

# Hokkaido 北海道

## a winter wonderland



Have you ever visited Hokkaido? Hokkaido is a large island at the northern end of the Japanese archipelago.

The island accounts for about 22% of Japan's entire surface area and is the 21st largest island in the world. As a comparison, Hokkaido is a little smaller than the island of Tasmania. With a population of some 5.38 million people, Hokkaido has a population density of 70 people per square kilometre, making it the most spacious region to live in all Japan.

### Hokkaido's four seasons

Hokkaido has four distinct seasons. In spring, snow melts and cherry blossoms bloom. Summer days are cool and refreshing with many fine days. In autumn, leaves turn red and it is time to enjoy the magnificent autumn colour. Winter sees a silver wonderland spread through Hokkaido as it becomes covered by snow. Hokkaido is a region where the seasons each have their own beauty to enjoy. This time let's focus on winter when the largest number of foreign visitors come to Hokkaido.

### Winter sports - skiing

Skiing is the most popular winter sport in Hokkaido. You can enjoy skiing and snowboarding for around half the year, from the end of November to early May. Hokkaido is famous for its



top quality snow known as 'powder snow'. Skiers and snowboarders in search of the world's best powder snow come from around the world to Hokkaido. The internationally famous Niseko is just one of many ski resorts in Hokkaido which also include Rusutsu, Furano and Tomamu. Many have lessons for children, so the whole family can enjoy skiing in Hokkaido.

### Winter's natural wonder

One of the must-sees in winter in Hokkaido is the drift ice in the Sea of Okhotsk. Fresh water from the great Amur River on the far east of the Asian mainland flows into the Sea of Okhotsk and freezes. As it makes its



way south to Hokkaido, the drift ice grows larger and larger. From late January, the mysterious looking floes of ice can be seen along the Okhotsk Coast.

### A truly winter event

The Sapporo Snow Festival takes place for a week in early February every year, and it has come to represent Hokkaido, not only in Japan but also around the world.



The festival features giant snow sculptures as large as buildings up to 15 metres tall. A skate rink and ice slides can also be enjoyed.

### Hot springs

Have you experienced a Japanese hot spring (*onsen*)?

To call Hokkaido an "onsen heaven" is no exaggeration. There is a great variety of *onsen*: from resorts offering expansive public baths and small private *rotemburo* (open-air baths), to therapeutic baths and traditional Japanese *ryokan* inns with 'secret' *onsen* full of atmosphere.



From late January to early March at Lake Shikaribetsu in Tokachi, you can enjoy a *rotemburo* on top of the frozen lake – a strong recommendation because you can only have this experience here!

A wonderful winter experience awaits visitors in Hokkaido.

<http://en.visit-hokkaido.jp/>

Contributed by: HOKKAIDO TOURISM ORGANISATION