Hokkaido is the second-largest of Japan’s islands, long regarded as a remote wilderness by other residents of the Japanese archipelago. Known in feudal times as Ezo, Hokkaido was originally inhabited only by the indigenous Ainu people. Today it attracts nature lovers and is a pristine paradise of mountain ranges, lush forests and indescribably beautiful crater lakes produced by volcanic activity.

Join Oku Japan’s small-group guided tour on a wonderful journey from Kushiro on Hokkaido’s eastern Pacific coast, through to the Shiretoko Peninsula stretching out into the Sea of Okhotsk. See untouched nature, visit UNESCO wetland nature reserves, experience spectacular landscapes formed by volcanoes, and enjoy flora and fauna special to Hokkaido. You have the chance to spot abundant wildlife as we walk the trails – watch out for foxes, deer and numerous species of birds. After each day’s walk we relax in Onsen hot springs, a delightful by-product of the region’s geothermal activity. Another highlight of the tour is Hokkaido’s wonderful regional cuisine, some of the freshest in Japan with local specialties found at every stage of our journey. Hokkaido covers too large an area to explore on just one visit, but Oku Japan’s itinerary brings you to the very best locations on the island.

Our adventure begins in the fishing port of Kushiro, famous for some of the best seafood in Japan and home to a unique fishing culture which invented the Robatayaki style of cooking on an open grill. From Kushiro we visit Hokkaido’s largest marshland area, and continue to Lake Akan, the only place where the famous spherical Marimo algae can be spotted. At Ainu Kotan village, home to the largest remaining Ainu community in Hokkaido, we view a traditional dance performance. Our journey also brings us to Lake Mashu, one of the clearest lakes in the world and finally onwards to the Onsen town of Utoro on the Sea of Okhotsk. If the weather is kind, we take a boat ride from the Shiretoko Peninsula with the chance to glimpse waterfalls visible only be seen from the sea and Hokkaido brown bears searching for fish with their cubs. Shiretoko is the very end of Japan – a remote area of truly untouched nature.

**DATES & PRICES**
Please see website

**TOUR LENGTH**
9 days

**TYPE AND LEVEL OF TRIP**
Active - Daily walking and hiking between 1.5 and 5 hours, with soothing Onsen Hot Springs after each day’s walk.

**WHAT’S INCLUDED**
Transport, accommodation, English-speaking tour guide, entrance fees, daily luggage transfer, daily breakfast & 8 evening meals included.
Not included are international flights, drinks with meals, lunches and airport transfers.
See incredible views of varied landscapes each day- from wetlands, to forests, to mountains - taste Hokkaido’s famed seafood and local produce- considered some of the best in Japan - enjoy natural wonders and viewing Hokkaido brown bears from the sea on a wildlife-spotting boat ride - visit crystal clear crater lakes unique to the region - experience soothing Onsen Hot Spring baths after incredible hiking - learn about the unique culture of Hokkaido’s indigenous people

HIGHLIGHTS

1. Mt. Meakan
2. Sulfer vents at Mt. Iou
3. The rare red-crowned crane
4. Kushiro Marshland
5. Robatayaki cuisine
**ITINERARY**

**DAY 1 ➤ Meet in Kushiro**
Meet at the tour hotel in the centre of Kushiro. Enjoy a Welcome Dinner at a local Robatayaki restaurant. Robatayaki is a style of cooking on an open hearth called an Irori and said to originate in Kushiro. Fishermen of northern Japan have cooked in this way for more than a century and the technique has now spread throughout the country. Our dinner is grilled seafood of the highest quality.

*Accommodation*: Hotel

**DAY 2 ➤ Walk Kushiro Marshland and travel to Akan Onsen**
Travel this morning by private vehicle to Kushiro marshland, Japan’s largest wetland area with a diverse ecosystem and Japan’s first Ramsar Site. The area is home to the red-crowned crane, a national treasure and loved by birdwatchers, as well as abundant other wildlife. Walk through the forest to the observatory overlooking the vast marshland and then continue on trails through the marsh exploring the local flora and fauna. After the walk we head onwards in our vehicle to Lake Akan, a crater lake in the Lake Akan National Park. The area is home to the largest community of indigenous Ainu people Hokkaido. We stay here for two nights in a lovely Onsen hot spring hotel in a lakeside setting.

*Walking distance*: 6.8km / 4.2 miles  
*Elevation gain*: negligible ascent and descent  
*Time required*: 3 hours  
*Accommodation*: Japanese-style Hot-spring Hotel

**DAY 3 ➤ Hike Meakandake**
Today we climb Mount Meakandake, an active volcano whose peak reaches 1,499m and which has formed the landscape around Lake Akan. We hike through wonderful scenery. Ainu legend says that Mount Meakandake and Mount Oakandake were a married couple, but Oakandake was unfaithful to his wife. The volcanic activity which continues to this day symbolises the strife between them.

Gaze across the landscapes of Mount Oakandake and Lake Onneto, watching out for alpine flowers unique to Hokkaido.

*Walking distance*: 6.6km / 4.1 miles

**DAY 4 ➤ Visit Ainu Kotan Village in the morning and afternoon walk to Mt. Iou**
inhabitants, the Ainu. We watch a traditional dance performance, officially recognised as an important feature of Japan’s cultural heritage.

Afterwards we travel by our private vehicle to Kawayu Onsen and enjoy a lovely walk to Mount Iou, known as Atosa Nupuri or ‘Naked Mountain’ in the Ainu language. Today, Mount Iou is a very active volcano and we will watch as sulphur rises from the more than 1,500 fumaroles covering its slopes.

Our lodging tonight is a charming Ryokan inn in Kawayu Onsen. The town is famous for having some of the highest-quality thermal waters in the whole of Hokkaido. Kawayu Onsen’s name in the Ainu language is ‘Seseki-petsu’, meaning ‘hot river flowing through the village’.

*Walking distance*: 5.2km / 3.2 miles  
*Elevation gain*: negligible ascent and descent
Time required: 2.5 hours  
Accommodation: Onsen Ryokan (Hot-spring Travellers Inn)

DAY 5 > Walk along Lake Mashu and traverse the Mashu Caldera

After a short journey by private vehicle we reach Lake Mashu. Known as one of the clearest lakes in the world and one of the most beautiful in the whole of Japan, Lake Mashu is often shrouded in mist during the summer months, giving it an air of mystery.

After climbing on foot to the peak of Nishibetsudake, we descend the other side of the mountain, enjoying amazing views of the vast grass farmland unique to Hokkaido. After the hike, we continue by private vehicle to Abashiri, a modern town which relies on its fishing industry. Our accommodation tonight is a lovely Onsen Ryokan.

Walking distance: 11.4km / 7.1 miles  
Elevation gain: 553m/1814 feet ascent; 763m/2503 feet descent  
Time required: 5 hours  
Accommodation: Onsen Ryokan (Hot-spring Travellers Inn)

DAY 6 > Wakka Nature Centre

Today we enjoy optional cycling or walking through one of the largest wildflower nature reserves in Japan beside Lake Saroma, Japan’s third-largest lake with a length of 20 kilometres. In the Wakka Nature Centre we can spot hundreds of different types of flowering plants.

Later, we visit the Museum of Northern People and learn more about the indigenous peoples inhabiting the north. The Ainu have a history stretching back over 2,000 years to the time of their arrival in Hokkaido from Siberia; the area also has mysterious traces of an even earlier culture called the Moyoro.

We make our way to Utoro Onsen, a pleasant hot-spring town and gateway to the vast Shiretoko Wilderness. This is a perfect base for our next three nights in a local hotel enjoying the Onsen baths and regional delicacies.

Optional
Cycling/Walking distance: up to 20km / 12.5 miles  
Elevation gain: negligible ascent and descent  
Time required: 2 hours

Accommodation: Hot-spring Hotel

DAY 7 > Sea of Okhotsk boat ride and Shiretoko Five Lakes trails

If the weather is kind today, we enjoy a boat ride on the Sea of Okhotsk. From the sea there are stunning views of the Shiretoko Peninsula’s dramatic coastline and perhaps even glimpses of Hokkaido brown bears and their cubs, as well as deer, foxes, and marine life such as dolphins and whales. If the weather is not calm enough for the boat ride, we’ll stay on land and hike a lovely waterfall path instead.

In the afternoon we travel by local bus to the famous Shiretoko Five Lakes, spending time on the picturesque nature trails there.

Walking distance: 3.4km / 2.1 miles  
Elevation gain: negligible ascent and descent  
Time required: 1.5 hours  
Accommodation: Hot-spring Hotel

DAY 8 > Lake Rausu

Today begins with a local bus journey to the start of today’s walk past picturesque lakes and onwards to Lake Rausu, recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage site and the largest lake on the Shiretoko Peninsula. Here there are stunning views of Mount Rausu, highest peak of the peninsula. This is a wonderfully remote area whose beauty is not widely known. We provide boots for the uniquely enjoyable mud trail before returning to our lodgings in Utoro Onsen.

Walking distance: 6.3km  
Elevation gain: 187m/613 feet ascent; 187m/613 feet descent  
Time required: 3 hours  
Accommodation: Hot-spring Hotel

DAY 8 > Tour ends

After breakfast, our guide will arrange transfer to Membanbetsu airport for your return flight to Tokyo or Osaka airport.