

Exploring Akan & Shiretoko in Winter

Drift Ice Walking, Snowshoe Hiking, Cycling on Ice & Ainu Culture Walks



Experience outdoor activities unique to winter in the two national parks of Shiretoko and Akan Mashu. From the Shiretoko mountain range and Mashu and Kussharo calderas to the volcanoes of Akan, discover the breathtaking scenery of eastern Hokkaido.

The highlight of your time in Shiretoko National Park is the drift ice, which appears along the Shiretoko coast in January each year having made its way from the mouth of the Amur River some 1,000 kilometers away. Don snowshoes and hike through the Shiretoko forest to an observation point to see the drift ice. Next, head down to the sea for the extraordinary experience of walking on and floating among the drift ice.

Shiretoko's unique ecosystem, which covers both sea and land and relies on the drift ice for its biodiversity, was recognized in 2005 when it was registered as a World Natural Heritage Site. On this trip, observe the drift ice from land and sea and experience it with your entire body. At the same time, gain a deeper understanding of Shiretoko wildlife and its natural habitat.

Akan Mashu National Park is a stunning landscape of forests and lakes that boasts Japan's largest area of volcanic topography. With the powerful presence of the Meakan and Oakan mountains and the magnificence of Lake Akan, there is no better place to experience Hokkaido's natural diversity than Shiretoko.

Onneto, a small lake with a peculiar shimmer that attracts curious tourists throughout the summer, is closed off by deep snow in the winter. However, equipped with snowshoes, you can make your way into the primeval forest to enjoy the vivid contrast between the evergreen leaves and the white snow. From the frozen surface of Lake Onneto bask in the magnificent views of Mount Meakan and Mount Akan-Fuji shimmering silver in the crisp air.

Cycling on the frozen expanse of Lake Akan with a fat bike equipped with special tires is an activity unique to this season and this location. Moreover, walking with guides from the local Ainu population through forests that Japan's indigenous people have long cherished is an invaluable experience and one that brings you closer to the Ainu philosophy of living in harmony with nature.

Highlights:

- Experience walking on drift ice while wearing a special wetsuit
- Hike through the Shiretoko forest in snowshoes and observe the drift ice from the land
- Walk in snowshoes to Lake Onneto with a local guide
- Cycle on frozen Lake Akan with a fat bike
- Discover the winter forest with Ainu, who have long lived in harmony with nature

Location:

Shiretoko (Utoro), Hokkaido

Lake Akan, Hokkaido

Main Activity: Walking on the drift ice and Snowshoe hiking

Difficulty: 3

Tour Dates: 1st February to 10th March

Pax: Minimum 4 Maximum 8

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[Day-by-day Itinerary](#)

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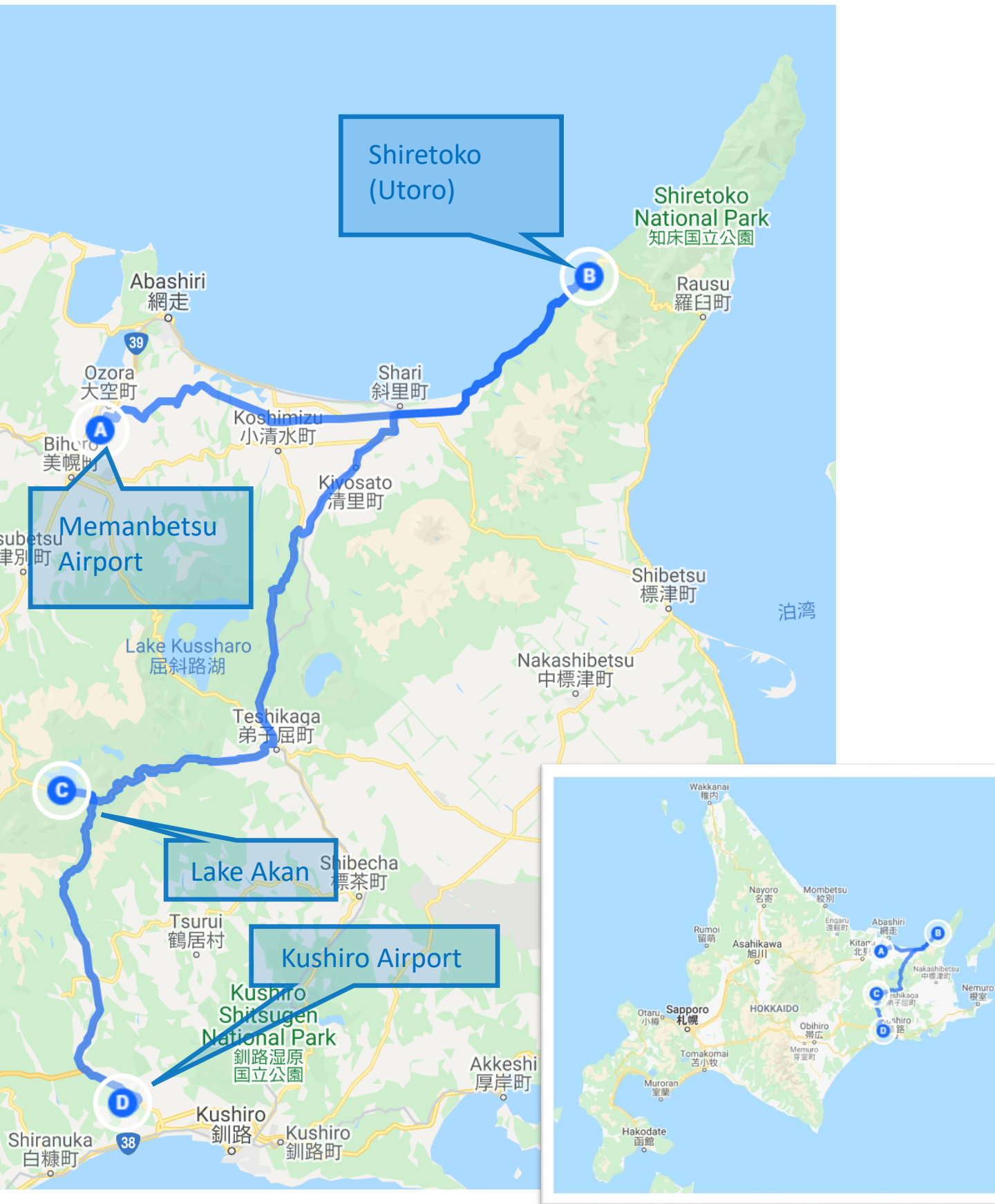
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Route map



Day-by-day Itinerary

Day 1 - Arrive at Memanbetsu – Shiretoko (Utoro)

After arriving at Memanbetsu Airport (MMB), meet your tour guide at the arrival lobby. Direct flights to Memanbetsu Airport from Haneda Airport in Tokyo are available with JAL, ANA or AIR DO. Once your group is assembled, board a private bus to Hokkaido Museum of Northern People. The museum showcases the cultures that once flourished along the coast of the Sea of Okhotsk in Hokkaido. Learn about the lifestyles of the people who lived in this extremely cold region and how their culture has influenced the Hokkaido of today.

From the museum head to Kitakobushi Shiretoko Hotel & Resort at Utoro Onsen, the gateway to World Natural Heritage Site Shiretoko. From here, there is a panoramic view of the Sea of Okhotsk, the setting for the following day's events. A sightseeing boat pier, roadside station and convenience store are all within walking distance, making it one of the best locations in the area. A footbath, bar lounge and various other facilities overlooking the sea add to the pleasure of staying in Shiretoko.

After checking in, join a briefing about the itinerary before enjoying a buffet dinner at the hotel.

Dinner

A buffet dinner at the hotel. The 50 or so buffet dishes, which are both Japanese and Western, make full use of seafood from Shiretoko and other ingredients from Hokkaido's farmland. Food is freshly prepared in open kitchens and a variety of sweets is served up by the restaurant's pastry chefs.

Day 2 - Shiretoko

Breakfast

A buffet-style breakfast at the hotel

Don snowshoes and begin hiking through the winter forest and into the open snowfields, where the views are better. Look out for traces of wildlife, such as footprints on the snow, while enjoying the otherworldly atmosphere created by the snow. After reaching the Furepe Falls observation point, spend time enjoying the half-frozen falls. From the sheer cliffs that are a feature of Shiretoko marvel at the sight of drift ice on the Sea of Okhotsk and the Shiretoko mountain range shimmering in the cold air before returning to the nature center.

Lunch

Seasonal seafood at a local restaurant run by a former fisherman.

In the afternoon, enjoy walking on the drift ice, an activity unique to Shiretoko in winter. Wearing a specially designed wetsuit, follow your guide across the surface of the sea. The ever-changing conditions mean the ice can often be like stepping-stones.

Buffeted by seasonal winds and ocean currents, pack ice drifts about 1,000 kilometers across the Sea of Okhotsk. The phytoplankton trapped in the ice blooms below the surface as the ice begins to melt in spring, generating huge amounts of zooplankton that feed on it. This attracts larger sea animals, such as seals and sea lions, in search of fish, as well as seabirds and even larger mammals such as orca. In addition, migrating salmon and trout bulk up with marine nutrients as they head to their river spawning grounds and, in doing so, become a valuable food source for land-based animals such as brown bears and white-tailed eagles. Eventually, animal droppings and carcasses return to the soil and become nutrients for plants that enrich the Shiretoko forests. Dead leaves are washed into rivers as the snow melts and carried to the sea, where they become food for sea animals. In this way, the drift ice supports the ocean food chain, with phytoplankton at the bottom and the orca at the top, as well as the unique ecosystem that connects land and sea.

This experience allows observation of winter wonders that cannot be seen from the land. These include the size and colors of the ice slabs. After the drift ice walk, follow your guide to a point that offers superb views of the sunset. End your day in Shiretoko and return to the hotel to see the dramatic sight of the sun setting over the ice.

Dinner

Japanese and Western-style course meals using ingredients from the mountains and sea at the hotel.

- Activity:** Morning : Snowshoe hiking
Distance : 2.5km
Time required : 2 hours, Elavetion gain : 45m
- Afternoon : Drift ice walking
Distance : 1 – 2km *Depending on the ice conditions
Time required : 1.5 hours
- Difficulty:** Snowshoe hiking : 2/5, Drift ice walking : 2/5

Day 3 – Shiretoko (Utoro) - Akan

Breakfast

A buffet-style breakfast at the hotel

Leave your hotel and travel about 10 minutes by private vehicle to the Shiretoko Nature Center to continue from the previous day.

Today's snowshoe hike is centered on the Shiretoko forest. Follow your local guide into the majestic atmosphere of the primeval forest, a place where few people have ventured. Hike through the snow into the depths of the forest. Look out for the reflections of birds and trees in the snow, as well as the footprints of the creatures that live in this harsh environment, which is an important part of the Shiretoko ecosystem. The tip of Shiretoko Peninsula and Cape Shiretoko can be seen from the open snowfields.

Lunch

At a local restaurant specializing in Shiretoko seafood dishes such as seafood on rice.

Following lunch, leave by private vehicle to hot spring hotel Lake Akan Tsuruga Wings on the shores of Lake Akan. Enjoy this unique environment from the moment you enter and see the Ainu gallery in the lobby. The hotel offers a number of rock baths with various temperatures, aromas and herbs, as well as healthful meals that use seasonal ingredients and as few additives as possible.

Dinner

Japanese kaiseki meal that makes the most of seasonal ingredients from Hokkaido's mountains and seas at the hotel

Activity: Morning : Snowshoe hiking
Distance : 2.5km
Time required : 2 hours, Elavetion gain : 45m

Difficulty: Snowshoe hiking : 2/5

Day 4 – Lake Akan

Breakfast

A buffet-style breakfast at the hotel

Leave the hotel by private vehicle with an English-speaking guide and an expert on local nature.

Onneto, at the foot of the active volcano Mount Meakan, is a small lake with a circumference of about two and a half kilometers. The name means “big old lake” in the indigenous Ainu language.

Don snowshoes before entering the deep snow of the Sakhalin spruce primeval forest. Make your way through the forest. Look out for traces of wildlife, such as footprints on the snow, and enjoy the vivid contrast between the evergreen leaves and the white snow. You reach Lake Onneto in about an hour. The lake, which has an unusual sheen in summer, freezes during the cold months. From the frozen surface of the lake bask in the magnificent views of Mount Meakan and Mount Akan-Fuji shimmering silver in the crisp air.

Lunch

At a local restaurant that specializes in fish from Lake Akan.

In the afternoon, experience cycling unique to this season and unique to Lake Akan. On a fat bike with tires 4.8 inches wider and tires one size thicker than usual cycle across the frozen expanse of Lake Akan while marveling at Mt. Oakan towering over you. There is an irresistible feeling of exhilaration in cycling on ice.

Dinner

A casual dinner of mostly seafood, such as sashimi and grilled fish, from Hokkaido

Activity: Morning : Snowshoe hiking
Distance : 3km
Time required : 3 hours, Elavetion gain : Generally flat

Afternoon : Cycling on Lake Akan
Distance : 5km, Elavation gain : Generally flat
Time required : 3 hours

Difficulty: Snowshoe hiking : 2/5, Cycling : 3/5

Day 5 – Lake Akan

Breakfast

A buffet-style breakfast at the hotel

Leave the hotel by private vehicle with an English-speaking guide and an expert on local nature.

Equipped with snowshoes, set out to hike the Bokke Nature Trail. In the Ainu language, “bokke” means “a place that is boiling” and refers to the geological phenomenon of mud volcanoes. The bokke forest is a mix of coniferous trees such as spruce and fir and broad-leaved trees such as katsura and mizunara. It is also rich in wildlife and home to many Yezo sika deer and squirrels. This two-hour hike offers the opportunity to fully enjoy all that the volcanic Akan Mashu National Park has to offer in winter.

Lunch

On local ingredients at a long-established restaurant at Akanko Onsen.

Hokkaido is dotted with villages where Japan’s indigenous Ainu people live. With some 120 residents, Lake Akan Ainu Kotan is Hokkaido’s largest Ainu village. Nature is highly respected in Ainu culture. With instruction by a local Ainu guide, begin the afternoon by making a traditional Ainu musical instrument known as a mukkuri. After this, learn from your guide how important the lakeside forest once was for food, clothing and shelter. Hear stories of the forest and discover the role the many plants played in traditional Ainu lifestyle. The forest is the ideal place to test out your newly made mukkuri. Mount Oakan, which is one of the “One Hundred Mountains of Japan” (日本百名山), can be seen from among the trees. Spend time here taking in views long enjoyed by the Ainu and gain a deeper feeling for their culture. Snowshoes are worn if necessary.

Dinner

A course dinner with teppanyaki centered on Ezo venison from Hokkaido at a local restaurant

Activity: Morning : Snowshoe hiking
Distance : 3km
Time required : 2 hours, Elavetion gain : Generally flat

Afternoon : Cultural walking with Ainu
Distance : 1.5km, Elavation gain : Generally flat
Time required : 1.5 hours

Difficulty: Snowshoe hiking : 2/5

Day 6 – Lake Akan to Kushiro

Breakfast

A buffet-style breakfast at the hotel

Check out of the ryokan and leave for Kushiro Station or Kushiro Airport by private vehicle.

Accommodations :

Day 1 - 2 : (Hotel) Kitakobushi Shiretoko Hotel & Resort, Twin Room with Toilet and Buthtub

Day 3 - 5 : (Ryokan) Lake Akan Tsuruta WINGS, Twin Room with Toilet and Buthtub

What's included

- Local English-speaking guide and activity guides
- Accommodation (5 nights)
- Meals (5 breakfasts, 4 lunches, and 5 dinners)
- Coach transfer from Memanbetsu Airport to Kushiro Airport or Kushiro Station
- Safety equipment
- Cost of activities

We provide & What to bring

We provide

- Safety equipment
- The guide will also bring GPS, communication device, first aid kit
- Snowshoe
- Dry suits and gloves for drift ice walking

What to bring

Upper and lower body

Warm Jacket, Water proof warmwear, T-shirt, Hiking pants, Underwear

Hands, feet and head

Knit cap, Sunglasses, Neck warmer, Warm gloves, Warm socks, Snow boots

Activities

Backpack (over 20L) and rain cover

Other items

- Portable toilet
- Small towel
- First aid
- Bring your water bottle (please support the conservation of our planet)
- Cash (AS small shops and restaurant may accept cash only, we recommend that you exchange money after arriving at the airport in Japan.)

*Please bring any prescription medication, asthma inhalers or epi-pens that you need.

Optional

- Camera
- Sunscreen
- Wind jacket
- Binoculars
- Trekking poles

About us

JTB -- “Perfect moments, always.”

The JTB Group traces its roots back to 1912 when “Japan Tourist Bureau” was formed to attract international travelers to Japan and assist with their travel needs. While our activities and clientele have expanded greatly since then, the JTB Group remains aligned around a core purpose: bringing people, places and possibilities together. Developing innovative services and solutions that enable our customers to connect more deeply and meaningfully. Contributing to the creation of sustainable communities and a more peaceful and interconnected planet.

No matter how the world changes, the JTB Group remains as committed now as we were 108 years ago to delivering unrivaled excitement, value and satisfaction. At its essence, JTB’s legacy resides in the bonds of trust we have forged with our customers, communities and stakeholders.

The JTB Group is poised to embark on the next exciting chapter in its incredible journey, staying attuned to and aligned with the evolving needs of a new era, maintaining its position as a digital trailblazer, and delivering real value that our customers can feel.

Guides

A certified tour conductor will accompany you throughout the trip, and each activity will be led by a guide who lives in the area.

Information and Requirements

Dietary Restrictions

If you have dietary restrictions, an allergy to nuts or seafood, or need vegetarian, vegan, or gluten-free meals, please let us know in advance and we will provide you alternatives to the best of our abilities.

Emergency Response Plan

There is mobile phone reception at all accommodation facilities. In the event of an accident, your guide will respond promptly in cooperation with local medical personnel. In the event of problems such as broken gear or minor mechanical problems, please rest assured that we will assist you.

Reservation & Cancellation Policy

Payment Methods

Only payments by credit card will be accepted.

How to pay by credit card

Visa, MasterCard®, JCB, AMEX and Diners Club are accepted.

Your credit card statement will show that the payment has been made to JTB Corp., the agent handling registration.

Cancellation

*In the event of a cancellation, your deposit will be refunded after deducting the cancellation fees shown below.

*JTB will refund the remainder of the tour fee within 7 days of the day after cancellation if the refund is requested before the departure of the tour.

*Cancellation fee when notice is given:

- 21 or more days prior to the departure date of the tour : No cancellation fee
- 8-20 days prior to the departure date of the tour : 20% of the tour fee
- 2-7 days prior to the departure date of the tour : 30% of the tour fee
- 1 days prior to the day of departure : 50% of the tour fee
- After the day of departure, or if no notice is given : 100% of the tour fee

Disclaimer

Trip Cancellations: JTB reserves the right to cancel or change the itinerary of a tour. In the event that we need to cancel a tour, we will refund 100% of your costs.

Weather conditions are almost never severe enough to warrant cancelling a tour; cancellations only occur as a result of truly exceptional events that could not be predicted.

JTB is not responsible for compensating any additional costs such as flights.