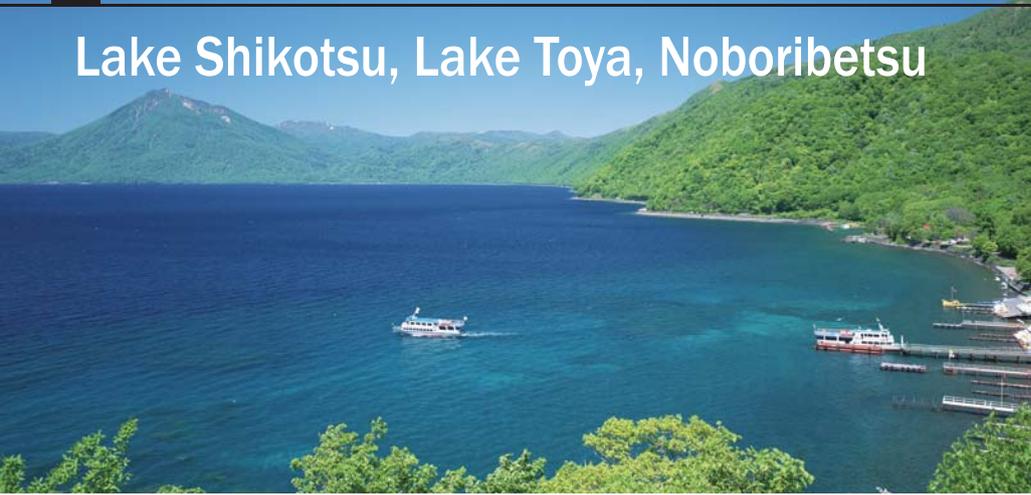


Lake Shikotsu, Lake Toya, Noboribetsu



Lake Shikotsu

Part of the Shikotsu-Toya National Park, Lake Shikotsu is known as the most northerly lake in Japan that doesn't freeze over in winter. The lake water is extremely clear and ranks with that of Lake Mashu and Lake Baikal. Water quality surveys in recent years have acknowledged it to be the best in the country. The average depth of the water is 265 m and the maximum is 363 m, making it the second deepest in Japan. The lakeshores are dotted with campsites and there are numerous hot-spring inns. The hot-spring waters of Shikotsuko Onsen are said to soften the surface of the skin and be effective in washing away fat and secretion, and are particularly popular with females as the water leaves the skin soft and smooth.

Rental cycles, pleasure boats, canoes, sockeye salmon fishing and even golf can be enjoyed in the vicinity. Hikers may like to climb Mt. Tarumae, where the unrestricted view from the rugged summit is a sight to behold. The trail up the mountain is ideal for experiencing the true beauty of the nature of Lake Shikotsu.

Chitose Tourist Association

<http://www.1000sai-chitose.or.jp/english/index.htm>

Lake Toya

Mt. Usu is a volcano that has erupted 4 times in 100 years, changing the shape of the fertile land around Lake Toya in its wake. The ashes and pumice spewed out by the volcano over the years have created a mineral-rich soil around the lake. As a result, eco-farming has increased due to the reduced use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, and now approximately 200 types of vegetables are produced in the area. The "Emi-Gold" sweet corn

produced near Lake Toya is known for its yellow, almost golden kernels.

Take a trip on a pleasure boat around the four islands in the center of Lake Toya, and enjoy the views of Mt. Yotei, the Showa Shinzan lava dome, Mt. Usu and the surrounding nature while being rocked gently by the waves on the surface of the lake. The lake boasts one of Japan's largest-scale catamarans, known as Espoir, which is modeled on the image of a castle from the middle ages. The boat also operates during the long running fireworks display that is held every night throughout the season.

At the Visitor Center and Volcano Science Museum, visitors can look back on the volcanic activities of Mt. Usu eruptions that have occurred in the past, including the latest eruption in March 2000, by means of images, explanations and hands-on facilities.

The Usuzan Ropeway takes six minutes to reach the summit station, from where two observation decks can be accessed: to the right is the Lake Toya Observation Deck that affords panoramic views of the Showa Shinzan lava dome and Lake Toya; and a 7-minute walk to the left brings you to the Usuzan Crater Floor Viewing Platform, where the craters that occurred as a result of an eruption in 1977 still spew out vapor as if the earth itself is breathing.

Toyako Onsen Tourist Association

<http://www.laketoya.com/>

Noboribetsu Onsen

Hokkaido is one of Japan's hot-spring paradises, dotted with numerous onsen resorts and spa towns. One of the most famous of these is Noboribetsu Onsen. One of Japan's leading spa towns, Noboribetsu boasts nine different hot-spring sources, enabling it to be ranked "No.1 in Japan" by a certain tourism magazine, due to its outstanding water quality and popularity. Jigokudani,

or Valley of Hell, is a series of explosion craters that occurred due to volcanic activity; the site measures 450 m in diameter and covers approximately 11 hectares. The valley contains numerous geysers and blowholes, and the bubbling festering scenery is reminiscent of "a hell inhabited by demons". From here, several springs spew out 3,000 liters of steaming hot water each minute, which feed the hot-spring baths of the nearby inns and hotels.

Noboribetsu Primeval Forest was designated a Natural Monument of Japan in 1924. The forest currently covers an area of approximately 186 hectares and boasts almost 60 species of trees and 110 species of plants. A footpath through the forest enables ramblers to view giant Japanese Oaks and the like from close range.

Noboribetsu Date Jidaimura is a theme park set in spacious grounds, where reproductions of downtown scenes and magnificent samurai dwellings create the atmosphere of the Edo period. A total of 94 wooden structures document the period, and fun-filled performances and attractions such as those in the Ninja House make this an entertaining day out for all the family – have fun while experiencing Japanese history at first hand.

Noboribetsu Marine Park Nixe boasts an 8m-tall "Crystal Tower" tank containing Napoleon Fish, not to mention an Aqua Tunnel through which visitors can stroll while the various fish swim overhead and all around. It's just like walking on the seabed! Don't miss the cute penguin parade or the dolphin and sea lion shows.

Noboribetsu Tourism Association

<http://www.noboribetsu-spa.jp/en>

