

Coexistence with Rare Wildlife - East Hokkaido Winter Observation Tour



The “Hokkaido Winter Bird Watching Tour,” rapidly gained popularity around the world due to its high encounter rate with rare wildlife such as Steller's sea eagle, white-tailed eagle and Blakiston's fish owl. Every winter, bird watching spots are becoming more and more crowded, with a concentration of tourists that have become undesirable for wildlife and local communities but also making difficult to book accommodations, cruises and local guides.

This tour aims to avoid crowded watching spots and lodgings. While coexisting in harmony with the wildlife, we will observe birds through traditional smelt ice fishing methods, local fishing boat rides and local photographers' best spots!

We will experience the Hokkaido winter wildlife as you never did before through the both unique "coexistence of traditional fishing and wildlife" and "wildlife ecology observation on a fishing boat." We will also visit the center dedicated to the protection of wild animals injured by accidents that occur due to the close proximity between them and people. We would like to think about the symbiosis between wildlife and people in order to realize sustainable tourism.

Highlights:

- Explore and photograph birds of prey (eagles, owls) and wildlife (sea otters, foxes, cranes, and deer) through traditional smelt ice fishing methods, fishing boat rides, and secret spots.
- Observe the ecology of rare wildlife through "symbiosis of traditional fishing and wildlife" and "observation of wildlife ecology by fishing boat," which are unique to the East Hokkaido in winter.
- Take part in a backyard tour of the Institute for Raptor Biomedicine Japan to understand the current status of wildlife in Hokkaido and contribute to the conservation of birds of prey by donating the full amount of the tour fee.

Location: Kushiroshitsugen National Park, Eastern Hokkaido

Main Activity: Wild Animal Observation

Difficulty: 2

Tour Dates: From the end of January to the beginning of March

Pax: Minimum 6 Maximum 10

Price: From JPY 386,000

[Route map](#)

[Day-by-day Itinerary](#)

[What's included](#)

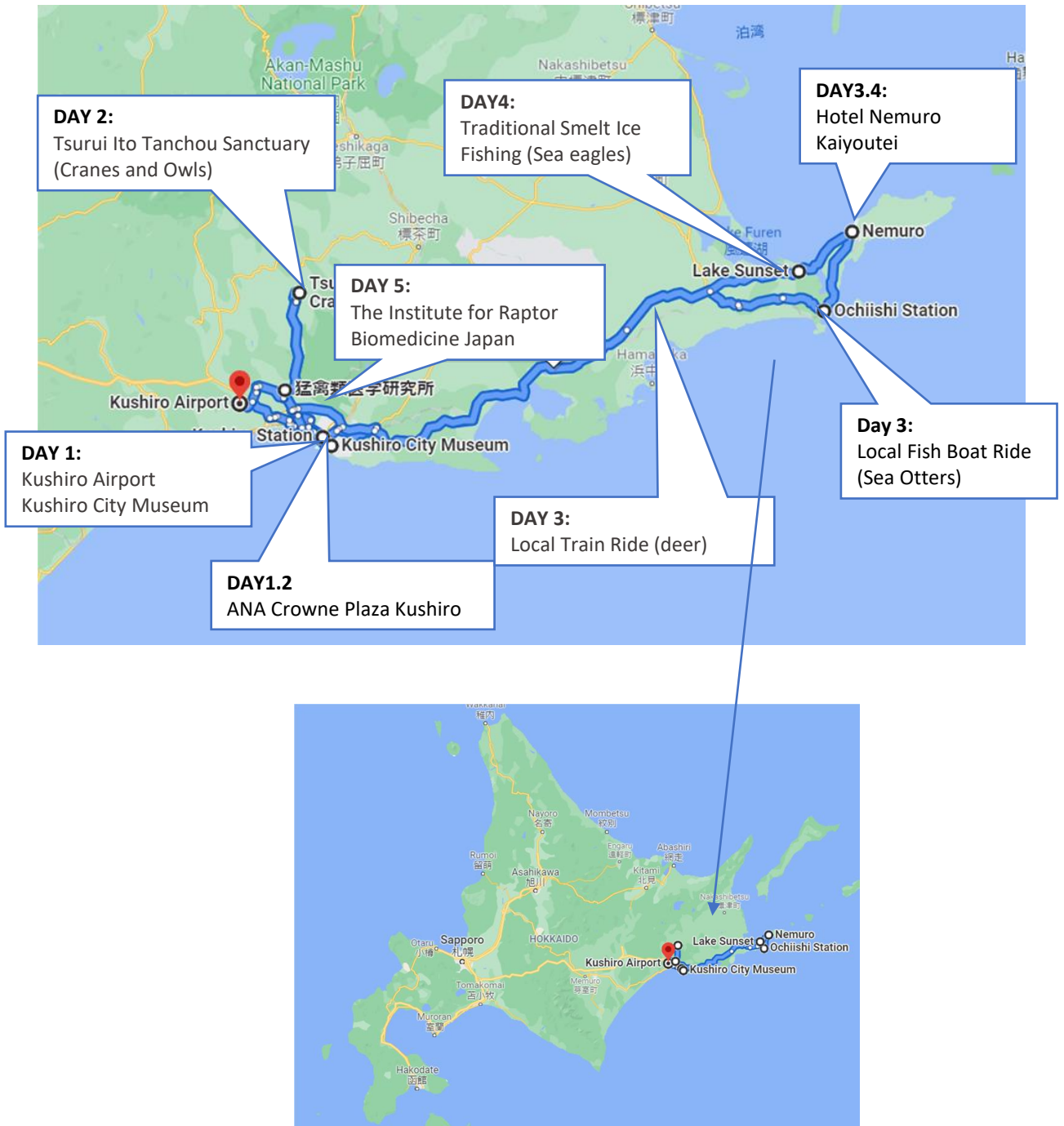
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Route map



Source: Google My Map

Day-by-day Itinerary

Day 1

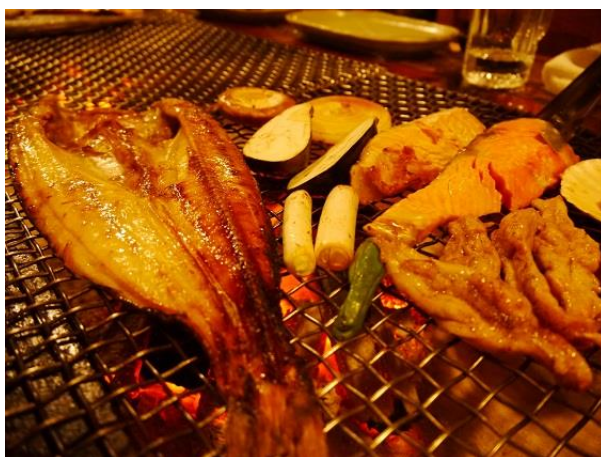
Meeting at Kushiro airport and National Park orientation

We will meet the rest of the group around 1:00 pm at Kushiro Airport (KUH). Once everyone has joined the group, we will spend some time getting to know each other and having a briefing for our upcoming adventure program before heading to the center of Kushiro city, only 20 min away from the airport by private van.

We will visit the Kushiro City Museum to get an idea of the uniqueness of east Hokkaido. Kushiro Marshland, which is located only few km north of the city of Kushiro, is Japan's largest marshland with a width bigger than the size of the center of Tokyo. We will learn about the wildlife and vegetation of Kushiro area and acknowledge the rarity of encounters with wildlife that we will experience from tomorrow. The Japan's largest submarine canyon is also located in this area and for our first Hokkaido meal, we will savor Kushiro's unique "seafood robata-yaki", a traditional way to enjoy fresh local seafood, similar to a barbecue.

Accommodation - Kushiro | Private room with ensuite

Included meals - Dinner at a Local Restaurant



Day 2

Visit the Tanchou (Red-crowned crane) homeland

Today, we will visit the homeland of Tanchou, "the Red-crowned crane" with a local photographer.

An hour's drive north from the town of Kushiro brings us to the small village of Tsurui, which means "the village where Tanchou live". It is where you can encounter the wildlife that has been essential to Hokkaido since ancient times, called Sarurun Kamui (God of the Marsh) in the Ainu language. Tanchou were thought to be temporarily extinct in the 19th century due to human overhunting. In Tsurui Village, more than a dozen Tanchou were discovered around 1920, and since then, residents have protected them. The town was named Tsurui Village because it became a habitat and breeding ground for the specially protected Tanchou. Today, the population has been revived to over 1,500 birds, but they are now facing a new stage of coexistence with humans due to their dependence on feeding and destruction of farmland.

The Ito Sanctuary was established on the land owned by Mr. Ito, who started feeding Tanchou in 1966 while working as a dairy farmer in Tsurui Village. Mr. Ito supported the conservation of Tanchou by serving as a feeder and monitor of them on commission in Hokkaido. After a lecture by an expert on coexistence with Tanchou, we will experience the ecology of them and human coexistence through photographing and observing them.

We will visit the studio of Mr. Wada, a famous local photographer in Hokkaido, and have lunch while exchanging opinions on wildlife conservation.

In the afternoon, we will visit a place only known by the local photographer that is the home of birds such as Ural owls. *Wild animals cannot be guaranteed to be seen

Accommodation - Kushiro | Private room with ensuite

Included meals - Breakfast, Lunch

* Dinner can be eaten anywhere around the hotel or at the hotel on your own. Your guide will assist you with your requests.

Activity

◆ Wild Animal Observation

- Tanchou lecture by expert
- Exchange opinions on wildlife conservation
- Ural owl observation

Difficulty: 2



Day 3

Scenic train journey to a fish port and observation of wild otters from a local fishing boat

Enjoy a 2 hours train ride on the 135 km railway Hanasaki Line that connects JR Kushiro station and JR Nemuro station. On this scenic route that passes through a wetland registered in the Ramsar Convention and has the highest wildlife encounter rate in Japan, observe Ezo deer, fox and birds from the train window. We will also see forests, farms and the Pacific. Our journey will end at JR Ochiishi Station, 16 km before Nemuro Station.

After arriving at the local station, we will drive to Ochiishi fish port and will enjoy a lunch box cooked by local women with ingredients caught in Ochiishi to contribute to local production for local consumption.

We will take a fishing boat accompanied by a professional local fisherman with 40 years of fishing experience to a local hole-in-the-wall spectacular spot. For 2.5 hours overall, we will observe up close wild birds and endangered sea otters.

At a café along the frozen lake where we will be shooting tomorrow morning, Mr. Kawamura, the owner of Lake Sunset, will give us a lecture on the history of his eagle photography and the seasonal changes of Lake Furen over a coffee break, which will make tomorrow's shooting even more meaningful.

In the town of Nemuro, home to Japan's easternmost sake brewery, we will enjoy a night out, savoring dishes that go well with sake.

Accommodation - Nemuro | Private room with ensuite | Spa

Included meals - Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner at local restaurant

Activity

◆ Local Train Ride

- Time Required: 2 hours
- Location: JR Kushiro station to JR Ochiishi station

Difficulty: 1

◆ Fishing boat ride and observe sea otters

- Time Required: 2.5hours
- Location: Ochiishi

Difficulty: 2



Day 4

Symbiosis between traditional fishing method of ice fishing and wildlife

In the morning, we will head to Lake Sunset where there is a café that also serves as an accommodation facility located at the entrance to Nemuro City, right in front Lake Furen. Lake Furen is one of the world's greatest bird sanctuaries and one of the largest swan migration sites in Japan. As the swans leave the lake for warmer waters before the lake freezes over, it becomes an excellent spot to see white-tailed eagles and Steller's sea eagles up close.

After having taken plenty photos of eagles, we will move to the small fish port where we will take part in the traditional smelt fishing. This traditional method of fishing takes place during the winter season from mid-January to mid-March when the lake is frozen. Snowmobiles are used to travel over the iced lake to the point where the fish are caught. As fishes other than Japanese smelt are dumped on the snow, white-tailed eagles, Steller's sea eagles and crows fly in for the sake of it. Some of the white-tailed eagles are currently nesting around this area. We will taste fresh Japanese smelt at the port and warm up with chilled Japanese Sake while watching wild animals.

Enjoy creative cuisine such as Ezo deer meat from Nemuro for our dinner. In Hokkaido, the ever-increasing number of Ezo deer is causing serious damage to agriculture and deforestation. In an effort to solve this problem, Ezo deer meat is being actively used as a precious blessing from the forest, and activities are being carried out to maintain an appropriate number of animals.

Today's whole tour will make us to be more conscious about the coexistence of humans and wildlife.

Accommodation - Nemuro | Private room with ensuite | Spa

Included meals - Breakfast, Light Lunch, Dinner at local restaurant

Activity

◆ Wild Animal Observation

- Time Required: 1hours
- Location: Lake Furen

Difficulty: 2



◆ Traditional Smelt Ice fishing

- Time Required: 3 hours
- Location: Lake Furen
- Light lunch and warm drink will be served

Difficulty: 2



Day 5

Take part in a backyard tour by the Institute for Raptor Biomedicine Japan

After having a relaxing breakfast, we will check out the hotel and drive back to Kushiro city for over 2 hours with a refreshment stop. The scenery from the van will differ from what we saw two days ago on the train.

Dr. Saito and other experts will give us a backyard tour and held a discussion session at the Institute for Raptor Biomedicine Japan, where wild animals are protected in a sustainable way. For those animals that cannot return to the wild and have to be kept in captivity for their entire lives, the Institute respects their natural way of living and seeks out their potential. In order to deal with each life, the Institute implements breeding methods that involve them in environmental treatment, accident prevention, rescue of injured animals and environmental education activities. By grasping this fact and sharing with people around us after enjoying this wildlife tour, and by donating the entire amount of the lecture fee, we believe that we too, in no small way, can make a difference by being a responsible visitor coexisting peacefully with the local wildlife.

Then we'll head to Kushiro Airport and have a last toast at the airport restaurant before we fly back to Tokyo.

Included meals - Breakfast, Lunch

Activity

◆ Backyard Tour

- Location: Institute for Raptor Biomedicine Japan

Difficulty: 1

Accommodations :

Dates	Location	Type	Room	Spa
Day1.2 ANA Crowne Plaza Kushiro	Kushiro City	Hotel	Private room with ensuite/wifi	None
Day3.4 Nemuro Kaiyoutei	Nemuro City	Hotel	Private room with ensuite/wifi	Spa

Food & Accommodation

Breakfast & Dinner

All of breakfasts on this tour will be served at our accommodation. The meals will be set menus or buffet, containing traditional Japanese dishes beautifully presented in separate plates & bowls. If you are a master of chopsticks, these skills will be handy, otherwise western utensils are usually available on request. For most of the dinner on this tour, we will take you to the local restaurant to taste authentic local food, including seafood, vegetables, and deer meat, followed by local Japanese Sake.

We will do our best to make arrangements for any dietary requirements so please be sure to let us know your needs in advance.

What's included

- 4 nights accommodation, single occupancy basis
(Due to limited capacity, we may ask you to share a room with another guest of the same gender In this case we will inform you in advance)
- 4 breakfasts, 4 lunches, 3 dinners
- Boat ride, Entrance fee, All the activities
- All transport as described in the itinerary
- Snacks and refreshments
- English speaking Japanese guide(s)

Not included

- Airfares
- Personal expenses
- Alcoholic drinks with included meals

Please note that you will be asked to show your passport when checking into accommodation in Japan. It is a requirement for accommodation providers to take a photocopy of the passport of overseas guests.

We provide & What to bring

We provide

- Heat pad
- First aid kit

What to bring

Make sure you bring high quality warm winter outfit, the boots, Beanie and gloves which fit to -15°C/ 5°F.

Essentials

- Warm/ Wind proof/ Waterproof jacket
- Warm winter boots and backpack
- Comfortable clothing that is easy to move with and a change of clothes for the walking
- Water bottle and thermos
- Sunscreen
- Sunglasses
- Energy Food
- Camera
- Personal Medications
- Travel insurance
- Passport
- Cash in Japanese yen. Small restaurants and shops in rural parts of Japan do not accept credit cards. You can withdraw cash from an ATM at a post office and Seven Eleven convenience stores.

Recommended items

- binoculars

About us



Hokkaido Treasure Island Travel

We are Hokkaido Treasure Island Travel (HTIT), an award-winning team of creators of unique, perfectly tailored Hokkaido travel experiences. HTIT Team is deeply rooted in Hokkaido, North Japan. In 2004, HTIT started its journey as a pioneer of a new style of adventure travel by sharing the treasures of Hokkaido. We are constantly opening new doors and making local destinations previously inaccessible for travelers available all over Hokkaido. We provide a compelling combination of personal and professional travel advice, knowledge beyond that of the guidebook insider, and behind the scenes access to places and authentic local experiences generally not available for the public. Our mission is to create for you a journey of a lifetime, every time you travel with us.

Tour Guides:



Captain, Hashi Yoshinobu

He lives in Ochishi Nemuro City. Representative of Ochishi Nature Cruise Fishing Boat Group, he is an experienced captain with 40 years of fishing experience, including octopus cage fishing, saury drift net fishing, sea bream fishing, and kelp fishing.

Tour Guide, Kaori Ikeda

Travel Consultant, Travel Sales Department, Hokkaido Treasure Island Travel Agency Co. Mainly in charge of Europe, America and Australian B2B clients.

In her twenties, as a PADI scuba diving instructor, she has been engaged in underwater guiding and diving course in English in Borneo Island, Papua New Guinea, and the Maldives. After returning to Japan, she worked as an exclusive overseas tour guide for a major travel company, mainly in Europe, the U.S. and Australia, and worked with local guides on hiking, historical and cultural experiences, and activities.



Information and Requirements

Dietary Restrictions

We believe that eating like the locals is the best way of experiencing Hokkaido's unique culture. However, we understand that it's not possible for everyone to do this and we're more than happy to cater for food allergies, dietary restrictions, and special requirements. If you have any diet restrictions or preferences, please tell us in the Registration Form at the time of booking, and we will do our best to accommodate your dietary needs.

In some rural areas particularly, we may ask you for some flexibility. For example, if you require halal food, we may be able to substitute for a vegetarian option instead. Please also be aware that for those who are allergic to MSG we may struggle to arrange a good alternative at every meal in Japan. Some of our overseas guests in the past found it difficult to find ready-made foods completely free of MSG, especially when buying from convenience stores. Most Japanese supermarkets sell simple foods like plain bread, boiled eggs, vegetables and fruits, so you should always be able to find something suitable. The most important thing about dietary requirements is to let us know in advance so we can prepare and organize the foods you need.

Emergency Response Plan

Your safety is our top priority, closely followed by fun and comfort! All our tour guides have years of guiding experience in the outdoors under their belt. At all times, our guides will carry a first-aid kit, as well as have an extra kit in our vehicle and hold an Emergency plan with the nearest emergency hospital for any severe accident. In case of heavy rain, strong winds or other unsafe weather conditions for walking and ride on the fish boat, there may be times when we have to change our tour plan. In such cases, we will try to substitute the original activity with other alternatives such as sightseeing, visiting museums or hot springs. We are here to turn a bad day around into a fun day!

Weather Conditions

Except some parts of southern Hokkaido, almost all Hokkaido has a subarctic climate with low temperatures throughout the year. And in mid-winter, many days are below freezing even during the daytime, with the lowest temperature being around $-20^{\circ}\text{C}/-4^{\circ}\text{F}$. In the Okhotsk region, blizzards can occur on rare occasions. The Sea of Okhotsk coast is blessed with clear skies and little precipitation (snowfall) due to the dry monsoon throughout the year. In winter, the lakes are covered with ice and the sea is calm with "drift ice" coming ashore. The average highest temperature between January to March is $8^{\circ}\text{C}/46^{\circ}\text{F}$ and the lowest is $-15^{\circ}\text{C}/5^{\circ}\text{F}$.

What you better to know about Japanese style hotel

In this tour, some of the hotel feature Japanese style rooms with tatami mats with rice paper partitions and futon (sleeping mattresses). Here are some good-to-know facts about Japanese style hotel to avoid unwelcome surprises.

- You are sleeping on the floor. A traditional Japanese room does not have western beds, instead futon bedding is provided. Often hotel staff enter your room and prepare your futon while you are out for dinner.
- Hotel provide "yukata", which is a traditional night robe that looks like a kimono. You can wear it to the public spa and also to dinner in Hotel, basically anywhere within the hotel facility. Our guides will explain how to wear yukata properly if you are unsure.



What is a Japanese Spa

Some hotels have spa, that are public Spa. Please keep in mind that there are certain protocols that go with bathing in a public Spa, however they're super simple!

- You bathe in your birthday suit, that's right, no clothes or swimwear is allowed in the bath. Don't worry, no one is looking!
- Take a shower before you enter the water. It's important for the waters to stay clean so make sure to rinse all soap off and long hair should be tied up. You can take a small towel in if you're feeling shy, but the towel cannot touch the waters.
- Be respectful of others. Do not run, talk too loudly, drink alcohol, or splash around while in the spa. Don't forget to take in a hand towel, so that you can lightly dry yourself before returning to the changing room. We're quite fussy about keeping the floors of the changing room dry. Last but not least, relax and enjoy yourself!

Reservation & Cancellation Policy

Reservation

When we receive your reservation request, we will send you an email with a link to a page on our website, where it asks you to fill in the Registration Form. We will ask for your contact details and personal information such as your height and dietary requirements etc., in order for us to adequately organise and arrange the tour service. Once the Registration Form is completed, you will be taken to the Shopping cart to review your booking, and finally onto the Check Out page to make the payment (Deposit/Full) to secure the booking.

Payment Methods

We will send a booking confirmation by email with an invoice requesting a deposit

- * A 20% Deposit is required for the confirmation of the booking.
- * The remaining cost(Balance Payment) is due 21 days before your arrival.
- * Payment is acceptable by Credit card or Bank Transfer:
 - A. Credit card
 - * We will send you a link with a form to fill in your credit card details
 - B. Bank Transfer
 - * Please process the payment from your local bank in Yen.
 - * All Transaction Fees will be paid by remitter.

Cancellation

- 20% of the tour price will apply 20 days prior to the travel starting date
- 30% of the tour price will apply 7 days prior to the travel starting date
- 40% of the tour price will apply 1 days prior to the travel starting date
- 50% of the tour price will apply on the travel starting date
- 100% of the tour price will apply after the start of the tour or the traveler does not participate in the Tour without notice

Disclaimer

Assumption of risk and safety declaration

Travelers are advised that all activities are undertaken entirely at their own risk and they must behave in a fit and proper manner at all times in accordance with Hokkaido Treasure Island Travel Inc's guidelines. All adventure tours and outdoor activities carry inherent risks and Hokkaido Treasure Island Travel Inc nor its partners do not assume any responsibility for accidents that are caused by its customers or caused by factors outside of human control.

With the purchase of your trip you acknowledge that:

By its very nature, adventure travel, hiking and cycling tours are more challenging and demanding with a significantly higher level of risk, and involve potential exposure to injury and possibly death.

Additional dangers and risks associated with adventure travel may include difficult and dangerous terrain; high altitude; extremes of weather, including sudden and unexpected changes; political instability; remoteness from normal medical services and from communications; and evacuation difficulties in the event of illness or injury.

You must follow our guide's instructions and use any safety equipment provided at all times. For the above reasons you accept the inherent and increased dangers and risks associated with the proposed adventure and the accompanying risk of injury, death or property damage or loss.

Our Responsibilities and Exemptions from Responsibility

All Travelers are required to acknowledge the Terms and Conditions that we provide to them before contracting with us. The Traveler acknowledges that he or she understands the Terms and Conditions, as well as the following information about exemptions from our responsibility.

- We shall be responsible for compensating any damage caused to the Traveler intentionally or negligently by us or by our agent in the performance of this Contract. However, this shall be limited to cases when we have received notice within two years from the time when the accident occurred.

- Except as provided in the preceding Paragraph, we will not be responsible for compensation in the following cases:

- (1) Acts of providence
- (2) Maelstrom of war or civil commotion
- (3) Suspension of Tour Services including transport and accommodation facilities
- (4) Orders from government and public agencies
- (5) Other causes beyond our control or the control of our agents

Tour Operator / Contact

Hokkaido Treasure Island Travel Inc.

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