

Japan's Far East

7 Day Wild Winter Tour – February Special



Hop between ice floes, snowshoe along the rims of caldera lakes and warm yourself in hot springs along Japan's wild eastern frontier. Not to mention the fantastic wildlife experiences that await you on this winter adventure!

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Prepared by [Adventure Hokkaido LLC](#),
Travel Agency Licence No. 2-789
Email: info@adventure-hokkaido.com
Tel: +81-50-3528-8243

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About the Tour

Start	Finish	Grading	Season
Lake Abashiri	Kushiro	Relaxed Winter Adventure	February

About Japan's Far East

Hokkaido's far east region is often described as the last unexplored frontier of Japan. This region is popular for wildlife and outdoor lovers in the summer. It is also renowned internationally in winter as a bird-watching destination.

On this tour, we will visit some of Hokkaido's beautiful national parks. We take in unique winter outdoor activities, including walking on the drift ice, watching the dancing cranes and snowshoeing on Shiretoko Peninsula among Japanese deer in their natural habitat.

You don't have to be an experienced skier or snowboarder to enjoy Hokkaido's untouched deep snow. We will use snowshoes to hike through the snowy landscape, allowing anyone to enjoy Hokkaido's winter scenery. Out on the drift ice, dry suits will keep you dry and warm despite the freezing temperatures. Let us guide your once-in-a-lifetime winter adventure!

Tour highlights

- Walk on ice that has drifted all the way from Russia's Amur River to Utoro, Shiretoko.
- Take a nature cruise off the Rausu coast, with the chance to catch sight of Steller's Sea Eagles and White-tailed Eagles.
- Dive into the world of the Ainu. Walk in native forest with an Ainu guide and experience their food, music and dance at the Lake Akan Ainu settlement.
- Venture into Japan's eastern frontier, home to a trio of national parks: Shiretoko, Lakes Akan & Mashu, and Kushiro-Shitsugen.

Who is this tour for?

- Active travellers who enjoy walking for 3 hours a day.
- Curious travellers who enjoy a mixture of activities and sightseeing and learning about the regions they visit.
- Winter hikers and snow lovers interested in hiking in snow with the help of snowshoes (no prior experience required).
- Adventurous travellers who enjoy rural hospitality, staying in Japanese style accommodations with natural hot springs on site.

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Itinerary at a glance

Day	Activities	Meals ¹
1	Meet your group in Abashiri	D ▾
2	Coastal walk & Transfer to Shiretoko	B, L, D ▾
3	Walk on the drift ice & Snowshoe at Utoro, Shiretoko	B, L, D ▾
4	Bird watching cruise in Rausu, Shiretoko & Explore Notsuke Peninsula	B, L, D ▾
5	Snowshoe to Kaminoko Pond, Visit Mt. Io & Ainu concert at Lake Akan	B, L, D ▾
6	Snowshoe with Akan Ainu & See Red-crowned Cranes	B, L, D ▾
7	Transfer to Kushiro & Farewells	B ▾

Accommodation

Day	Type	Location	Ensuite Toilet	Ensuite Shower	Onsen	Laundry
1	Hotel ▾	Lake Abashiri	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Hotel ▾	Utoro Shiretoko	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	Ryokan ▾ ²	Yoroushi Onsen	✓		✓	✓
4	Ryokan ▾	Yoroushi Onsen	✓		✓	✓
5	Hotel ▾	Lake Akan	✓	✓	✓	✓
6	Hotel ▾	Tsurui	✓	✓	✓	

We may change the facility options if our preferred accommodation is unavailable.

¹ B = Breakfast, L = Lunch, D = Dinner

² Ryokan is a traditional Japanese inn.

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Travel style

This tour includes a series of active experiences that while easygoing will still allow you to experience the great outdoors and work up a bit of a sweat! We will be outdoors in subzero temperatures for up to 4 hours at a time before returning to the van and travelling to the next stop. While it is cold outside, it will be warm in the van and indoors. This makes it easy to warm back up, but makes good layering important - make sure you check the packing list. Your luggage will stay in our van, freeing you up to enjoy the day's adventure with only a light day pack. There is also a focus on the region's wildlife and you will have multiple chances to catch a glimpse at some of Hokkaido's incredible migratory winter creatures.

Your guides are with the group throughout. Having a guide lead the way means you can relax and take in the scenery. They are also there to provide context on the local landscape and help navigate the dishes served in the evenings.

Adverse weather

While we try to organise everything, mother nature is out of our control. If the weather is too bad to safely hike or snowshoe (such as during a snowstorm) we will travel to the next inn in our support vehicle. Along the way we will still stop at local restaurants and visit indoor facilities, so you can still experience the charm of the area while travelling safely and comfortably.

What's included

- 6 nights accommodation on a twin share basis
- 6 breakfasts, 5 lunches and 6 dinners
- Guided drift ice walking tour in Utoro Shiretoko
- Guide wildlife watching cruise in Rausu Shiretoko
- Evening Ainu cultural show at Lake Akan Ainu settlement
- Guided forest walk with Akan Ainu
- Snowshoes & poles rental
- All transport as described in the itinerary
- English speaking local guide(s)

What's not included

- Airfare
- Travel insurance
- Personal expenses
- Drinks with included meals

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When do you run this tour?

We run this tour in February only as a special midwinter alternative to our regular 7-Day Wild Winter Tour. Hokkaido's midwinter is the only time of the year when we have the best chance of seeing the drift ice– and therefore, enjoying the related drift ice walk, cruise and wildlife visitors! (Although please keep in mind that the appearance of drift ice is of course dependent on currents and wind direction.) In recent years, Hokkaido's snowfall has been getting later and the thaw coming earlier, but February snow conditions still remain reliable for winter activities, including snowshoeing. It is simply the best time of year to enjoy the wonderful sensation of walking on fluffy, powdery snow!

What makes Hokkaido's winter special?

The Snow

Every winter, cold winds from Siberia pick up moisture as they cross the Sea of Japan before dropping it as snow on Hokkaido. The snow falls as big, light snowflakes, the kind you see in the movies, blanketing the landscape in white. With the thick bush buried, we are free to explore the forests and mountains, with access to areas that may be more challenging or even completely out of our reach in summer. Hike in the snow, and you will feel like you are in a private snow globe; the sense of stillness and solitude is hard to describe without experiencing it for yourself.

The Wildlife

While Brown Bears are tucked away in hibernation, many other animals are active throughout winter. Mountain Hares, Red Foxes and Japanese Deer leave a network of footprints behind as they search for food. Red-crowned Cranes perform mating dances in the fields, and giant Steller's Sea Eagles arrive from Siberia. Seeing the animals against a stark white background is a striking winter image.

Hot Springs & Warm Welcomes

It may be cold outside but step into one of Hokkaido's many cosy restaurants or lodges, and you are greeted with a warm local welcome. Tuck into a bowl of world-famous Hokkaido ramen or a local hot pot. Later, slip into a steaming hot spring to warm up your body and soothe your tired muscles. For a truly unique winter experience, brave the dash through the snow to the "rotenburo" outdoor pool.

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How to book this tour?

We will send you a link to our online sign up form, where we ask for the travel information of all the members travelling with you.

Once we receive this, we will send you a payment link for your tour deposit, which is JPY 50,000 per person. **We will confirm your booking upon receipt of your deposit payment.**

The deposit is treated as a part of the tour price. Payment of the balance will be reminded by email, which is generally 5 weeks prior to the tour departure date.

We accept payment via **Wise** or **Flywire**. We will send you payment links for both options, and you must use one of the payment links provided by us.

Wise payments are available in Japanese Yen only and require you to have a Wise account (Wise-to-Wise transfer only). You must pay any currency exchange or transfer fees yourself.

Flywire payments allow credit card payment or domestic bank transfer converted to your home currency. Credit card payments via Flywire incur an additional service charge of 1.5%, while domestic bank transfers via Flywire do not incur this service charge.

By paying for a deposit or full amount, you confirm that you have read, understand and agree to these [Terms and Conditions](#).

What is the minimum group size for this tour?

This is a mixed group tour and **we accept bookings for this tour from one person up**. However, our scheduled group tours require a minimum number of bookings for us to guarantee the departure of the tour, and to offer the tour at the price quoted. **The minimum number of booked guests to guarantee this tour is four people.**

If you book with less than four people, we will hold your place on the tour and wait for another group to join the tour. If the number of guests has not reached the minimum number by 60 days prior to departure, we will give you the option to cancel or to upgrade to a private departure.

If you choose to cancel, we will refund the amount in Japanese Yen that you have paid us. You're welcome to check with us at any time about the status of bookings.

Please be advised that we will not be liable to compensate for any inconvenience or incidental expenses that might have incurred to you, including airline tickets.

Single supplement

Our tours are priced on a twin share basis. Those travelling by themselves will need to pay an additional supplement for use of a single room. If you are happy to share a room with another guest – of the same gender – then let us know at the time of booking. If we match you with another solo traveller then we can discount the single supplement for both of you.

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Travel insurance

All guests joining our tours are required to have travel insurance. Please make sure you have a valid travel insurance, covering the kind of activities you are undertaking during our tour, cancellations, loss of personal belongings, and any unforeseen circumstances while travelling.

Travel to and from the tour

Getting to Abashiri

We will meet at 6:00 pm at our hotel near Lake Abashiri.

The closest airport is Abashiri Memanbetsu (MMB) and you can fly directly there from Tokyo Haneda (HND), Sapporo New Chitose (CTS) and Sapporo Okadama (OKD). Airport shuttles depart for Abashiri with the arrival of every domestic flight. The journey to Yobito Station Bus Stop (the closest stop to our hotel) takes approximately 15 minutes from the airport with the fare just under JPY 700.

You can also take a JR train from Sapporo to Abashiri if you prefer. It takes 5.5 hours and costs just over JPY 10,000 for a reserved seat. From Abashiri Station, you can transfer to a local train or bus to Yobito Station, costing JPY 320 or JPY 460 for the train or bus respectively. You can search schedules and fares in English on [Japan Transit Planner website](#).

Our hotel is 1 km from Yobito Station. The hotel offers a courtesy shuttle service which needs to be reserved in advance. **Please let us know if you would like us to book a seat for you.**

Alternatively, a taxi from the airport directly to the hotel will cost around JPY 4,500–5,000. From Abashiri Station to the hotel will cost around JPY 3,000.

Onward travel from Kushiro

On the last day, after breakfast at our accommodation in Tsurui, we will drop you off at either Kushiro Airport at around 10:00 am or Kushiro Station at around 10:30 am. If you need to catch an earlier flight, we can help you book a taxi to get you there, but an earlier drop off is not possible as it prevents the whole group from having breakfast.

If you are staying in Kushiro for extra nights, we can drop you off at your hotel in central Kushiro by 11:00 am.

Kushiro Airport has flights to Sapporo Chitose (CTS), Sapporo Okadama (OKD) and Tokyo Haneda (HND).

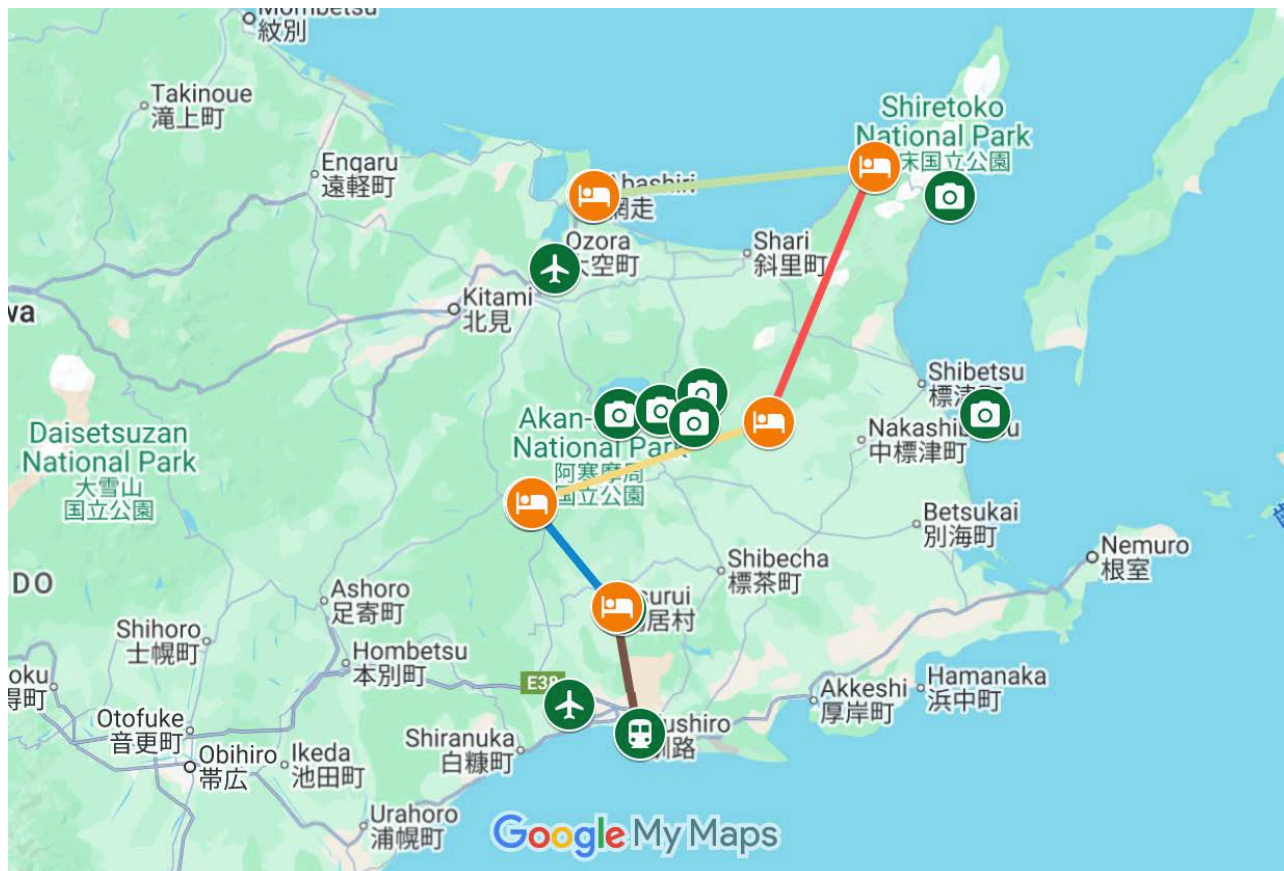
There are regular trains to Sapporo via Obihiro from Kushiro Station. The journey to Sapporo takes around 4.5 hours and costs just over JPY 10,000 including the seat reservation – there is no un-reserved seating on this service.

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Tour map

To view the route on Google My Maps, [click here](#).



Day to Day Itinerary

Day 1 – Meet your group in Abashiri

We will meet at our hotel at 6:00 pm near Lake Abashiri in Abashiri, the largest city on Hokkaido's eastern Sea of Okhotsk coast.

Dinner will be at the hotel and we will spend some time introducing the programme for our upcoming adventure and getting to know each other.

Meals	Accommodation
D	Hotel in Abashiri

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Day 2 – Coastal walk & Transfer to Shiretoko

After breakfast, we head to the coast for our first encounter with the Sea of Okhotsk in winter. This shoreline provides a starkly beautiful landscape where the arrival of the drift ice dictates the scenery. These floes form off the coast of Siberia and are pushed south by seasonal winds; while their exact position depends on the day's currents, the coast is a prime vantage point to see the ice as it collects on Hokkaido's coastline.



We will don snowshoes to walk down to the shoreline, keeping a sharp watch on the floating ice and the sky above for White-tailed Eagles and the magnificent Steller's Sea Eagles.

Next, we visit Lake Tofutsu, a coastal lagoon and designated Ramsar site. We will spend some time bird watching here, looking for the Whooper Swans that migrate to these waters for the winter. Following our time at the lake, we will have lunch at a local restaurant as we begin our transfer towards the Shiretoko Peninsula.

On our way to Utoro, we will stop at the Oshinkoshin Waterfall. In mid-winter, this braided cascade partially freezes, creating a dramatic wall of ice and water that drops towards the sea.

After checking into our hotel, we visit the Shiretoko World Heritage Centre to learn about the unique ecosystem that earned this peninsula its UNESCO status. We spend the night at a seaside hotel in Utoro, where we can enjoy a meal prepared with local ingredients.

Meals	Activity	Duration	Accommodation
B, L, D	Walking	2 hours	Hotel in Utoro Shiretoko

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Day 3 – Walk on the drift ice & Snowshoe at Utoro Shiretoko

Ready to wake up with a dip in the icy ocean? This morning is all about that. While we've seen the ice from the shore, today we head out directly onto the floes for a unique look at this natural phenomenon.

After breakfast, we meet our drift ice guides and kit up to soak in the cold sea. We wear drysuits over our normal winter layers, such as fleeces, to stay warm and dry. These suits also keep us afloat, so don't worry if you are not a strong swimmer.



The scale of the ice has been observably shrinking in recent years due to climate change. Because of the variability of this natural phenomenon, the exact location of our walk/swim depends on the location of drift ice on the day.

After our time on the floating ice, we come back ashore for lunch in Utoro. In the afternoon, we continue exploring Shiretoko on snowshoes to discover the peninsula's winter beauty. We trek through forests that are home to Japanese Deer, giving us a high chance of observing them as they forage in the snow. If conditions permit, we may reach a viewpoint to see the frozen columns of Furepe Waterfall. We then drive to Yorouchi Onsen for our two-night stay.

It's not just humans who visit Yorouchi Onsen; rare Blakiston's Fish Owls occasionally feed in the river running behind our hotel. As the largest owl in the world, the Ainu people worship this bird as *kotan-kor-kamuy*, the protector of the village. While it is impossible to know exactly when they will turn up, the hotel has a comfortable viewing lounge with large windows and sofas, allowing you to wait for their visit and take photographs from the warmth of the indoors.

Hopefully, the day's activities have left you with a significant appetite. Dinner at Yorouchi Onsen is a traditional ryokan meal and is notoriously generous. You can expect a wide array of courses, offering a great opportunity to sample a variety of local Hokkaido flavours.

Meals	Activity	Duration	Accommodation
B, L, D	Drift Ice Walking	1.5 hours	Ryokan in Yorouchi Onsen
	Snowshoeing	1.5 hours	

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Day 4 – Bird watching cruise in Rausu & Explore Notsuke Peninsula

Renowned for its kombu seaweed and sea urchins, the peculiar submarine topography makes Rausu a prosperous fishing town. It's not just humans that visit to fish though, the rich waters attract all sorts of wildlife and local fishermen offer wildlife watching cruises to share this experience with visitors.



We'll depart our inn at Yoroushi Onsen early this morning and have breakfast on the go to catch a morning bird watching cruise which departs from Rausu Port. During our 2.5-hour cruise off the Rausu Coast, we'll witness the magnificent Steller's Sea Eagles and White-tailed Eagles as they dominate the landscape, gathering on the sea ice to feed on fish. We'll also keep watch for Brunnich's Guillemots and Steller's Sea Lions. The boat brings us close to the sea ice, offering a spectacular backdrop of the Shiretoko mountain range – a breathtakingly scenic experience despite the cold.

After lunch in Rausu village, we will head south to Notsuke Peninsula, a Ramsar site. This 26km long sand spit is the largest of its kind in Japan. In mid-winter the bay freezes, providing a unique opportunity to walk on the frozen surface. It is also home to abundant Red Foxes and birds of prey, so we will hope to see them while exploring this special site. We will travel back to Yoroushi Onsen for our second night's stay. Tonight provides another opportunity to stay up and wait for the Blakiston's Fish Owl if you weren't able to see it the previous night.

Meals	Activity	Duration	Accommodation
B, L, D	Boat Cruise	2.5 hours	Ryokan in Yoroushi Onsen
	Wildlife Spotting	2.5 hours	

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Day 5 – Snowshoe to Kaminoko Pond, Visit Mt. Io & Ainu concert at Lake Akan

After staying up for the owls, you can wake yourself up with a soak in the hot springs. The onsen at Yoroushi remains open throughout the night, a feature often utilised by Japanese visitors for a bath before breakfast.



Leaving Yoroushi, we head towards the north side of Lake Mashu for a snowshoe adventure. We follow a tranquil stream through a forest of Sakhalin Fir to Kaminoko Pond. Fed by spring water originating from Lake Mashu, the pond remains unfrozen even in subzero temperatures, providing a vital water source for local wildlife. During the trek, we will keep an eye out for animal tracks in the fresh snow.

Before stopping for lunch in Teshikaga, we visit Mt. Io. This active volcano features impressive sulphur vents and an otherworldly landscape that remains clear of snow due to the geothermal heat.

The afternoon route is decided based on the weather and the pace of the day. One option is a visit to the Wakoto Peninsula at Lake Kussharo. This area features geothermal activity where hot spring water bubbles up from underground, keeping the lakeshore ice-free and attracting flocks of Whooper Swans. Alternatively, we may visit the Lake Mashu observatory to look over the caldera lake from its high, steep cliffs. On a clear day, the water is known for a deep, vibrant hue called "Mashu-blue".

We then transfer to Lake Akan, a location that has long served as a cultural hub for the Ainu, Hokkaido's indigenous population. Because the Ainu traditionally did not use a writing system, their history and folklore are preserved through song and dance. After dinner at our accommodation, we head out for a night performance at the Lake Akan Ainu Kotan, where we can experience first-hand how these stories have been passed down for generations.

Meals	Activity	Duration	Accommodation
B, L, D	Snowshoeing	3 hours	Hotel at Lake Akan

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Day 6 – Snowshoe with Akan Ainu & See Red-crowned Cranes

Forming part of the Akan–Mashu National Park, Lake Akan is a picturesque area to explore on foot, with volcanoes and old growth forests surrounding the caldera lake.

After having breakfast at our hotel, we venture into the forest, guided by a local Ainu. Our guide will teach us about Ainu history and their way of life, living in harmony with nature.



We will have lunch at a restaurant run by a local Ainu family to experience Ainu cuisine before we head south to Tsurui village.

Tsurui is famous for the successful recovery of Red-crowned Cranes. Their population has rebounded to over 1,900 birds in the area surrounding Tsurui, with a reasonably high chance to see one even from the main roads. We will visit the Ito Tancho Sanctuary to observe the cranes and learn about the community efforts which have contributed to their recovery.

Our lodging for the night is in central Tsurui, where we can have one last onsen soak before enjoying a Western-style course dinner featuring local ingredients from Eastern Hokkaido – a perfect meal to celebrate our final evening together.

Meals	Activity	Duration	Accommodation
B, L, D	Snowshoeing	1.5 hours	Hotel in Tsurui
	Wildlife Spotting	2.5 hours	

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Day 7 – Transfer to Kushiro & Farewells

For early birds and keen birders, we can get up before dawn to go out and see the cranes taking off in the early morning. They nest on the river next to our lodging, spending the night in a flock and leaving all at the same time to feed.

We will have breakfast at a more civilised hour at our lodging and then drive for about 1 hour to Kushiro City to complete the tour.



We can drop you off at either Kushiro JR Station or Kushiro Airport between 10 am and 11 am.

Meals	Activity	Duration
B	Wildlife Spotting (optional)	1.5 hours

Our recommended reading

[Layer Up! How to Dress for Hokkaido's Winter](#)

[A Local's Guide on What to Expect When Staying in Hokkaido](#)

[A Local's Guide to Snowshoeing in Hokkaido](#)

[Hokkaido Wildlife Guide](#)

[How to Onsen \(Like a Local!\)](#)

[What to pack for Hokkaido?](#)

[The Ainu, from a Hokkaido local's perspective](#)

[Going Gluten Free in Hokkaido](#)

[Vegan & Vegetarian in Hokkaido](#)

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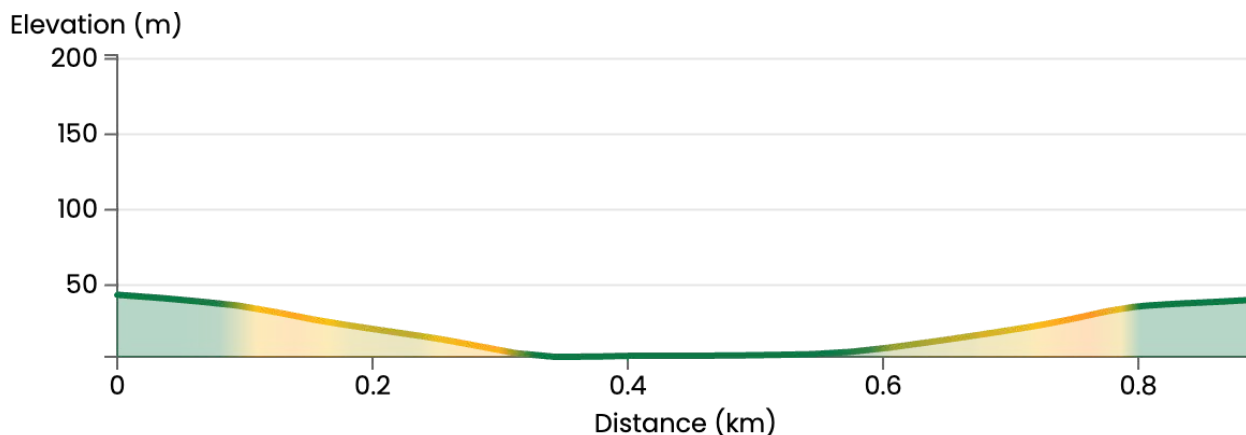
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Elevation Profiles

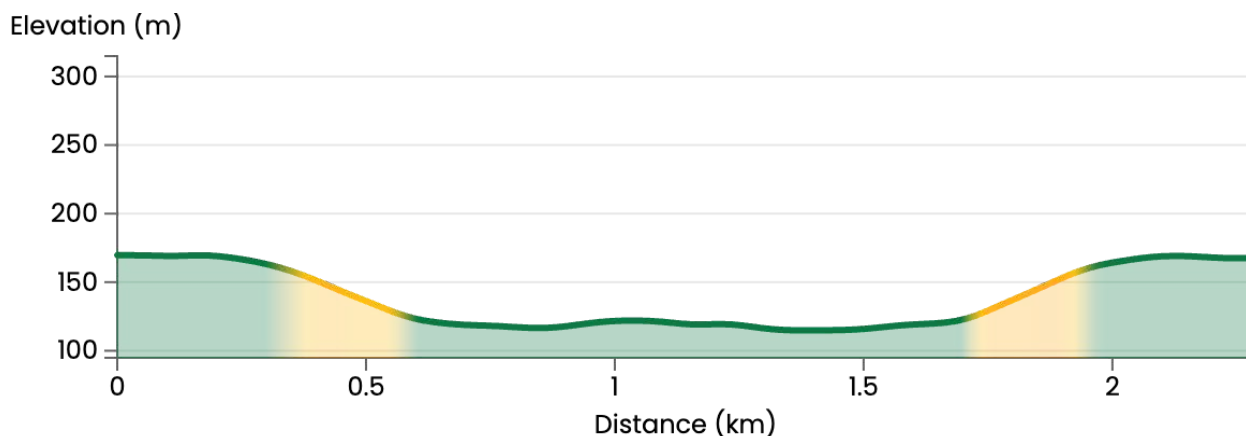
Day 2 - Coastal Walk

Distance - 0.9 km / 0.6 mi **Ascent** - 51 m / 167 ft



Day 3 - Furepe Waterfall

Distance - 2.3 km / 1.4 mi **Ascent** - 83 m / 272 ft



Day 5 - Kaminoko Pond

Distance - 4.2 km / 2.6 mi **Ascent** - 66 m / 217 ft

