SAMURAI TOURS

Adventures in Discovering Traditional Japan

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Best of Hokkaido and Tohoku



15 Days / 14 Nights

Best of Hokkaido and Tohoku

Tour Overview

The Best of Hokkaido and Tohoku offers the best of the northern part of Japan. The northernmost of the main islands, Hokkaido is Japan's last frontier. It is a natural wonderland of mountain ranges, deep caldera lakes, active volcanoes, numerous thermally-heated mineral springs and virgin forests. The attitudes of the inhabitants are akin to those of the pioneers of the American West, but still unmistakably Japanese. Tohoku is the northern part of Honshu, the main island of of the Japanese archipelago. Tohoku is known as a remote and scenic region, and for its numerous remote and traditional onsens, lakes, mountains, its high quality rice, and for its welcoming and friendly people. But Tohoku is also blessed with a rich cultural heritage and history.

Destinations

Tokyo, Sapporo, Otaru, Noboribetsu Onsen, Hakodate, Aomori, Sendai, Matsushima, Yamadera, Aizu-Wakamatsu, Ouchijuku, Kinugawa Onsen, Nikko

Tour Factors

Cultural Immersion
★★★☆☆

Pace
★★★☆☆

Physical Activity
★★★☆☆

Tour Details

Among the Japanese, Hokkaido has become synonymous with sensational food, stunning scenery, and some of the best onsens in Japan.

You will enjoy Sapporo, Hokkaido’s largest city, home to many fine restaurantes and host to the 1972 Winter Olympics. You will explore the morning market of Hakodate where you can have local specialties like crab, sea urchin, or squid prepared for you.

Tohoku may share the main island of Honshu, but it is a world apart from the crowded and busy south. The mountain villages are more remote, the forests more untamed, the traditional onsens more secluded, and the people friendlier. Better yet, Samurai history lives on in Aizu Wakamatsu, a castle town with a long Samurai tradition.

You will climb the 1,000 steps to Yamadera, a mountainside temple founded in the 9th century, and enjoy the natural beauty of Matsushima, ranked as one of the three most scenic spots in Japan. You will visit Nikko, one of the most elaborate shrines in Japan dedicated to the memory of Tokugawa Ieyasu, the first of the Tokugawa Shoguns who ruled Japan for more than 250 years.

Tour Highlights

- Sapporo, the Host of the 1972 Winter Olympics
- Grilled Lamb Dinner at the Sapporo Beer Garden
- Ramen Lunch at Sapporo's Ramen Alley
- Otaru's Beautifully Preserved Canal Area and Herring Mansions
- Five Overnights at Japanese Onsens
- Upopoy Ainu Village
- Dinner and Tsugaru-Style Shamisen Performance in Aomori
- Matsushima - Ranked as One of Japan's Three Most Beautiful Spots for Centuries
- Yamadera (Mountain Temple) - Founded more than 1,000 Years Ago with it's Beautiful Views of the Valley Below
- Aizu Wakamatsu - Known for its Samurai History and Traditions
- Ouchijuku - Former Post Town Restored to Look as it did in the Edo Period
- Three separate rides on a Shinkansen (bullet train)

Tour Inclusions

- Travel Guard Gold Policy (for American tour members only)
- Reserved Seat Train Tickets on all Inter-City Travel
- Domestic Airfare from Tokyo to Sapporo
- Meeting service at the arrival airport
- Sending service to the appropriate train station
- Baggage transfer from city to city
- Electronic version of Tour Handbook and Japanese History

Tour Exclusions

- International airfare is NOT included.
- A printed itinerary is not included
- Alcoholic beverages, soft drinks and desserts are NOT included

Map



Tour Destinations

Upopoy Ainu Village and Museum

Sapporo

Otaru

Noboribetsu Onsen

Hakodate

Aomori

Sendai

Matsushima

Yamadera

Aizu-Wakamatsu

Ouchijuku

Kinugawa Onsen

Nikko

Itinerary

Day 1 Arrive in Tokyo

After clearing customs and immigration, you will be met at Tokyo's Narita Airport by a Samurai Tours meeting staff member. They will then purchase a limousine bus ticket for you and help you board the bus to the hotel. After checking in, the evening is free. No meals are included.

Travel: 1-1/2 Hours; Walking: Light

Day 2 Fly to Sapporo; Sapporo - JR Sapporo Tower, Grilled Lamb Dinner at the Sapporo Beer Garden

After breakfast, we will travel to Tokyo's Haneda airport and you will fly to Sapporo's New Chitose Airport. We will then travel into Sapporo, the largest city on Hokkaido and the host of the 1972 Winter Olympics. After checking in, we will visit the JR Sapporo Tower where you will be able to get a bird's eye view of Sapporo while also getting your bearings. In the evening, we will have dinner at the Sapporo Beer Garden, located next to the original Sapporo Beer Brewery where you can try the local specialty of grilled lamb, cooked yourself at the table. Breakfast at the hotel and dinner at a local restaurant included.

Travel: 3 Hours; Walking: Light

Day 3 Sapporo - Nijo Fish Market, Odori Park, Tanuki Shopping Arcade, Sapporo Ramen Alley

We start the day at the Nijo Fish Market where locals visit to shop for fresh local produce and seafood such as crabs, salmon eggs, sea urchin and various fresh and prepared fish. On our way to the market, we will walk along Odori Park, the venue for the world famous Sapporo Snow Festival held annually in early February. We will also walk along the Tanuki Shopping Arcade. The unique aspect of this mall is that you will find traditional merchants selling kimonos, tea or incense side-by-side with modern stores specializing in computers, software and state-of-the-art electronics. Next we will visit Susukino. Susukino is Japan's largest entertainment district north of Tokyo. It is packed with stores, bars, restaurants, karaoke shops and pachinko parlors. We will end the tour with lunch at Ramen Yokocho, a narrow lane lined with shops serving Sapporo's famous miso ramen. The afternoon and evening is free. Breakfast at the ryokan and lunch at a local restaurant included.

Travel: 1/2 Hour;; Walking: Heavy

Day 4 Travel to Otaru; Otaru - Aoyama Family Herring Mansion, Free Time; Return to Sapporo

Today we will take a day trip to Otaru which once thrived as a major trade and fishing port. We will start our tour by visiting the preserved Aoyama family villa, documenting the time when the herring industry played a major role in Otaru and Hokkaido's history and development. After lunch, you will have some free time to explore the Canal area lined with Meiji period warehouses, and the Sakaimichi street with its Music Box Museum and Glass workshops. Breakfast at the ryokan and lunch at a local restaurant included.

Travel: 1 1/2 Hours; Walking: Medium

Day 5 Travel to Shiraoi; Upopoy Ainu Village; Travel to Noboribetsu Onsen

Before leaving for the day you will need to prepare your luggage to be transferred to Hakodate. You will travel to Noboribetsu and Hakodate with an overnight bag only. You will need to prepare your overnight bag for 3 days, 2 nights. First, we travel to the nearby city of Shiraoi where we will visit the Upopoy Ainu Village. Here we will learn more about the Ainu ,the foremost place in Japan to learn about the Ainu, the indigenous people of northern Japan. Later in the day we continue on to Noboribetsu Onsen, one of Japan's most popular onsens, in the late afternoon. Breakfast and dinner at the ryokan included.

Travel: 1 1/2 Hours; Walking: Medium

Day 6 Free Day in Noboribetsu Onsen

This day is free to explore the Noboribetsu area. Enjoy the many hot springs or walk around the Jigokudani (Hell Valley) where you will find many steam vents, thermally heated pools, and small geysers. You may also just want to relax and enjoy one of the 17 separate baths at the ryokan. Breakfast and dinner at the ryokan included.

Travel: N/A; Walking: TBD

Day 7 Travel to Hakodate; Hakodate - Goryokaku Fort, Motomachi District, Mt. Hakodate Ropeway

After breakfast, we will travel to Hakodate. Hakodate was one of the first cities in Japan open to foreigners after the Meiji Restoration. After arriving in Hakodate, we will visit Goryo-Kaku, Japan's first western-style fort. Built in 1864 by the Tokugawa Shogunate in the shape of a five-pointed star, it was designed to trap attackers in a deadly crossfire. We will go to top of the tower next to the fort, providing a view of Goryo-Kaku and the surrounding city. We will also visit the Moto-machi historic area. Overlooking the western bay at the foot of Mount Hakodate, there are numerous sloping streets lined with 19th century churches, consulates, shops and homes of the foreigners who first opened this area of Japan to commerce. In the evening, we will take a ropeway to the top of Mt. Hakodate, where we will enjoy a panoramic view of Hakodate's night lights. You will retrieve your main luggage after arriving in Hakodate. Breakfast at the ryokan and lunch at a local restaurant included.

Travel: 3 Hours; Walking: Medium

Day 8 Hakodate - Hakodate Morning Market; Travel to Aomori; Aomori - Nebuta Warasse Museum, Dinner and Tsugaru-Style Shamisen Performance

Before leaving for the day you will need to prepare your luggage for transfer to Sendai. You will need to prepare your overnight bag for 2 days, 1 night. We will begin the day at the Hakodate morning market where fresh seafood such as crabs (kani), salmon eggs (ikura) and sea urchin (uni), as well as fresh produce such as melons are sold. Many restaurants can be found in the market area, offering fresh seafood breakfasts/lunches such as uni-ikura domburi. Next we will take an express train and Shinkansen (bullet train) to the city of Aomori in northern Tohoku. Here we will stop at the Nebuta Warasse Museum, documenting the city's famous Nebuta Matsuri (Nebuta Festival) held every year in early August. The Nebuta Warasse Museum attempts to capture the spirit of the festival and gives visitors a taste of its lively atmosphere, history, and traditions. In the evening we will enjoy dinner while being entertained by a Tsugaru shamisen player. Breakfast at the hotel and dinner at a local Izakaya is included.

Travel: 2 1/2 Hours; Walking: Medium

Day 9 Aomori - Sannai Maruyama Archaeological Site; Travel to Sendai

After breakfast, we will continue our adventure by visiting the Sannai Maruyama Archaeological Site. This is the largest and one of the most complete and best preserved Jomon Period (13000-300 BC) villages in Japan. Unearthed by accident while surveying land to build a community baseball field, the former Sannai Maruyama Village once included over 700 structures and dwellings including long houses, storage structures, roads, and trash and burial pits. Later in the afternoon, we will travel to Sendai where we will be staying overnight. You will retrieve your main luggage after arriving. Breakfast at the hotel and dinner at a local restaurant included.

Travel: 4 Hours; Walking: Heavy

Day 10 Travel to Matsushima; Matsushima - Matsushima Bay Cruise, Zuiganji Temple, Godaido, Kanrantei Tea House; Return to Sendai

Today we will take a local train to Hon-Shiogame Station. From here we will board a boat for a cruise around Matsushima Bay that will eventually take us to Matsushima. For hundreds of years, Matsushima has been celebrated as one of the Japan's three most scenic views along with Miyajima and Amanohashidate. Matsushima Bay has more than 200 small islands covered with pine trees, and the best way to see these is by boat. After arriving at Matsushima, we will tour Zuiganji. Zuiganji was a former Tendai sect temple founded in 828, but later changed to a Zen temple in the 13th century. After years of decline, Zuiganji was restored to prominence by the feudal lord Date Masamune who rebuilt it as his family temple in 1609. We will then visit Godaido. Godaido was originally built in 807 and contains five statues which were enshrined there by the same priest who founded Zuiganji. The statues are displayed to the public only once every 33 years, and were last displayed in 2006. The present building is a 1604 reconstruction by Date Masamune. We will finish our day by enjoying tea and sweets at Kanrantei. Kanrantei is a Momoyama style tea house originally built in Kyoto by Toyotomi Hideyoshi, who gave it to Date Masamune for his service. Date's son eventually moved it to its current location on a hill overlooking Matsushima Bay. We will then return to Sendai by local train. Breakfast at the hotel and lunch at a local restaurant included.

Travel: 1 1/2 Hours; Walking: Medium

Day 11 Travel to Yamadera; Yamadera; Return to Sendai; Travel to Aizu Wakamatsu

Before leaving for the day you will need to prepare your luggage for transfer to Aizu Wakamatsu. You will need to prepare your overnight bag for 2 days, 1 night. We will start the day by traveling to Yamadera. Yamadera is a scenic temple located in the mountains northeast of Yamagata City. The temple grounds extend high up a steep mountainside (the name Yamadera literally translates to "mountain temple") from where there are scenic views overlooking the valley below. The temple was created over a thousand years ago in 860 as a temple of the Tendai sect. Later in the afternoon we will travel to Aizu-Wakamatsu, a former castle town with a long Samurai tradition. Breakfast at the hotel and dinner at the ryokan included.

PLEASE NOTE: There are between 800 to 1,000 steps at Yamadera. If you are not able to climb this many steps, there are many shops near the temple.

Travel: 4 1/2 Hours; Walking: Heavy

Day 12 Aizu Wakamatsu - Sazedo Pagoda, Nishinkan Samurai School, Tsuruga Castle

Today we will be exploring the Samurai city of Aizu Wakamatsu. We will start at Sazedo. Built in

1796, it features a double helix staircase similar to the famous Château de Chambord, the French castle designed by Leonardo da Vinci. Visitors ascending the slope in a circular direction and reaching the top story are considered to have completed the Saigoku Kannon Pilgrimage to 33 Buddhist temples. It is now a nationally designated Important Cultural Property. Next, we will visit the Nissin-kan Samurai School. It was established in 1803 by the Aizu Domain for the purpose of fostering Japan's next generation of samurais. Children of samurai families entered this school at the age of ten and worked on academic studies and physical exercises to instill both physical and mental discipline. We will continue the day by visiting Tsuruga Castle. Tsuruga Castle was originally built in 1384, however, it was destroyed after the Boshin War of 1868, a rebellion against the newly formed Meiji government by Samurai still loyal to the Tokugawa Shogunate. Tsuruga Castle was one of the last strongholds of the Boshin War. The castle was rebuilt as a concrete reconstruction in the 1960s. Renovation was completed in 2011, and the color of the roof tiles was changed from grey to the original red tiles. The inside of the castle houses a museum with displays depicting the history of the castle and the Samurai lifestyle. You will retrieve your main luggage after returning to the ryokan. Breakfast at the ryokan and dinner at the ryokan included.

Travel: 1 Hours; Walking: Heavy

Day 13 Travel to Ouchijuku; Free Time at Ouchijuku; Travel to Kinugawa Onsen

Before leaving for the day you will need to prepare your luggage for transfer to Tokyo. You will need to prepare your overnight bag for 2 days, 1 night. After breakfast we will travel by train to Ouchijuku. Ouchijuku is a former post town along the Aizu-Nisei Kaito trade route, which connected Aizu with Nikko during the Edo Period. Restrictions set by the shogunate required travelers to make their long journeys on foot, and as a result post towns developed along the route to provide travelers with food, accommodations, and rest. Ouchijuku has since been restored to look as it did in the Edo Period with telephone and electrical wires buried. The unpaved main street is lined with thick thatched roof buildings which house shops, restaurants and inns. We will continue on to Kinugawa Onsen where we will stay overnight. Breakfast at the ryokan and dinner at the ryokan included.

Travel: 2 1/2 Hours; Walking: Medium

Day 14 Travel to Nikko; Nikko - Rinnoji Temple, Toshogu Shrine, Taiyuinbyo; Travel to Tokyo; Sayonara Dinner

After breakfast we will travel to Nikko. In the past, Nikko was a center of Shinto and Buddhist mountain worship for many centuries before Toshogu Shrine was built in the early Edo Period. Toshogu Shrine is the final resting place of Tokugawa Ieyasu, the founder of the Tokugawa Shogunate that ruled Japan for over 250 years between the years of 1603 and 1868. The lavishly decorated shrine complex consists of more than a dozen buildings set in a beautiful forest. Countless wood carvings and large amounts of gold leaf were used to decorate the buildings in a way not seen elsewhere in Japan where simplicity has been stressed in shrine architecture. In addition to touring Toshogu Shrine, we will also tour Rinnoji and Taiyuinbyo. Rinnoji is Nikko's most important temple, and was founded by Shodo Shonan, the Buddhist monk who introduced Buddhism to Nikko in the 8th century. The temple's main building houses 3 large gold lacquered wooden statues of Amida, Senju-Kannon (Kannon with a thousand arms), and Bato Kannon (Kannon with a horse head). The three statues are regarded as Buddhist manifestations of Nikko's three Shinto mountain deities which are enshrined at the nearby Futarasan Shrine. Taiyuinbyo is the mausoleum of the third Tokugawa shogun, Iemitsu, the grandson of Ieyasu. Iemitsu's lavish mausoleum complex resembles Toshogu Shrine in its layout and architecture, but it was intentionally built somewhat more modestly than Toshogu, due to Iemitsu's deep respect for his grandfather. Later in the afternoon, we will travel by local train and Shinkansen to Tokyo and enjoy our Sayonara dinner. You will retrieve your main luggage after checking into the hotel. Breakfast at the ryokan and lunch and dinner at local restaurants included.

Travel: 2 1/2 Hours; Walking: Heavy

Day 15 Return Home

It is time to say Sayonara. You will meet the sending service in the lobby of the hotel, and they will help you board the appropriate transportation to the airport. Breakfast at the hotel included.

Travel: 1 1/2 Hours; Walking: Light

Walking level descriptions:
Light – 0 to 2 miles on level ground
Medium – 2 to 4 miles on level ground or 0 to 2 miles on hilly ground
Heavy – 4 to 6 miles on level ground or 2 to 4 miles on hilly ground

Dates & Pricing

Dates	Price (land only) / Single Supplement (All prices are per Person)	Status
Apr 11, 2027 - Apr 25, 2027	$6,559.04/ $783.83	Available
Jul 4, 2027 - Jul 18, 2027	$6,243.86/ $783.83	Available
Oct 17, 2027 - Oct 31, 2027	$6,559.04/ $783.83	Available

Add-On Tours

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Inclusions

- Local, licensed, English-speaking, Japanese guides

- **Travel insurance from Travel Guard**, one of the world's largest travel insurance providers, will be provided to everyone from the United States. All others will receive a $100 per person credit and will be responsible for obtaining their own travel insurance in their own home country. (The insurance provided by Samurai Tours will cover the land portion only. Insurance to cover airfare and other additional expenses is the tour member's responsibility.)
  - Exact coverage dependent on state
    - For residents of the following states please click here for your available plan. FL, KS, MN, MO, MT, NY, and WA
    - For all other states and the District of Columbia click here
  - **Travel Insurance Surcharge:** Depending on your age at the time the travel insurance is purchased, you may be subject to the following surcharge for your travel insurance. Travel insurance surcharges will be due at the same time as your tour deposits. (the surcharge itself is not insured)
    - Up to 69 – $0
    - 70-74 – $104
    - 75-79 – $180
    - 80-84 – $356
    - 85+ – $545
  - **Travel Insurance Opt-Out:** If you would prefer to opt out of the travel insurance, please note this at the time of registration. You will receive a $100 credit per person, which will be reflected on your invoice. In the event that you would need to cancel your tour, cancellation penalties may apply. See the Terms and Conditions page for the Cancellation Fees Schedule.

- Airport transfer from Tokyo's Narita or Haneda Airports and airport transfer to Tokyo's Narita or Haneda Airports
- Meeting service at Tokyo's Narita Airport or Tokyo's Haneda Airport and transfer to the hotel near the airport
  - The meeting service will meet you at the airport and provide you a transfer to the airport hotel
  - Meeting service can only be provided between 8am and 9pm. If you arrive at a time outside of these hours, we will need to provide alternative directions for you to get to the hotel on your own

For those requiring meeting or sending services on other than the scheduled arrival/departure dates, there will be a $100 fee for the meeting service from the airport into Tokyo or the sending service to Tokyo airports.

- Lodging for 14 nights in Japanese-style ryokans and western-style hotels
- Meals
  - Japanese-style or western-style breakfast every morning (please note: some ryokans do not offer western-style breakfast
  - Five Japanese-style lunches
  - Nine Japanese-style or western-style dinners (including four gourmet kaiseki dinners at the ryokans)
- All transportation costs when traveling with the group (transportation costs during scheduled free times are the tour member's responsibility)
- Flight from Tokyo's Haneda airport to Sapporo's New Chitose Airport
- Electronic version of itinerary
- Admission fees to the destinations and activities listed in the Tour Highlights column on the right, during non-free times (itinerary specifics subject to change)
- Baggage transfer from the hotel in Tokyo to the hotel in Sapporo (one bag only)
- Baggage transfer from the hotel in Sapporo to the hotel in Hakodate (one bag only)

- Baggage transfer from the hotel in Hakodate to the hotel in Sendai (one bag only)
- Baggage transfer from the hotel in Sendai to the hotel in Aizu-Wakamatsu (one bag only)
- Baggage transfer from Aizu-Wakamatsu to Tokyo (one bag only)
- Each tour member receives a tour handbook. This handbook is full of tips and suggestions taken from our Japan experiences. It allow you to better plan and prepare for your trip, and therefore enjoy your trip even more. The tips and suggestions included cover everything from how to save while exchanging money, what to pack, some basic Japanese-language tips, general etiquette, do's-and-don'ts, and ryokan customs

Exclusions

- International Airfare is NOT included
- Alcoholic beverages are NOT included
- A printed itinerary is not included

Thank you for downloading this PDF version of our tour. Please visit our website at www.samuraitours.com/tours for the most current dates, prices and information.

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