

Shikotsu-Toya

6 Day Winter Hiking Tour



Explore a land of ice and fire as we make our way through the snow-capped volcanoes of Shikotsu-Toya National Park. As well as the spectacular views, you can enjoy learning all about the indigenous Ainu and Hokkaido's fascinating wildlife.

[View Departure Dates & Prices](#)

[View Gallery](#)

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About the Tour

| Start | Finish | Grading | Season |
|-------------|----------|----------------------------|-----------|
| New Chitose | Jozankei | Intermediate Winter hiking | Jan & Mar |

About Shikotsu–Toya National Park

Shikotsu–Toya National Park lies close to Sapporo and is home to a number of spectacular caldera lakes and steaming active volcanoes. The volcanoes concentrated in the region have of course given rise to several natural hot springs, meaning that it is popular among domestic Japanese visitors for its many resorts. For us, however, it is not the resorts that we are interested in but the amazing landscape that makes this national park perfect for adventure travel. As well as the warm hot springs, it is also home to rich forests, fascinating geological hikes and incredible wildlife. In winter, mountain trails open up as snowshoeing routes that allow the adventurous to experience the unique sight of fiery volcanoes capped with Hokkaido's magical snow and pure blue caldera lakes surrounded by white mountain rings.

Tour highlights

- Witness the power of the Earth as we take in views of several active volcanoes and pass by steaming fumaroles.
- Snowshoe through wintery forests and up snow-covered mountains, enjoying amazing lake vistas from above.
- Bathe in natural hot springs heated by volcanoes in the National Park.
- Enjoy the sight of Hokkaido's charming wildlife, such as migratory Whooper Swans and Japanese Deer.
- Visit the Upopoy National Ainu Museum, Japan's largest facility dedicated to celebrating the indigenous Ainu and educating visitors about their culture and history.

Who is this tour for?

- Active travelers who enjoy uphill snowshoeing or hiking, averaging 6 km (3.7 mi) a day with elevation gains of up to 530 m (1,739 ft).
- 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 | Km | Miles | Meals ¹ |
|-----|--|-----|-------|--------------------|
| 1 | Meet your group at Sapporo New Chitose Airport | 4.8 | 3.0 | D ▾ |
| 2 | Hike up Mt. Monbetsu | 7.9 | 4.9 | B, D ▾ |
| 3 | Visit the National Ainu Museum in Shiraoi & Walk Noboribetsu Hell Valley | 4.0 | 2.5 | B, L, D ▾ |
| 4 | Hike up Mt. Usu | 6.0 | 3.7 | B, D ▾ |
| 5 | Hike up Mt. Kokimobetsu | 6.2 | 3.9 | B, D ▾ |
| 6 | Farewells in Jozankei | 0 | 0 | B ▾ |

Accommodation

| Day | Type | Location | Ensuite Toilet | Ensuite Shower | Onsen | Laundry |
|-----|-----------------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|-------|---------|
| 1 | Ryokan ▾ ² | Lake Shikotsu | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| 2 | Ryokan ▾ | Lake Shikotsu | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| 3 | Ryokan ▾ | Noboribetsu | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ |
| 4 | Ryokan ▾ | Jozankei | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ |
| 5 | Ryokan ▾ | Jozankei | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ |

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 below. Your luggage will stay in our van, freeing you up to enjoy the day's adventure with only a light day pack. This tour also gives you the opportunity to immerse yourself in Hokkaido's culture, from the history of the indigenous Ainu through to modern Japanese hot spring culture.

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

- 5 nights accommodation on a twin share basis
- 5 breakfasts, 1 lunch and 5 dinners
- Admission to the Upopoy National Ainu Museum
- Snowshoes & poles rental
- All transport as described in the itinerary
- English speaking local guide(s)

What's not included

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

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When do you run this tour?

We run this tour in January and March. Winter is a magical time of year in Hokkaido, when the landscape becomes a beautiful pure white and the whole world seems silent and still. Snowfall is of course weather-dependent and we can never be sure exactly when it will fall, but it is a safe bet that by late December, Hokkaido will be blanketed in its characteristic pure white snow, lingering until into March. By January, it is easily deep enough to snowshoe through. Temperatures around late January and February are low enough that you have a chance of encountering beautiful natural phenomena like rime ice or maybe even diamond dust in the early mornings.

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 and beautiful Whooper Swans nest around lakes, escaping Siberia's freezing temperatures. 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. Many of the accommodations we will use on this tour are completely Japanese-style with no ensuite shower in the rooms – because the facility would much rather you use their wonderful, natural hot spring baths! So after your tour, you can slip into a steaming hot spring to warm up your body and soothe your tired muscles, just as Japanese hikers do (and you may even meet a few of them in the bath yourself!). 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 does the Minimum Number mean?

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 the Meeting Point

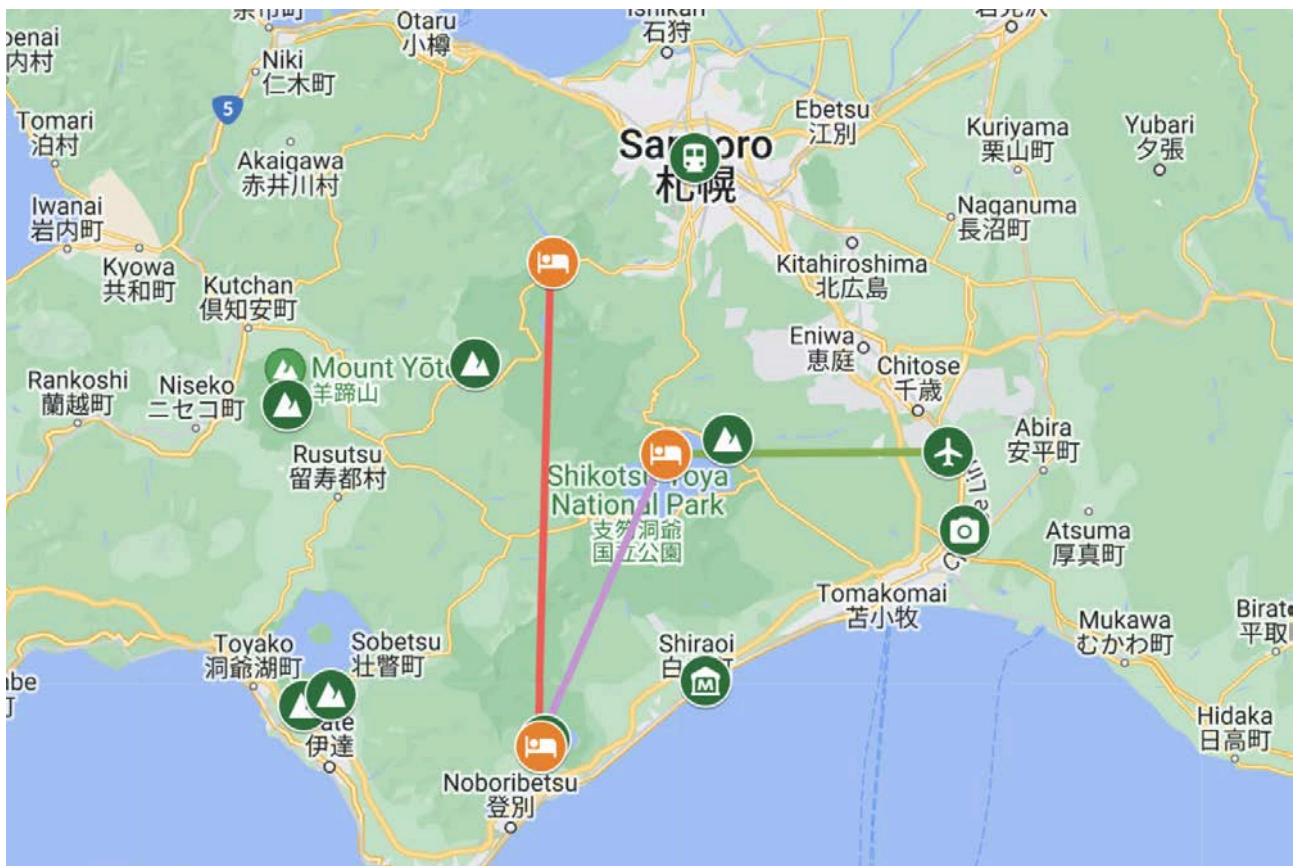
We will meet between 1:00 pm and 1:30 pm at either JR Chitose Station or New Chitose Airport. You can fly directly to New Chitose Airport from Tokyo Haneda (HND), Tokyo Narita (NRT), Kansai Airport (KIX), Osaka Itami Airport (ITM) and most other major airports in Japan. Flights depart several times a day from these four major airports, but they may be less frequent from other, regional airports.

If you would like to spend some time exploring Sapporo before joining the tour, you can reach Chitose Station via the local JR Hakodate Line from Sapporo Station in around 30 minutes. The fare costs ¥1,040 per person.

You can search train timetables in English on [Japan Transit Planner website](#).

Tour map

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



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Day to Day Itinerary

Day 1 – Meet your group at Sapporo New Chitose Airport (CTS)

Our group will gather between 1:00 pm and 1:30 pm either at New Chitose Airport or JR Chitose Station. As soon as everyone is here, we will hit the ground running and head to our first destination immediately, so please make sure you have eaten a good lunch before meeting us!

We'll transfer by van to Lake Shikotsu, chatting and getting to know each other along the way. We will make a stop enroute, and we will enjoy a walk around Lake Utonai's sanctuary, where we can enjoy the sight of winter migratory birds like Whooper Swans, congregating on the lake.

Tonight, we will enjoy amazing onsen (hot springs) with a lake view, as well as a delicious dinner provided by our Japanese accommodation. You can also expect to see a number of Japanese Deer strolling through the area!



| Meals | Hike | Ascent | Accommodation |
|-------|----------------|---------------|-------------------------|
| D | 4.8 km 3 mi | 30 m 98 ft | Ryokan at Lake Shikotsu |

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Day 2 – Hike up Mt. Monbetsu

Today we will get accustomed to snowshoes and confront the first challenge of hiking up Mt. Monbetsu.

This is a very popular route among local snowshoers with a steady gradient and a wide road. On the way up, we'll enjoy the incredible view of Lake Shikotsu, Mt. Fuppushi and Mt. Tarumae, all of which we can see across the lake. Crossing the tree line, we can even see as far as Mt. Eniwa, an active volcano, out in the other direction on a clear day. After our descent, we'll have a late lunch at one of the restaurants in the village.



If you are travelling in late January, later today you can head to the shores of Lake Shikotsu to enjoy a fantastic Ice Festival! This is a chance to see some amazing ice sculptures perfectly preserved during Hokkaido's frigid winters.

Later, we'll enjoy another delicious meal at our ryokan and you're of course welcome to take another dip in the hot springs!

NOTE: There is a chance that Hokkaido's wild winter weather may make conditions unfit for us to head to the summit. If that turns out to be the case, we will instead snowshoe on a different trail at lower altitudes near Lake Shikotsu.

| Meals | Hike | Ascent | Accommodation |
|-------|------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|
| B, D | 7.9 km 4.9 mi | 530 m 1,739 ft | Ryokan at Lake Shikotsu |

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Day 3 – Visit the Upopoy National Ainu Museum & Walk Noboribetsu Hell Valley

This morning we will leave Lake Shikotsu behind and travel south to Shiraoi along the Pacific coast. You can enjoy some wonderful ocean views as we go!

Our destination is Lake Poroto and the adjacent Upopoy National Ainu Museum, set in a large park. This is the first and only national museum in Japan dedicated to the Ainu and visitors can learn all about their culture and history. Entrance is included in the tour, but you will be left to explore the park completely at your leisure.

We will regroup for lunch at a restaurant in the park before we head to Jigokudani in Noboribetsu Onsen. “Jigokudani” means “hell valley” and the name is very appropriate for this literal fire-and-brimstone area, home to many steaming volcanic vents! We will get as close as possible, observing the vents from the safety of a railed boardwalk. This is an area that is hugely popular during the autumn leaf season. However, it is quieter during the winter months and the valley looks incredibly pretty dressed in snow! The cold temperatures also make the rising steam all the more pronounced.

A highlight of our day is Oyunuma, a 50°C steaming sulphurous pond. Although this temperature would be dangerous to humans, a river flows out of the pond and cools to safer levels a little further downstream. So, we can enjoy an *ashiyu*– a hot spring foot bath! This is entirely optional of course but you might enjoy the chance to warm up your toes in this freezing weather.



After the walk, we will check into our accommodation and enjoy a wonderful Japanese-style meal. You are also highly encouraged to take a dip in our ryokan’s onsen– though of course, they will probably be quite a bit cooler than 50°C!

| Meals | Hike | Ascent | Accommodation |
|---------|----------------|----------------|-----------------------|
| B, L, D | 4 km 2.5 mi | 80 m 262 ft | Ryokan in Noboribetsu |

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Day 4 – Hike up Mt. Usu

Together with Lake Toya and Showa Shinzan on the northern side, Mt. Usu, an active stratovolcano, is another popular destination for domestic and international visitors.

Today we'll hike up the mountain from the southern side through snow-covered old-growth forests. We will climb all the way to the crater rim, from where we will be able to see a spectacular view of the Pacific Ocean

on one side and Mt. Usu's impressive, steaming crater on the other. We will continue our climb up to the crater observatory, where we can safely observe the crater itself. Afterwards, we will retrace our steps and descend the mountain.



We'll stop by a local convenience store to stock up on food for lunch before we head to Showa Shinzan for a quick photo stop. Showa-Shinzan is a volcanic lava dome whose formation is quite recent– 1943~1945, in fact! It's very humbling to witness a volcano so soon after its birth.

After our photo stop, we will travel inland to Jozankei Onsen. Fun fact– although Jozankei is technically within Sapporo City, it is still a part of Shikotsu-Toya National Park!

Dinner will be served at our accommodation this evening. As always, don't forget to check out the facility's attached hot springs!

| Meals | Hike | Ascent | Accommodation |
|-------|------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| B, D | 6.0 km 3.7 mi | 410 m 1,345 ft | Ryokan in Jozankei |

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Day 5 – Hike up Mt. Kokimobetsu

This morning we will drive for about 30 minutes to the Mt. Kokimobetsu trailhead. The drive will take us over Nakayama Pass, which links Sapporo and popular ski resort Niseko.

When we reach the mountain's car park, we will begin our ascent. Not long into the hike, we will be greeted by the magnificent sight of Mt. Yotei in the distance, also known as Ezo-Fuji due to its uncanny resemblance to Mt. Fuji ("Ezo" is the old Japanese word for Hokkaido).



Today's trail is not too steep and the summit is below the tree line at 970 m (3,182 ft). However, copious amounts of snowfall, some of the highest in Hokkaido, along with good access make Mt. Kokimobetsu a popular spot for local snow hikers and skiers.

As always, we will carry plenty of provisions with us for the day but after our descent, we will stop by Roadside Station Nakayama Pass to warm ourselves up with some hot drinks and food. A visit to a Japanese Roadside Station is quite an experience in itself! We recommend exploring the facility to see what unusual local souvenirs, specialities and goods you can spot.

Afterwards, we will hop back into our van and return to base at Jozankei Onsen. Tonight, we will dine together to celebrate the completion of our tour.

NOTE: There is a chance that Hokkaido's wild winter weather may make conditions unfit for us to carry out today's planned snowshoe hike. If that turns out to be the case, we will instead stay in Jozankei Onsen and spend a leisurely day enjoying the village on foot.

| Meals | Hike | Ascent | Accommodation |
|-------|------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| B, D | 6.2 km 3.9 mi | 480 m 1,575 ft | Ryokan in Jozankei |

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Day 6 – Farewells in Jozankei

Otsukaresama desu! (Good job!) Our tour finishes after breakfast today.

If you are returning to Sapporo, the handy highway bus “Kappa Liner” departs from Jozankei every couple of hours and can take you directly to Sapporo Station, Odori or Susukino. The journey is just 1 hour with no changes. Tickets cost 1,400 yen and need to be purchased online by 5 pm the day before. Make sure you discuss this with your guide after your Mt. Kokimobetsu climb if you wish to use this service and they can provide you with the web link.

An alternative to the mentioned bus is catching the No. 7 or 8 local express buses from Jozankei Onsen headed for Sapporo Station, although they may not have as much space for luggage. A reservation is not required for this local bus, so you can pay the fare when you get off at Sapporo. The journey takes 70 – 80 minutes and costs 790 yen.

Have a safe onward journey! *Itterasshai!*

| Meals | | | |
|-------|--|--|--|
| B | | | |

Our recommended reading

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

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

[What to pack for Hokkaido?](#)

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

[How to onsen \(like a local!\)](#)

[Vegan & Vegetarian in Hokkaido](#)

[Hokkaido Travel Tips & Common Questions](#)

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

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Elevation profiles

Day 1 – Nanajo Waterfall **Distance** – 4.8 km / 3.0 mi **Ascent** – 30 m / 98 ft



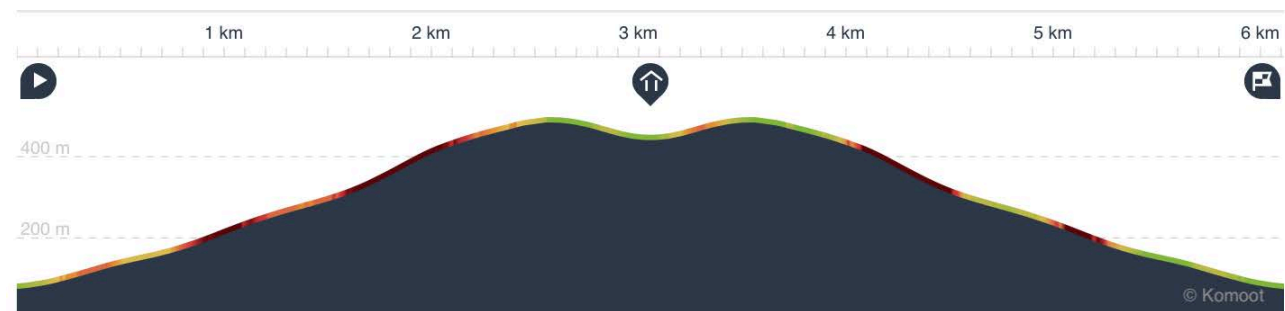
Day 2 – Mt. Monbetsu **Distance** – 7.9 km / 4.9 mi **Ascent** – 530 m / 1,739 ft



Day 3 – Noboribetsu Hell Valley **Distance** – 4.0 km / 2.5 mi **Ascent** – 80 m / 262ft



Day 4 – Mt. Usu **Distance** – 6.0 km / 3.7 mi **Ascent** – 410 m / 1,345 ft



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Day 5 - Mt. Kokimobetsu **Distance** - 6.2 km / 3.9 mi **Ascent** - 480 m / 1,575 ft

