

Best of Honshu & Hokkaido: Snow Monkeys & Hokkaido Winter Festival Tour 2018 - 1/28

Explore the two main winter attractions of Japan - Snow Monkeys and Hokkaido Winter Festivals

Tour Code: GTU1389796

Tour Information

Land cost: from USD \$5598

Single supplement: USD \$1200

Tour duration: 16 days 15 nights

Destination:

Honshu (Tokyo / Lake Kawaguchi / Matsumoto / Yudanaka / Takayama / Shirakawa-go / Kanazawa / Kyoto / Uji / Nara / Osaka), Hokkaido (Chitose / Shiraoui / Lake Shikotsu / Sapporo / Otaru / Asahikawa / Sounkyo / Abashiri / Lake Tofutsu / Akan National Park / Kushiro)

Tour cost includes:

- 11 nights Western style and 4 night Japanese style accommodation
- Meet and greet upon arrival at Narita 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
- 11 lunches and 7 dinners

Admission fees and activities

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

Dates & Price

2018

Start Date	End Date	Twin / Triple	Start City	End City	Style	Status
Sun. Jan 28, 2018	Mon. Feb 12, 2018	USD \$5598.00	Tokyo	Kushiro	Deluxe	View Tour

Itinerary

Tour Code: GTU1389796

Day 1 Narita Airport

Welcome to Tokyo! An AJT representative will meet you at the arrival gate and direct you to the hotel by hotel shuttle bus.

Hotel:

Narita Excel Hotel Tokyu or similar class

Tobu Hotel Levant Tokyo or similar class (NOTE 1 & 2)

NOTE 1: If you wish to stay in the center of Tokyo for the first 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 you directions to get to your hotel in advance.

NOTE 2: If you will be flying into Haneda Airport (HND) instead of Narita International Airport (NRT), we can arrange for you to stay in the center of Tokyo (Tobu Hotel Levant Tokyo or similar class) instead of Narita Excel Hotel Tokyu. In this case, airport transfer and meet- and-greet are not included, but we will provide with full instructions to get to the hotel in advance.

NOTE 3: The meet and greet is ONLY available for flights arriving in Terminal 1 & 2 after 11:00 AM. For guests arriving in Terminal 3, airport pickup is not included, but and we will provide you with directions to get to your hotel in advance.

NOTE 4: If you wish to stay extra nights before the tour starts, please contact us to book hotel accommodations.

Day 2 Tokyo (Asakusa Sensoji Temple / Imperial Palace / Meiji Shrine / Tokyo Tower / Odaiba)

In the morning you will be taken to Asakusa Kannon Temple, an active place of worship where you can see the largest paper lantern in Japan. Here, discover the difference between a Shinto Shrine and a Buddhist Temple. Afterwards explore Nakamise District, which resembles a traditional style shopping street of a bygone era. Then, we will proceed to the Imperial Palace, the former site of Edo Castle. You can explore the park surrounded by moats and stone fortifications in the heart of the city. Next is a visit to Meiji Shrine, a shrine dedicated to the deified spirits of Emperor Meiji and his consort, Empress Shoken. The shrine was completed and dedicated to Emperor Meiji and Empress Shoken in 1920, eight years after the passing of the emperor and six years after the passing of the empress. The shrine was destroyed during the Second World War, but was rebuilt shortly thereafter. In the afternoon, we will visit the world's tallest self supporting steel tower. At 333 meters high, Tokyo Tower is 13 meters taller than its model, the Eiffel Tower. We will go up 150 meters to the main observatory deck and get a bird's eye view of Tokyo. From there we will cross the Rainbow Bridge, and be treated to stunning views of Tokyo Bay. We will travel to the man made islands of Odaiba and see cutting edge architecture, as well as, the night view of Tokyo Tower and Rainbow Bridge.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch

Hotel:

Tobu Hotel Levant Tokyo or similar class

Day 3 Lake Kawaguchi (Kubota Itchiku Art Museum / Kachi Kachi Ropeway), Matsumoto (Matsumoto Castle)

We will depart from Tokyo to Mt. Fuji on our private coach. Along the way, enjoy the changing scenery, from thick vegetation to lowlands and rolling clouds. At one of shores of Lake Kawaguchi is the Itchiku Kubota Art Museum. The museum displays the beautiful kimonos done by Itchiku Kubota with the tsujigahana dyeing technique. His unfinished masterpiece called the "Symphony of Light," is a kimono 80-piece set depicting the four seasons and his own universe. Currently 40 of the 80 set pieces were completed by Itchiku, the rest was continued by his children. Next, we get ready to ride the Kachi Kachi Ropeway, which often depicts a tanuki (raccoon dog) in its vicinity due to a children's story based on that area. The ropeway extends from the top of Mt. Tenjo to the shores of Lake Kawaguchiko, along the way you can enjoy a spectacular view of Mount Fuji. We will then travel to Matsumoto where we'll visit the photogenic Matsumoto Castle, or Black Crow Castle, dating back over 400 years. Tonight, we will stay at the Onsen Ryokan at Yudanaka, where you can soak in the therapeutic waters of a spa bath and feast on a traditional Japanese Kaiseki banquet dinner.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

Hotel:

Ryokan Biyu no Yado or similar class

Day 4 Yudanaka (Snow Monkey Park), Takayama (Sanmachi Suji Old Town / Takayama Jinya)

This morning Yudanaka gives us the chance to see the famous snow monkeys as they enjoy their hot spring baths. From Yudanaka, we will continue on to Takayama. This city is located amongst the Japanese Alps and is known as "Little Kyoto" for its preserved historical structures and environment. Due to its remote position in the mountains, it was cut off from the rest of Japan for most of its history and, thus, has maintained a very unique and traditional atmosphere. We'll explore the old town of Takayama, a place that creates a sense of tradition and nostalgia. Along the way you'll notice the huge cedar balls hanging from the eaves of several shops - these indicate that the shops are sake shops. Next, visit Takayama Jinya, the only traditional local government office in existence and a fine example of a miniature palace containing offices, an interrogation room with torture devices, and a 440 year-old rice granary.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

Hotel:

Hotel Associa Takayama Resort or similar class

Day 5 Takayama (Morning Market), Shirakawa-go (Shiroyama Viewpoint / Gassho-zukuri Minkaen), Kanazawa (Kenrokuen), Shinkansen Bullet Train Ride

This morning we'll enjoy the lively city market before heading to the World Heritage site in the rural area of Shirakawa-go. In this very photogenic village, we will walk past thatched roof farm houses and cultivated fields and see unspoiled Edo period wooden buildings. Once there, we will also go to the Shiroyama Viewpoint, which allows us to have a scenic view of Shirakawa-go from higher grounds. From Shirakawa-go, we will depart to Kanazawa to visit Kenrokuen Garden, one of three most beautiful gardens of Japan. The name "Kenrokuen" literally means a garden combining the 6 attributes of a perfect landscape: spaciousness, seclusion, artifice, antiquity, water features, and panoramas. Here, you'll find the oldest fountain in Japan and Kotoji-toro, the two-legged stone lantern that is iconic of Kenrokuen and Kanazawa. Next, experience a Shinkansen bullet train ride from Maibara to Kyoto, which can reach speeds of up to 300 km/hr. We will stay two nights in Kyoto, a historical city. During World War II it was spared from air raids and saved from the atomic bomb for its cultural and historical value.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch

Hotel:

Grand Prince Hotel Kyoto or similar class

Day 6 Kyoto (Nijo Castle / Nishijin Kimono Show / Golden Pavilion / Kiyomizu Temple / Gion Geisha District)

Today we will start our tour of Kyoto, once the capital of Japan and still considered its cultural center. First is a visit to the Nijo Castle, built in the early 17th century. Ninomaru-goten, renovated in 1626, is a building renowned as a priceless example of the architectural style of that period. At the Nishijin Textile Center, you can view displays of kimonos and even watch a kimono fashion show. Visit the Kinkakuji Temple (Golden Pavilion) covered with 18 carat gold leaf. This three story structure was originally built by the Shogun Ashikaga Yoshimitsu in 1397. Next is the famous Kiyomizu Temple, best known for its wooden stage that juts out from its main hall, 13 meters above the hillside. The stage affords visitors a nice view of the numerous cherry and maple trees below that erupt in a sea of color in spring and fall, as well as a picturesque view of Kyoto in the distance. Lastly, we will tour Gion, the old Geisha Quarter, and Pontocho, whose cobblestone alleys vibrate with night life.

Meals:

Breakfast / Dinner

Hotel:

Grand Prince Hotel Kyoto or similar class

Day 7 Kyoto (Fushimi Inari Shrine), Uji (Green Tea Ceremony), Nara (Todaiji Temple / Deer Park), Osaka (Dotonbori - Shinsaibashi)

The day begins with a visit in the scenic and historic Fushimi district, which is also one of the brewing capitals of Japan. First is a visit to the stunning vermilion colored Fushimi Inari Shrine, whose 4km long tunnel of scarlet torii gates was featured in the film *Memoirs of a Geisha*. This complex wraps around a bamboo wilderness that includes mountains, streams, and ponds, the perfect backdrop for a scenic hike. Then, we proceed to Uji where we will experience a traditional Japanese tea ceremony. From there we continue to Nara, the oldest capital city of Japan. We will visit Todaiji Temple, the largest wooden building in Japan. The temple also houses the largest bronze statue of Buddha at 16.3 meters high, and the surrounding park is filled with over 1,000 Sika Deer. In the afternoon we will travel to Osaka by private coach. Our last visit for the day is Dotonbori, which runs parallel to the Dotonbori canal. Popular for its shopping, entertainment, and food district, Dotonbori is known for the hundreds of neon and mechanized signs that line the street, including the famous Glico Running Man and Kani Doraku Crab signs.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch

Hotel:

Hotel Nikko Kansai Airport or similar class

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Day 8 Osaka Kansai Airport - Chitose Airport

After breakfast, free for leisure until transfer to Osaka Kansai Airport for your domestic flight to Sapporo. Upon arrival in Sapporo, an AJT representative will meet you at the arrival gate and direct you to the hotel.

Meals:

Breakfast

Hotel:

ANA Crowne Plaza Hotel Chitose or similar class

Day 9 Shiraoi (Shiraoi Ainu Village), Lake Shikotsu (Lake Shikotsu Ice Festival), Sapporo (Sapporo Beer Museum)

Today we start our tour with 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 venture out to Lake Shikotsu, also known as, the Shikotsuko Hyoto Matsuri to see the lake's annual ice festival where snow sculptures, caves, and even buildings with 3 floors are made for people to walk around in for their amusement. In the afternoon, we will depart for Sapporo by a private coach and visit the Sapporo Beer Museum, dedicated to all things beer. Sapporo is Japan's oldest brewery and exports its beer throughout the world.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

Hotel:

ANA Hotel Sapporo or similar class

Day 10 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 11 Sapporo (Nijo Market / Mt. Okura Observatory / Historic Village of Hokkaido), Otaru (Glass Workshops / Music Box Museum / Otaru Snow Light Path)

This morning we continue to enjoy a tour of Sapporo at the Nijo Market where there are variety of fresh fruit, vegetables, and fish. Afterwards is a visit to 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 once used for storage spaces are now stores, restaurants, 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:

Grand Park Otaru Hotel or similar class

Day 12 Asahikawa (Asahikawa Winter Festival / Asahikawa Ramen Village / Otokoyama Sake Brewery), Sounkyo (Sounkyo Ice Fall Festival)

Today, we will take a 2-hour ride by private coach from Sapporo to Asahikawa for the Asahikawa Winter Festival. Once in Asahikawa, we will have lunch at the Asahikawa Ramen Village before heading to the Asahikawa Winter Festival. The biggest snow castle is found in the winter festival, entertaining all who come to visit it. The building may be cold, but you would always warm up with a nice cup of sake. Next, we visit the Otokoyama Sake Brewery where historical sake brewery tools are displayed and the history of Otokoyama sake was born. Enjoy a sake tasting experience to add to your experience. Then, we will proceed to Sounkyo Gorge in Daisetsuzan National Park. Lets enjoy the views of the Sounkyo Ice Fall Festival's snow creations that take shape in forms of creatures, cultural sites, and pop culture characters. After your evening stroll around the ice festival you can return to your hotel and relax in the hot spring baths.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

Hotel:

Sounkyo Choyotei Hotel or similar class

Day 13 Sounkyo (Ginga & Ryusei Waterfalls), Abashiri (Okhotsk Ryuhyo Museum / Hokkaido Museum of Northern Peoples)

After breakfast, we will explore the Sounkyo Gorge area including Ginga and Ryusei waterfalls, a popular ice climbing spot. From there, feast your eyes on enchanting scenery along the way to Abashiri. Then, we visit Okhotsk Ryuhyo Museum where you can learn about the surrounding environment and the cold temperatures that it can reach. The Sea of Okhotsk is frozen in winter, leaving plenty of drift ice from the Arctic waters. Your personal definition of cold temperatures and what it can really do will surely change after this activity. At the end of the day, we will visit the Hokkaido Museum of Northern Peoples, where we will learn of the indigenous people of Hokkaido, their culture, traditions, clothing, and nutrition.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

Hotel:

Abashiri Kanko Hotel or similar class

Day 14 Abashiri (Ice Breaker Cruise / Abashiri Prison Museum), Lake Tofutsu, Lake Akan (Wakasagi Smelt Fishing)

This morning, we will experience an Ice Breaker cruise among the floating drifts of ice. Once there, you will notice the different species that come to migrate or live in the area year-round. We will also visit Abashiri Prison Museum. The original Abashiri Prison was constructed in the 1890s, it was set to hold over a thousand dangerous criminals, but soon was overcapacitated and created unliveable conditions for its inmates. Ishii Teruo's films, however, created a Yakuza image in the 1960's that was more interesting for the public. Eventually, the prison's original buildings were moved and remodeled, then finished in 1985. It is now an open air museum, for the public. In the afternoon we will take a tour of Lake Tofutsu and Lake Akan. Once at Lake Akan, we will experience a local practice and delicacy, Wakasagi smelt fishing.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

Hotel:

New Akan Hotel or similar class

Day 15 Akan National Park (Lake Akan Observatory / Akan International Crane Center), Kushiro (Kushiro City Marsh Observatory / Washo Market)

After breakfast we transfer to Akan National Park, known for its "red-crown" Tancho cranes and preserved park. Continuing from there we will visit Kushiro City Marsh Observatory and the Washo market. The Washo Market in Kushiro, Hokkaido is a market specializing in selling fish produce to the public. It is located close to the Kushiro Station within walking distance of the market. It is considered one of the top three markets to go to in Hokkaido.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch

Hotel:

ANA Crowne Plaza Hotel Kushiro or similar class

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Day 16 Tour End

After breakfast, our tour officially ends. Checkout time is 11 am and Kushiro Airport can be reached by Airport Limousine Bus.

Meals:
Breakfast

NOTE 5: If you would like to stay longer in Japan, please contact us to book hotel accommodations.