

JOURNEYto the EAST

— Specialist in tours to Japan —

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2024 SNOW SPECTACULAR TOUR OF JAPAN

This spectacular Japan winter tour has it all; the Sapporo Snow Festival, snow monkeys, dancing red-crested cranes, even an icebreaker ride.

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DURATION

14 days

📖

THEME

Remote Japan Tours,
Winter Tours

👥

GROUP SIZE

Min 4 – Max 8

OVERVIEW

DATES & PRICES

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“A top-quality, well planned & organised small group tour”

– Ross & Rosalind Hayward

ようこそ
welcome

TOP TOUR HIGHLIGHTS

Hokkaido's fabulous snow festival
See the amazing giant snow carvings. The main street of Sapporo is transformed into a wonderland with coloured lights reflecting from the snow carvings

Laugh at the antics of the snow monkeys
Watch these creatures hop in and out of the hot spring waters to keep warm

The best time to understand these strange buildings
The thatched roofs in this village tell their own story in winter. Visiting the village at this time is so special

The buzz of walking in Japanese snow shoes
A fabulous opportunity walk on the snow through an ancient forest and mountains

Enjoy the whimsical Japanese dancing cranes
These beautiful creature are magnificent as they dance for you on the snow. Their red crowns add a touch of colour to their otherwise stark outfits.

Experience the glow of Otaru
This fabulous canal town has an amazing history. With its own ice festival it is just so memorable in winter

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FULL JAPAN 14-DAY ITINERARY

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TOUR OVERVIEW

The 2024 Snow Spectacular Tour of Japan takes you on a unique 14-day journey through the heart of the Japan Alps and to the remote wilderness of Japan’s northernmost island of Hokkaido. The finale is the fabulous Sapporo Snow Festival. The tour reveals the spectacular beauty of Japan during winter-time through an amazing selection of experiences.

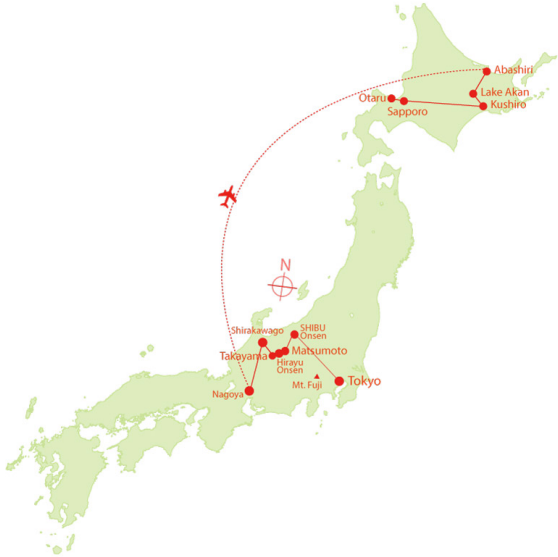
Along the way, you will visit the thatched-roof farmhouses of a UNESCO-listed village, Shirakawago, plough through floating drift ice on board an icebreaker in Hokkaido’s Sea of Okhotsk and visit Japan’s internationally renowned Sapporo Snow Festival.

ITINERARY

The tour also allows you to witness the rare sight of Japan’s precious wild snow monkeys bathing in hot spring baths. You stay in

spring onsen hospitality, local food and culture. You encounter first-hand the sublime beauty of the outdoors and travelling through the sheer beauty of winter.

DOWNLOAD FULL ITINERARY



▼ Day 1: Arrival in Tokyo

Welcome to Japan! On arrival at one of Tokyo’s international airports, you will meet a member of the Journey to the East team and transfer to your hotel. After a good night’s sleep, you will be ready to start your 2024 Snow Spectacular Tour of Japan.

Tokyo (Park Hotel Tokyo)

No meals

▼ Day 2: Tokyo

After orientation with your guide, you begin your exploration of Tokyo and its many faces. Today you will head to the Harajuku area. Your first stop is Meiji Shrine, located in the heart of Tokyo’s fashion district. Surrounded by a forest of evergreen trees and stroll gardens, this impressive Shinto shrine complex provides a peaceful oasis in an otherwise bustling city. We then walk along the fashionable tree-lined boulevard of Omotesando. Here the contrasts are stunning as the world’s super-brands sit comfortably alongside edgy Japanese designers, avant-garde architecture, and Harajuku’s teen pop-culture. On the way back to your hotel, we will show you the famous Shibuya crossing filled with urban buzz. Tonight our welcome dinner is held at a restaurant serving modern Japanese degustation with great night views.

Tokyo (Park Hotel Tokyo)

Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

▼ Day 3: Shibu Onsen

This morning we ride the impressive bullet train – the shinkansen, it is time to head for the wilderness of Japan. The next destination is Nagano Prefecture, the heartland of the Japan Alps and blanketed in snow at this time of year. We are headed to Yudanaka on the 'Snow Monkey Express' to visit the Snow Monkey Park. Walking along a winding path for 30 to 60 minutes (depending on snow conditions) we come to the natural hot spring bath where wild monkeys come to bathe in the hot thermal waters to get warm. Tonight you will stay in the small mountain hot springs village of Shibu Onsen, to experience your own onsen bath. Our guide will talk you through the ritual of the Japanese bath and explain why a visit to an onsen remains one of the nation’s most popular pastimes. Dinner will be traditional kaiseki, a multi-course banquet featuring seasonal foods and regional specialities. Your room will be a traditional tatami-mat room where you can experience sleeping on comfortable futon floor bedding. Japanese ryokan hospitality at its absolute finest!

Shibu Onsen (Shibu Hotel)

Breakfast, Dinner

▼ Day 4: Matsumoto



Breakfast is an authentic Japanese-style – a nutritious mix of grilled fish, miso soup, tofu, rice, and pickles! You then head by local train to Matsumoto. Surrounded by snow-covered mountains, Matsumoto is a home to the impressive Matsumoto Castle. It is Japan’s oldest wooden castle and one of the nation’s four castles designated as National Treasures. Still in impeccable original condition, you will have the chance to explore its wooden interior and climb to the top of its distinctive black-and-white turret. After visiting the Matsumoto Castle, we stroll around the lovely alpine city and stay overnight.


Matsumoto (Matsumoto Marunouchi Hotel)


Breakfast (Japanese), Dinner



▼ Day 5: Shin-Hotaka


A **ride on the Shin-Hotaka Ropeway**, one of the **world’s longest** ropeways is on the cards today. From the viewing platform, **2,200 metres above sea level** there is a spectacular uninterrupted view of Japan’s pristine northern alps. Here you will have an opportunity to explore the summit's short walking circuit. In the late afternoon, we travel by private minivan to Hirayu Onsen to **stay in another onsen village deep in the mountains** to enjoy the natural hot springs and beautiful environment. Our accommodation also has outside baths where you can soak and relax surrounded by nature. Enjoy a restorative soak after an active day outside and heartwarming country-style dinner.


**Hirayu Onsen (Hirayu no Mori - with private toilet in room and communal bath facilities)**

**Breakfast, Dinner**

▼ Day 6: Shirakawago


A private minivan takes us to the **UNESCO World Heritage Site** of Shirakawa-go, in the heart of the rugged Hida region. This exquisite rural village features the traditional thatched-roof farmhouses unique to Japan's alpine regions. With their steeply-slanted roofs built to withstand heavy snowfalls, they resemble “hands clasped together in prayer” (hence their name, gassho-tsukuri). A walk through the village allows us to **experience the magic of the farmhouses in the snow**, and learn more about the construction of these houses and the traditional life of the villagers. We then travel to our next destination, Takayama. A compact, atmospheric town surrounded by mountains, **Takayama** is known for its beautifully preserved **streets of timber merchant houses dating from the late 17th century**.


**Takayama (Tokyu Stay Hida Takayama Musubinoyu)**

**Breakfast, Dinner**

▼ Day 7: Takayama


In the morning, we will have a guided tour of Takayama including morning market and the elaborately decorated **Takayama Festival Floats** Exhibition Hall. In the afternoon, explore Takayama at your leisure. You may like to visit Takayama Jinya (once the prefectural office for the Tokugawa shogunate in feudal times), or wander the **impossibly photogenic narrow streets of the old merchant district**. Some of the original wooden buildings have been made into small museums or converted into boutique sake breweries and rustic cafes. Takayama is also famous for Hida beef and you may like to visit one of the **local restaurants serving this succulent local marbled beef**. Our guide is naturally happy to provide sightseeing advice and restaurant recommendations if needed.


**Takayama (Tokyu Stay Hida Takayama Musubinoyu)**

**Breakfast**

▼ Day 8: Transfer to Hokkaido

After a few days exploring the central Japanese alps, we take a **train trip, down a scenic river valley all covered in snow**, to the eastern seaboard city of Nagoya. Here we transfer to a **domestic flight to Hokkaido** for the second half of 2024 Snow Spectacular Tour of Japan. The 2024 Hokkaido winter festivals including the Sapporo Snow Festival are firmly in our sights. With large tracts of pristine wilderness, Hokkaido is a popular destination for those who love its vast, open landscapes and extensive wildlife. We **fly into the little seaside town of Abashiri in Hokkaido** for our own special adventure. Our private minivan will take us to our hotel to begin our travels through the hauntingly beautiful country side of snow laden Hokkaido.


**Abashiri (Hokuten no Oka Abashiri-ko)**


**Breakfast, Dinner**

▼ Day 9: Abashiri

We are in the town of Abashiri on Hokkaido’s northeastern coast. Buffeted by strong arctic winds coming down from Russia across the Sea of Okhotsk, it's a captivating, beautiful and rugged part of the world. We **board an icebreaker to break the drift ice that builds up off the coast of Abashiri**. Back on land, we visit an Ainu (indigenous peoples of Hokkaido) Museum. **An outstanding expose of the lives of the traditional people of Hohhaido**.

In the afternoon, our minivan takes us to Lake Akan. The **Akan National Park** is an extensive park complex **features deep gorges and icy lakes, craggy volcanic peaks, and dense cypress forests**. We stay at a traditional onsen hotel on the shores of Lake Akan, located in the middle of the park. The hotel has a number of onsen baths, some located outside **providing exquisite views of the lake and the surrounding countryside**.

**Lake Akan (Akan Yukyu no Sato Tsuruga)**

**Breakfast, Dinner**

▼ Day 10: Lake Akan

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Today we pause to take a breath and relax at our hotel and around the lake. We will have a **guided snowshoe walk** in the morning, and you can choose how you'd like to best **enjoy Lake Akan's wintry wonderland** for the rest of the day. You may like to go **ice-fishing, take a ride across the frozen lake in a snowmobile, or simply experience walking across the lake's huge expanse**. Our hotel's hot spring baths will be a great way to relax after a day spent outside exploring the lake. After dinner tonight, you will go to a **local theatre for a traditional Ainu dance show**.

 **Lake Akan (Akan Yukyu no Sato Tsuruga)**

 **Breakfast, Dinner**

▼ **Day 11: Kushiro**

This morning, we leave Lake Akan and travel by a private minivan to **Kushiro Shitsugen National Park**. It is a **huge wetlands area**, which was designated as a protected area in 1987, to protect the then dwindling populations of tancho-zaru, **Japan's beautiful red-crested white crane**. Here we visit the crane sanctuary to see this elegant bird in its natural environment and to learn more about ongoing conservation efforts and breeding programs. In the afternoon, an express train takes us westwards **through the stunning views of the centre of Hokkaido's snow covered land** to the city of Sapporo, the host of **internationally famous Snow Festival**. As a relatively new city that developed in the late 19th century as the country modernised, **Sapporo** was able to apply some of the new urban planning concepts popular at the time. It has **unusually wide boulevards and large public parks**. Sapporo today is a welcoming and cosmopolitan city with a lively food scene, fashionable shopping malls, and stylish cafes.

 **Sapporo (Sapporo Grand Hotel)**

 **Breakfast, Dinner**

▼ **Day 12: Sapporo**

Our guide takes us on a **walking tour of central Sapporo** this morning. We stop to have a look at the historic Clock Tower, built in 1878. Wander past other early brick buildings from the late 19th and early 20th centuries on our way to Odori Koen, the **1.5km-long stretch of public park** in the city's heart. The **Odori Koen** is the main **venue for the fabulous 2024 Sapporo Snow Festival** and you have the afternoon and evening free to savour more of the festival atmosphere or explore Sapporo's attractive streetscape and try some of its great restaurants. The **Sapporo Snow Festival is one of the most popular events in Japan**. Huge sculptures are carved in packed snow and displayed along the city's central boulevard, attracting **highly skilled participants from** Japan and **all over the world**. Apart from the sculptures, **the city turns on musical performances (delivered from stages made of ice)**, builds ice bars serving mulled wine and sake cocktails, and creates snow activities for families and kids. It's a **buoyant, vibrant festival atmosphere set against a beautiful snowy backdrop**.

 **Sapporo (Sapporo Grand Hotel)**

 **Breakfast**

▼ **Day 13: Sapporo and Otaru**

You will have a morning to enjoy the Sapporo's festive atmosphere and great shopping. Then **your guide will take you on a afternoon guided tour of the nearby picturesque town of Otaru**. Once a vibrant trading centre where the **indigenous Ainu people, Japanese, Chinese, and Russian traders mingled to exchange goods**, Otaru retains many of the grand stone and brick buildings from its late 19th century boom times. Many of the warehouses from its trading past have been converted into attractive museums and cafes along its canals. Today we **wander down Otaru's iconic central canal with its Victorian-era street lamps**. **As the sun sets**, the area is lit up for the Otaru Snow Path Light Festival and we enjoy the romantic atmosphere of its cobbled streets, street lamps, and canal illuminated by ice lanterns and candles. Returning to Sapporo, it is our last night and our farewell dinner in this wintry wonderland awaits us.

 **Sapporo (Sapporo Grand Hotel)**

 **Breakfast, Dinner**

▼ **Day 14: Sapporo and Bon-Voyage**

This morning, you will check out of your hotel after breakfast and your 2024 Snow Spectacular Tour of Japan concludes. You can return to Tokyo by train or air to fly home, or perhaps linger in Sapporo for a little longer to enjoy the Snow Festival and visit more of the Sapporo attractions such as Sapporo Brewery. We will be delighted to plan your personal post-tour extension to show you a different part of Japan. **Please see our Tour Extension Model Itineraries for inspirations!** Note: The cost of an escorted transfer to your departure airport is not included in our Small Group Tours (as we found many guests choose to stay in Japan a bit longer), but we will be happy to arrange your transfer to next destination or to exit airport. Please see our FAQ for more details.



 **Breakfast**



DATES & PRICES

2024 Snow Spectacular Tour of Japan

Tour Code	Starts	Departs From	Available Places	Currency	PP Twin Share	Single Supplement ?		
GWS-24	Jan 24, 2024	Tokyo	Available	AUD\$	9,650	2,700	ASK A QUESTION	BOOK NOW
GWS-24a	Jan 30, 2024	Tokyo	Available	AUD\$	9,650	2,700	ASK A QUESTION	BOOK NOW

You can choose a different currency at the very top right of the page

INCLUSIONS

Each guest is personally looked after with one-on-one interactions with our hand-picked, expert tour guides. As part of your investment, this tour includes:

- ✓ 13 nights accommodation with daily breakfast
 - ✓ Lunches & dinners as specified
 - ✓ All public and private transport for the group itinerary
 - ✓ SUICA transport IC card preloaded with starter credit
 - ✓ Flight from Nagoya to Memanbetsu airport (Abashiri)
 - ✓ Airport meet & greet and hotel transfer by public transport on arrival
 - ✓ Locally licensed English speaking tour guides
 - ✓ Cultural activities and entry fees included in itinerary
 - ✓ Luggage transfers (1 piece per person)

DISCLAIMER: Unless otherwise stated, this tour does not include the costs of international and domestic airfares, transfers on the last day, travel insurance, alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages, transport during free time, personal expenses (laundry, internet, telephone, coin lockers etc.) and Visa (if required).



WHO THIS JAPAN TOUR IS FOR...

This is a perfect tour for people who:

- ▶ Enjoy a touch of adventure well of the beaten track,
- ▶ Fancy a chance to see some of the very best of Japan in winter
- ▶ Want to experience the wonderful Japanese winter fair.
- ▶ Like to be entertained by the local wild life.
- ▶ Know that the Japanese love festivals and winter is an ideal opportunity.
- ▶ Would like to experience the friendliness and culture of the more remote places in Japan
- ▶ Have a reasonable level of fitness because much of what you will enjoy is reached on foot

REVIEWS



I highly recommend touring with JTE. From the first contact they were quick to respond and helpful. They provided a spectacular tour, covering all aspects so efficiently. They arranged my extra accomodation and transport and ensured I not only had all tickets needed but had clear instructions to make it all so easy and stress free.

★★★★★ Trip date: January 2023
Sheryl Collins - New Zealand



Have a question about this tour? Get in touch with our staff directly.

CONTACT US



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BLOG

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