

BASIC TOUR OUTLINE

2026 SNOW SPECTACULAR TOUR OF JAPAN (SIGNATURE)

Start: Friday, 30 January 2026 from Tokyo (Haneda)

Finish: Wednesday, 11 February 2026 at Hakodate

Duration: 13 days

Group size: 10 people

Cost estimate: AUD \$10,270 per person

Single supplement: AUD \$3,350 per person

Ref: GWS-26

TOUR OVERVIEW

The 2026 Snow Spectacular Tour of Japan is staged in the wildness of Japan's northern island of Hokkaido and runs for an unforgettable 13 days. The tour reveals the spectacular beauty of Japan during wintertime through an amazing selection of experiences. The highlights include the internationally renowned Sapporo Snow Festival, drift ice in the remote Sea of Okhotsk, UNESCO World Heritage-listed rugged Shiretoko Peninsula and the charming historic city of Hakodate. Along the way, you will play like a child in the snow making a snowman, walking with Japanese snowshoes in a panoramic snowfield, diving into virgin powder snow and being a snow angel!

The tour also allows you to witness the rare sight of Japan's protected red-crested cranes in their natural environment. Learn about the fascinating traditional people of Hokkaido, Ainu at the engrossing Upopoy National Ainu Museum. You stay in authentic traditional Japanese inns and appreciate the best of Japan's hot spring onsen hospitality, local food and culture. This tour lets you first-hand encounter the sublime beauty of Japan covered in snow. It suits travellers who love travelling in the wild and delving into remote local cultures.

*The group size of our Hokkaido tours is a maximum of 10, instead of our usual 8, because we use a comfortable larger size minibus throughout the tour to zip around Hokkaido.

*Accommodation will be as planned below or similar.

DAY	DATE	PLAN	DETAILS	MEALS	ACCOMODATION
1	Fri 30/1/2026	Airport meet and greet on arrival	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 be escorted to your hotel at Haneda Airport. After a good night's sleep, you will be ready to start your 2026 Snow Spectacular Tour of Japan .	No meals	Villa Fontaine Grand Haneda Airport [Superior Twin/King]

DAY	DATE	PLAN	DETAILS	MEALS	ACCOMODATION
2	Sat 31/1/2026	Transfer to and guided tour of Abashiri	<p>This morning, you will transfer by domestic flight to Hokkaido to begin your adventure. With large tracts of pristine wilderness, Hokkaido is a popular destination for those who love vast, open landscapes and extensive wildlife. Upon arrival at Memanbetsu Airport, you will begin a guided tour of Abashiri. Today, you will visit Okhotsk Ryu-hyo (drift ice) Museum to gain background knowledge of nature and wildlife in the Sea of Okhotsk, and the Hokkaido Museum of Northern Peoples for an outstanding exposure to the lives of the traditional people of Hokkaido. Before leaving Abashiri, you will drop by a wonderful glassware gallery where ice-like glassware is being created using recycled fluorescent tubes, a great opportunity to learn the environmental impacts on the northern waters.</p> <p>Tonight, you will travel to UNESCO World Heritage site of Shiretoko Peninsula. Shiretoko was added to the list for the irreplaceable value of its ecosystem and biodiversity. For the next two nights, you will immerse yourself in the world of ice and sea.</p>	Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner	Kitakobushi Shiretoko Hotel & Resort [Sea View Twin]
3	Sun 1/2/2026	Guided tour of Shiretoko	<p>This morning, you have the option of walking on drift ice. You need to meet certain physical conditions (less than 110 kg (243 lb) in weight and under 75 years old) and wear very thick wetsuits, but this could be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to be in wild nature.</p> <p>In the afternoon, you will put on a pair of Japanese snowshoes and walk on the frozen Furepe Falls. Overlooking the snow-covered Shiretoko mountain range against the winter blue sky is an amazingly unforgettable experience.</p> <p>Another night in your resort-style accommodation and enjoy a buffet dinner and an onsen hot spring bath.</p>	Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner	Kitakobushi Shiretoko Hotel & Resort [Sea View Twin]

DAY	DATE	PLAN	DETAILS	MEALS	ACCOMODATION
4	Mon 2/2/2026	Transfer to and guided tour of Lake Mashu	<p>Hokkaido is the biggest producer of kombu (kelp) which is used in most dashi soup stock. You will visit Rausu on the Shiretoko Peninsula to get the background of this seaweed and taste it for lunch. You then leave Shiretoko and travel further into the wildness of the Notsuke Peninsula on the east coast between Shiretoko and Nemuro Peninsulas. It is a curved 26 km sand spit sticking out into the Nemuro Straights. The long and thin peninsula offers an abundance of wildlife and pristine nature all year around. Eagles, foxes, deer, seals, cranes and scores of migratory birds, just to name a few, can be seen in the Notsuke Peninsula, and this is the reason you are here today.</p> <p>In the afternoon, you continue heading to the Akan-Mashu National Park. The pristine Lake Mashu is known as one of the clearest lakes in the world. The landscape appears otherworldly from late January to late February as the surrounding trees are coated in shimmering frost. Lake Mashu's distinct shade of sapphire blue stands out vividly against the pure white winter surroundings. In the indigenous Ainu language, the lake is called Kamui-to, or "Lake of the Gods," indicative of its otherworldly appearance.</p> <p>Tonight, you will stay at a traditional onsen ryokan in this area. Enjoy true Hokkaido hospitality and onsen therapy!</p>	Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner	Yuyado Daiichi [Japanese style room with private toilet, with communal onsen bath - Main Building Maisonette on Mountain side]
5	Tue 3/2/2026	Guided tour of Kushiro and transfer to Sapporo	<p>This morning, you will travel by a private minibus 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. One of the reasons to come this far in Hokkaido in winter is to see their courtship dance. Here you visit the crane sanctuary to see this elegant bird in its natural environment and to learn more about ongoing conservation efforts and breeding programs.</p> <p>In the afternoon, a private minibus takes you westwards through the stunning views of the centre of Hokkaido's snow-covered land to the city of Sapporo, the host of the internationally famous Sapporo Snow Festival. As a relatively new city that developed in the late 19th century as the country modernized, 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.</p>	Breakfast	Sapporo Grand Hotel [Standard Large Twin/Double]

DAY	DATE	PLAN	DETAILS	MEALS	ACCOMODATION
6	Wed 4/2/2026	Morning guided tour of Sapporo (Snow festival)	<p>Your guide takes you on a walking tour of central Sapporo this morning. You stop to have a look at the historic Clock Tower, built in 1878 as an agricultural college to pass down the western farming method to the new land. 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 2026 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.</p> <p>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.</p>	Breakfast	Sapporo Grand Hotel [Standard Large Twin/Double]
7	Thu 5/2/2026	Guided tour of Otaru	<p>This morning, your guide will take you on a morning guided tour of the nearby picturesque canal 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 you wander down Otaru's iconic central canal with its Victorian-era street lamps.</p> <p>Otaru is also famous for the number of sushi restaurants in the relatively small city. You will have a sushi lunch here before heading back to Sapporo for free evening to enjoy more of the festival feel.</p>	Breakfast, Lunch	Sapporo Grand Hotel [Standard Large Twin/Double]
8	Fri 6/2/2026	Guided tour of Shiraoi and Noboribetsu then transfer to Lake Toya	<p>This morning you will leave Sapporo in a private minibus to the town of Shiraoi famous for its wagyu brand Shiraoi Beef. It is also a home of Upopoy National Ainu Museum. Set in a beautiful natural environment, it is a great place to learn about the culture of Ainu people.</p> <p>After the Shiraoi beef lunch at a local family run restaurant, we head to Noboribetsu hot springs which generate some 10,000 tons of hot water a day. Here your guide will take you on the Jigokudani (Hell Valley) Nature Walk, an interesting walk where you can observe intermittently erupting geysers along the path.</p> <p>The final destination today is Lake Toya. Here you will stay at a brand new lake side resort for a very relaxed two days.</p>	Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner	Lake Toya Tsuruga Resort Hikari no Uta [Japanese-Western room with Private Onsen]

DAY	DATE	PLAN	DETAILS	MEALS	ACCOMODATION
9	Sat 7/2/2026	Guided tour of Toyoura	<p>Today you will visit the nearby fishing village of Toyoura, a premium scallop producer. Luckily the scallops are in season in winter, and a local guide will explain the fascinating story of how scallops grow from a minute egg to a delicious scallop. You will experience an auction as well as a quick cooking lesson while you are here. Of course, you will get to taste-test the scallops at lunch.</p> <p>Dropping at a local dairy farm for a quick ice cream stop before arriving and relaxing back at Lake Toya.</p>	Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner	Lake Toya Tsuruga Resort Hikari no Uta [Japanese-Western room with Private Onsen]
10	Sun 8/2/2026	Guided tour of Mt Usu and transfer to Hakodate	<p>This morning, you will go up to the top of Mt Usu by ropeway. Mt Usu is an active volcano and the 6-minutes ropeway ride will take you up close to the summit. From the observation deck, you can enjoy panoramic views of Lake Toya and Showa Shinzan. Showa Shinzan is a lava dome created by the earth movements between 1943 and 1945.</p> <p>From here, you will travel southward in your private minibus to the enchanting city of Hakodate. This historic port city with its 19th-century streetscapes has a distinctly European feel. It was designated one of Japan's two foreign trade ports that could legitimately engage with foreign traders during the national isolation policy period, and foreign influence and architecture make this city so intriguing.</p> <p>In the evening, you head up Mt Hakodate. From the hillside restaurant, there is a panoramic view of Hakodate all lit up at night, considered one of the top three views in Japan.</p>	Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner	Century Marina Hakodate [Deluxe Twin room]
11	Mon 9/2/2026	A day of snow activity	<p>Today is all about playing in the snow! You will head to a nearby snowfield from Hakodate and try snowshoe walking with great panoramic views at the top of a mountain. All the clothing and shoes are available for rent and it caters for every fitness level. In the afternoon, you will continue trying snow activities including ice fishing.</p> <p>This evening is free. After the fun-packed day, relax in Hakodate and stroll around the red brick district checking out local souvenirs and special winter food.</p>	Breakfast, Lunch	Century Marina Hakodate [Deluxe Twin room]

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12	Tue 10/2/2026	Guided tour of Hakodate	<p>The Hakodate Morning Market trades a wide array of seafood in a relatively casual environment and many small restaurants allow you to sample the local delicacies. On the guided tour of Hakodate, you will visit a number of historical sites such as Goryokaku Fort as well as the Motomachi district. The Goryokaku Fort was built in a five-sided star shape, designed by a samurai, Takeda Ayasaburo who was influenced by a French military engineer Vauban. The fort, in the centre of Hakodate, was completed in 1864 as Japan's first Western-style fortification.</p> <p>This evening, you will gather together one last time for a farewell dinner.</p>	Breakfast, Dinner	Century Marina Hakodate [Deluxe Twin room]
13	Wed 11/2/2026	Departure	<p>This morning, you will check out of your hotel after breakfast and your 2026 Snow Spectacular Tour of Japan concludes. We will be happy to make your personal transfer arrangements from here whether it is flying or taking Shinkansen back to Tokyo, staying a few more days in Hokkaido, or travelling to a different part of Japan. Please see our Tour Extension Model Itineraries for inspiration!</p> <p>Note: The cost of 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, however, we will be happy to arrange a transfer to your next destination. Please see our FAQ for more details.</p>	Breakfast	
Inclusions for Group Tour			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 12 nights' accommodation listed above ■ Airport meet & greet and hotel transfer by public transport on arrival ■ Private guide as specified ■ All public and private transport stated in the group itinerary ■ Domestic flight from Haneda to Memanbetsu ■ Cultural activities and entry fees as included in the group itinerary ■ Meals as specified 		

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		Exclusions for Group Tour	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ International and domestic airfare (unless otherwise stated)■ Travel insurance■ Transfer on the last day■ Alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages (except the 1st drink at each meal)■ Tips and gratuities (not routinely expected in Japan)■ Transport during free time■ Personal expenses (laundry, coin-locker, internet, telephone etc.)■ Visa (if required)		