

# Hello, Hokkaido!

Japan's latest shinkansen, the **Hokkaido Shinkansen** [right], entered into service on 26 March 2016. You can now travel by train from Tokyo to Shin-Hakodate in Hokkaido in around four and a half hours. Let's explore its terminus, **Hakodate**.



Hakodate lies on the southernmost point of Hokkaido island. It is the prefecture's third largest city, and while it is little known overseas, in 2015 the city was voted the most attractive destination in Japan for the second year in a row\*.

The view from Mt Hakodate has long been considered one of the must-sees when visiting the city and the view at night is beautiful [photo a]. Accessible by a ropeway, it also becomes clear from this vantage point that Hakodate is a city of the sea.

Covering the Oshima Peninsula, to the east of the city lies the Tsugaru Strait and to the west Hakodate Harbour. The city is famous for the quality of its fresh seafood [d], and fishing and seafood processing are major industries. Hakodate flourished as a fishing port and it was also one of the first ports to be opened to foreign trade under the 1854 Kanagawa Treaty.



The city's Motomachi area reflects this early international exchange and historical buildings still remain such as the Hakodate Russian Orthodox Church [e] and the Old Public Hall building constructed in an elaborate Western style, a symbol of the city. The Old Soma House is the former residence of a wealthy merchant family and here you can see the mix of traditional Japanese and Western influences and historical items such as the traditional Ainu costume pictured here [c]. There are also several museums, including the Hakodate City Museum of Northern Peoples where you can learn about the indigenous Ainu culture.



Getting around the historic part of the city down to the Bay Area is easily done on foot and much of the charm of the city is wandering up and down sloping streets and taking in the views. There is also a tram system with a vintage tram for tourists.

A little further out is a site well worth a visit for anyone interested in Japanese history. It is fascinating to think that it was way up in the north of Japan that the final battle between supporters of the Tokugawa Shogunate and the Meiji Imperial Forces took place. The Goryokaku Fort [f] is where this last stand of the Boshin Civil War happened in 1869. The impressive Western-style star-shaped fortress was



only completed in 1864 and had at its centre the magistrate's office which had been relocated from the foot of Mt Hakodate for defensive reasons; the earlier site was too close to the foreign ships coming into the newly opened trading port. The original having been dismantled by the Meiji Government (1868-1912), the main part of the magistrate's office has been rebuilt using traditional Japanese building techniques and opened in 2010. The scale and design of Goryokaku are best appreciated from the nearby Goryokaku Tower.



After taking in all the sights of Hakodate, a Japanese *onsen* is a great way to relax and Yunokawa is the city's popular hot spring area [b]. Also in the Yunokawa area is Hakodate City Tropical Botanic Garden where in winter the monkeys, which are free to roam, share the love of a good soak in an open-air hot spring.

**Hakodate Travel** is the official tourism website for the city and a great place to start to explore travel options in and around the city. Note that some places such as the Old Soma House close during the winter.

[www.hakodate.travel/en/](http://www.hakodate.travel/en/)



\* Survey by Tokyo-based Brand Research Institute