



Hokkaido Spring Explorer

April 30th – May 7th, 2021

*7nts fr. \$3395 triple \$3495 double
and \$3895 single*

Hokkaido at Leisure

Cancel for any reason up to 60 days prior-FULL REFUND!

Maximum Tour size is 24 tour members!

**TOUR
24**

Sapporo, Otaru, Hakodate, Lake Toyo and Noboribetsu

Springtime in Hokkaido begins in early May when it awakens from the slumber of winter and color returns to the land. With it comes blue skies and the beauty of wildflowers beginning to bloom. We also cannot forget the hibernating animals as they wake up and get ready to be active again.

Everywhere you visit in Hokkaido, you can experience different attractions of the island. Japanese people are proud of their big island, where nature blends in with people's lives so well.

Our tour begins with a 4-night stay in Sapporo at The Century Royal Hotel, adjacent to the JR Sapporo Station. We follow up with a 2 night at La Vista Hakodate Bay, a 4-star property in the center of Hakodate. Our last night, Noboribetsu Grand, a charming onsen hotel that brings out the best of this famous onsen resort town.

Besides local sightseeing in Sapporo, there is a day trip to Otaru and a free day to catch up on some of Japan's best shopping.

There is more, much more... a fruit picking experience, Nikka Whisky, Shiroi Koibito Park, a train ride, the Hakodate Winery, Hokkaido Konbukan, the kelp museum, and an Ainu dance show at the recently opened, Upopoy National Ainu Museum and Park.

Springtime highlights include visits to Goryokaku Park, a night tour to Mt. Hakodate, a photo stop at Lake Toya, a drive along Noboribetsu Cherry Blossom Tunnel, and Noboribetsu Jigokudani (Hell Valley).

Join us on this unique tour as we are off discovering Hokkaido's various sceneries, activities, and food.

Itinerary/Details

Day 1 – April 29th, 2021 Thursday – Depart from Honolulu

Hawaiian Airlines #441 Departs Honolulu 12:55 pm – Arrive Chitose 5:00 pm + 1

Please meet up with your Panda Travel representative a minimum of 3 hours prior to the flight departure at the Hawaiian Airlines international check-in counters, located in Terminal 2, Lobby 4.

The check-in lines as well as TSA security check has been experiencing long lines. We ask that you plan to be at the airport at minimum, 3 hours prior to the flight departure time.

Day 2 – April 30th, 2021 Friday – Chitose-Sapporo

On arrival in Chitose, please make your way to the baggage claim area as we need to clear immigration and customs. Free luggage carts are available. We suggest that you use one as there is a short walk to our chartered bus. Our local English-speaking Japanese guide will be there to meet us.

Accommodations for our stay in Sapporo are at the Century Royal Hotel Sapporo, ideally situated, adjacent to the shopping zone in front of JR Sapporo Station, and directly connected via an underground passage.

The drive time from Chitose is under one hour. Our arrival at the hotel will be approximately 7:00pm allowing you time to go out for a night stroll or bite to eat.

There is a 24-hour convenience store just off the ground floor of our hotel.



Accommodations: Century Royal Hotel Sapporo  **Free**

Day 3 – May 1st, 2021 Saturday – Sapporo-(B)



After breakfast, please meet your guide by 8:30am as our day begins with a short drive to visit Hokkaido Shrine, a deeply spiritual place, and the resting place of four deities. With origins that date to 1869, the grounds, lush in nature, are filled with history as well, a variety of wild animals such as the Hokkaido squirrel. Enjoy free time to explore.

From here, off to Okurayama Ski Jump for a ride on the lift to its peak. This ski jump stadium was used at the Winter Olympics held in Sapporo in 1972.

Once at the top enjoy time at the viewing lounge and the panoramic views of the city of Sapporo, the Ishikari Plain, and Ishikari Bay. It is also an ideal location to view the start line of the ski jump right before your eyes - looking directly down at the steep slope of the approach will certainly give you an idea of how the skiers are feeling when they begin their jumps!



Next, a visit to Nijo Fish Market, over 100-years old and said to have developed in the early Meiji Period when fishermen from Ishikari Bay began selling fish here. Over time, the number of bars and greengrocers in the area began to increase, laying the foundations for today's Nijo Fish Market. The market continues to serve residents' culinary needs and is also popular with visitors.

As Hokkaido is surrounded by the sea, the market offers up a treasure trove of seafood. With Sapporo as its main city, the freshest catches from all over the island are sold here. Each store has its own unique selection and it is interesting to see the differences between them. Besides an array of seafood, they offer dried fish and other processed seafood products.

You can find a variety of sit-down restaurants to enjoy lunch or wait a bit until we cross over to Tanukikoji Shopping Street, Sapporo's oldest covered shopping arcade. This covered arcade stretches for 10-blocks with over 200 stores. Here you will find old and traditional merchants selling kimonos, tea, or incense side by side with modern stores specializing in computers and software or state-of-the-art electronics and digital cameras – all of which lends it a bazaar-like quality. Some of the popular shops that Hawaii folks enjoy are here, a multi-story 108-yen Daiso, as well 24-hour Mega Don Quijote. A variety of additional dining options are available along the street.

We are allowing for plenty of free time to browse and shop at your leisure; however, if you prefer to remain longer and return to the hotel on your own, choose between the easy unground path or taxi, less than \$10.



Accommodations: Century Royal Hotel Sapporo  **free**

Day 4 – May 2nd, 2021 Sunday – Sapporo-Otaru-Sapporo (B)

After breakfast, please meet your guide in the lobby by 8:30am as we are off on a full day of touring.

The morning begins with a fruit picking experience at a local farm followed by a drive to visit the Nikka Whisky Factory. Enjoy a tasting experience along with time at their gift shop. Some of the whiskeys and gift items are only available to purchase here.

Now, off to Otaru. From old days, when they sailed trading boats from Honshu-mainland to Hokkaido, Otaru played important roles as the center of trade or commerce, not to mention fishery in Hokkaido. Walking along the main streets, you find a charming and nostalgic city filled with historic architecture.

Here you will find the old remnant of Otaru's major industry, glassware shops. Glass buoys were used to light up fishing boats at night to attract herrings. A glass industry flourished in Otaru to support the herring trade. When the herring fishing industry declined in the 1950s, the makers of glass buoys diverted their business to produce refined glassware, as the demand for buoys plunged. The result today are numerous glass shops, which now carter mainly to souvenir hungry tourists. If you think that blown glassware is only made in Venice, then you are wrong.

The city is renowned for its glassworks, music boxes, and sweet shops that can be found lining Sakaimachi Street. As you near the end of Sakaimachi Street, look and listen when you come to the vintage steam clock at the front of the charming Music Box Museum. The nostalgic atmosphere inside the main building of the museum takes you back in time. The museum houses almost 15,000 music boxes, ranging from matchbox sized souvenirs to precisely tuned masterpieces. The Music Box Museum has something for everybody, from The Beatles to the latest J-pop hits. We will enjoy a hands-on music box making experience.

Another must stop is at the Kitaichi Glass Shop where you can enjoy looking and shopping for beautiful glassware. How about making glassware on your own with the help of the artisans?

Another famous landmark in Otaru is the Kitakaro confectionary shop. The cake and confectionery store are popular stops for tourists and locals alike. There is a cult like following of its famous honeyed wheeled layered cakes and there are good reasons why. The layered cakes are delicate and the honey flavored intense, but not too sweet. Sit and enjoy at the small café right in the store. Coffee, tea, and ice cream are also available.

Enjoy free time to shop, browse and have lunch on your own at one of many restaurants. Otaru is well known for its beer, and Otaru Beer, next to the canal, is a popular restaurant with a medieval Germanic theme. If sushi is more to your liking, a stroll down to Sushi-dori Street is well worth your time. You will find a collection of some 20 sushi restaurants.



As we make our way back to Sapporo, a visit at Shiroy Koibito Park, a theme park by Ishiya, a local chocolate company. The company's flagship product is the Shiroy Koibito cookie, which consists of two thin butter cookies and a layer of white chocolate in between. It is one of the most famous souvenirs from Hokkaido.

The park consists of a free area with a shop, cafe and restaurant and a paid area with various chocolate related exhibits and, most interestingly, a few large windows through which you can observe the cookie production process in the factory.

Besides being a heaven for sweet lovers, there is a very beautiful flower garden that changes with the seasons. The combination of the colorful flowers and red brick buildings make for beautiful scenery.



Shiroy Koibito Park

From here, back to Sapporo and our hotel, arrival by 4:45pm. The remainder of the afternoon and evening is free.

Accommodations: Century Royal Hotel Sapporo



free

Day 5 – May 3rd, 2021 Monday – Sapporo- (B)

After breakfast, enjoy a complete free day.

If you would like to return to Nijo Fish Market or Tanukikoji Shopping Street, your Panda Travel escort will set a time to meet and walk you over via underground.

Close-by to Tanukikoji is Susukino, Sapporo’s entertainment district. It is also home to Sapporo Ramen Yokocho. This famous alley is not just known for its concentration delicious ramen, but also for being the birthplace of miso ramen!

It all began in 1951, with eight ramen restaurants and now there are a total of 15 serving ramen along this alley. Sapporo ramen has become one of the most famous Japanese dishes in the world now. With only 6 to 8 seats per restaurant, it is quite an experience and an option for lunch.

Another consideration is a visit to the Sapporo TV Tower, not far from our hotel. There is no better introduction to Sapporo like the views from the top of the tower, modeled after the Eiffel Tower. On a clear day, you can see out as far as Ishikari Plain and the Sea of Japan.

Accommodations: Century Royal Hotel Sapporo



free

Day 6 – May 4th, 2021 Tuesday – Sapporo-Hakodate (B/D)

After breakfast, please meet your guide in the lobby by 11:00am. Our luggage will be sent separately and meet up with us on arrival at our hotel.

We will walk over to the JR Sapporo Station for the Limited Express Hokuto 12 that departs at 12:09pm and arrives in Hakodate Station at 4:05pm. On arrival we will be met by bus and drive for the transfer to our hotel.

Accommodations for our 2-night stay is at La Vista Hakodate Bay, ideally located right on the waterfront in the Kanemori Red Brick Warehouse District. This onsen hotel features six types of hot spring baths on the top floor, offering spectacular night views of Hakodate.

Once checked in, please meet at the designated time for a walk over to the Kanemori Red Brick Warehouse. It is less than 10-minutes from the hotel.

Welcome to Hakodate, one of Hokkaido’s most popular cities for sightseeing. Hakodate was developed as an international trading port, much like Yokohama and Nagasaki and as a result, the town prospered. You can easily see the influence of Western culture expressed in some of its buildings.

Originally built in 1887 as a sales warehouse, the Kanemori Red Brick Warehouses changed from being a storage facility to commercial use. This came about due to changes in ocean shipping during the late Showa Period and resulted in a shrinking warehouse industry.

Although the original buildings were destroyed by fire, they were rebuilt and now house restaurants, shops, art museums and meeting spaces. After dinner at one of the restaurants, the remainder of the evening is free.



Accommodations: La Vista Hakodate Bay  **free**

Day 7 – May 5th, 2021 Wednesday – Hakodate (B)

After breakfast, please meet your guide in the lobby by 8:30am as we are off to discover Hakodate.

The morning begins with a visit at Goryokaku Park & Tower, a five-cornered fort, Japan's first Western-style fort. The fort was completed in 1864 after 7 years of construction work. Hijikata Toshizo and Enomoto Takeaki fought against the new Meiji government here and it was the last stage of the Boshin War. It has the distinction of being only one of 2 European-style forts built in Japan. The architectural style is an eclectic mix of Japanese and European.

The star-shaped fort has been developed into a park and is well-known for its 1,660 beautiful cherry trees. From the observation platform of the 107-meter high Goryokaku Tower in the park, you can get a bird's-eye view of the Goryokaku and the surrounding area.

At this time of the year we can enjoy **cherry blossom viewing**. The cherry blossoms at Goryokaku consist of about 1600 Yoshino cherry trees. While darker pink blossoms are more prevalent in Hokkaido, the Somei Yoshino will be found here. Its flower is very pale, almost a whitish pink.

Next, a visit to Hakodate Winery in the near-by town of Nanae. Enjoy a free tasting and time at their company store. Some of the products are only available at this store. Do not miss the locally popular wine soft-serve ice-cream (red & white wine).

From here, a visit to the Hakodate Morning Market, close-by to the train station. This lively market is open daily from 5am-2pm and is a must do experience when visiting here. With over 150 stores spread across several building and alleyways, there is fresh seafood everywhere you look, squid, crabs, other shellfish as well as fruits and vegetables.

You can also try ikaman (meat bun). The ones found here has a black, squid ink colored outer skin and inside the filling is of seasoned squid and vegetables. It is said to be delicious.

Besides hairy and snow crabs, squid remains the primary catch here and many of the restaurants offer fresh squid sashimi. A unique experience is to catch your own from the tank and have then clean and prepare it for you so that it is enjoyed at its peak of freshness.

Enjoy free time here to walk around, shop and have lunch on your own.

From here, back to our hotel so that you have additional free time to explore the area on your own and maybe catch up on some omiyage shopping. Do keep some energy stored away as we have a fun evening planned.

Please meet your guide back in the lobby at 5:15pm as we are off on a night tour of Hakodate and views of the city from Mt. Hakodate viewing area. Arrival back at our hotel will be approximately 7:30pm.

Dinner is on your own tonight. You may want to have an early dinner prior the night tour, or on the return.



Accommodations: La Vista Hakodate Bay free

Day 8 – May 6th, 2021 Thursday – Hakodate-Noboribetsu (B/D)

After breakfast, please meet your guide in the lobby by 8:30am as we make our way to Noboribetsu.

The morning begins with a visit to the popular Kombukan Kelp Shop and Museum. In Japan, konbu is only gathered in Hokkaido and Touhoku. Long ago, konbu was gathered in Hokkaido and shipped all over the country using a water route called "Konbu Road".

A total of 120,000 tons is produced every year within the country. 95% of that amount is gathered along the coastal lines of Hokkaido. In Japan, there are 45 different species of konbu.

This facility has a planetarium-like movie theater, museum and a shop that sells a variety of kelp products. Kombu or kelp seaweed is a healthy and popular cooking ingredient in Japan. Here you will find almost all kelp products from kelp powder to candies, snacks, soup, and condiments. Do not forget to try the kelp tea while here.

We are now off to Lake Toya. The drive time is approximately 2-hours and a rest stop will be made along the way.

Lake Toya is large caldera, 43 kilometers in diameter, was formed more than 100,000 years ago when a volcanic eruption diverted a stream, creating this massive pool. This lake is ice-free year-round due to geothermal heating, and trout and smelt fishing is plentiful.

The surrounding scenery is spectacular, especially in that it should be the peak **for cherry blossom and plum viewing**. We will make short stop here for viewing and photo opportunity.

Next, a stop at Michino-eki Mitara Muroran, a roadside area with shops and a variety of dining options. Enjoy free time to browse, eat, and shop.

As we get closer to Noboribetsu, we will be driving along the **Noboribetsu Cherry Blossom Tunnel**, a famous cherry blossom that usually peaks in early to mid-May. This road that leads from the Noboribetsu Higashi Interchange of the Hokkaido Expressway into the center of town gets covered in a veil of cherry blossoms, creating a "flower tunnel". Have your cameras out and ready.

Now, off to our onsen hotel, Iwainoyado Noboribetsu Grand Hotel, located in the heart of this famous onsen resort town. Our arrival will be by 4:00pm, followed by dinner at 6:00pm.

Before and after dinner, do enjoy visiting the indoor/outdoor public hot-spring baths. You can also refresh in the sauna rooms and for a fee, enjoy a relaxing massage.



Accommodations: Iwainoyado Noboribetsu Grand Hotel free- Japanese style rooms

Day 9 – May 7th, 2021 Friday – Noboribetsu-Chitose (B)

After breakfast, please meet in the lobby by 9:30am. It may be our last day on tour, but still much to see before our flight home later this evening.

The morning begins with a visit to Noboribetsu Jigokudani, or "Hell Valley", a spectacular valley just above the town of Noboribetsu Onsen. It is a main source of Noboribetsu's hot spring waters. Given the name Jigokudani because of the steam from the hot spring that rise along the vertical cliffs. The surrounding natural environment is also very unusual and is covered in snow for almost one-third of the year.

Even in spring, when the migratory birds return, snow remains, and one needs the same warm clothing as in the middle of winter. In June, the mountain hydrangea bloom all around, but it is still cool even now of year, and it is only in July that the song of the cicadas finally echoes around the valley, heralding the advent of summer. The short summer ends in mid-August.

From here, off to Upopoy National Ainu Museum and Park, recently opened in July 2020. This museum located on the shores of Lake Poroto serves as a national center for the revival of the Ainu culture. "Upopoy" is an Ainu word meaning "singing together in a large group".

The Ainu are an indigenous people in the northern region of the Japanese archipelago, particularly Hokkaido. The Ainu culture is distinctive, with a language that is unrelated to Japanese, a spirituality that holds that spirits dwell in every part of the natural world, traditional dances that are performed at family events and festivals, and crafts such as wood carving and embroidery that incorporate unique patterns.

Sit back and enjoy an Ainu dance show during our visit.

Now, off to Aeon Mall Tomakomai for shopping and lunch on your own.

From here, off to the Chitose Airport to begin the check-in process for our flight home.

Hawaiian Airlines #444 Departs Chitose 7:45 pm – Arrive Honolulu 8:05 am