Drive and enjoy Hokkaido to the full this summer

With its wide, open spaces and the sheer expanse of Hokkaido, a car is an ideal way of enjoying the sights here in summer. Although sighting buses are convenient and economical, freedom can be restricted, making a rented car the best way of traveling at your leisure while stopping to enjoy the delights en-route whenever it takes your fancy.

But beware! Overambitious schedules could result in tiredness, which can lead to road accidents. It’s important for drivers to take regular rests and even short naps throughout the day to ensure they are alert, as the roads in Hokkaido are relatively free from traffic signals and the urge to speed must be resisted. Whatever you do, drive safely and enjoy sightseeing to your heart’s content; you’re sure to take home some great memories of Hokkaido.
How to get to Southern Hokkaido

By plane
There are direct domestic flights to Hakodate Airport from Tokyo, Osaka, Nagoya and Sapporo. A shuttle bus operates from Hakodate Airport to downtown Hakodate and takes approximately 20 minutes. There are also direct international flights linking Hakodate Airport with Seoul (Incheon Airport) in Korea.

**From Tokyo**
Hakata Airport → Hakodate Airport, approx. 1 hr. 20 min.

**From Osaka**
Kansai International Airport → Hakodate Airport, approx. 1 hr. 40 min.

**From Nagoya**
Central Japan (Chubu) International Airport → Hakodate Airport, approx. 1 hr. 30 min.

**From Seoul, Korea**
Incheon Airport → Hakodate Airport, approx. 2 hrs. 30 min. (3 times a week: Tues., Thurs., Sun.)

**By train**
From the Tokyo area, take the Tohoku Shinkansen and a second-class sleeper train service to Sapporo, then take a special train to Hakodate.

**By ferry**
Ferry services to Hakodate operate from Aomori and Oita, and are convenient for those traveling by car.

- From Aomori:
  1. Taisetsu Kaiyō Ferry, approx. 3 hrs. 40 min.
  2. Seikan Ferry, approx. 4 hrs.
- From Oita:
  1. Taisetsu Kaiyō Ferry, approx. 1 hr. 40 min.

Please confirm with the respective ferry companies in advance.

Hakodate Morning Market
Initially started during the black-market period after the war, Hakodate Morning Market is the oldest type of market in Japan. Originally, stalls were set up on the road but the market moved to its present site around 1956. Over 400 stalls – selling everything from seafood, vegetables, fruit, dried food, candy and even clothing – make up the market, which bustles to the sound of traders hawking their wares from as early as 5 a.m. Although in recent years the market has undergone refurbishment, much of the old atmosphere remains. An arcade of small food bars selling rice topped with fresh seafood has been completed, ensuring the market is as popular as ever.

Motomachi area
Needless to say, this is one of Hakodate’s two most popular sightseeing spots; the other being the nighttime view from the top of Mt. Hakodate, which is said to equal similar views of Naples and Hong Kong and be one of the top 3 nighttime views in the world. Motomachi is the area located at the northern base of Mt. Hakodate, where the sloped streets oozing with an exotic atmosphere created by the variety of architecture found there. Places of worship such as the Hakodate Russian Orthodox Church and Motomachi Catholic Church, as well as Western-style buildings like the Old British Consulate of Hakodate, make up the neighborhood. Hakodate Ward make Motomachi the perfect place for visitors to Hakodate to take a stroll. The smart cafés, restaurants and souvenir shops dotted around the area add to the atmosphere and enjoyment.

Mt. Hakodate
The observatory at the summit is accessible via the Hakodate Ropeway from the base station, as well as by a road that is open during the daytime but closed to private vehicles at night and during the winter. On clear days it is possible to see not only beautiful views of the city of Hakodate below, but also far across to the Shimokita Peninsula on the other side of the Tsugaru Strait. At nighttime, the view from Mt. Hakodate is particularly stunning thanks to the contrast between the bright lights of the city and the darkness of the sea on either side of the honglass-shaped peninsula, not to mention the bright lights of the squid-fishing boats on the horizon. Along with Naples and Hong Kong, Hakodate is said to be one of the world’s top three nighttime views.

Goryokaku Tower
Originally completed in December 1864 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the building of Goryokaku Fort, the former tower (60 m tall) was replaced by the new tower (107 m), which opened on April 1, 2006. The tower’s observatory affords panoramic views of Mt. Hakodate, Tsugaru Strait, the peaks of the Yokotetsu Mountain Range and the star-shaped grounds of Goryokaku Fort below.

Yunokawa Onsen
The name Yunokawa is derived from the Ainu words meaning hot-water river. In 1453, a lumberjack discovered a hot-water spring and the water is said to have healed a pain in his arm. Subsequently, the local people started to bathe in the water, and in 1885 a spring with abundant hot water was dug and hot-spring inns were constructed. In 1887 a tramline was opened and Yunokawa began to thrive as a spa resort for the people from Hakodate. Now, approximately 1.8 million visitors per year stay in Yunokawa Onsen, and the spa has become a popular base for sightseeing in the Hakodate area.
Access

Map of Southern Hokkaido

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Incheon Airport ↔ Hakodate Airport, approx. 2 hrs. 30 min. (3 times a week: Tues., Thurs., Sun.)

By train
From the Tokyo area, take the Tokohoku Shinkansen and limited express train services per day. 1. From the Tokyo, Sendai and Morioka areas Shinkansen limited express train (Tokyo ↔ Sendai ↔ Morioka ↔ Shin Aomori) approx. 8 hrs. 2. Cassiopeia Luxury Overnight Limited Express (Tokyo ↔ Sendai ↔ Morioka ↔ Hakodate) approx. 12 hrs. 40 min. 3. Hokkaido Limited Express Sleeper Train (Usu ↔ Sendai ↔ Hakodate) approx. 11 hrs. 30 min. 4. Super Hakodate and Hakodate Limited Express Trains (Sapporo ↔ Hakodate) approx. 3 hrs. 20 min.

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Toyota Rent a Car
Hakodate Station Branch
Ohto-machi 19-2, Hakodate (5-min. walk from Hakodate Station)
Tel: 0138-26-0100
Business hours
8:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. (from Apr. 1 to Oct. 31)
First Time Users

Honda Rent-a-Car
Hakodate Airport Sales Office
Takamatsu-cho 569-38, Hakodate
Tel: 0136-69-2121
Business hours
7:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m.
First Time Users
https://www.hondarent.com/english/index.htm

The final battle between the remnants of the Tokugawa shogunate and the armed rebel forces of the Ezo Republic. From late April, the Yoshino Cherry Blossoms in the park bloom, making the location a favorite among the locales for staying cherry blossom viewing parties.

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Mt. Esan active volcano trail

Hakodate Jomon Culture Center

This facility houses a display of artifacts from Jomon culture, including Hakodate’s only national treasure, the Chuku Dogu hollow clay figurine, as well as hands-on earthware vessel and stone tool-making corner.

Chuku Dogu hollow clay figurine

Located at the southeastern tip of Hakodate, the area boasts a Japan Pacific-coast temperate climate, and as Mt. Esan rises steeply from the nearby shores, sea mists are common even in summer. The summit is accessible via a mountain trail, and there is a road up to an altitude of approximately 300 m. The road also boasts an observatory en route, where views of the Shionokawa coastline across the strait can be enjoyed.

Komagatake

Komagatake is a 1,131 m-high active volcano (stratovolcano) that straddles the three Hokkaido towns of Moti, Shikabe and Nanae. This lone peak was originally cone shaped like Mt. Fuji but repeated volcanic explosions gradually changed the shape of the summit to how it is seen today.

Since 2007, local groups have implemented controlled group test hikes in the name of volcanic studies, and on June 3, 2010 part of the hiking restrictions from the area around Umanose (900 m) were lifted. The summit comprises three peaks — Kengamine, Sawaradake and Sudamori — and although there are no watering places or mountain huts along the trails, the three separate routes (Chushiguchi Course, Komagatake Course and Sawaradake Course) are accessible by novice and intermediate hikers.

Onuma Quasi-national Park – often referred to as simply Onuma – boasts numerous lakes of different sizes, including Onuma, Konuma and Junsainuma, and is said to be the place that inspired the famous Japanese song Sen no Kaze Ninatte (A Thousand Winds).

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From the parking lot at the end of the road there is a footpath to the Mt. Esan crater floor and summit, and alpine vegetation such as black crowberry, ezoiso rhododendron and alpine azalea can be enjoyed along the way.

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Konuma, Junsainuma

Bridges link small islands on the Onuma and Konuma lakes, creating a walking trail from which to enjoy the views. The shores of the lakes are lined with lush green forests where a rich variety of plants and flowers can be seen between spring and autumn, and the waters provide an ideal habitat for carp and pond smelt. Onuma is the largest of the three lakes, with a circumference of 24 km. Located next to Onuma and linked by the Tsukimi Bridge is Konuma, with a circumference of 16 km. A little more off the beaten track than Onuma, Konuma is the ideal place to enjoy a quiet stroll amid the peaceful landscape.

Junsainuma was so named after the local specialty of junsai (brasenia or water shield), which can be found there. This lake is surrounded by trees and has a calm feel to it.
What's on

Hakodate Jomon Culture Center

Hakodate Jomon Culture Center is a facility that doubles as a roadside station (parking area) and museum, at which Hokkaido's first national treasure – a hollow clay figurine – is on permanent display. The display also features a variety of earthenware vessels and stone tools excavated from Jomon remains in Hakodate and the Minamikyube Jomon archeological sites. Located alongside the National Highway Route 278 bypass, the museum also functions as a roadside station, and is known to be the only roadside station in Japan to boast a national treasure.

Mt. Esan active volcano trail

Mt. Esan is the subject of spiritual worship since ancient times. The effects of fumarolic gas and geothermal heat mean that vegetation from midway up the mountain slopes is sparse, with bare reddish-brown volcanic rock creating an unusual sight. Such dynamic geological landscape has resulted in the surrounding area being designated as the Esan Prefectural Natural Park. Despite its relatively low altitude, many varieties of alpine vegetation can be seen on Mt. Esan. This is thought to be because it is a relatively new volcano and the soil has not yet fully developed, and because of the mountain's location protruding into Funka Bay, where the effects of sea mist cannot be ignored.

Chuku Dogu hollow clay figurine

This facility houses a display of artifacts from Jomon culture, including Hokkaido's only national treasure, the Chuku Dogu hollow clay figurine, as well as hands-on earthenware vessel and stone tool-making corner. The adjoining roadside station, Jomon Roman Minamikyube provides a base for conveying information about the Jomon culture in the southern Hokkaido region and is expected to be an important new addition to the list of places to visit while sightseeing in Hakodate.

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Hokkaido Komagatake is a 1,131m-high active volcano (stratovolcano) that straddles the three Hokkaido towns of Mori, Shiikake and Nanae. This lobe peak was originally cone shaped like Mt. Fuji but repeated volcanic explosions gradually changed the shape of the summit to how it is seen today.

Since 2007, local groups have implemented controlled group trekking in the name of volcanic studies, and on June 3, 2010 part of the hiking restrictions from the area around Umanose (900 m) were lifted. The summit comprises three peaks – Kengamine, Sawaradake and Sudamori – and although there are no watering places or mountain huts along the trails, the three separate routes (Chushiguchi Course, Komagatake Course and Sawaradake Course) are accessible by novice and intermediate hikers.
Esashi and Okushiri

Until the beginning of the Meiji period (late 1860s and early 70s), the town of Esashi thrived on the herringshing and trading of the Kitamae ships and the Japanese cypress timber trade. Much of that prosperity is displayed in the downtown structures along the coast (wholesale warehouses, merchants’ houses, shop premises, temples and shrines), many of which remain today.

One such building is the Yokoyama residence, which has been located there for over 200 years. In 1786, a fishing, commercial trading and wholesale boat business was operated from the location, but the trading house that stands there now was built approximately 160 years ago and is designated as a Cultural Property of Hokkaido.

Esashi Oiwake

The roots of the Oiwake-bushi song lie in a horseman’s song that was sung on the Nakasendo route in Shinshu in a horseman’s song that was sung on the Nakasendo route in Shinshu in the direction of Aonae, is Unimaru Park Center houses an exhibition room dedicated to professional baseball player Yoshihito Sato, who comes from the island. On the Aonae Peninsula in the south of Okushiri is Ryokuchi Park, along with the Jikusho sculpture and Okushiri Tsunami Museum. The granite sculpture, which is located next to the museum, is a memorial to the victims of the tsunami that occurred after the 1993 Hokkaido Earthquake, and features a central grove that faces the epicenter of the earthquake off the coast to the southwest. On July 12, the date the disaster struck, the sun can be seen setting in the grove, providing a dramatic sight to behold. The memorial represents “a heart, the sea and wings” and flaws at the bottom of the sculpture represent splashing waves. A wall is inscribed with the names of the 198 victims, along with a stone plaque inscribed with the words of the national anthem and a poem by Okushiri poet Naisko Azou.

To ensure that the memory and records of the victims of the 1993 Hokkaido Earthquake are not forgotten, the Okushiri Tsunami Museum displays an archival documentation telling the whole story of the disaster.

Kaiyo Maru

The Kaiyo Maru is a feudal government naval vessel that was built in the Netherlands at the end of the Edo period. During the Boshin War, the ship was used by Takeaki Enomoto and his crew, but became grounded off the coast of Esashi during a storm in 1868, and sank. The present Kaiyo Maru was reconstructed from the original plans that remained in the Netherlands. Inside the ship, approximately 3,000 exhibits salvaged from the hull of the sunken Kaiyo Maru are on display, including a cannon, prototypes of weapons and daily utensils in a mixture of Western and Japanese styles. A hands-on corner allows visitors to experience the sound of a cannon being fired, and the weight of a cannon ball.

Okushiri

A small island that’s a treasure trove of delicacies of the sea, located off the coast of the southwestern tip of Hokkaido. Nabetsuru-iva (pot-handle rock), a scenic spot symbolic of Okushiri, is a 19.5m-high rock shaped like the handle used to hang a cooking pot over a stove. Views of the rock are particularly stunning against the background of sunlight from the sunrise and sunset, and at night it is floodlight amid the sound of the waves.

Approximately 10 min. by bicycle from Okushiri Port, past Nabetsuru-iva in the direction of Aonae, is Unimaru Park, a family sports and recreation park, where visitors are met by a monument of Unimaru – a character based on the local specialty, sea urchin. This grassy park features an adventure playground and is especially popular among families with children. The nearby Unimaru Park Center houses an exhibition room dedicated to professional baseball player Yoshihito Sato, who comes from the island. On the Aonae Peninsula in the south of Okushiri is Ryokuchi Park, along with the Jikusho sculpture and Okushiri Tsunami Museum. The granite sculpture, which is located next to the museum, is a memorial to the victims of the tsunami that occurred after the 1993 Hokkaido Earthquake, and features a central grove that faces the epicenter of the earthquake off the coast to the southwest. On July 12, the date the disaster struck, the sun can be seen setting in the grove, providing a dramatic sight to behold. The memorial represents “a heart, the sea and wings” and flaws at the bottom of the sculpture represent splashing waves. A wall is inscribed with the names of the 198 victims, along with a stone plaque inscribed with the words of the national anthem and a poem by Okushiri poet Naisko Azou.

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Matsumae Castle and Castle Museum

The initial head of the Matsumae Clan, Toshihiro Matsumae built the first castle on this site in 1660. After subsequent fires and reconstruction, the 17th head of the clan, Takahiro became the Castle Daiymyo and after 5 years of construction work, Matsumae Fukuyama Castle was completed in September 1854, making it the last old-style castle to be built in Japan.

The new castle covered approximately 77,800 m² and was equipped with a castle keep, two outer towers, 6 turrets, 16 gates and 7 cannon batteries. In 1841 the castle was designated as a national treasure, but what was left of the keep after the Boshin War, the Colonial Commission’s destruction and Pacific War was totally destroyed in a blaze. The current castle keep was reconstructed in 1961, thanks to the benevolence of people nationwide in response to pleas by citizens of the town.

Matsumae Castle and Hokuto

Matsumae-han Yashiki (Edo Village)

A theme park based on a reconstruction of Matsumae during the era of clan rule, complete with 14 reconstructed buildings from the Edo period.

Trappist Monastery

In 1896, nine monks from France visited this area and established the first-ever Trappist monastery in Japan. The name Trappist is derived from La Trappe Abbey in France, which reformed the Cistercian order.

The current brick building was constructed in 1908 after a fire destroyed the previous structure, and the peaceful atmosphere created by the harmony of brick and surrounding greenery is known to have a calming effect on visitors.

Even now, 40 or so monks continue their strict life of prayer, study and work here at the monastery, which is also known for producing typical Hokkaido souvenirs such as Trappist butter, cookies, butter candies and jam.

Danshaku (Potato) Museum

Danshaku (Baron) – the classic Hokkaido potato; perfect when accompanied with butter or for any type of cuisine. A museum dedicated to the Danshaku (Baron) potato exists on the land that was once a farm owned by the creator of the potato, Baron Ryokichi Kawada, who came from Kochi prefecture.

The king-size cowshed, which was built in the early 1900s, has been refurbished and now houses a precious display of materials such as American farming implements and everyday utensils that were very rare at the time. Other exhibits that can only be seen here, such as the only remaining wooden silo in Japan and an American “Locomobile” steam automobile are also on display.
Esashi and Okushiri

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One such building is the Yokoyama residence, which has been located there for over 200 years. In 1786, a fishing, commercial trading and wholesale boat business was operated from the location, but the trading house that stands there now was built approximately 160 years ago and is designated as a Cultural Property of Hokkaido.

Esashi Owake

The roots of the Owake-bushi song lie in a horseman’s song that was sung on the Nakasendo route in Shinshu (Nagano) during the Edo period. It was one type of popular song that spread nationwide, and is said to have reached Esashi approximately 200 years ago, as it was sung by the captains of the Kitamae ships that sailed to the port. Furthermore, the song was mixed with other local songs to produce the distinctive tones that are now famous throughout Japan as the Esashi Owake.

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The king-size cowhich, which was built in the early 1900s, has been refurbished and now houses a precious display of materials such as American farming implements and everyday utensils that were very rare at the time. Other exhibits that can only be seen here, such as the only remaining wooden silo in Japan and an American “Locomobile” steam automobile are also on display.
HOKKAIDO Walk-a-pedia is a periodical web magazine, whose title is based on the meaning of a "walking encyclopedia of Hokkaido." This tourism information book introduces the abundant nature, excellent environment, safe food and charming culture of Hokkaido, an Asian resort area for high-end travelers from around the world. The tourism-related information is collected and released by members of Hokkaido's international community.

With its wide, open spaces and the sheer expanse of Hokkaido, a car is an ideal way of enjoying the sights here in summer. Although sighseeing buses are convenient and economical, freedom can be restricted, making a rented car the best way of traveling at your leisure while stopping to enjoy the delights en-route whenever it takes your fancy.

But beware! Overambitious schedules could result in tiredness, which can lead to road accidents. It’s important for drivers to take regular rests and even short naps throughout the day to ensure they are alert, as the roads in Hokkaido are relatively free from traffic signals and the urge to speed must be resisted. Whatever you do, drive safely and enjoy sightseeing to your heart's content; you’re sure to take home some great memories of Hokkaido.