

NOBLE CALEDONIA

AUTUMN IN HOKKAIDO

A 14 day escorted tour of Japan's
remote island wilderness & beyond

9th to 22nd October 2020

Hirosaki Castle



Hokkaido, Japan's northernmost and least developed island is often considered by the Japanese to be the country's last frontier and is a world away from the traditional view of Japan. Only colonised by Japan in the past 150 years, we won't find a land of ancient temples and shrines or developed cities with skyscrapers but instead large swathes of wild, open spaces, primeval forests, crystal clear lakes, beautiful alpine flowers, active volcanoes and bubbling hot springs. During our escorted tour of this remarkable island and Northern Japan, we will explore nature trails, watch for wildlife in the national parks, learn more of the indigenous Ainu people and hopefully see landscapes burst into colour with the arrival of the autumn leaves that should coincide with our visit.

We begin our exploration with the bright neon lights of Tokyo where the cityscape of skyscrapers is interspersed with ancient temples and scenic gardens before heading to the enchanting island of Hokkaido. Here, more than two million acres are dedicated to national parkland and we will visit some of the most remarkable: the Kushiro Marshlands, home of Hokkaido's resident red-crowned cranes and Japan's iconic bird; the lakes of central Hokkaido including the mysterious and beautiful Lake Mashu and Shiretoko National Park, home to brown bears, Yezo shika deer and white-tailed eagles. Before returning to Tokyo our last few days are spent on the north coast of Honshu island visiting the Feudal town of Hirosaki and the spectacular Towada Hachimantai National Park. We hope you can join us for this unique tour of Japan's lesser-known treasures at this most delightful time of year.





Sensoji Temple, Tokyo



Lake, Shiretoko



Tokyo



Yezo Shika Deer

THE ITINERARY

Day 1 London to Tokyo, Japan. Fly by scheduled flight.

Day 2 Tokyo. Arrive this morning and transfer to the Keio Plaza Hotel for our overnight stay. The remainder of the day is at leisure to acclimatise before we meet our fellow travellers this evening for a welcome dinner in the hotel. (D)

Day 3 Tokyo to Kushiro. After breakfast in the hotel we will make our way to the Meiji Shrine which is dedicated to the deified spirit of Emperor Meiji and a popular place for traditional Japanese weddings. Surrounded by over 100,000 trees, Meiji is an oasis of serenity and spirituality in a city that never sleeps. We continue to Asakusa, Tokyo's "old town" where we visit Sensoji, Tokyo's oldest temple and spend time in Nakamise, a shopping street that has been providing temple visitors with a variety of traditional, local snacks and tourist souvenirs for centuries. After some free time for lunch, we transfer to the airport for our scheduled flight to Kushiro. On arrival transfer to the ANA Crowne Plaza Hotel for check in before meeting for dinner this evening. (B, D)

Day 4 Kushiro. Today we will visit Kushiro Marshlands, Japan's largest wetland and marsh habitat and home to the only known population of Japan's sacred red-crowned cranes. The cranes were thought to have been made extinct due to overhunting and

habitat destruction. However, in 1926 a group of 20 birds were discovered in this area which with conservation efforts now number more than 1000. We will visit the observatory with displays of the flora and fauna of the region and views over the marshlands before taking a walk along the Onnenai Trails. We end at the Tancho Red Crane Reserve where we will learn about the efforts made to preserve their numbers. Return to Kushiro for lunch and an afternoon and evening at leisure. There will be the opportunity to stop at Washo Market, the city's major market selling seafood, dried goods and local fruits and vegetables. Here, our local guides will show us how to eat like a local by creating our own "rice-bowls" with the market's sushi and sashimi. (B)

Day 5 Kushiro to Lake Akan. Check out of the hotel after breakfast and head out towards the many lakes of Central Hokkaido. We will make stops at the Takimibashi Bridge and Lake Akan Lookout, both renowned for their views of the autumn leaves. After free time for lunch we will make our way to Lake Onneto, part of Akan National Park. The lake, with a circumference of 2.5 kilometres, was created when the river was dammed up due to the volcanic eruption of Mount Meakan-dake. Due to high acidity levels, fish cannot live in the lake but ezo salamander and crawfish can. Since the surface of Lake Onneto beautifully changes

colour from light blue to green and dark blue, depending on the time of day or the season, the lake is also called Goshikinuma and, along with Okotanpe Lake and Shinonome Lake, is considered one of the three major mystery lakes in Hokkaido. Those feeling active may wish to take a hike on the walking trail around the lake to enjoy the changing colours. Later we transfer to Lake Akan Tsuruga Wings ryokan on the banks of Lake Akan and meet for dinner tonight. (B, D)

Day 6 Lake Akan. This morning we will board one of the local boats for a cruise on Lake Akan, providing the perfect vantage point to the forests lining the banks with views up to the surrounding volcanos of Me-Akan and O-Akan. The lake is also famous for marimo, an aggregation of algae which forms into balls which is unique to this lake. During our cruise we will pass by Takiguchi as well as visit the observation centre on Churui Island. Enjoy free time for lunch before we walk to Akanko Ainu Kotan, where we will be able to see the traditional crafts, dance and learn about the culture of the indigenous Ainu people of Hokkaido. (B, D)

Day 7 Lake Kussharo, Lake Mashu & Shiretoko. Today we continue our exploration of the lakes of Hokkaido arriving this morning at Lake Kussharo, which with a circumference of 57 kilometres is

one of the largest caldera lakes in Japan. Maybe enjoy a walk through the forested banks famous for their autumn colours or spend time on the beach where you can create your own "hot springs" in the sand. After lunch in a local restaurant we will continue to Lake Mashu, regarded as the most scenic lake of Hokkaido. Enveloped in a fog most of the time, it is referred to as Kiri no Mashu-ko which means Foggy Lake Mashu. Once the fog has cleared, the extraordinarily beautiful Lake Mashu comes into view. It is 211 metres deep and boasts some of the clearest water in the world with a visibility of 41.6 metres and is surrounded by cliffs over 300 metres high. After viewing the lake we will continue our journey to the north coast of Hokkaido and check in to the Kiki Shiretoko Natural Resort near the Shiretoko Peninsula. There will be some free time to relax before we meet for dinner in the resort this evening. (B, L, D)

Day 8 Shiretoko. After breakfast in the hotel we will start our exploration of the Shiretoko National Park, located on the Shiretoko Peninsula and a UNESCO World Heritage Site due to the diversity of its ecosystems. Shiretoko translates from the Ainu for "end of the earth" and this remote and untouched park combines rivers, forests, mountains and waterfalls and is home to an array of wildlife including brown bears, Yezo shika deer and red fox.



Lake Akan , Akan National Park



Lillies, Sapporo



Oirase Stream



Lake Mashu

This morning, if weather permits, we will take the Shiretoko Pass offering stunning views of the autumn leaves on Mount Rausu. Continue to the Shiretoko Nature Centre where we can learn about the wildlife of the park as well as the impact of the drift ice which arrives here in the winter months. Afterwards we will head to the Shiretoko Five Lakes which were formed by eruptions from Mount Ito and fed by underground springs. Here there will be a choice of either a long or short walk through the wilderness on the lookout for wildlife, colours and views of the lakes. (B, L, D)

Day 9 Abashiri & Sapporo.

Continuing our adventure along the northern coast of Hokkaido, we arrive at Abashiri where we visit the excellent Hokkaido Museum of Northern Peoples which provides insight into the cultures and traditional everyday lives of the peoples inhabiting the northern, subarctic regions of the globe such as the Ainu, First Nations people, Inuit and Sami. Continue to Memanbetsu airport where we will take a scheduled flight to Sapporo. On arrival we transfer to the JR Tower Hotel Nikko Sapporo and have some free time to settle in before dinner tonight. (B, D)

Day 10 Sapporo. We have the day to spend in Sapporo, Hokkaido's capital and largest city. This morning we will leave the city and visit Takino Suzaran, a huge park on

the outskirts of the city and a must-visit location in autumn. We will take walks along the trails through the woodlands, one of which will take you to the lovely Ashiribetsu Waterfall. Return to Sapporo and visit one of the city's most famous venues, the beer museum. Hokkaido is the birthplace of beer in Japan and it has been brewed in Sapporo since 1877. A tour of the museum will introduce the history of the industry and includes a tasting. After lunch we return to the hotel for an afternoon at leisure. You may wish to simply enjoy the hotel and its facilities or to make an independent visit to see the colours at the Hokkaido University Botanical Gardens or Nakajima Koen. (B, L)

Day 11 Hirosaki & Aomori. After breakfast we transfer to the airport for our flight to Aomori on the north coast of Honshu island. From here we visit the former Feudal town of Hirosaki which was the political capital of the region in the Edo Period. A tour of the city will include the three story castle, which was the focal point of the old city and the base of the powerful Tsugaru Clan. Surrounding the castle is what was the samurai and merchant district where we can visit the preserved houses and the Fujita Kinen Teien, a Japanese landscape garden built in 1919. After our visit we transfer to the Hotel JAL City Aomori and enjoy some free time before meeting for dinner this evening. (B, D)

Day 12 Oirase Gorge. Today we will head inland to the spectacular Towada Hachimantai National Park which involves a scenic drive through the Kayano plateau, Hakkoda mountains to the scenic Oirase Valley and Lake Towada, a magnificent ancient caldera lake surrounded by deciduous forests. The scenery is stunning, especially as the hillsides change to red and orange. We will wander the trails at the Tsuta Nana-numa Ponds, a collection of seven lakes which are surrounded by a forest of Japanese Beech trees before continuing to Oirase Gorge. The gorge runs for 14 kilometres from Lake Towada to Yakeyama and we will walk alongside the crystal clear Oirase Stream seeing the beautiful scenery, autumn foliage and waterfalls. Return to Aomori this

afternoon and enjoy an evening at leisure. (B, L)

Day 13 Aomori to Tokyo. We have a free morning in Aomori and you may wish to learn about the local Nebuta Festival at the nearby museum or visit the A-factory or the local market for souvenirs. In the late morning we will transfer to the station and board our Shinkansen service to Tokyo. A lunch box will be provided on the train. On arrival in Tokyo we will transfer to the Keio Plaza Hotel and have some free time before meeting for dinner this evening. (B, L, D)

Day 14 Tokyo to London. Check out this morning and transfer to the airport for our scheduled flight to London. Arrive this afternoon. (B)

PRICES PER PERSON

Based on double occupancy

| Room | Brochure Price |
|--------|----------------|
| Twin | £6995 |
| Single | £8795 |

PRICE INCLUDES: Economy class scheduled air travel • 12 nights hotel accommodation • Breakfast, lunch & dinner as indicated (B - Breakfast, L - Lunch, D - Dinner) • Excursions • English speaking local guide • Noble Caledonia Tour Manager • Gratuities • Transfers.

Not Included: Travel insurance, visa.

Group Size: We are limiting the group size to a maximum of 24 participants.

Please note: The autumn colours are a natural phenomena and sightings are not guaranteed. We have timed our journey to meet the traditional times for the changing colours in Hokkaido and Aomori but are too early to see the colours in Tokyo.

YOUR ACCOMMODATION



KEIO PLAZA HOTEL, TOKYO

Two nights (non-consecutive)

Located just a five minute walk from Shinjuku Station in the heart of Tokyo's shopping and entertainment district, the Keio Plaza is ideally situated to explore this bustling metropolis. Each room offers wonderful views of the city and includes Wi-Fi, L'Occitane toiletries and complimentary bottles of water. Facilities include an outdoor pool and fitness room whilst meals can be enjoyed in one of the twelve on-site restaurants. Choose to enjoy Japanese meals of tempura, sushi and teppan-yaki or alternatively try Chinese, Korean, French or Italian cuisine. Enjoy afternoon tea in the Art Lounge and maybe end the day with a drink at the Aurora Sky Lounge on the 45th floor with panoramic views of the city.



ANA CROWNE PLAZA HOTEL, KUSHIRO

Two nights

Adjacent to the Kushiro's Fisherman's Wharf, the ANA Crowne Plaza Kushiro is a favourite amongst many of the city's visitors and features 180 spacious guest rooms specially designed for comfort. Each room features air-conditioning, complimentary Wi-Fi, LCD television and spectacular views of the harbour and its natural surroundings. Enjoy western or Japanese breakfast at Restaurant del Nord whilst dinner can be taken at Teppanyaki Fuji or Unkai restaurants. Begins Bar, located on the 18th floor, provides a respite away from the bustling city with a choice of beverages and breathtaking views.



TSURUGA WINGS, LAKE AKAN

Two nights

Located right next to the beautiful Lake Akan, Tsuruga Wings is a contemporary and stylish ryokan style property. Fitted with tatami (woven-straw) flooring and traditional futon bedding, each room is equipped with a flat-screen TV, fridge, telephone, electric kettle and coffee machine. Additionally, all of the rooms benefit from views of the mountains or the lake. Guests can unwind in the public bathing area (separated by gender) featuring indoor/outdoor hot spring baths and saunas. A gift shop is available onsite and complimentary Wi-Fi is provided in the lobby. Hokkaido Buffet Hapo offers hearty buffets featuring a live open kitchen and fresh local ingredients whilst lavish buffets at Main Dining Tenga include all-you-can-eat sushi and other international dishes.



KIKI SHIRETOKO NATURAL RESORT

Two nights

Kiki Shiretoko Natural Resort is located amidst the hilltop forests of picturesque Shiretoko and provides a great base from which to explore the vibrant city and local area. The hotel features 176 rooms which are all equipped with air-conditioning/heating, television and an LCD/plasma screen. There is an onsite restaurant and a range of recreational facilities on offer including a Jacuzzi, sauna, hot spring bath, table tennis and a games room.



JR TOWER HOTEL NIKKO SAPPORO

Two nights

Offering direct access from JR Sapporo Train Station, JR Tower Hotel Nikko Sapporo offers air-conditioned rooms with complimentary Wi-Fi, flat-screen TV, a safety deposit box and a fridge. The guestrooms are located on floors 23 to 34 ensuring wonderful views. The hotel boasts four dining options and two of the restaurants are located on the 35th floor offering panoramic views of Sapporo city. Tancho Sky Restaurant offers Japanese dishes featuring seasonal local ingredients and Western dishes and a spectacular night view is available at Sky J Restaurant and Bar. The Sky Resort Spa, located on the 22nd floor features hot baths, Jacuzzis and a sauna with views over the city.



HOTEL JAL CITY AOMORI

Two nights

Hotel Jal City Aomori is located close to the train station and offers stylish, air-conditioned rooms which are equipped with a flat-screen TV, desk, electric kettle, refrigerator and en-suite bathroom with toiletries, a hairdryer and a bath. Complimentary Wi-Fi is available throughout the hotel. The dining options include La Sera restaurant which serves a buffet-style breakfast of Japanese and western dishes as well as à la carte lunch items, and Kanade restaurant which offers sushi and other Japanese dishes. The location is excellent - a few minutes by foot is the Aspuma shopping area for local products and there are numerous traditional restaurants close by.



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All special offers are subject to availability. Our current booking conditions apply to all reservations and are available on request. Ports subject to change.
Cover image: Lake Akan

