start date - we will email you a balance reminder including your invoice and possible payment methods.
- Once we have the minimum required number of bookings we will email you to confirm the course is running (confirmed trips will also be visible on our website). Once confirmed, you should arrange your travel insurance and travel to resort.
- We will email you 2 weeks before the course start date with any final info including your guides contact details, hotel details/directions and any other final info.

More Info

Please contact us for more info regarding any aspect of the trip – info@alpine-guides or 0113 8151904 (we might be out skiing or climbing – if so please leave a message and we'll get back to you asap, thanks!).

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Japan Ski Touring Kit List

Just remember, every extra kilo on your back knocks 10% off your enjoyment on the descents – so try and keep the weight down!

TECHNICAL CLOTHING

- **Waterproof jacket –** preferably lightweight and breathable
- **Softshell jacket** – mid weight wind/snow resistant jacket
- **Softshell trousers/Mountain Pants** – ideally designed for ski touring.
- **Waterproof overtrousers** – preferably with 3/4 or full length side zips
- **Spare lightweight insulated jacket** – lightweight synthetic/down jacket or other warm layer
- **Wicking thermal top** – ie a 'base layer' not cotton please…
- **Thermal leggings** – base layer 'long johns', light or mid weight (ie not exped weight!)
- **Socks** – specialist ski socks, or a warm loop lined pair of mountain socks
- **Thin inner gloves**
- **Warm ski gloves** – or mittens, if you suffer from cold hands
- **Warm hat**

PERSONAL ITEMS

- **Water container** – at least 1 litre, or a **vacuum flask** is a good idea on this trip
- **Personal medications and blister kit** – any regular medications, zinc oxide tape, compeed, painkillers etc
- **Ski goggles**
- **Sun glasses** – CE rated 3 or 4, with side protection
- **Sun and lip cream** – factor 30+
- **Headtorch and batteries**
- **Wallet, passport and insurance docs**
- **Swimwear** – we are quite likely to visit a geothermal pool during the trip.

TECHNICAL EQUIPMENT

- **Rucsack** – 30-35L - NB rucsack MUST have straps on to carry your skis
- **Ski mountaineering boots** – must have good, dedicated walk mode
- **Skis with Touring Bindings** – extra wide skis are a must on this trip - see notes above **-** lightweight pin binding setup required. Heavy freeride setups not suitable. Older style bar/rail bindings (Fritschi Freeride, Marker Duke etc) not allowed – please update your kit!
- **Ski strap** – to hold skis together on your rucksack if we need to carry them
- **Ski Poles** – with good size 5cm+ baskets (telescopic poles are not needed)
- **Climbing skins** – they come with the skis if you hire your kit
- **Harscheisen (ski crampons)** – please bring them, they are useful on some of the volcanoes.
- **Metal snow shovel** – must be a full metal shovel (plastic blades don't work in real avalanche debris!)
- **Avalanche probe**
- **Avalanche transceiver** – must be a modern digital model (older analogue models are now obsolete)
- **Crampons** – lightweight alloy crampons preferable on most tours, steel crampons for ski mountaineering
- **Ice axe** – lightweight model preferable (NB must have a steel head – see our advice article)
- **Ski Helmet** – lightweight ski touring or backcountry model preferred. Wearing a helmet is compulsory on descents and may be needed on other parts of the route depending on conditions

NB A harness, boot crampons and ice axe are **not required** on this trip.

Your guide will have all other ski safety kit, first aid and survival equipment.

For more advice on ski mountaineering equipment please get in touch, or visit:
https://www.alpine-guides.com/ski/insider-knowledge-ski/ski-touring-equipment-advice/

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