HOKKAIDO / SAPPORO · NISEKO · NOBORIBETSU · FURANO · 13 DAYS · BY TRAIN & BUS

Powder, ice & hot water: a Hokkaido winter by rail

Updated October 2026 · Best time: Jan–Feb

Trip planner · tabi-notes.com/hokkaido-winter-ski-onsen

Winter is the best reason to visit Hokkaido: light, dry powder snow, snow festivals, and steaming outdoor baths while it's −10 °C around you. You don't need a car for any of it. Trains, ski buses and airport shuttles connect every stop on this route, so you never drive on icy roads.

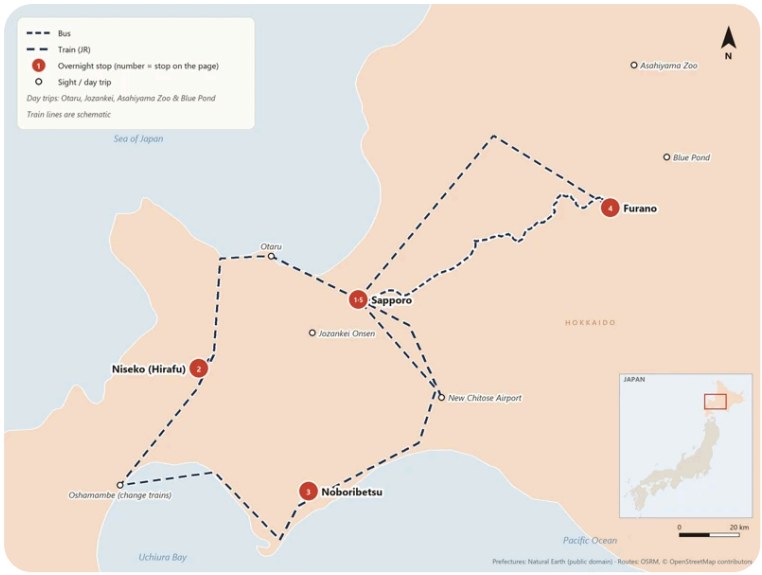
The trip mixes city, mountains and onsen: Sapporo for the festivals and food, **four nights in Niseko** for skiing and snowboarding, **Noboribetsu** for two nights of hot springs, and **Furano** for quieter slopes, Asahiyama Zoo's penguin walk and the light-up at Biei's Blue Pond.

13 days	**0 km** to drive	**5** bases	**Jan–Feb** best snow
from ~¥245k per person*			

*Accommodation, ski passes and trains & buses for two, sharing a room. Flights and ski rental not included.

The route at a glance

1. **Sapporo** — Nights 1–3
2. **Niseko** — Nights 4–7
3. **Noboribetsu** — Nights 8–9
4. **Furano** — Nights 10–11
5. **Sapporo** — Night 12



The route by train and bus: Sapporo → Niseko → Noboribetsu → Furano → Sapporo. Train lines are schematic.

Prices are per room for two per night. Ryokan prices include dinner and breakfast. ⭐ = famous / worth it · ⭐⭐ = splurge.

Stop by stop

01 Sapporo 札幌

Nights 1–3 · Snow Festival, Otaru & Jozankei

PLAN

- Day 1: New Chitose Airport → Sapporo by JR Rapid Airport (~37 min, ~¥1,150)
- Sapporo Snow Festival in early February: giant snow and ice sculptures in Odori Park and Susukino, snow slides for kids and adults at the Tsudome site
- Day trip to Otaru (~40 min by JR): the canal and, in February, the Snow Light Path with thousands of candles and lanterns
- Half-day: Jozankei Onsen in the mountains (~1 h by bus) for your first outdoor bath in the snow
- Eat: miso ramen at Ramen Yokocho, soup curry, crab and jingisukan

WHERE TO STAY

⭐ **JR Tower Hotel Nikko Sapporo** above the station, easy with ski bags	¥30–50k
Dormy Inn Premium Sapporo onsen bath & late-night ramen	¥20–35k
Cross Hotel Sapporo design hotel near the station	¥20–35k

> **Good to know** Snow Festival week (usually the first half of February) is Sapporo's busiest time. Book as soon as the dates are out, or come in late January and skip the crowds.

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02 Niseko ニセコ

Nights 4–7 · Powder snow under Mount Yotei

PLAN

- Day 4: ski bus from Sapporo or New Chitose Airport straight to Hirafu (~2.5–3 h), or JR via Otaru to Kutchan (~2 h) and a 20-minute bus
- Days 5–7: ski or snowboard Niseko United, four linked resorts (Grand Hirafu, Hanazono, Niseko Village, Annupuri) on one All-Mountain Pass; night skiing under floodlights
- Off-piste only through the official gates and ideally with a guide (the 'Niseko Rules')
- Après-ski: Hirafu village's restaurants and bars, then the onsen at your hotel or in Niseko Village

WHERE TO STAY

☆ **Hirafu lodges & apartments** self-catering, walk to the lifts	¥25–50k
Hilton Niseko Village ski-in / ski-out with outdoor onsen	¥60–120k
☆☆ **Park Hyatt Niseko Hanazono** the splurge, right at the Hanazono lifts	¥150k+

Good to know Niseko is in huge demand from Christmas to February: book accommodation, ski rental and lessons 6–9 months ahead. Lift passes are cheaper online.

03 Noboribetsu 登別

Nights 8–9 · Onsen days in a snowy Hell Valley

PLAN

- Day 8: JR local train Kutchan → Oshamambe (~1.5 h, only a few trains a day), then Limited Express Hokuto to Noboribetsu (~1 h) and a 15-minute bus up to the onsen town
- Alternative: back via Otaru and Sapporo, then Limited Express Suzuran or Hokuto (about 3.5–4 h in total, more trains)
- Day 9: a rest day for tired legs: Jigokudani's steaming crater under snow, the forest walk to Oyunuma, and as many baths as you like

WHERE TO STAY

☆ **Dai-ichi Takimotokan** huge bathhouse with many spring types, overlooking Hell Valley	¥35–55k
Noboribetsu Grand Hotel classic onsen hotel in the town centre	¥30–45k
☆☆ **Takinoya** refined ryokan with private baths	¥80k+

Good to know Send ski bags ahead with takkyubin luggage forwarding from Niseko to Furano, so you travel light on the train days. The Oyunumagawa footbath trail can be snowed in.

04 Furano 富良野

Nights 10–11 · Quieter powder, penguins & the Blue Pond light-up

PLAN

- Day 10: Limited Express to Sapporo (~1 h 10), on to Takikawa and the Nemuro Line to Furano (about 3.5–4 h in total)
- Day 11: ski Furano's long runs with Daisetsuzan views, usually much quieter than Niseko
- Or a day trip to Asahikawa (~1 h 15 by train): Asahiyama Zoo's penguin walk (usually from mid-December, once there's snow), then the bus to Biei's Blue Pond, lit up after dark in winter

WHERE TO STAY

New Furano Prince Hotel ski-in resort hotel with onsen	¥30–50k
Furano Natulux Hotel next to Furano Station	¥18–30k
☆ **Kitanomine pensions** small lodges near the Kitanomine lifts	¥20–35k

05 Sapporo 札幌

Night 12 · Last night in the city

PLAN

- Day 12: highway bus Furano → Sapporo (~2.5 h)
- A last crab feast or jingisukan, and a beer at the Sapporo Beer Garden
- Day 13: JR to New Chitose Airport (~37 min). The airport has its own ramen street, an onsen and a chocolate factory, so go early

WHERE TO STAY

☆ **JR Tower Hotel Nikko Sapporo** above the station	¥30–50k
Dormy Inn Premium Sapporo onsen bath & late-night ramen	¥20–35k

Budget

Estimates for October at ¥150 ≈ US$1 · ¥165 ≈ €1. Ranges, not promises.

Per person (sharing a room)	Value	Middle
Accommodation, 12 nights	≈ ¥170k	≈ ¥240k
Ski passes (5 days: 3 in Niseko, 2 in Furano)	≈ ¥50k	≈ ¥55k
Trains & buses	≈ ¥25k	≈ ¥25k
Total per person	**≈ ¥245k**	**≈ ¥320k**

MY RECOMMENDATION

Take the middle version, **about ¥300k per person**. Best splurge: one night at the Park Hyatt Niseko Hanazono or Takinoya in Noboribetsu.

NOT INCLUDED

- Flights
- Ski or snowboard rental: about ¥6–10k per day
- Lessons and backcountry guides
- Food: Niseko restaurants are pricey in peak season
- Christmas, New Year and Snow Festival week: up to +50% on hotels

Booking & practical tips

CLOTHING

−5 to −15 °C in the mountains, around −5 °C in Sapporo. Dress in layers, with waterproof boots and grip-on cleats for icy pavements.

TRAINS IN SNOW

Heavy snow can delay or cancel trains, so build in a buffer, especially before your flight home.

RAIL PASS

Compare the Hokkaido Rail Pass with point-to-point tickets. Ski buses are not covered by it.

LUGGAGE

Takkyubin forwards ski bags and suitcases between hotels, usually by the next day.

TATTOOS

Some onsen still ban tattoos. Private baths solve it, and many Niseko hotels are relaxed about it.

BOOKING

From Christmas to February, book Niseko 6–9 months ahead, and Snow Festival hotels as soon as the dates are announced.

Frequently asked questions

Do I need to be a skier to enjoy this trip?

No. Snowshoeing, the Snow Festival, onsen days, Otaru's canals, Asahiyama Zoo's penguin walk and the light-up at the Blue Pond fill the days without skis.

When is the Sapporo Snow Festival?

In early February, for about a week. Hotels in Sapporo fill months ahead, so book as soon as the dates are announced.

Is it safe to travel by train in heavy snow?

Mostly. JR Hokkaido runs reliably, but blizzards can cancel trains for a few hours. Keep afternoons flexible on travel days and check JR Hokkaido's English updates.

How cold does it get?

Sapporo is around −5 °C in January; Furano and Niseko's mountains can fall below −15 °C. Layers, a warm jacket, gloves and anti-slip shoe grips are essential.

Can I bathe in onsen with tattoos?

Many big onsen hotels don't allow them. Book rooms or private baths you can rent, which Noboribetsu and Niseko offer at many hotels.