

Highlights of Hokkaido & Tohoku: Winter Festival Tour 2017 - 2/9

Experience Japan's best and biggest winter festivals

Tour Code: GTF1849643

Tour Information

Land cost: from USD \$3898

Single supplement: USD \$800

Tour duration: 11 days 10 nights

Destination:

*Sapporo / Otaru / Shiraoi / Noboribetsu / Lake Toya /
 Hakodate / Seikan Tunnel / Aomori / Hirosaki / Towada /
 Kakunodate / Yokote / Hiraizumi / Matsushima / Zao /
 Ouchijuku / Aizu / Nikko / Omiya*

Tour cost includes:

- 7 nights Western style and 3 nights Japanese style accommodation
- Meet and greet upon arrival at Chitose Airport
- Airport transfers on arrival and departure
- Private coach transfers between destinations in Japan
- Comprehensive escorted with AJT professional English speaking tour guide
- Gratuities

Meals

- Breakfast everyday
- 7 lunches and 3 dinners

Admission fees and activities

- All entry fees to sites, activities listed in the itinerary

Dates & Price

2017

Start Date	End Date	Twin / Triple	Start City	End City	Style	Status
Thu. Feb 9, 2017	Sun. Feb 19, 2017	USD \$3898.00	Sapporo	Tokyo	Deluxe	View Tour

Itinerary

Tour Code: GTF1849643

Day 1 Chitose Airport

Welcome to Sapporo! An AJT representative will meet you at the arrival gate and direct you to the hotel.

Hotel:

ANA Crowne Plaza Hotel Chitose or similar class

NOTE 1: The meet and greet is ONLY available for flights arriving after 11:00 AM.

Day 2 Sapporo (Mt. Okura Observatory / Historic Village of Hokkaido), Otaru (Glass Workshops / Music Box Museum / Otaru Snow Light Path)

Let's start of the day with a breathtaking scenery at the Mt. Okura Observatory. The 90-meter ski jump portion of the Winter Olympics 1972 was held in the Okurayama Ski Jump Stadium. Taking a chair lift to the Okurayama Observatory at the top of the hill, then experiencing a breathtaking view of Sapporo's best views from above. From there, we go into the Historic Village of Hokkaido where horse-drawn carriages and trolleys are still seen and used. The village offers insight on its history and an open-air museum as well as through their buildings, which exemplify architectural evolution from the Meiji and Taisho eras into the modern age. From there, we travel into the romantic and nostalgic town known as Otaru. The warehouses that were onced used for storage spaces are now stores, resturants, and museums. Once there, we will go to the glass workshops and see the great designs and fine figures. Next, the Otaru Music Box Museum where a collection of music boxes of all shapes, sizes, and sounds are seen all around. Finally, we stroll around the Otaru Snow Light Path where candle lights illuminate the snowy surrounding, making the atmosphere a pleasant one for even the coldest of hearts.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch

Hotel:

ANA Hotel Sapporo or similar class

Day 3 Sapporo (Sapporo Snow Festival)

This morning we will visit the Sapporo Snow Festival (the Odori Site), the biggest snow festival in Hokkaido, by train. The festival's famous large snow sculptures are crafted by citizens who compete against each other's work of arts. It is normal for these snow figures to measure more than 25 meters wide and 15 meters high. Most are exhibited in the Odori site. Even so, many more snow sculptures of varied sizes and shapes are exhibited in events and concerts at other locations apart from the main stage in Odori's park. For those who want a view to remember, they can consider taking a view from the Sapporo TV Tower at the eastern end of Odori Park. The afternoon is free for you to enjoy, along with lunch on your own. Our tour guide will be there to help you make arrangements or take you to places depending on the group's need.

Meals:

Breakfast

Hotel:

ANA Hotel Sapporo or similar class

Day 4 Sapporo (Nijo Market / Sapporo Beer Museum), Shiraoi (Ainu Village), Noboribetsu (Jigokudani)

This morning we continue to enjoy a tour of Sapporo at the Nijo Market where there are variety of fresh fruit, vegetables, and fish. Then, we will visit the Sapporo Beer Museum, dedicated to all things beer. Sapporo is Japan's oldest brewery and exports its beer throughout the world. A visit to the Ainu Village at Shiraoi, where you will learn about and meet the Ainu, the native people of northern Japan. Here you can enter their traditional thatch roof houses, watch a dance demonstration, listen to indigenous music, and sample prepared traditional smoked salmon that were hung from ceiling rafters. Then, we go to Noboribetsu's Jigokudani, translated as "Hell Valley". These hot springs are appropriately named due to the steamy areas that release hot sulfur smells. Then, we have dinner upon our return back to the hotel.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

Hotel:

Noboribetsu Manseikaku or similar class

Day 5 Lake Toya (Usuzan Ropeway), Onuma Park, Hakodate (Fort Goryokaku / Mt Hakodate Ropeway)

Today, we continue our tour with a visit to Lake Toya, and a ride on the Usuzan Ropeway. The lake is part of the Shikotsu-Toya National Park and the lake is said to never freeze, even during winter season. From the Usuzan, we will go to Onuma Park, an attractive and natural environment with peninsular features and smaller islands within the area. After taking a relaxing view in Onuma Park, we head towards Hakodate where we will visit the Goryokaku fort. This fort was first built over a hundred years ago just as the end of the Edo Period in defense against the Western nations who appeared to threaten the Japanese government. From here, we will take a ropeway ride up to Mt Hakodate from where we can look down upon the twinkling lights that surround Hakodate Bay. The views from the mountain are spectacular and included among Japan's three best night views alongside the views from Nagasaki's Mount Inasa and Kobe's Mount Rokko.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch

Hotel:

Loisir Hotel Hakodate or similar class

Day 6 Undersea Train from Hakodate to Aomori (Nebuta Warasse), Hirosaki (Hirosaki Castle / Hirosaki Castle Yuki-Doro Festival)

Today we will travel across the Tsugaru Channel between the islands of Hokkaido and Honshu by train via the undersea train tunnel, before arriving to Aomori. We will visit the Nebuta Warasse, a museum in Aomori exhibiting some of the greatest parade displays about the Nebuta Matsuri in Japan. Afterwards, we will visit Hirosaki Castle and go to the Hirosaki Castle Yuki-Doro Festival. This Yuki-Doro Festival, also called the Snow Lantern Festival, is a mixture of illuminations and snow sculptures that reflect architecture and the imagination of the human mind. Fireworks are also put on display for the visitors, lighting up the sky and the eyes of those who come to celebrate the event.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch

Hotel:

Hotel Naqua City Hirosaki or similar class

Day 7 Towada (Oirase Gorge / Lake Towada), Kakunodate (Samurai District - Aoyagi Samurai Manor Museum), Yokote (Yokote Kamakura Snow Festival)

Let's start the day off by going to see Towada's Oirase Gorge. Oirase is not only preserved for its distinctive picturesque spots and its trees like the Japanese beech, white cedar, and maple trees, but also because of its various waterfalls seen along the road. Then, we visit Kakunodate's Samurai district where we will also see the Aoyagi Samurai Manor Museum. This manor is one of the more notable samurai homes due to the simple difference in size and elegant features compared to those in the area, which were smaller and more humble. From there, we can then go to Yokote, which also has its Yokote Kamakura Snow Festival. The kamakura are actually small igloo-like houses where children may be found. Inside these houses are people who pray to the water gods, asking for another year of clear water. Amazake (low-alcohol content and sweet sake) and mochi (rice-gluten snack) are usually served during this annual event.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch

Hotel:

Hotel Plaza Annex Yokote or similar class

Day 8 Hiraizumi (Chusonji Temple), Matsushima (Matsushima Cruise / Zuiganji Temple), Zao Onsen (Zao Snow Monster Festival)

This mornig we ride by private coach to Hiraizumi for a cultural interlude and to stroll around the magnificent Japanese Cedar Trees and photogenic buildings at Chusonji Temple. Hiraizumi is now listed as a World Heritage site and is home to Konjiki-do (Golden Hall) within Chusonji Temple, which attempts to re-create an ideal Buddhism world. As such, it is host to an ensemble of exquisite "culture of gold" remnants from the brand of Buddhism that developed independently in the Tohoku region far away from the cultural center of Kyoto in the late Heian era of the 11th century. UNESCO has recognized this area as being a globally rare example of local culture to manifest on such a high level in the transitional period from the ancient era to the medieval period. Next is Matsushima, a picturesque bay full of pine tree covered small islands, where we explore ancient caves once frequented by meditating monks. Matsushima is famous for being one of Japan's three most scenic views alongside Miyajima and Amanohashidate. The bay is dotted by over 200 small islands covered by pine trees. We will take the best way to view the islands by boarding one of the sightseeing boat. Afterwards, we visit one of the most distinguished temples of the Tohoku region, the Zuiganji Temple (founded in 828 A.D.). The temple is so notable that it has been received as a national treasure in Japan especially because of its elegant Peacock Room. Finally, we depart for the Zao Snow Monster Festival. This festival takes place on the first weekend of February each year at Zao Onsen. There, the illuminations light up trees covered in snow, appearing as monsters to most in the audience.

Meals:

Breakfast / Dinner

Hotel:

Zao Kokusai Hotel or similar class

Day 9 Zao (Zao Snow Monster - Ropeway / Okama Crater), Ouchijuku, Aizu (Oyakuen Garden / Suehiro Sake Brewery)

This day will begin with a ride on the Zao Snow Monster Ropeway to take a great image of the snowy land around us. Once there, we will also visit the Okama Crater, a lake that is guarded by three mountains Kumanodake, Goshikidake, and Zao mountain. This spectacular site is enhanced when snow is settled all about this harmonious scenery. Next is a scene back from the Edo period, when the shogunate restricted their modes of travel post towns like Ouchijuku were built up for weary travelers looking for food and board. Travelers once stayed in these kind of towns to continue their journey to places from Nikko to Aizu, and vice versa. As we continue our own travels to Aizu, we will arrive at the Oyakuen Garden, a garden once used to encourage cultivation of medicinal herbs per a feudal lord assistance. Then, we end the day with a visit to the family owned sake business, the Suehiro Sake Brewery. This sake is one of the most recognized sake products in the Tohoku region and has won awards internationally and domestically.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

Hotel:

Kinugawa Onsen Hotel or similar class

Day 10 Nikko (Toshogu Shrine / Kegon Waterfall), Omiya (Omiya Bonsai Art Museum)

The Japanese have a saying: "Don't say kekko (wonderful) without seeing Nikko." Today we head off to visit the shrine of the great Tokugawa Ieyasu. Nikko is famous for the Toshogu Shrine, which holds the mausoleum of Tokugawa Ieyasu, the famous founder of the Tokugawa Shogunate that ruled for over 200 years (1603-1868). Next is Kegon Waterfall, which is one of the more famous waterfalls in the region visited by both foreign guests and Japanese citizens alike. Lastly, we will go to Omiya's Bonsai Art Museum that was first opened in 2010. Here, we will see the collection of bonsai art, woodblock prints, bonsai pots, and the history of bonsai including the tools that they used long ago for this fine craft.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch

Hotel:

Narita Excel Hotel Tokyu or similar class

Tobu Hotel Levant Tokyo or similar class (NOTE 2 & 3)

NOTE 2: If you wish to stay in the center of Tokyo for the last night instead of Narita Excel Hotel Tokyu, we can arrange for you to stay at Tobu Hotel Levant Tokyo (or similar class). In this case, airport transfer is not included, but we will provide full instructions for you to get to the airport in advance.

NOTE 3: If you will be flying out from Haneda Airport (HND) instead of Narita Airport (NRT), we can arrange for you to stay at Tobu Hotel Levant Tokyo (or similar class) instead of Narita Excel Hotel Tokyu. In this case, airport transfer is not included but we will provide full instructions for you to get to the airport in advance.

Itinerary

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Day 11 Tour End

After breakfast, our tour officially ends. Checkout time is 11 am and Narita Airport can be reached by hotel shuttle bus.

Meals:
Breakfast

NOTE 4: If you would like to stay longer in Japan, please contact us to book hotel accommodations.