

EXPLORE!

Sapporo Snow Festival

13 days

Japan - Trip code JIF



Sapporo Snow Festival

This exciting journey takes us to the far north of Japan where we make the most of the winter temperatures, taking an ice breaker cruise in the Sea of Okhotsk before spending time admiring the incredible snow sculptures at the annual Sapporo Snow Festival. We also spend time exploring ultra modern Tokyo, exploring zen gardens in ancient Kyoto and visiting the snow monkeys at Yudanaka.

Trip highlights

- ★ **Sapporo** - Experience the annual snow festival in the capital of Hokkaido, Japan's northern island. Odori Park is home to huge snow sculptures and dramatic ice carvings
- ★ **Otaru Lantern Festival** - Stroll along the banks of the canal, lit by thousands of tiny candles and snow lanterns
- ★ **Tokyo** - Explore the neon bright capital city, gateway to Japan
- ★ **Bullet Train** - Whizz across the country in comfort at an average speed of 300 kilometres an hour
- ★ **Kyoto** - See the traditional side of Japan, stunning temples, immaculate zen gardens and the geisha district of Gion
- ★ **Snow Monkeys** - Visit the bathing beauties making the most of the hot springs at Yudanaka Onsen

ACCOMMODATION GRADE:

Standard

Our standard, mid-range accommodation offers a good level of service, often with other amenities such as a restaurant, bar, garden or swimming pool. Generally rooms will be comfortable with en suite facilities.

TRIP PACE:

Full on

Full on paced trips are for travellers who like their holidays packed with activities and experiences, moving on quickly from place to place with lots of early starts and long, busy days. Some may find them tiring, but others get a buzz from packing their precious holiday-time as chock-a-block full of new experiences as possible!

GROUP SIZE:

10 - 16

Maximum group size ranges from between 6 to 20 people, depending on the type of trip, the transport and accommodation used and activities included. We rarely have groups that are smaller than five or six people and the average is 12 people plus an Explore leader.

Itinerary

Itineraries on some departure dates may differ, please select the itinerary that you wish to explore.

DAY 1 - Join tour in Tokyo

Our tour starts in Tokyo, the modern day capital of Japan.



Accommodation: Shiba Park Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available




Meals Provided: Dinner


DAY 2 - Visit ancient Asakusa Temple and modern Harajuku

It is said that over one quarter of Japanese live within a 50 km radius of the centre of Tokyo. The result is a bustling and exciting city, the economic powerhouse of Asia. Our first introduction to this unique culture is when we take a walking tour of the city highlights. We visit the Meiji shrine and Shinjuku area, where the latest electronic gadgets can be seen in neon-fronted shops before making our way to the traditionally styled Hamarikyu gardens. The gardens are located in central Toyko and feature several seawater ponds which change levels as the tides rise and fall. We then board a boat for a short journey along the Sumida-gawa river to the Asakusa Temple, Tokyo's oldest temple. This journey offers a totally different perspective of Tokyo, as we sail past high rise apartments, secluded gardens and busy warehouses.



Accommodation: Shiba Park Hotel (or similar)

 Standard Hotel

 Single room available

 Meals Provided: Breakfast


DAY 3 - Fly to Abashiri; discover the Meiji-era Prison Museum

This morning we leave the capital and after a short transfer by train and monorail we take a flight to Abashiri, located on the Okhotsk Coast. The town is most famous for the Kangoku, a prison opened in 1892 with a fearsome reputation for harsh winter conditions. Nowadays the prison has been transformed in to an interesting museum which we will visit, with chance to test out the cells if only for a few minutes.



Accommodation: Hokuten no Oka (or similar)

 Standard Hotel

 Meals Provided: Breakfast & Dinner


DAY 4 - Cruise on the Sea of Okhotsk; scenic train to Sapporo


Abashiri is Japan's northern most major city located at 44 degrees north latitude. From mid-January to late March the waters here are covered in drift ice and we will be taking a cruise through the Sea of Okhotsk to get to the main drift ice areas. A variety of wild animals can be seen including seals and sea eagles resting on the ice. From the ship you can sometimes spot fox and deer on the coast. The boat ride takes about one hour in total depending on ice conditions. We take the afternoon train to Sapporo, a scenic route with views across the snow covered landscape.



Accommodation: Cross Hotel Sapporo (or similar)

 Standard Hotel

 Single room available

 Meals Provided: Breakfast & Dinner


DAY 5 - View snow sculptures at Sapporo's annual festival

We spend the full day exploring the annual Snow and Ice festival. The festival first began in 1950 but gained worldwide recognition in 1972 when Sapporo hosted the winter Olympic Games. We will see all of the main venues that have snow statues and ice sculptures including Odori Park, Tsudome dome and the main street in Susukino, Sapporo's entertainment quarter. We will also take time to stop at one of the many ice bars that pop up during the festival. In the evening there is an option to visit the Sapporo Brewery for a tour.



Accommodation: Cross Hotel Sapporo (or similar)

 Standard Hotel

 Single room available

DAY 6 - Day trip by train to explore Otaru's lantern festival

Today we take the train to Otaru, a small town set along the Otaru Canal. Once a year it is home to the Snow Light Path festival. The snow covered town is decorated with small snow statues decorated with lights, particularly alongside the canal. Often there are also small floating candles in the water. As well as the lanterns there are often food stalls set up alongside the canal so we can sample some local snacks as we make our way through the displays. We return to Sapporo by train in the late evening.



Accommodation: Cross Hotel Sapporo (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available

DAY 7 - Take the train to old trading port of Hakodate

Leaving Sapporo we take the train to Hakodate located on the south-west corner of Hokkaido Island. Hakodate was one of the first ports to open to foreign trade and as such has a distinct blend of Japanese and Western architecture. We wander through Motomachi which gives an insight in to how the traders lived and how the cultures merged. In the evening we take a trip to Mount Hakodate for spectacular views down across the city.



Accommodation: Hotel Resol Hakodate (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available

DAY 8 - Discover the morning market; flight and train to Kyoto

We rise early this morning to visit the Hakodate morning market. Starting at 6am in the winter the traders sell fresh seafood including crabs (kani) and sea urchins (uni) as well as fresh fruit and vegetables. There are plenty of opportunities to snack as we wander through the stalls. After the market we make our way back to the airport for the short flight to Osaka where we take the train to Kyoto, the old Imperial capital. Kyoto is the cradle of all things uniquely Japanese and the only large city to escape bombing in WWII. It was the Imperial capital for more than 1000 years and was at the heart of the events that shaped Japan's destiny. Signs of the past are visible throughout the city in its grand temples and palaces and also the many traditional shops selling wares that have been produced for centuries. This afternoon we visit the Kiyomizudera Temple and the Gion Geisha district.



Accommodation: Karasuma Kyoto Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available

DAY 9 - Walk through the temples and zen gardens of Kyoto

Kyoto is regarded as the place to see everything you expect to experience in Japan, with more than 2000 temples and shrines, many set in manicured landscaped gardens. But it is also a modern city. We spend a full day exploring including a visit to the temple of the Golden Pavillion, Arashiyama Bamboo grove and the nearby Ryonji temple with its beautiful zen gardens.



Accommodation: Karasuma Kyoto Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 10 - Free day to explore Kyoto. Option to visit nearby Nara

Today is a free day to explore Kyoto at your leisure. You may wish to take a trip to nearby Nara, home to the Todaji Temple, Big Buddha and the Kasuga Shrine. Your Tour Leader will be on hand to give you tips on where to visit and make the best of your time in this beautiful city.



Accommodation: Karasuma Kyoto Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 11 - Take the bullet train to Nagano

Today we take our first journey on the Shinkansen, Japan's bullet train. Travelling at speeds of up to 300km per hour, with quiet carriages and departures running to a strict timetable this is the ultimate in train travel. We combine this with a slightly slower local train as we make our way to Nagano.



Accommodation: Toyoko Inn Nagano (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 12 - Reflect at Zenkoji Temple before meeting Yudanaka's snow monkeys. Take the bullet train to Tokyo

After breakfast we pay a visit to the nearby 7th century Zenko-ji temple complex. We can experience the daily workings of temple life, with a chance to watch the monks taking their morning prayers. After a stop for lunch we head to Yudanaka, home to the famous 'snow monkeys'. During the cold winter months these clever simians take to the hot springs to keep warm. There are plenty of onsens (shared baths) which we can try out as well, all monkey free. In the late afternoon we board the Shinkansen and make our way back to Tokyo for our last night in this incredible country. 10



Accommodation: Shiba Park Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



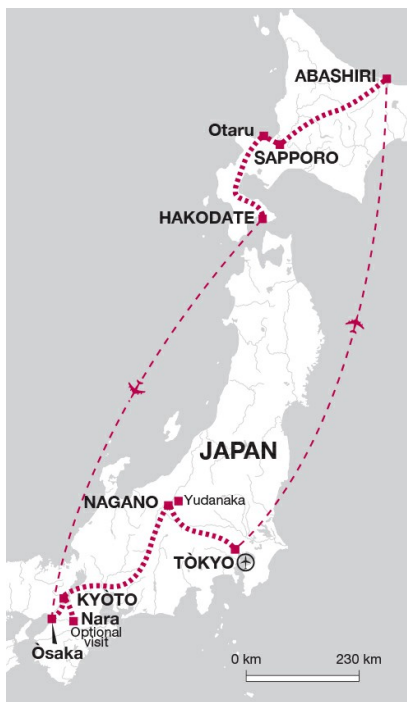
Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 13 - Tour ends in Tokyo

Our tour ends in Tokyo this morning after breakfast.



Meals Provided: Breakfast



Why book this trip

From food to festivals, scenery to sledding, history to hilltops this is a varied tour where you will be well and truly off the beaten tourist path. This tour is ideal for anyone wanting to learn more about Japanese culture whilst experiencing the unique Sapporo Snow Festival.

What's included?



Included meals

Breakfast: 12
Dinner: 5



Transport

Bus
Boat
Flight
Train



Trip staff

Explore Tour Leader



Accommodation

12 nights standard hotel

Trip information

Country information

Japan Holidays & Tours

Climate

Japan's climate is mostly temperate, with five distinct seasons. Summer is from June to September with temperatures reaching 30°C, although it can vary from warm to very hot. After mid-July, July and August can be humid. Spring and Autumn are mild throughout Japan. Winter, October to April, is cold with snowfall. The main rainy season is June. Japan can be prone to short, tropical cyclones in August to October. October/November although cooler is a great time to see the Autumn colours.

Time difference to GMT

+9

Plugs

2 Pin Flat

Religion

Buddhism, Christian and Shinto

Language

Japanese

Budgeting and packing

Optional activities

Sapporo Brewery visit - 3000 Yen per person including dinner Day trip to Nara - 2250 Yen per person

Clothing

Rain gear is essential. You will need warm clothing for this trip as both daytime and night time temperatures are cold. Expect it to be around -1 degrees centigrade during the day and sinking to minus 8 during the night.

Footwear

Comfortable walking boots with good grips for walking around the ice festival. There will be plenty of snow so good waterproof footwear is a must.

Luggage

20kg

Luggage: On tour

One main piece of baggage and a daypack. We recommend a compact suitcase with wheels or good quality rucksack. While in Japan we will make use of their efficient luggage transfer service to transfer your main bags between Sapporo and Kyoto and from Kyoto to Tokyo. For the nights spent in Hakodate and Nagano you will need to bring overnight items in your daypack as there will be no access to your main bag.

Equipment

Bring a water bottle to save on purchase of plastic bottles and a small torch. Hairdryers are provided at all the hotels.

Tipping

Explore leader

At your discretion you might also consider tipping your Tour Leader in appreciation of the efficiency and service you receive.

Local crew

Although entirely voluntary, tipping is a recognised part of life in this region of the world. Some local staff will look to members of the group for personal recognition of particular services provided. Accordingly you should allow £20 for tips. In order to make things easier for you, the Tour Leaders may organise a group's tips kitty and if this is the case, they will account for it throughout the tour.

Country Information

Japan Holidays & Tours

Food and drink

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Lunch price

£8

Dinner price

£20

Beer price

£4

Water price

£1.00 - 2.00

Foreign Exchange

Local currency

Yen.

Recommended Currency For Exchange

It is preferable to take money in Yen or traveller's cheques.

Where To Exchange

Most major towns - your Tour Leader will advise you on arrival.

ATM Availability

All post offices have international ATMs. Some other ATMs do not accept Western bank/credit cards. Your tour leader will advise you locally.

Credit Card Acceptance

In major restaurants and stores.

Travellers Cheques

It should be noted that outside of the major cities it is difficult to change traveller's cheques. Where available it takes 30-45 minutes, the best places to exchange them is at the airport on arrival.

Transport, Accommodation & Meals

Transport Information

Bus, Boat, Flight, Train

Essential information

FCO Advice

We strongly recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for up-to-date information and advice about your destination: safety and security, entry requirements, health, local laws and customs. For UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office advice [click here](#).

For more information from Explore about travel advice, [click here](#)

Under 18 immigration guidance

Please note that some countries require proof of parental consent when travelling overseas with under 18s. Please check requirements with the relevant embassy or consular office well in advance of travel if this applies to your party.

Essential Information

Once your booking has been confirmed we guarantee the price will not increase, whatever the circumstances. Before booking please ensure you have read our important tour pricing information. [Booking Conditions](#)

Visa Information

Japan: Visas are not required by UK, Australian, New Zealand, US and Canadian citizens. Other nationalities should consult their local embassy or consular office.

If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may consider applying through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. See www.travcour.com to download the relevant visa application for your trip, if applicable (UK citizens only), along with details of how to apply for your visa through Travcour. The Team at Travcour will be happy to answer specific questions relating to visa applications, please call them directly on 0208 5431846.

Booking conditions

Before booking your Explore trip, please ensure that you read both our [Essential Information](#) and [Booking Conditions](#).

Transfers

[Find out more about Trip Transfer Terms and Conditions before you book.](#)

Booking a land only package with Explore

Customers who have chosen to book on the 'Land Only' arrangements of our tour, please ensure that you have checked your tour specific 'Joining Instructions' prior to booking your own travel arrangements. Your joining instructions can be found below in the dates and prices information.

You may also be eligible for the Free Explore Transfer.

Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will now receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The transfers will be from the Explore designated airport or train station to the joining point of your tour, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. The exception to this rule is customers who are booked on a tour where the joining and ending point is at the designated airport or train station.

Free transfers are not available for Self-Guided, Tailormade or Tours for Churches customers.

If you are not eligible for the Free Transfer then you will need to make your own way through to the joining and ending point. On a majority of our tours Explore will be able to provide a private transfer at an additional cost. Please ask for a quote at the time of

booking.

For more information regarding the Explore Free Transfer [click here](#)

Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Explore that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country. Please ensure your policy includes medical emergency helicopter evacuation in the event of illness or injury and covers the entire duration of your holiday. If you are trekking at altitude please ensure that there is no upper altitude limit which may limit or exclude cover for your trip. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling on trips within the United Kingdom.

Read more information about what travel insurance is required.

Flight information

Explore offers a wide range of flexible flying options to make joining and leaving our trips easy. [Read more about them here.](#)

Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Booking a flight inclusive package with Explore

We have a good selection of flights not only from London but from many regional airports around the UK allowing us to compare fares between scheduled carriers as well as low cost and charter airlines. Our dedicated flights team will match the best flight options to your arrival and departure airport.

On our website we display a UK flight inclusive package guide price which is generally based on a London departure. To avoid paying supplements or to secure your preferred flight option, we recommend booking as early as possible, especially for peak travel dates.

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Vaccinations

Nothing compulsory. We recommend protection against typhoid, tetanus, infectious hepatitis and polio. The use or possession of Vicks inhalers and some other common prescription and over-the-counter medicines (e.g. for allergies and sinus problems or even certain mild painkillers, such as those containing certain levels of codeine) are banned under Japan's strictly enforced anti-stimulant drugs law. Customs officials may not be sympathetic if you claim ignorance about these medicines. If in any doubt about customs procedures for such items, you should check with the nearest Japanese Embassy before visiting Japan.
