

Geopark Exploration in Northern Japan: Sanriku & Toya-Usu (10 days / 9 nights)



Japan, where hills and mountains occupy more than 70% of the country, is one of the world's leading volcanic powers and a wonderland for curious explorers and geo-fans! This tour will take you on an active discovery of two of Japan's largest geoparks.

The Sanriku Geopark is Japan's largest geopark, stretching some 220 km along the Pacific Coast of Aomori, Iwate and Miyagi Prefectures. From the pristine waters of Jodogahama Beach (literally 'Paradise Beach') to the mysterious hues of Ryusendo Limestone Cave's underground lakes, the Sanriku Geopark is a breathtakingly beautiful world of blue!

One of Japan's oldest geological sites, since ancient times the Sanriku area has been ravaged by earthquakes and tsunamis, including the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami of 2011. Ten years following the disaster, this tour gives visitors the chance to experience firsthand the incredible recovery of the coastal region as they walk along sections of the 'Michinoku Coastal Trail', recently recognized by National Geographic and Lonely Planet. Enjoy the chance to meet with the resilient people of the region, listen to their stories, and learn more about their unique lifestyle and culture based on a deep reverence toward nature and both the blessings and ferocity it brings.

Moving further north to Japan's northernmost island prefecture, Hokkaido, discover and experience the Toya-Usu UNESCO Geopark, also known as a 'Living Volcano Museum'. Further to the east side of Hokkaido, Akan Mashu National Park, which has two caldera terrains of Lake Kussharo and Lake Akan, is one of the largest national parks in Japan. Here you can visit former industrial remains like sulfur mines, while climbing an active volcano surrounded by rising volcanic steam!

Highlights:

- Walk several sections of the Michinoku Coastal Trail – witness firsthand the ongoing recovery of the coastal region impacted by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami disaster.
- Take-in the epic ‘blue’ scenery across both coastal and mountainous regions of Japan’s largest geopark.
- Interact with the local people of coastal Iwate and learn more about the regional culture, traditions, flavours and lifestyle.
- Adventure with a volcanic master at a village damaged by 2000 eruption (where you need special permission to enter) in the Toya-Usu UNESCO Geopark
- Challenge yourself with a 7-hour climb of Mt. Meakandake, an active volcano.
- Climb Mt. Iou, where only certified guides can enter

Itinerary at a glance

Day 1 Arrive in Sanriku Geopark and explore Jodogahama, ‘Paradise Beach’ (D)

Day 2 Walk along the Michinoku Coastal Trail and visit a local fishmarket (B,L,D)

Day 3 Explore the mysteries of Ryusendo Limestone cave (B,L, D)

Day 4 Transfer to Hokkaido by bullet train (D)

Day 5 Guided one-day volcano tour in the Toya-Usu UNESCO Geopark (B, L,D)

Day 6 The blessings of volcanoes, guided food tour at Toyoura and canoeing at Lake Toya (B, L, D)

Day 7 Transfer to Kushiro and get brief instruction about Akan Mashu National Park (B, D)

Day 8 Guided walking tour at Lake Onneto(B,L, D)

Day 9 Guided Climbing tour at Mt Meakandake (B, L, D)

Day 10 Guided trekking tour at Mt Iou and transfer to Kushiro airport(B, L)

B: Breakfast, L: Lunch, D: Dinner

Location:

Sanriku Geopark:

Extending 220 km from north to south, as far as Kesenuma in Miyagi prefecture, Sanriku Geopark is Japan's largest geopark. This region, said to be home to the country's oldest geological history, contains records of earthquakes and tsunamis since ancient times, including the 2011 Tohoku earthquake disaster.

Shikotsu Toya National Park, South Hokkaido

Akan Mashu National Park, East Hokkaido

Main Activity: Walking (Michinoku Coastal Trail) , Climbing (Shikotsu Toya National Park)

Difficulty: 2-3

Tour Dates: June to September

Pax: Minimum 4 Maximum 8

Price:
4 pax :JPY 715,000
6 pax :JPY 592,000
8 pax :JPY 540,000 Single Supplement: 90,000

Price:

[Route map](#)

[Day-by-day Itinerary](#)

[What's included](#)

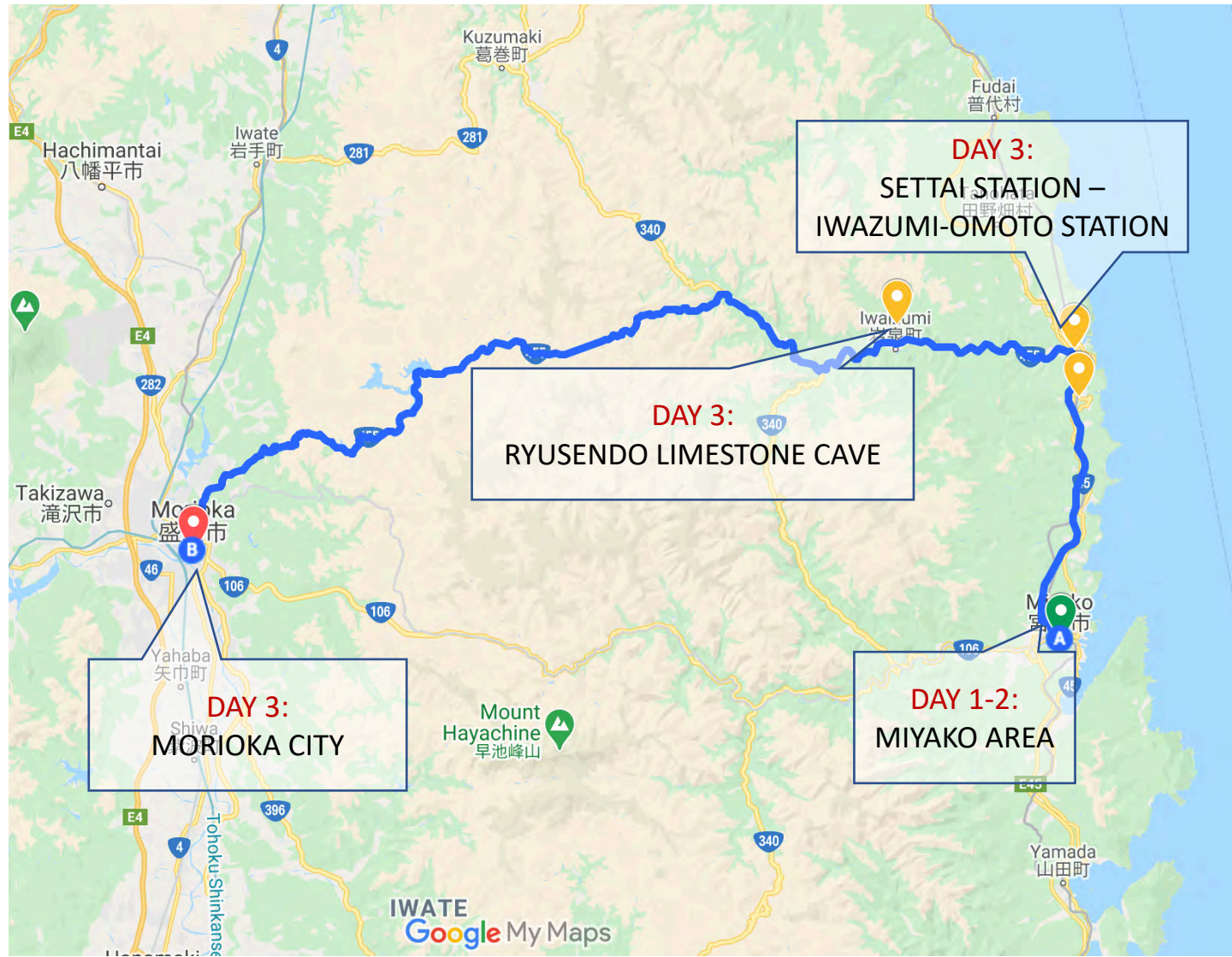
[We provide & What to bring](#)

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[Reservation & Cancellation policy](#)

ROUTE MAP (Days 1-3)



Source: Google My Maps

Day-by-day Itinerary

Day 1 – Settling in to Sanriku Geopark and ‘Paradise Beach’

Arrive at Sanriku Geopark (Miyako City, Iwate Prefecture) and check-in to your accommodation overlooking the beautiful Jodogahama Beach on the Pacific Coast. Free of your luggage, wander down to the beach with your guide and spend a relaxed hour or so exploring and soaking up the stunning scenery.

Jodogahama is one of the more recognizable scenic points of Sanriku Geopark, featuring beautiful white sandy beaches framed by pine forest, dramatic rock formations and emerald green water. For an indication of the pristine beauty of this area, you don’t have to look any further than the name of the beach itself; the word ‘Jodo’ refers to the Buddhist concept of Nirvana or eternal paradise.

After spending some time at beach, head back to the Sanriku Geopark Visitor Centre for an overall tour orientation session and to learn a little more about the unique environment where you will be spending the next three days.

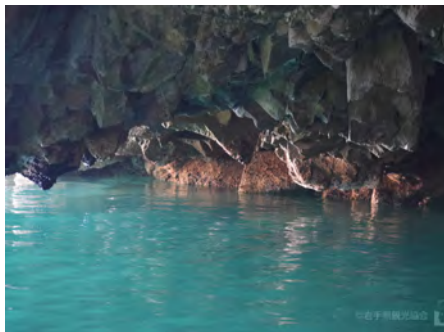
The rest of the afternoon/evening is yours to relax and prepare yourself for the journey ahead! Sit down to a delicious ‘Kaiseki’ course dinner at your accommodation featuring dishes made with locally sourced seafood and ingredients before enjoying a leisurely soak in the outdoor baths.

Activity: Beach walk & orientation

Difficulty: 1

Accommodation: Jodogahama Park Hotel | shared room with ensuite | Onsen

Included meals: Dinner



Day 2 - Sights and flavours of Miyako

An early start is worth it for the epic views of the morning sun over the Pacific as you begin your journey walking along the Michinoku Coastal Trail. First fuel-up with a delicious local breakfast eaten outdoors while taking-in the scenery of Jodogahama Beach.

The first section of the trail will take you from the beautiful Mattsukihama through to the ‘Michino-eki’ (roadside station) in nearby Taro town.

After lunch, enjoy the rare opportunity to view a local fish-market auction in the afternoon! Unlike most fish markets in Japan, Miyako City fish market is unique in that it holds two daily auctions, one in the morning and one in the evening, with a steady flow of fishing boats unloading at the port. A local fisherman – affectionately known as the ‘Squid Prince’ by Miyako locals – will give you a guided tour of the market and share his recommendations for seasonal seafood to enjoy throughout the rest of your journey.

Before sampling some of the fresh seafood for dinner it’s time for one more activity! Head back to the beautiful Jodogahama and board a small boat for a guided tour of the ‘Blue Cove’. Not unlike the famous Blue Grotto of Capri in Italy, be amazed at the trick of light which creates an almost neon blue effect as the sun hits the deep yet perfectly clear water in the cove. Your captain will also give you a tour of some of the dramatic rock formations and points of interest in the bay (just beware of the overly-friendly seagulls)!

Dinner

Wrap up an active day with an extra-special local culinary experience! Enjoy eating and drinking just like one of the locals at a small ‘izakaya’ (Japanese-style pub) owned and run by none-other than the ‘Squid Prince’ who guided you around the fish market! Watch the fresh produce transformed into multiple tasty dishes to be shared with the group tapas-style. With everything from fresh sashimi to crispy tempura codfish the Prince will make sure no one goes hungry! Pair each dish with recommendations from the impressive selection of local sake.

Activity: Walking – Michinoku Coastal Trail | Distance – approx. 10 km | Time – 4 hours
Difficulty: 2
Accommodation: Jodogahama Park Hotel | shared room with ensuite | Onsen
Included meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



Day 3 – from the blue ocean to the blue mountains

Today’s program starts with a break for your weary legs as you sit back and take in the coastal scenery from the windows of the famous Sanriku Railway. Known for being one of the most scenic train routes in northern Japan, your ride will take you north from Miyako City to Settai Station, crossing over the rias coastline where you can see first-hand the impact and recovery from the tsunami of 2011.

Once off the train in Settai, put those walking shoes back on and conquer another section of the Michinoku Coastal Trail; this time between Settai and Iwaizumi-Omoto Stations, crossing over the beautiful Moshi-kaigan coastline along the way.

Having worked up an appetite, reward yourself with a delicious lunch of Italian style dishes made with local ingredients from the Sanriku region at local crowd-pleaser *Trattoria Acqua Monte*.

In the afternoon, leave the coast behind you and enter a whole new world of blue – the fascinating ‘Ryusendo’ Limestone Cave! Believed to extend for some 5000m and featuring eight underground lakes (three of which are open to the public), Ryusendo is known as one of Japan’s ‘three great limestone caves’ and has been named a national natural treasure along with the bats that inhabit the caverns. The water of the underground lakes is said to be among some of the most transparent in the world, giving off a transfixingly beautiful blue hue when illuminated.

From Ryusendo, your private transport will take you across the mountains of Iwate Prefecture to the capital city of Morioka! Check-in to your accommodation in the downtown area of the city and enjoy another night of eating and drinking like (and with!) the locals and preparing for the next section of your journey!

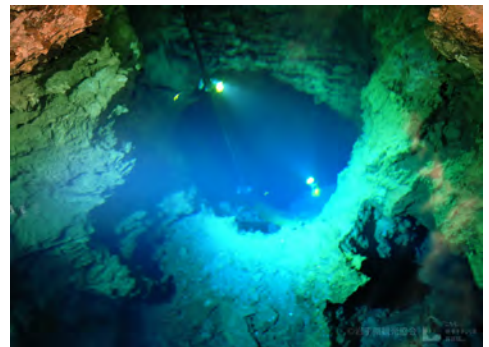
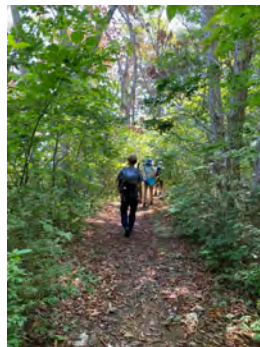
Activity: Walking – Michinoku Coastal Trail | Distance – approx. 8km | Time – 2 hours
Cave exploration | Distance – 700m | Time – 2 hours

Difficulty: 2

Accommodation:

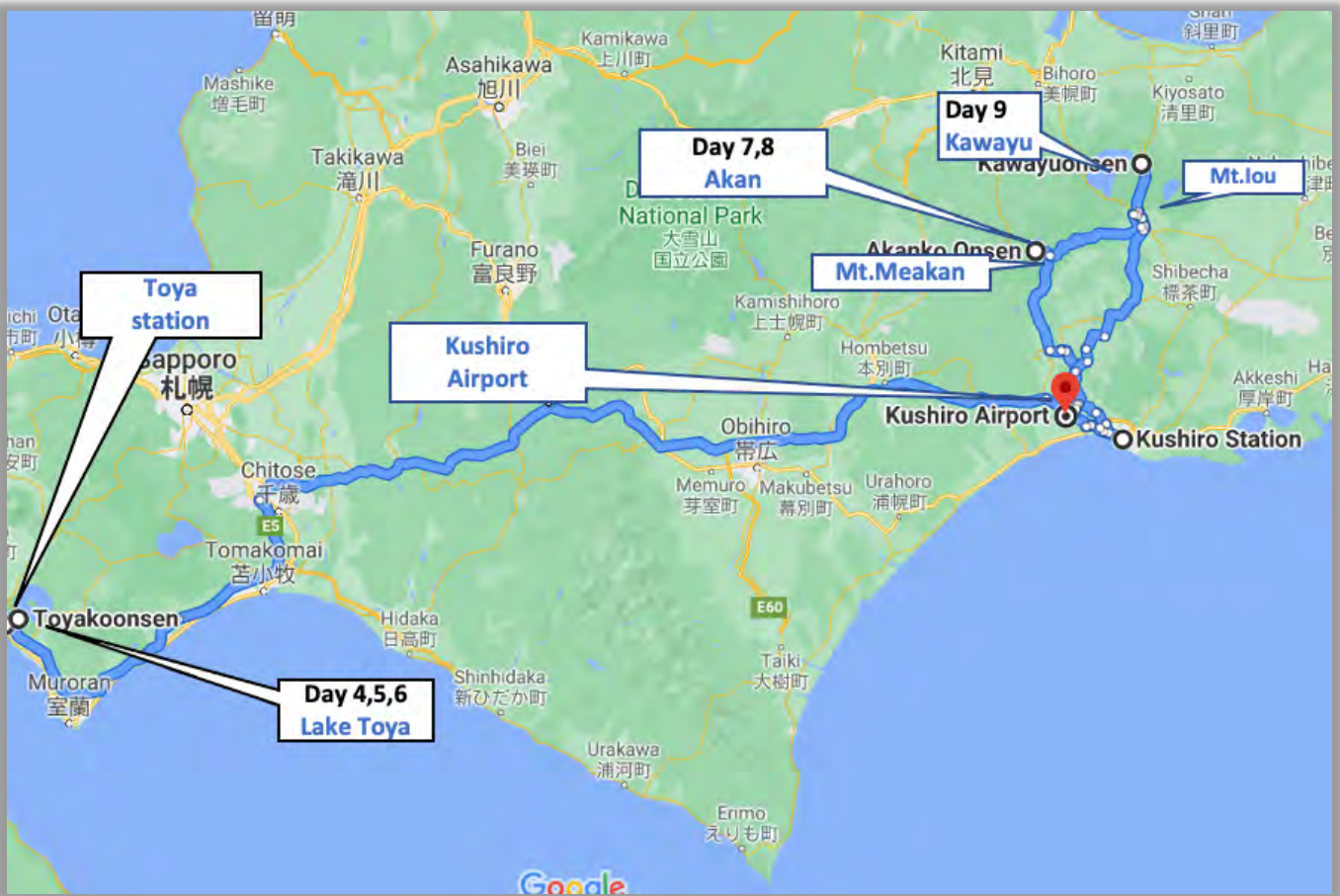
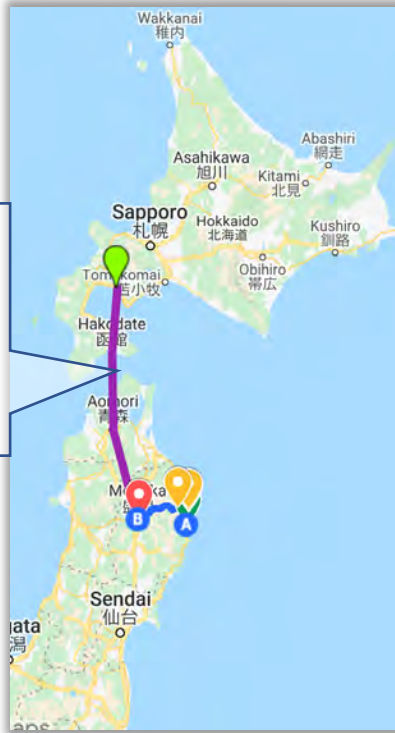
Morioka City (Business Hotel) | twin-share room, Western style with ensuite

Included meals: Breakfast, Lunch



ROUTE MAP (Days 4-10)

DAY 4:
MORIOKA CITY
→
LAKE TOYA



Source: Google My Maps

Day 4

Transfer to Hokkaido by bullet train

Morioka station 10:32- 12:18 Shin Hakodate Hokuto 12:18 /12:34 Toya13:43

Welcome to Hokkaido! Our guide, Ms.Egawa, the Toya Volcano Master, greet you at Toya station. After a brief introduction, we will hop on a van and head to Lake Toya Onsen town.

After a short ride, we will arrive at Volcano Science Museum at the Toya Visitor Center to deepen our knowledge of Mt.Usu that erupted in 2000. Mt.Usu is located in Shikotsu-Toya National Park, a Living Volcano Museum. Visitors can see the diverse range of hot springs, active volcanoes, and volcanic activity in this area. Mt.Usu is an active volcano, and it erupts in 20-25 years of the cycle. The most recent eruption being in March and April 2000. This eruption created 60 new craters on the west side of the mountain and destroying nearby buildings and roads, but there were no victims.

Late afternoon, we will check in our hotel along the lake. You may see Mt.Youtei, also known as Ezo Fuji, which resembles Mt.Fuji over the lake. Please refresh yourself with an Open-Air onsen after the long train ride from Morioka.

Accommodation - Lake Toya | Private room with ensuite | Onsen Spa
Included meals - Dinner



Day 5

Guided one-day volcano tour in the Toya-Usu UNESCO Geopark

Today, we spend a whole day with our Volcano master Ms.Egawa to go deeper into this area. We can see some of the volcanic activities scars from walking trails.

We will take a cable car that goes up close to the Mt.Usu volcano's summit. From there, we enjoy the great view of Mt. Showa Shinzan, Lake Toya, and the whole area around this volcano. Mt. Showa Shinzan is a volcanic lava dome created between 1943 to 1945 due to the Mt.Usu eruption. The peak is now 398 m /1,306ft tall and still actively smoking. Our next destination is 1977 Eruption Remnants Park, and we visit a hospital that collapsed due to crustal movements by the eruption.

After having lunch, it will be a walking tour along Nishiyama foothills' path, where disaster remains. We can see how close Mt.Usu is to people's lives by following the volcanic disaster's scars remain vividly.

We will stay at the lake view hotel on this night again, and you may see the beautiful lake and mountain around there in a different way on this night.

Accommodation - Leke Toya | Private room with ensuite | Onsen Spa
Included meals - Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Activity :

- ◆ Walk Nishiyama Crater Walking Trail
 - Time Required: 1.5hours
 - Distance:1.8km/1.1miles
 - Location : Lake Toya Area
 - Field situation : Unpaved road

Difficulty: 2



Day 6

The blessings of volcanoes, guided food tour at Toyoura and canoeing at Lake Toya

After breakfast, we will leave the hotel and head for Toyoura town, about an hour's drive away. Toyoura has a pleasant coastline that opens wide to the south facing the Funkawan Bay, which means "the Volcanic Eruption Bay" in Japanese. Toyoura is a town scallop cultivation at Funka Bay originated. A guide living in the local area will introduce you to "the world of scallops that you do not know," including how scallops are cultivated and shipped. After a walk of the fishing harbor, please enjoy a lunch of all kinds of scallops dishes at a popular restaurant even among the residents of the town.

We will back to Lake Toya and ready for a 2-hour canoeing adventure. The lake is nearly circular, 10 km in diameter from the east-west and 9 km from north-south. Lake Toya is the northernmost lake in Japan that never ices and the second most transparent lake in Japan. Lake Toya boasts pure, clear water and changing faces on a different day under different weather conditions. Whether it shines or rains, we can cruise on the lake and feel the vast nature near you—mellow and relaxed canoeing on the lake and teatime.

Late afternoon, please relax along the lake and enjoy fireworks in the night.

Accommodation - Lake Toya | Private room with ensuite | Onsen Spa
Included meals - Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Activity :

◆Canoeing

- Time Required: 2hours
- Location : Lake Toya

Difficulty: 2



Day 7

Transfer to Kushiro and get brief instruction about Akan Mashu National Park

We leave Lake Toya to Kushiro by express train. We will change trains at Minami Chitose Station and travel to Kushiro, which takes total 5 hours of a comfortable ride. Upon arriving at JR Kushiro Station, we will head to Lake Akan Onsen Town with one hour ride.

Akan Mashu National Park is located in eastern Hokkaido. Almost 90% or more of the national park is an undeveloped nature conservation area. The park is well known for its active volcanos, the expanse of forests, and three beautiful lakes: Lake Akan, Lake Mashu, and Lake Kussharo besides Ainu culture at Akanko Ainu Kotan.

Upon arriving at Eco-Museum Center in the Akan Onsen Town, we will receive a lecture about Akan Mashu National Park. We will check in our hotel and relax on the onsen for the next day's adventure.

Accommodation –Lake Akan | Private room with ensuite | Onsen Spa

Included meals – Breakfast, Dinner

Activity: N/A

Difficulty: N/A

Day 8

Guided walking tour at Lake Onneto

It is a day to go around Lake Onneto where the minerals generated from the volcano are melting and to know that the surrounding environment and landscape are formed together with the volcano. Enjoy the walking course around Lake Onneto, which is located about 20km/12miles away from Akan Onsen.

In the surrounding area, there is a pure forest of Sakhalin spruce and we can observe abundant vegetation such as alpine plants and many mushrooms throughout the season with a primitive atmosphere. It is also a place where we can meet the natural monument Black woodpecker.

After a relaxing walking tour, we will go back to the hotel and visit Akanko Ainu Kotan to get an idea of Ainu culture.

Accommodation –Lake Akan | Private room with ensuite | Onsen Spa

Included meals – Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

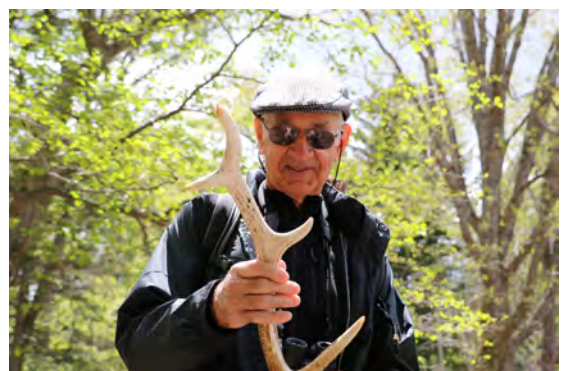
Activity:

◆ Walking

- Time required: Approximately 4hours
- From the start-Yu no Taki: Partly paved, unpaved, and partly covered
- From the east side of Lake Onneto to the foot of Mt.Meakandake: Unpaved, with some fallen trees
- Relatively flat

* Wifi and mobile phone radio waves are out of service in this area except for the paved road on the west side of Lake Onneto.

Difficulty: 2



Day 9

Guided Climbing tour at Mt Meakandake

This is a day to challenge yourself with a climb of Mt.Meakandake that is still active while feeling the history of people around the past industrial remains such as sulfur mining traces.

We start Volcano Trail of Mt. Meakandake from the Lake Akan trailhead near Akan Onsen. It is easy climbing course with a gentle slope. We will aim for the summit of Mt. Meakandake while enjoying the scenery of the volcano and the sulfur mining traces on the way.

The volcanic activity in this area started about 20,000 years ago. It is a compound volcano with ten mountains forming a complex mountain body after repeated eruptions, and it is still active today. Mt.Meakandake is covered with forests centered on Sakhalin spruce, which is rare in Hokkaido, and *Abies sachalinensis*. After arriving at the Lake Onneto trailhead, we will be on a van for one hour and head to Kawayu Onsen Town.

Accommodation –Kawayu | Private room with ensuite | Onsen Spa

Included meals – Breakfast, Buffet Dinner

Activity:

- ◆ Climbing
 - Time required: Approximately 7hours
 - Unpaved (relatively well-maintained mountain trails), cliffs near the summit
 - Height difference: about 800m/2,624feet

Difficulty: 3

