

Japan: Snow Monkeys and Winter Cranes

WILDLIFE AND CULTURAL ADVENTURE IN A WINTERY WORLD



TRIP DATE

Feb 2-12, 2025

ITINERARY	3
TRIP COST, PAYMENT & INSURANCE	5
LODGING	6
ARRIVAL & DEPARTURE	8
TRIP LEADER	9
TRIP DETAILS	10



Japan: Snow Monkeys and Winter Cranes

WILDLIFE AND CULTURAL ADVENTURE IN A WINTERY WORLD

Wild monkeys soaking in geothermal pools, graceful cranes preening and “dancing” on snowy rivers, whooper swans gliding on icy lakes, the snow sculptures of Sapporo—this is the natural winter world of Japan. We head to the Japanese Alps to watch snow monkeys (Japanese macaques) as they blissfully soak in bubbling mineral springs deep in the forest (we’ll enjoy soaks of our own at our traditional hot-springs inn). In Hokkaido, Japan’s northernmost island, we join in the fun and food of the Sapporo Snow Festival, where huge snow sculptures line the streets. At the great Kushiro Marsh, Japan’s largest wetland reserve, we’ll see flocks of red-crested cranes, the symbol of Japan. Journeying to Lake Akan National Park, with its caldera lakes, we’ll witness Ainu culture with traditional dances. Most nights we’ll stay in ryokans, where a hot soak at the end of the day will feel particularly good in the winter! A highlight of any visit to Japan is its superb cuisine, and we sample both familiar and new dishes, plus winter specialties such as yosenabe (“hot pot,” often cooked right at the table), along with Hokkaido’s bounty of amazing seafood. Japan is a new world in many ways in winter—get out your winter boots and warm parka and join us!



1102 Ninth Street, Berkeley, CA 94710

800-368-2794 • 510-558-2488

www.wildernesstravel.com • info@wildernesstravel.com

Itinerary

DAY 1 TOKYO

Arrive in Tokyo and make your way to our accommodation, the Courtyard by Marriott Ginza Hotel. We gather for a Welcome Dinner and trip briefing this evening...D

DAY 2 NAGANO / YUDANAKA

Taking the Shinkansen (“bullet train”) to Nagano, we meet our private bus and head up to the Japanese Alps and the town of Yudanaka, which has a hundred-year-long history as hot springs resort. We’ll have the afternoon to explore this small town and perhaps enjoy a soak in our onsen’s hot springs before dinner. Overnight at Yudanaka Onsen Yoroduya...BD

DAY 3 YUDANAKA / JIGOKUDANI MONKEY PARK / SNOW MONKEYS

From our onsen, we catch a shuttle to a snowy forest path and walk one mile each way to reach Jigokudani, where about 100 wild-living Japanese macaques have taken up residence around the natural hot springs. Jigokudani means “Hells Valley,” a name given to this region for its volcanic steam vents and sulphurous streams that naturally heat the spring water. In winter, the valley is usually snow-covered. We spend the morning watching, learning, and taking photos of these fascinating creatures as they bathe, swim, groom, and scamper around in groups. The monkeys are picturesque, dusted with snow and enjoying the warmth of the hot spring in the winter landscape. They are accustomed to seeing people and are easy to photograph. We return to town for lunch, with an optional afternoon return to Jigokudani Monkey Park, or time to soak in our onsens ourselves. Overnight in ryokan...BD

DAY 4 HOKKAIDO / SAPPORO

Returning to Nagano and heading to Tokyo via train, we fly to Sapporo, capital of Hokkaido, the northernmost of Japan’s main islands. Sapporo is a lovely city of parks, galleries, brew pubs, and a creative restaurant scene. Its annual snow festival was begun in 1950 and today is an international winter attraction. Overnight at the Hotel Monterey Edelhof Sapporo, a Western-style hotel in Sapporo...BD

DAY 5 SAPPORO SNOW FESTIVAL

We spend the whole day seeing the spectacular sights of the festival and joining in the fun and magic of this event. Giant snow and ice sculptures, intricately carved and colorfully lit at night, line the streets and parks, and a festive atmosphere prevails. Beautiful Odori Park, which runs the length of the central Sapporo, features the festival's famously large snow sculptures, some more than three stories tall. Overnight at hotel...B



TRIP DETAILS AT-A-GLANCE

- Length:** 11 days
Arrive: Tokyo, Japan
Depart: Sapporo, Japan
Lodging: 10 nights ryokans and hotels
Meals: All meals included except 8 lunches and 1 dinner (B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, D=Dinner)
Activity: Cultural Adventures, Walking
Trip Level: 1 ② 3 4 5 6
Walking, including some steep stairs, 6-7 hours a day, Japanese-style dining (sitting on floor)

HIGHLIGHTS

- Get a fascinating insider perspective on Japanese culture
- See the famous “snow monkeys” of Japan’s Alps and the red-crested cranes and whooper swans of Hokkaido
- Join in the fun of the Sapporo Snow Festival, see the Snow Light Path Festival in Otaru
- Enjoy cozy traditional ryokans, a great way to experience Japanese life

Itinerary (cont'd)

DAY 6

KUSHIRO / KUSHIRO MARSH / RED-CRESTED CRANES

A train journey carries us across Hokkaido's scenic countryside of birch forests and small towns to Kushiro, a port city and site of the Kushiro Marsh, home of the red-crested crane, the beloved symbol of Japan. We delight in the opportunity to see and learn about these birds and efforts at their preservation. More than half the world's population of red-crested cranes visits this reserve, and we witness their famous courtship dances as we explore the sanctuaries and marshlands. Red-crested cranes (known as "rancho" in Japanese) stand nearly five feet tall, with a wingspan of eight feet. Our overnight will be at Kushiro Prince Hotel...BD

DAY 7

KUSHIRO MARSH / CRANE VIEWING

After breakfast, we'll head to the Toro Nature Center for a canoe/raft trip through the marsh, a great way to view birds and other wildlife, and we'll make an afternoon visit to crane sites. Overnight at hotel...BD

DAY 8

KUSHIRO / AKAN / AINU FESTIVAL

Early risers can go to a bridge overlooking a river where the cranes wake at sunrise, a great chance for photography. Lake Akan is a spectacular crater lake that is frozen in winter. We'll explore its crane-viewing sites and visit the small festival held on the lake by the Ainu people, Japan's indigenous people. They have established a cultural center here, with traditional dances held nightly, and we'll see the dances on one of our evenings. We stay at a ryokan-style hotel at Lake Akan, enjoying the hot baths and local food for both dinner and breakfast in this location, our most remote lodging. The food in Hokkaido is fresh from the sea, with local meats, and a variety of vegetables. Warm stews, noodle soups, and pickles and pickled vegetables are common fare in the winter season. Overnight at an onsen (hot springs inn) on Lake Akan...BD

DAY 9

LAKE KUSSHARO / AKAN NATIONAL PARK / WHOOPER CRANES

At Lake Kussharo, a magnificently scenic crater lake in mountainous Akan National Park, we'll visit sites where whooper (pronounced hooper) swans congregate in flocks of dozens, even hundreds. These huge birds spend most of the year in Siberia but migrate here in winter, feeding around the lake's shallow edges, where hot springs melt the ice. We also visit Lake Mashu, a crater lake famous for its deep, clear waters. With luck we may see red fox or sea eagles. Overnight at onsen...BD

DAY 10

KUSHIRO / SAPPORO / OTARU SNOW LIGHT PATH FESTIVAL

We have a relaxing morning amid Lake Akan's beauty before our 1.5-hour transfer to Kushiro Airport for a flight to Sapporo. This evening in Otaru, we'll stroll amid the atmospheric lights of the Otaru Snow Light Path Festival and enjoy our Farewell Dinner. Overnight at Hotel Nord Otaru...BD

DAY 11

DEPART

Depart on homeward-bound flights...B

Trip Cost, Payment & Insurance

TRIP COST

Prices for this trip are being finalized. Contact us and we'll send them to you as soon as they are available.

To offer the lowest possible cost, our trips are priced according to the number of participants on the trip. All costs are per person, based on double occupancy. If you wish to have a single room, you must pay the single supplement fee. Please note that Wilderness Travel staff, or guests of Wilderness Travel such as travel writers, photographers, or leaders-in-training, are not included in the tier pricing count.

CURRENCY EXCHANGE RATE

Due to the volatility of currency markets, we can only offer the most competitive pricing on our trips in Japan by partially tying the trip cost directly to the value of the Japanese Yen. In the late spring of 2023, when we set the rates for our 2024 programs, the US Dollar equaled 136 Japanese Yen. While in most years, no price changes are ever necessary, if there were to be a significant change in exchange rates, we may be forced to raise or able to lower our trip cost; if so, your final invoice, sent two weeks before your final payment is due, will reflect the difference. Please note that the calculation will not be a straight proration. While most of the trip cost is paid in Japanese Yen, the remainder of our expenses are paid in US Dollars. The overall effect is to moderate any change; thus, if the Japanese Yen were to rise in value, the trip cost would rise less than might be expected, and if the Japanese Yen were to fall, the drop in land price would also be less than might be expected.

TRIP COST INCLUDES

- Expert leadership of a Wilderness Travel Trip Leader and local guides
- Accommodations in comfortable ryokans and hotels
- All meals included except 8 lunches and 1 dinner as indicated in the Detailed Itinerary (B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, D=Dinner)
- Ground transportation, site and entrance fees as part of the itinerary

TRIP COST DOES NOT INCLUDE

International airfare, airport transfers, any meals not specified after each itinerary day, fees for optional activities, airport departure taxes, optional tipping or gratuities to leaders or staff, additional hotel nights that may be necessitated by airline schedule changes or other factors; pre-trip expenses of medical immunizations (if any), travel insurance, or passports and visas; and other expenses of a personal nature (alcoholic beverages, laundry, etc.).

PAYMENT SCHEDULE

At time of reservation: \$600

90 days prior to departure: Balance

CANCELLATION AND TRANSFER FEE SCHEDULE

Up to 91 days prior to departure: No charge!

61-90 days prior to departure: 25% of trip cost

46-60 days prior to departure: 50% of trip cost

45 days or less: 100% of trip cost

TRAVEL INSURANCE

We highly recommend you purchase travel insurance. You can take advantage of a comprehensive Travel Protection Plan designed for Wilderness Travel by Travelex, or purchase other insurance on your own. See our website for details: www.wildernesstravel.com/insurance

Lodging



COURTYARD MARRIOTT GINZA HOTEL

Tokyo, Japan
Day 1 (1 night)

The location of this hotel is its best selling point—it's within walking distance of all the Ginza shops and cafes as well as the Imperial Palace and a handful of subway stations. The guest rooms are on the small side, as is typical in Japan, but they are quiet and comfortable. The breakfast buffet includes both Japanese and Western items and there are two on-site restaurants.



YUDANAKA ONSEN YORODUYA

Nagano, Japan
Days 2 to 3 (2 nights)

This stylish, traditional ryokan is conveniently located in the center of Yudanaka, just a short distance from where the snow monkeys have taken up residence. We stay in Japanese-style rooms with tatami mats and en-suite bathrooms, and the ryokan has plenty of soaking options, from open-air onsens to a traditional Momoyama bath enclosed by Japanese umbrella pine, believed to be a sacred tree of Mt. Koya. The ryokan's restaurant serves wonderful Japanese cuisine and houses beautiful artwork.



HOTEL MONTEREY EDELHOF SAPPORO

Sapporo, Japan
Days 4 to 5 (2 nights)

Hotel Monterey Edelhof Sapporo looks like a piece of Vienna in Japan. The name Edelhof means "Manor House" in German, and the hotel does a fine job replicating the architecture and European ambience, with large rooms, an elegantly decorated lounge and dining area, and a nice spa. The hotel is also walking distance to downtown Sapporo.



KUSHIRO PRINCE HOTEL

Kushiro, Japan

Days 6 to 7 (2 nights)

With a convenient location near the Kushiro Marsh, this hotel is perfect for exploring the area. The hotel's top-floor lounge has panoramic views of the Pacific Ocean and serves three meals a day including a breakfast buffet, while the Skyroom's Japanese-style seating overlooks the garden. Comfortable guest rooms have city or ocean views, private bathrooms, and bathtubs.



LAKE AKAN TSURUGA WINGS

Kushiro, Japan

Days 8 to 9 (2 nights)

Set right near Lake Akan, this onsen hotel offers Western and Japanese style rooms. The main attraction of Lake Akan Tsuruga Wings are the two onsens that guests can enjoy. Gender-separate indoor and outdoor baths are perfect to unwind and relax in after a day's explorations.



HOTEL NORD OTARU

Otaru, Japan

Day 10 (1 night)

Inspired by Italian design and situated next to a canal in the shopping district of Otaru, Hotel Nord is a peaceful hotel with clean rooms and nice bathrooms. Take a walk alongside the picturesque canal or enjoy a drink at the hotel bar overlooking the city.

These are our signature accommodations for this trip. Although it is highly unlikely, we may make substitutions when necessary. To see more photos and descriptions, please visit our *Japan: Snow Monkeys and Winter Cranes* webpage and click on the "Lodging" tab.

Arrival & Departure

Upon confirming your trip reservation, we will send you a Welcome Packet that includes a list of documents (passport, visas, etc.) required for your trip. Please feel free to call if you would like this information before making your air arrangements.

ARRIVAL & MEETING PLACE

Courtyard Marriott Ginza Hotel
Tokyo, Japan

Date & Time: Day 1, in time for evening Welcome Dinner

Suggested Airport for Arrival: Narita International Airport (NRT) or Haneda Airport (HND)

Suggested Flight Arrival Time: 4:00 pm or earlier

Upon arrival, you will need to clear customs and immigration. There is a currency exchange on the arrival floor outside the customs area. We suggest changing your money into Japanese Yen here before continuing to the hotel by taxi, bus, or train.

A good website for arranging public transportation within Japan is www.hyperdia.com.

DEPARTURE

Sapporo, Japan
Date: Day 11

Suggested Airport for Departure: New Chitose (Sapporo) Airport (CTS)

Suggested Flight Departure Time: After 3:00 pm

On Day 11, we provide a transfer from the hotel to New Chitose (Sapporo) Airport. Travel time to the airport can be up to 60-90 minutes, so we suggest that your outbound flight depart after 3:00 pm.

INTERNATIONAL AIR TRAVEL

You are responsible for making your own arrangements for flights to and from Japan. Airlines with the most convenient schedules for this trip include:

All Nippon

800-235-9262
fly-ana.com

United Airlines

800-521-0810
united.com

Japan Airlines

800-525-3663
japanair.com

There are many online consolidators for booking travel, but for more personal help arranging air transport, you can contact Exito Travel at 1-800-655-4053 in the US or 1-800-670-2605 in Canada. They are very adept at putting flight itineraries together, to even the most far-flung places. More information can be found on Exito's website at www.exitotravel.com.

Depending on your routing, it is necessary to depart from the US one day prior to Day 1 of the trip itinerary. The name on your airline ticket must match the name on your passport exactly, and your passport must be valid for at least six months after your date of return to the US.

Please do not purchase your tickets until you are confirmed on the trip. Once your tickets have been purchased, please forward a copy of your email confirmation from the airline. It is your responsibility to ensure your flight times coordinate with the arrival and departure logistics for this trip.

Trip Leader

Wilderness Travel Trip Leaders have a passion and a joy for creating an unforgettable journey. We are extremely proud of them and the incredible travel experiences they make possible. For more information, including client comments about them and which specific trips they will be leading, please visit our webpage and click on “Trip Leaders”: www.wildernesstravel.com/trip/japan/hokkaido-sapporo-winter-cultural-tour



LUCY WHITEHEAD

Having grown up in rural Tasmania, Lucy developed a deep love of nature and the outdoors through exploring the bush around her home on horseback and hiking with her family. She began her independent exploration at a young age with a week in the South West World Heritage area at the age of 11, and a school exchange in Japan at the age of 15. She is a world traveler who has lived in Europe, Japan, and Central America. After a year of working in Japan, she studied Japanese at the University of Tasmania, and later returned to Osaka on a scholarship to study Japanese literature along with anthropology, film, and ceramics. During her seven years in Japan, she taught English, hitch-hiked around Hokkaido, climbed Mt. Fuji, and walked the Kumano Kodo. She currently lives in Tasmania, one of her favorite places in the world, and works as a guide in both Tasmania and Japan. Lucy’s partner is a well-known sushi chef from the countryside of Wakayama. Together they relish camping and diving in Tasmania’s pristine wilderness, dining on internationally inspired dishes using home-grown produce, and surfing and snorkeling on the coast. Lucy is fluent in Japanese and is keen to share her love of Tasmania, Japan, and all the places in between, with travelers and friends.

Trip Details

WHAT THE TRIP IS LIKE

The trip is rated 2, easy to moderate, according to our trip grading system. Although not physically demanding, the trip will yield greater rewards if you are in good physical condition and able to stay on your feet for 6-7 hours per day. Please remember, we will be sleeping on futons and eating at floor level, so it is important that you are able to sit down on and get up off the floor without much difficulty.

We will be walking on a possibly snowy pathway for about a mile each way to see the snow monkeys. Warm, waterproof boots are necessary for this, plus warm, waterproof jackets, gloves, and hats for our time in Hokkaido. Our day at the Sapporo Snow Festival is spent walking on possibly snowy or icy boulevards during the day as well as in the evening. We spend our time at Kushiro visiting crane sanctuaries, with some outdoor walking as well as a boat trip on an open raft on our trip through the marsh. Our time at Lake Akan includes an evening visit to the frozen lake festivities, again walking on icy, snowy roads. Though our days should see temperatures in the mid-30s, it can be quite cold in Hokkaido in the winter, with temperatures dropping to below freezing and even possibly to zero Fahrenheit. We travel by train and charter bus, so layers work well.

Though not physically difficult in terms of hiking, this trip can be challenging in other ways. The possibly very cold weather (and possibility of rain instead of snow) can make things uncomfortable for those who are not dressed properly, and the weather can even cause us to change our plans. A flexible nature and readiness to absorb and enjoy the culture are necessary for enjoyment of this trip, but the rewards are many!

We will have a mix of free time and group time, providing the opportunity for independent exploration. Our breakfasts and most dinners are eaten together and we have the time to share our experiences and new discoveries over these meals.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Japan is a blend of the traditional and modern, and our trip encompasses this unique mixture. We will stay at traditional ryokans as well as Japanese-style hotels. The quiet world of the ryokan is a venerable cultural institution—a way to experience a simple, timeless way of life. After being

warmly welcomed, we trade our street shoes for slippers. Once inside, we remove our slippers as we step onto the finely woven tatami mats covering our sleeping room floors. Our rooms are spacious and pleasant with low tables and comfortable futon mattresses with quilts and blankets. Some of our rooms will have attached toilets; at other times, we share the “down the hall” facilities. Although a few ryokans have baths in the rooms, most have an ofuro (a Japanese-style bath). Note: Single travelers will share accommodations at the ryokans.

Normally, a fresh cotton yukata (robe) is provided for each guest. These light kimonos can be worn anywhere in and around the ryokan and we often wear them to meals (make sure to wear the left side over the right). For many of our breakfasts and dinners, beautifully presented meals are served as we sit on the floor at low tables on our tatami mats. Please note that many of the meals at ryokans are already set menus.

JAPANESE BATHING

In Japan, bathing is a time honored tradition, a relaxing daily event. While staying in our ryokans, we will bathe as the Japanese do—using the ofuro system. In separate men and women’s sides, the custom is to wash and rinse before entering the ofuro, a large tub of hot water where we can sit back with legs extended, submerged to the neck (this trip is not for the very modest!). Early Shinto was a religion of cleanliness and purification. Ritualistic bathing began during this time and has been perfected over the centuries. Either as a divine imperative or a luxury, bathing in Japan has always been regarded as more than a hygienic chore. The ofuro is the perfect way to finish a hectic day of travel. After a relaxing bath, we gather for the evening meal.

JAPANESE CUISINE

A highlight of any visit to Japan is its superb cuisine defined by fresh ingredients and artful presentation. We will have ample opportunity to sample both familiar and new dishes. We will sample many types of Japanese food, and usually the first “bite” is with our eyes, the presentation being a tantalizing array of fresh fish, beef, vegetables, tofu, miso soup and, of course, rice, all served on individual plates and bowls of exquisite sizes, patterns, and proportions. We eat with chopsticks and are usually seated at low tables on the floor. During our stay at ryokans, a set menu is offered for dinner. At some ryokans, you may choose between a

Japanese breakfast of fish, rice, miso soup, tofu, vegetables, pickled condiments and tea, or a western breakfast consisting of eggs, toast, salad, and coffee. Many places, however, offer only Japanese food.

Given our locations, and true in most of Japan, choices of foods are not given. If you have dietary restrictions or allergies please check with us before booking. Our typical dinner hour is 7:00 pm, although we may eat earlier to accommodate early rising days.

You will have all lunches and some dinners on your own, allowing you ample opportunity to sample the endless variety of Japanese food. When we are traveling, we may try an obento (box lunch), and we sample the snack foods of Japan and/or get a bowl of udon, ramen, or soba (noodles) at one of the local spots. Napkins are not used except at western-style restaurants; bring your own handkerchief.

Keep in mind that Japanese food is very different from what we are used to, and with the limited availability of American foods, your food intake will be a big part of the Japanese adventure.

Please note that vegetarian options are available, but limited. Strict vegetarian diets, vegan diets, or gluten reduced diets will be difficult to accommodate due to the pervasiveness of the fish-based stock dashi and the use of soy sauce and miso in Japanese cuisine. Gluten free cuisine will not be available.

WEATHER

We could experience snowy or even blizzard conditions during the course of this journey, which may alter our plans. Be prepared with cold weather clothing and good warm snow boots with adequate tread for walking. Of course, bring an additional pair of shoes to change into for our hotel dinners. Slippers are provided at our inns. A daypack is useful for our day trips, as well as to carry and shed or add layers on our bus days. We carry our own bags through the stations, airports, and on and off the trains and buses. You must be able to handle your own luggage with ease.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT TRIP

Adventure travel often involves exotic destinations, unusual levels of physical exertion, or activities you may not have participated in previously. We work hard to help you choose the right trip for you, paying attention to your individual interests, abilities, and needs. If you have questions about the level of comfort or any of the activities described in this itinerary, please call Wilderness Travel at 1-800-368-2794 and ask for the Asia Manager or email us at asia@wildernesstravel.com.

REFERENCES

We'd be happy to put you in touch with a past client that has traveled with us on this or a similar trip.

TOUCAN CLUB

We're proud to have one of the highest rates of repeat travelers in the business! The Wilderness Travel Toucan Club was established to reward our travelers for their loyalty. For details, please visit the Toucan Club page of our website at www.wildernesstravel.com/resources/toucan-club.

VISIT OUR WEBSITE

At www.wildernesstravel.com, you can book your trip online or find out about added departures, last-minute deals, and one-time Limited Edition adventures that aren't listed in our catalog. You can also access our complete library of detailed itineraries filled with enticing photos and videos, read bios of our Trip Leaders, find descriptions of trip accommodations, and check real-time availability of any trips that interest you.



WILDERNESS TRAVEL HAS BEEN AWARDED:

World's Best Tour Operators: *Travel + Leisure*, 2022, 11-time winner

Best Travel Specialists in the World: *Conde Nast Traveller*, 2022, 3 years in a row

Best Wildlife, Hiking & Walking Trips: *AFAR Magazine*, 3 years in a row

Best Adventure Travel Companies: *USA Today*

Trip of the Year: *Outside Magazine*, 9-time winner

50 Tours of a Lifetime: *National Geographic Traveler*, 9 years in a row

Best Adventure Travel Companies: *National Geographic Adventure*, 3-time winner

Please be advised that California has established a Travel Consumer Restitution Fund under the California Seller of Travel Law that took effect January 1, 1996. This fund is designed to protect consumers from unscrupulous practices by discount airfare ticket sellers or air charter operators. Unfortunately, this law does not cover non-California residents and, even in the case of California residents, it does not cover any foreign travel where the foreign "providers of transportation or travel services" are not in compliance with the Sellers of Travel Law (compliance being defined as registered as a Seller of Travel in California and a participant in the Travel Consumer Restitution Fund). Thus none of Wilderness Travel's tours qualify and we are required by law to advise each client that they are not covered by the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires sellers of travel to maintain a trust account or bond. This business has a trust account. California Seller of Travel #100769640

While as accurate as possible at the time of printing, this itinerary should be considered an approximate indication of the schedule and scope of activities and trip routing, rather than an inflexible schedule of events; it is subject to change due to circumstances beyond our control. This trip is subject to the Limitation of Liability and all the terms and conditions as detailed in the General Information section of the Wilderness Travel Catalog.

March 5, 2024 3:24 PM