



HOKKAIDO JAPAN





WELCOME TO HOKKAIDO

Japan captivates at every turn, an archipelago of nearly 7,000 islands filled with dramatic scenery, vibrant culture, and extraordinary moments of discovery. It's a dream setting for true expedition cruising. Remote, rugged, and wonderfully wild, Hokkaido stands apart as Japan's last great frontier. This northern island, famed for its raw landscapes and deep-rooted indigenous heritage, offers a striking contrast to the temples, shrines, and neon skylines of the mainland. Only settled by Japan within the last 150 years, Hokkaido remains shaped by nature, not cities.

With over two million acres of national parks, the island is a haven for wildlife: brown bears roam the forests, Yezo shika deer graze in the meadows, and Steller's sea eagles soar overhead.





Clearance and formalities

The Japanese government requires expedition ships to obtain several cruising permits and to pass international clearance standards when entering and sailing around Japan, including Hokkaido. Because Japanese legal procedures are often complicated, it is recommended that vessels seeking cruising permits use an experienced agent for logistical support and advice.

Current requirements for ships entering Hokkaido

- For expedition ships entering Hokkaido, standard maritime clearance applies:
 - Submit a Pre-Arrival Procedure Form (PAPF) to the Japanese Coast Guard (JCG) and ensure you have necessary nautical charts/publications.
 - Ship operators must coordinate with JCG and port authorities for clearance, plus complete customs and immigration forms online at Visit Japan Web.
 - Entry into Japan must be made at an official Port of Entry. There are approximately twelve commonly used Ports of Entry in Hokkaido – but Abashiri, Kushiro, Muroran, Hakodate and Otaru are the most common. View more details [here](#).

Best time to Visit

For an expedition cruise to Hokkaido, the best times are summer (June-August) for vibrant flowers and mild weather, or autumn (late September-October) for stunning fall foliage, fewer crowds, and clear skies.

Summer offers lush green landscapes, long days and is pleasantly cool, less humid, no rainy season, ideal for hiking and outdoor activities. Autumn brings stunning foliage colours and better visibility for lakes (less mist) and excellent photography conditions.

Major ports in Hokkaido

Muroran 42°19'32.6"N 140°58'21.8"E

Visit for Toya Caldera and Usu Volcano UNESCO Global Geopark (the living earth).
Also the location of a former G8 Summit.

Kushiro 42°58'54.7"N 144°22'45.6"E

See Japanese cranes, the symbol of Japan and a special national monument,
and Kushiro Shitsugen National Park.

Abashiri 44°01'14.3"N 144°17'05.7"E

Experience Shiretoko World Heritage Site and an array of exceptional wild
animals viewed during trips upon the sea.

Rebun & Rishiri Islands 45° 11' 38.04' N, 141° 15' 28.8' E

Dominated by the conical Mount Rishiri (Rishiri-Fuji), the region is ideal
for hiking to see unique alpine plants and forests. Rebun Island is also
affectionately known as the "floating island of flowers."

Otaru 43°12'11.4"N 141°00'25.5"E

Experience the harsh, yet rich natural
environment that nurtures
this historic port city, and the
strong undiluted whiskeys
for which it has become
well known for.





Day 1: Muroran

Adventures await in Shikotsu–Toya National Park, a landscape shaped by its renowned twin caldera lakes. This picturesque natural haven offers easily accessible trails leading to impressive lakes, soothing hot springs, and a fascinating volcanic landscape, perfect for both relaxed walks and more energetic hikes.

07.00am	Ship arrives alongside Muroran Port.
08.00am	Scenic drive toward Shikotsu–Toya National Park.
09.00am	Enjoy a short guided walk, explore the iconic volcanic landscape, home to twin caldera lakes and steaming geothermal features.
9.30am	Ride the cable car to the summit of Mount Usu, taking in sweeping views of Lake Toya, surrounding forests, and volcanic formations.
10.45am	Take a short drive to Jigokudani “Hell Valley” one of Hokkaido’s most famous geothermal zones.
12.00	Return drive to Muroran.
1.00pm	In the afternoon, enjoy free time to explore the port city of Muroran. Stroll out to the scenic cape and lighthouse, or take a rewarding walk up Mount Sokuryo for panoramic views of the city and coastline.
4.00pm	Return drive to Muroran.

Day 2: Kushiro



The major fishing port of Kushiro is best known for Kushiro Shitsugen, Japan’s largest marshland and a protected national park that provides sanctuary to the country’s revered Red-crowned Cranes (tancho). Once believed to be extinct, a small flock of 20 birds was rediscovered here in 1926; although the population has since grown to nearly 2,000, the species remains endangered due to the continued loss of wetland habitat.

Explore the park’s walking trails, keep watch for these elegant cranes in their natural environment before continuing to the Kushiro Crane Reserve to learn about ongoing breeding efforts and the rehabilitation of sick or injured birds. In the afternoon, visit the architecturally striking Kushiro City Museum. Inside, engaging exhibits reveal the region’s natural history and offer insight into the rich cultural traditions of the Indigenous Ainu people.

08.00am

Scenic drive toward Kushiro Shitsugen, Japan’s largest marshland and national park.

08.45am

Explore Kushiro Shitsugen walking trails at a leisurely pace, keeping an eye out for the elegant Red-crowned Cranes in their natural habitat. Learn about the unique ecosystem of this wetland and its vital role in protecting endangered wildlife.

10.15am

Visit the Kushiro Crane Reserve to discover its breeding and rehabilitation programs for sick or injured cranes. Gain insight into ongoing conservation efforts to safeguard these iconic birds.

11.30pm

Return to Kushiro City for lunch & self-exploration.

1.30pm

Visit the architecturally striking Kushiro City Museum, featuring exhibits on the region’s natural history and the cultural heritage of the Ainu people, the indigenous inhabitants of Hokkaido.

3.00pm

Return to the Port.

Day 3: Shiretoko Peninsula cruise & Akan Mashu National Park

Cruising the Shiretoko Peninsula

Settle onto the outer decks this morning for exceptional views as we sail around the remote and rugged Shiretoko Peninsula en route to Abashiri. Keep watch for seabirds and marine life that thrive in these nutrient-rich waters. One of Japan's most pristine national parks, Shiretoko is home to an impressive diversity of wildlife, including 36 land mammal species, 22 marine mammal species, and 285 bird species. Brown bears, Blakiston's fish owls, and even orcas can be found across its dramatic volcanic landscapes, which span ocean, river, and dense forest ecosystems that transform strikingly with the seasons.

Explore Akan Mashu National Park

This afternoon, travel inland to Lake Kussharo, a spectacular tree-lined caldera lake, the largest within Akan Mashu National Park, encircling 57 kilometres of pristine shoreline. Continue on to Higashimokoto Shibazakura Park, where more than 10 hectares of vibrant moss phlox burst into vivid pink hues during the annual Shibazakura Festival from May to early June, creating one of Hokkaido's most dazzling seasonal displays.



Day 4: Rebun & Rishiri Islands

Visit Rebun Island

Known as Japan's "Island of Flowers," Rebun is a scenic jewel off the northwest tip of Hokkaido and a haven for rare alpine flora. From late April to mid-September, the island becomes a vibrant tapestry of blooms, many of which are found nowhere else on earth. This morning, enjoy opportunities to walk along Rebun's flower-lined coastal trails, where sweeping views reveal crystal-clear waters, the dramatic silhouette of Rishiri Volcano, and the rugged headlands of Cape Gorota.

Exploring Rishiri Island

In the afternoon, continue to neighbouring Rishiri Island, dominated by the striking cone of Mount Rishiri, a dormant volcano rising 1,721 metres above sea level. Enjoy a leisurely walk around the serene, man-made Himenuma Pond, listening for birdlife and admiring the mirror-like reflections of the mountain and surrounding forest. Then explore the wooded paths of Kutsugata Cape Park, home to species such as Japan's iconic Black Woodpecker and the charming Long-tailed tit. Leave time to wander into town or unwind in one of the island's relaxing hot springs before returning to the ship.



Day 5: Otaru

This morning, end your voyage in Otaru, on the west coast of Hokkaido. Disembark the ship and visit Sakaimachi Street, bustling with seafood vendors, cafes and shops selling some of Otaru's famous glassware. Also visit the Otaru Canal, a former port, now restored with warehouses as museums, shops, and restaurants.





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After graduating from the University of Calgary, Alvin strapped on a backpack and headed abroad, leading to an exciting career in travel. Having travelled to nearly 100 countries and 6 continents, Alvin has worked with some of the world's leading expedition brands to develop life-changing travel experiences. He now works with our key markets to identify new business opportunities, and directs the Expeditions by Destination Asia sales and operational departments. With a personal involvement of over 30-years in the cruise industry, many of those in the Asia-Pacific region, Alvin heads our product development, port consulting, itinerary planning, and directs the ongoing 'branding' of Expeditions by Destination Asia.