



SEEING JAPAN ∴ WINTER 2025

HOKKAIDO INTENSIVE
A CREATIVE IMAGE-MAKING PHOTOGRAPHY TOUR

24 JANUARY – 5 FEBRUARY 2025


Robert van Koesveld & Daisuke Kondo



WELCOME

Photographers Robert van Koesveld and Daisuke Kondo invite you join them for a journey through the unique Winter landscapes of Hokkaido in northern Japan. With a small photography tour size, you will be inspired to create images that reflect the poetic beauty of farmlands, mountains and hills under snow. Moving to the coast we will marvel at the sea ice and sculptural shore protection. Visiting inland lakes, we look for elegant environmental images of the famous red-crowned Japanese cranes and whooper swans.

Your creativity will be well supported by coaching, teaching and conversation.



***Hokkaido is transformed in deep winter...
Blanketing snow simplifies the natural landscape.
Evidence of human presence is rendered mysterious and
unfamiliar. The thoughtful photographer can find engaging
images of stillness, subtlety, and a kind of mystery.***



CALM & FOCUSED TRAVEL

We have designed this itinerary to maximise your photography opportunities. With short distances between hotels and at least two nights in each place, we can stop along the way more often and for longer.

Good photos come from taking time and thinking about your vision. There is time to review your images, and teaching is designed around the daily locations and participants' interests.



**SPACE FOR CREATIVITY &
LEARNING**

We can offer support and guidance to take your image-making further and deeper. With just 4-6 participants and two photography coaches it also means we can travel in one van and be flexible in response to interesting options that present themselves.

We are excited about offering creative opportunities to you in a place we both love.

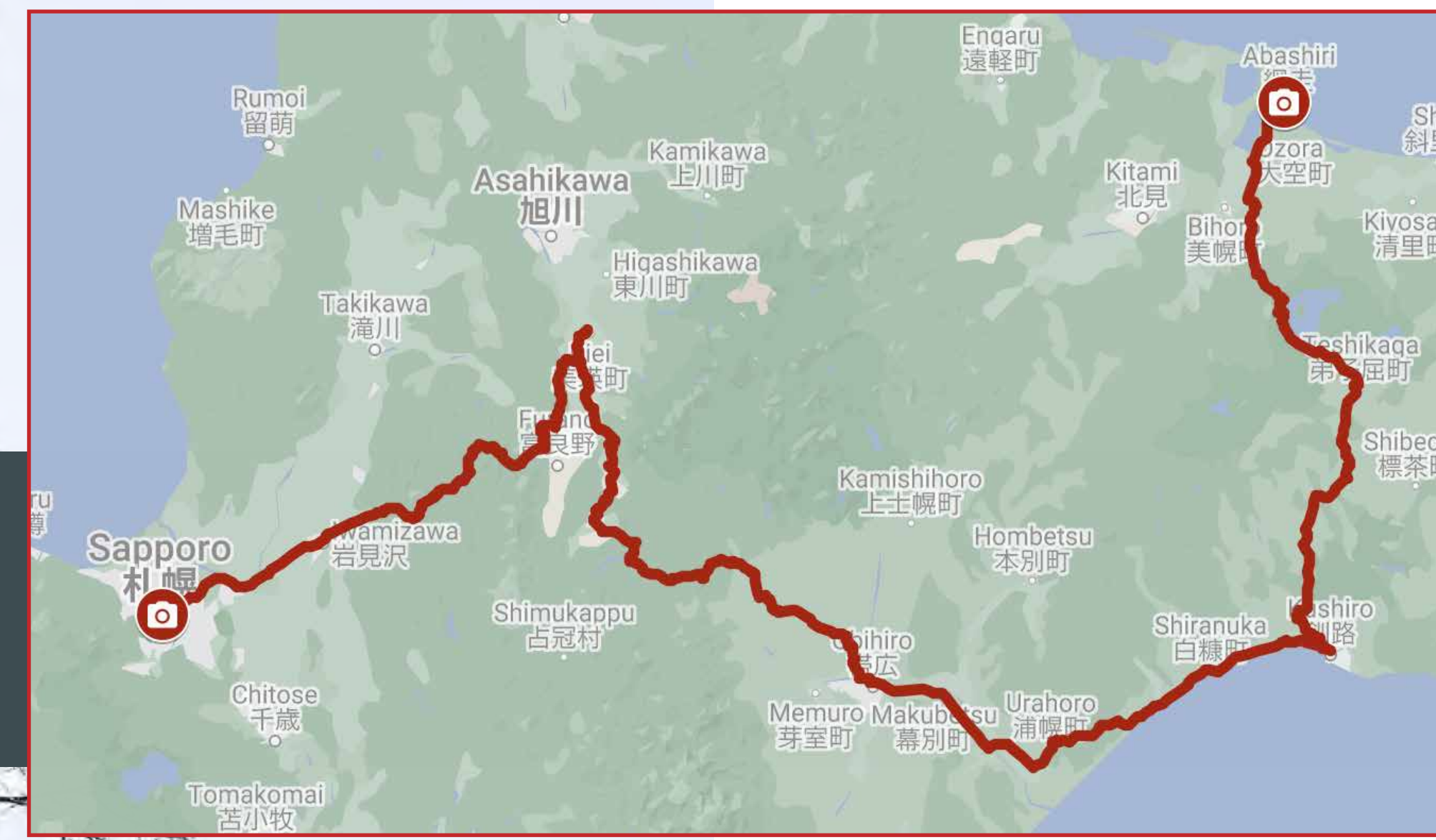


“*Making thoughtful images takes time... so we take time too. Hokkaido Intensive is paced so there is room for a deepening conversation between you and the landscape.*

HOKKAIDO INTENSIVE

HIGHLIGHTS

- ❖ An inspiring variety of winter landscapes – forests, farmlands, windbreaks, gorges, waterfalls, mountains, seashore, lakes and those poetic lone trees in the snow.
- ❖ Creative focus for your images – drawing on your own style. Discover your response to this white-world and make images that express your vision.
- ❖ Spend time with whooper swans and Japanese cranes. Make portraits or landscapes of these elegant creatures in their environment.
- ❖ Time to review your images as you go and consider your purposes and methods, all with access to two photography coaches, whose priority is your creativity.
- ❖ Due to carefully researched routes and itineraries, your time in the field is maximised.



HOKKAIDO INTENSIVE

ITINERARY

This photography tour begins in Sapporo and ends in Abashiri. We travel from west to east, with no backtracking. Beyond Sapporo our overnight stops are always for two or three nights, and we drive short distances between hotels.

Day 1 † *January 24*

Sapporo

We begin with an afternoon briefing, followed by a shared meal. Our hotel is easily accessed by train from New Chitose airport.

Day 2 † *January 25*

Sapporo ⇒ Biei

Driving to Biei we stop in a couple of our favourite locations. In the afternoon we begin exploring landscape locations under deep snow.

Day 3-4 † *January 26,27*

Biei

During our three days in Biei we visit some well-known trees as well as lesser-known places. There are many opportunities to build images in different

light. Each snowfall resets the landscape, so locations are always changing. We also look for birch forest, treelines, gently shaded hills and the blue waterfall.

Day 5 † *January 28*

Biei ⇒ Obihiro

Winter transforms the farmland of Furuno with its vineyards and other crops. We look for shapes and patterns in the landscape with the Daisetsuzan Mountain Range as background. The Sorachi River also provides opportunities.

Day 6 † *January 29*

Obihiro

Windbreaks and bare fields invite both sun and shadow compositions. Hokkaido has a long history of working draft horses, and we will aim to visit these huge female horses and capture images of them running in the field.

Day 7 † *January 30*

Obihiro ⇒ Kushiro

The Pacific Ocean coastline brings new opportunities to construct images using the tetrapod shore defences as well as the fishermen's port with their boats all hauled in for winter.

Day 8 † *January 31*

Kushiro

The famous red-crowned cranes are a special delight this morning, and we will keep an eye out for cranes as we explore a range of locations and landscapes in the afternoon.

Day 9 † *February 1*

Kushiro ⇒ Lake Kussharo

Hilly farmland and wiggling fence lines. Deep snow forming shapes in the valleys. Fascinating volcanic scenery of Akan-Mashu National Park.





Day 10 † *February 2*

Lake Kussharo

We visit the whooper swans in the misty early morning. Our small van means we can access quiet locations where the swans gather around Lake Kussharo. We also visit the lakes and forests of Akan-Mashu National Park, including the steaming vents of Iozan.

Day 11 † *February 3*

Lake Kussharo ⇒ Abashiri

Deciduous and evergreen forests on snowy hillsides invite images of shape and texture. Spectacular views from Bihoro Pass of Lake Kussharo, Japan's biggest caldera lake.

Day 12 † *February 4*

Abahiri

We explore the drift ice on the coastline of Okhotsuku and look for images with snow covered tetrapods. We also look for our last landscape images.

Day 13 † *February 5*

Abahiri

Tour ends with breakfast and airport transfers.

Note: Point to point distances between hotels are small in this itinerary and we spend at least 2 nights in most hotels, meaning maximum time to make images.

The above basic itinerary is the plan. The actual tour may vary slightly due to weather, road conditions or other things beyond our control. We have built in some flexibility and will decide some details based on the best options on the day. We adjust our plans to take advantage of weather changes or new opportunities.



YOUR TOUR LEADERS



Robert van Koesveld

Robert is a full-time photographer whose work is primarily involved with world cultures. Since retiring early from his psychotherapy practice, he has concentrated on photography and travels extensively. His photo book 'Bhutan Heartland' (2010), co-authored with his wife Libby Lloyd, was well received internationally, and his photo book 'Geiko and Maiko of Kyoto' (2016) won the Australian Professional Photography Awards category of best Photo Book of the year. Robert is interested in capturing 'spirit of place' and 'people's presence' in a cultural context. He has led photo tours to Bhutan, India, China and Japan, exhibited in Kyoto, Arles, Dubai and Perth, and published in 'Kyoto Journal' and 'Better Photography'.



Daisuke Kondo

Dai has always been passionate about exploring the world's environments and cultures, even while growing up in Tokyo. His travels began in Australia and led to him guiding outdoor adventures in Japan, New Zealand and Malaysia. As well as developing his photography skills, Dai trained as an Emergency Medical Technician in North America. This useful combination of interests, knowledge and skills enabled him to conduct photography tours and teach First Aid in his travels. His extensive travels in his native Japan led to him establishing Spark Photography, specialising in leading photography tours throughout his homeland. Dai has worked with Robert on his previous photo tours and scouting trips. Dai lives in Sapporo, Hokkaido.

TEACHING & COACHING

Developing as a photographer is not just a product of time. Experience needs reflection to be genuinely useful developmentally. Technical skills are valuable at times, but simply acquiring a bunch of techniques, or a bunch of cameras, won't really take you forward. While we can talk about technical matters if appropriate for you, we are most interested in deepening your conceptual process so that you come away with images that matter to you. If you are open to sharing your images and visual process, we can support your development.

Robert will offer some group teaching tailored to the actual participants, and with a small group we will be able to converse and coach individually along the way. Still, we won't be intruding, and if you just want to work on your own, we will leave you to it.

We (Robert and Daisuke) will photograph alongside you at times and are always happy to share our process of conceptualising images. Your images though are our absolute priority. There will be opportunities for image review as well as teaching and coaching. We are always open to chatting about image-making and Japanese culture.



IMAGE-MAKING

Robert considers a camera is just a tool for engaging with our world and for making images. The best images are made not 'taken'. We aim to photograph what we feel, not just things or places. By engaging with the people and places we meet, we deepen our experience of them, as well as their cultural and physical environment. Then we can begin to identify 'what this photograph is about' and find ways to make an image that reflects our deeper experience, and also really moves and interests the viewer. Sometimes one image tells your story, other times it needs a sequence or series of images.



WHO SHOULD COME?

Photographers of any level of experience will enjoy this trip. Artists and non-photographers will enjoy making written or sketched images. We do spend lots of time in most locations.

In terms of gear, there are no special requirements, other than your ability to carry it. We recommend travelling reasonably light. Anything from a good phone camera through to a mirrorless dslr or a medium format camera is fine.

If you are not a photographer, something like a sketch book or writing journal will be good too. We provide a detailed pre-departure document to help with gear and most other questions.

Curiosity and respect for the rich and complex culture that is your ultimate host is also important.

TRANSPORT

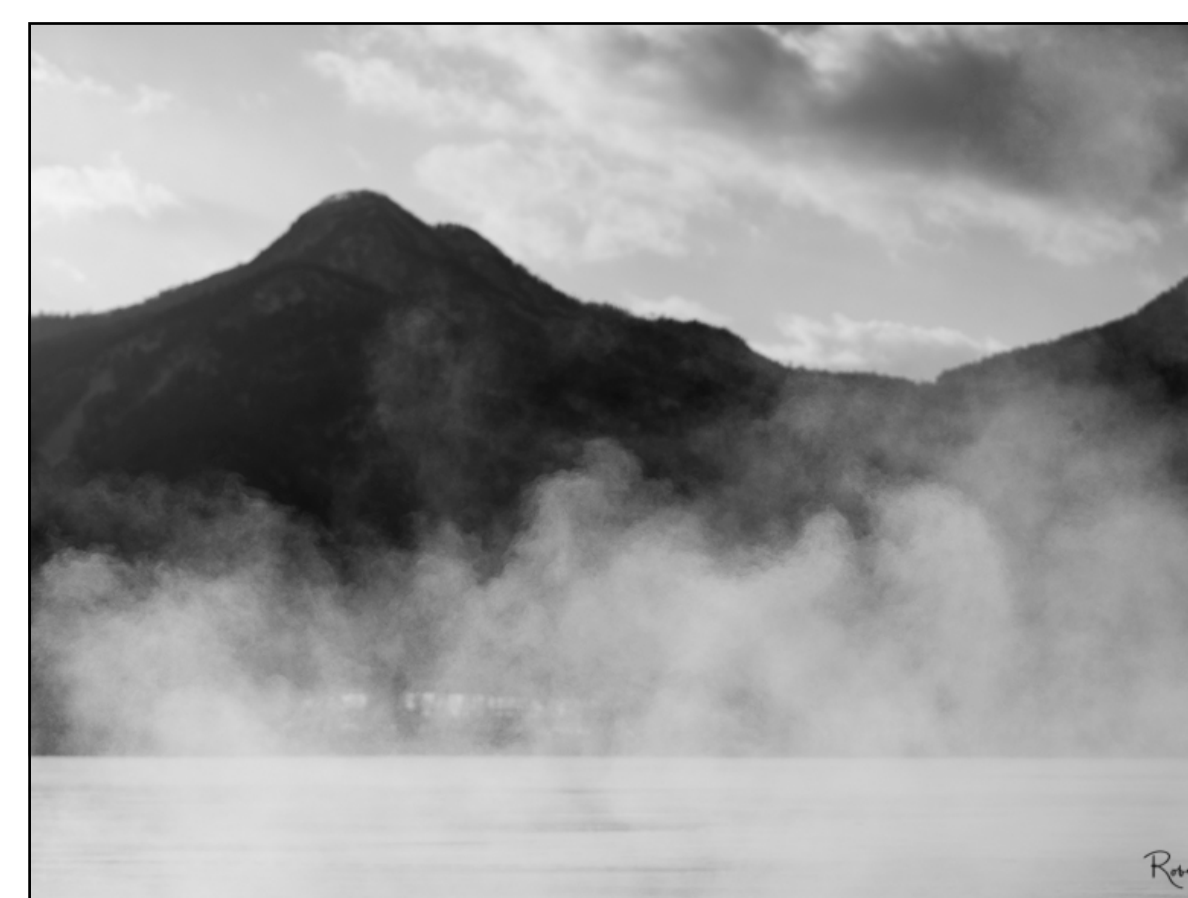
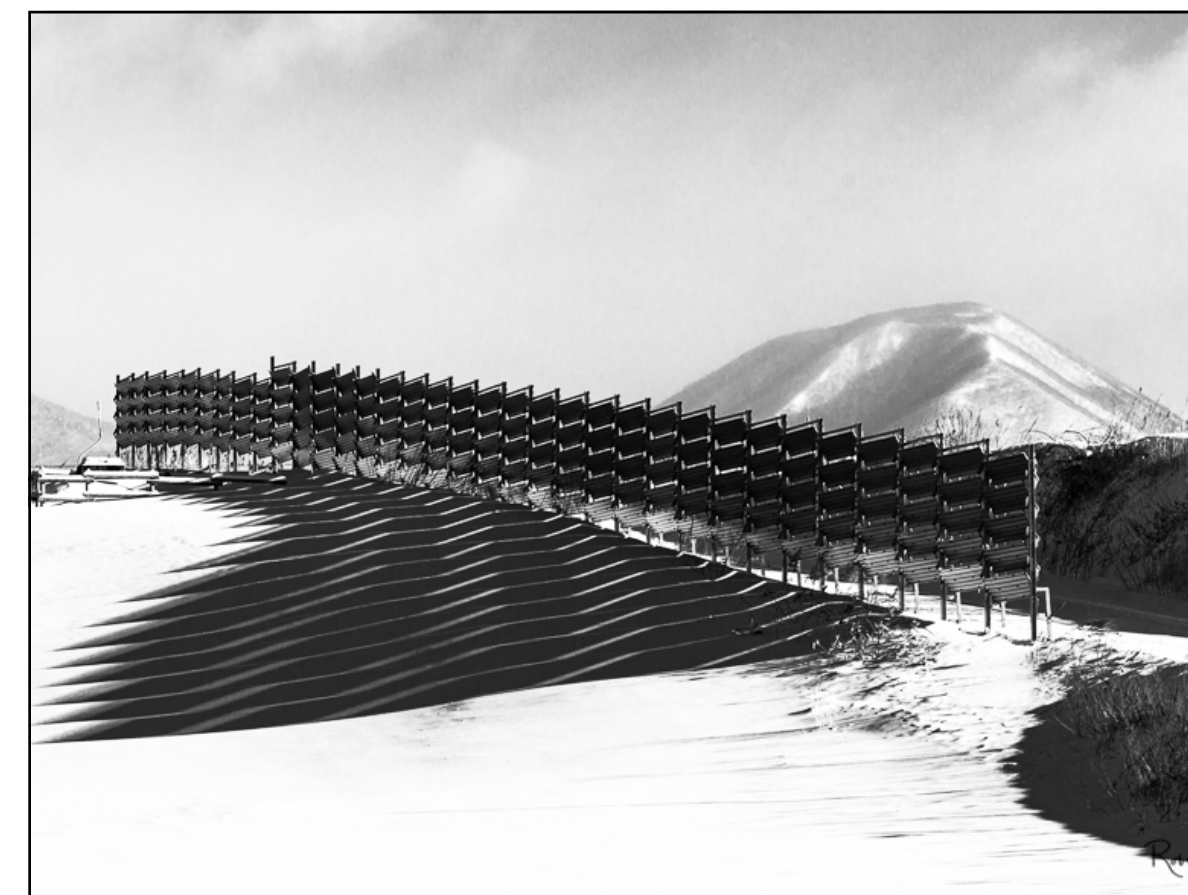
We travel in a spacious van throughout our journey. This allows us to set our timing according to the light and new opportunities. Keeping the group small means just one vehicle and gives us freedom to stop for opportunities and take the backroads where they are most interesting.



ACCOMMODATION

We have an interesting mixture of hotels and onsens planned. Because Japanese hotels often do not open bookings until around 6-months before the date, we will send a final list at that time. Some of the hotels are western-style while others are more traditional with tatami rooms and futons put out on the night. Most westerners add an extra futon underneath for comfort in traditional rooms. Western-style rooms can be quite small in Japan.

Some traditional Japanese onsen-style hotels have access to a hot bath which Japanese really love; you may too.



FOOD

Dinners in Japan are a real highlight. We will have quite a few banquet-style Japanese meals, often in our hotels. Other times we will visit a range of local and speciality restaurants. Menus will include local delicacies and dishes throughout our journey including: Ramen, Sukiyaki, Shabu-shabu, Okonomiyaki, Onigiri, traditional homemade Udon and Soba, and Sushi/Sashimi. Breakfasts are usually included in the hotel arrangements. Simple 'western style' or traditional Japanese.

When on the move, there is maximum flexibility, personal choice and efficiency if guests choose ready-to-go lunches from the ubiquitous *konbini*, Japanese convenience stores. As well as being a fun cultural experience, it means we don't waste time ordering and eating there. It also allows us to sometimes eat lunch on location in the wild. Other lunches will be in local restaurants.

We will do our best to accommodate dietary preferences or restrictions. If you have specific concerns email before booking.



PHYSICAL FITNESS

A basic level of walking fitness is essential. This tour is not a hiking or a trekking tour, so nothing extreme will be required of you. We carry light snow shoes but mostly we are on quiet roadsides. Winter conditions are variable but you will have access to the van if it gets too cold. If you have any health issues or doubts, please let us know more and we will see how we can work around them.



HEALTH & SAFETY

In what we hope will be post-Covid times, we will maintain appropriate infection precautions. We clean inside the vehicle each day and avoid queues and crowds. Hand sanitising gel will be available. Please discuss any health concerns with us before signing up. Health matters are covered in more detail in the trip information you will receive after registration.

Japan is a mask-oriented culture, so masks will be a part of our wardrobe at times. Following best practice health protocols will be a requirement for guests and leaders.

HOKKAIDO INTENSIVE

24 JANUARY – 5 FEBRUARY, 2025

DATES & COSTS

The tour commences at 5:00 pm on the first day in our hotel's lobby before a group dinner and ends after our breakfast on the morning of the final day.

PRICE

¥ 995,000 per person [Japanese Yen]
(approx. \$US 7,000)

Single Supplement: ¥ 80,000 (approx. \$US 550)

We price this tour in JPY (Japanese Yen) so our price remains stable and you know the exact cost.

Single supplement: Many Japanese hotels do not have single rooms and charge us for a single person at the double room rate for a 'double' room. If you wish to share a room, you need to book together with your own nominated travel companion.

WHAT IS INCLUDED

- Ground transport during the tour by private passenger van
- All breakfasts, and dinners (excluding drinks)
- Hotel accommodation throughout the tour (12 nights)
- Entrance fees for all included locations
- Expert photography coaching and key cultural briefings
- Use of individual 'YakTraks' which attach to your boots to manage slippery surfaces, and access to snow-shoes
- Review, post-processing and image composition sessions during the tour
- One-on-one sessions to develop use of light and composition, story-telling and post-processing
- Specially developed notes and materials specific to your tour.

WHAT IS NOT INCLUDED

- International and domestic airfares and visas if required
- Lunches
- Personal expenses including laundry, snacks, drinks and extras you might choose to buy along the way
- Transfers between the start and finish hotels and airports, etc. (people often have independent plans)
- Travel Insurance for cancellation, health and travel (required as a condition of booking)
- Camera and other gear insurance
- Costs arising from unforeseen circumstances or factors beyond our control.

We can accept credit card payments for the deposit (details on reservation tab).

Final payment by foreign exchange transfer is recommended.

We have to pass on card providers fees (currently 3.25%) for final payments.

To reserve your place and complete the deposit and trip application forms go to -

<https://www.sparkphotography.jp/seeing-japan-winter-2025>

(live links do not work in some web browsers, so if the above hyperlink doesnt connect you please paste it into your browser directly)

This tour is planned and managed by Spark Photography in collaboration with Robert van Koesveld.

Our Japan Tour operator is ::

MY Travel Consulting Inc. (ANTA3-1049) —
a member of the All Nippon Travel Agents
Association

Address ::

254-1, Warabi, Yotsukaido-shi, Chiba,
Japan 284-0044

Certified General Travel Services Manager ::
Mayumi Kawana

E-mail :: contact@mytravelconsulting.co.jp

Telephone :: +81-50-3613-8975

HOKKAIDO INTENSIVE

To book your place in this tour, please use the reservation form on the SparkPhotography website:

<https://www.sparkphotography.jp/seeing-japan-winter-2025>

E-mail *Daisuke Kondo* with any questions:

info@sparkphotography.jp

or call +81-90-3811-0038



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