

October 23, 2025

The Irresistible Allure of “Japow”



©Hokkaido Ski Promotion Council

Japan’s ski resorts with their world-famous “powder snow” are an increasingly precious tourism asset, as the growth in international travelers drawn to the quality snow of Japanese ski areas far outpaces that of domestic skiers, whose population remains well below that of the boom years of the 1980s and 1990s, according to industry data.

This issue of Japan Tourism Spotlight focuses on the allure of powder snow in Japanese ski resorts. Overseas skiers, particularly those from Australia, tend to concentrate in a limited number of resorts, including Niseko (which is estimated to attract roughly half the international skiers in pursuit of this top-quality snow). But this country has many more “Japow” (short for Japan powder) ski resorts in other parts of Hokkaido, as well as Tohoku and regions close to central Japan.



What makes these ski resorts attractive to overseas skiers is not just the quality of snow, but also the variety of after-ski experiences they offer, including onsen (hot springs) and local food culture. International skiers are estimated to spend four times more than their Japanese counterparts on average, and they tend to stay here long after they ski. The Japan Tourism Agency has set an agenda of supporting the development of internationally competitive winter sports resorts as a key to promoting inbound tourism and regional development in rural Japan.

Index

1. [Hokkaido Winter Wonderland — the Powder Belt](#)
2. [The Premium Aspirin Snow at Appi Resort in Iwate](#)
3. [Combined Allure of Powder Snow and Onsen in Gunma, Niigata](#)

* For media inquiries, including requests for interviews, coverage of a story, or use of images related to facilities or individuals whose contact information is not listed on the content sites, please contact us at media_inquiry@jnto.go.jp.

1. The Winter Wonderland Where Japow Dreams Are Made Of



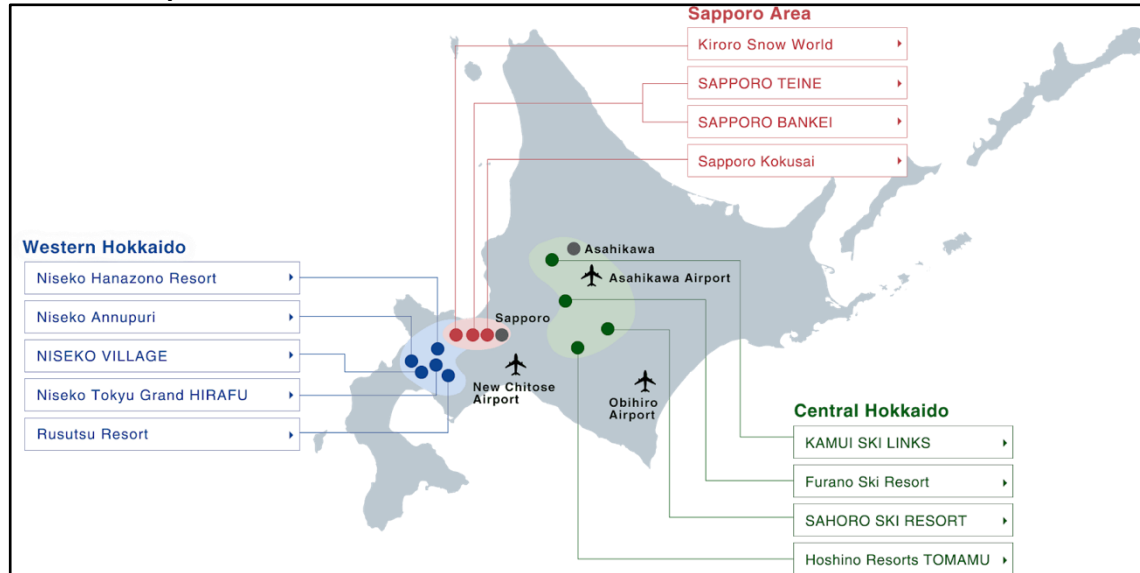
©Hokkaido Ski Promotion Council

When January comes, adrenaline chasers arrive in full force in Hokkaido to open “Japanuary.” It’s the month when the famed powder snow affectionately known as “Japow” falls abundantly. It’s the best season for the featherlight, dry, and fine snow that blankets the mountains, hills, and resort towns of western and central Hokkaido. Japow creates a winter wonderland that combines the island’s natural beauty, international flair, and cultural offerings.

But beyond the rush of excitement brought by skiing past snowy peaks and slopes, the region also offers a plethora of downtime options. From steaming onsen to frozen waterfalls, as well

as ice bars and ice hotels, there are many things to see and do. So put on the best snowshoes and warmest jackets to go on the Hokkaido Japow adventure.

Center of Japow attention: Hokkaido's "Powder Belt"



©Hokkaido Ski Promotion Council

(Powder Belt covers the central Hokkaido area marked in green)

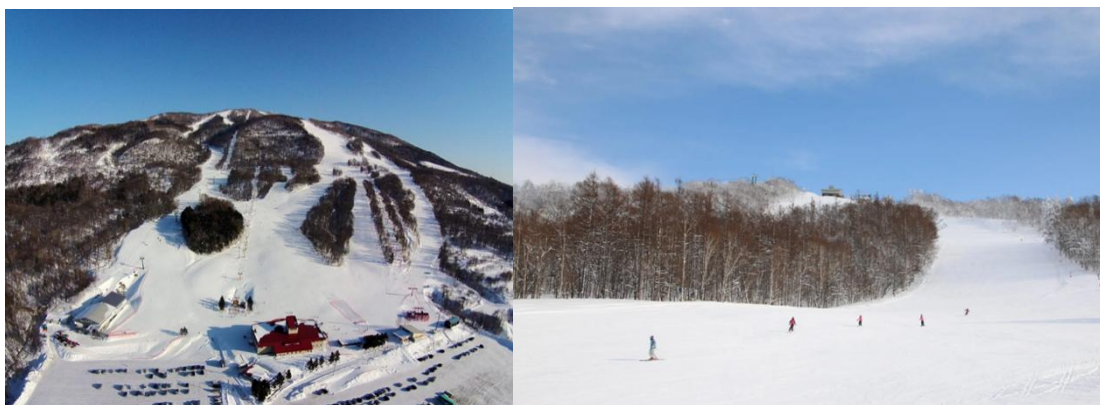
What is Japow and how is it formed? The secret lies in the humidity and air temperature. During winter months, cold and dry Siberian winds blow across the warm Sea of Japan (due to tidal currents) and pick up moisture from the rising water vapor, forming clouds. As these moist clouds are blown inland and hit Hokkaido's mountains, they rise and cool rapidly, causing abundant snowfall. The extremely low temperatures of the inland climate (falling to 20-30 degrees below zero in the Daisetsuzan area, known as the "roof of Hokkaido") cause the snow crystals to fall as dry flakes of snow as they reach the ground, creating the extremely light, fluffy powder snow.

The western side of Hokkaido boasts the world-famous Niseko and Sapporo resorts. But a train ride to the central part of the prefecture will bring one to the "Powder Belt," the collective term for the chain of ski areas including Kamui, Furano, Tomamu, Kurodake, and Asahidake. These resorts run north-south for almost 200 kilometers along the Daisetsu and Tokachi mountain ranges. The area is convenient for skiers from outside Hokkaido due to the easy access from three airports (Asahikawa, Obihiro, and Shin-Chitose).

From big resorts to small local ski areas, from hills to steep snow-capped mountains, this region has everything for newbies and professionals. Resorts complete with equipment offer beginner courses, children's areas, and après-ski facilities, making the belt at par with more popular resorts. A five-day common lift ticket for Furano, Kamui, and Hoshino Resort Tomamu is available this season (through March 21, 2026).

[Hokkaido Powder Belt](#)

Kamui Ski Links: A local hidden gem



©Hokkaido Ski Promotion Council

Kamui Ski Links, which may be one of the least known among the Powder Belt ski resorts, is composed of 26 runs, with a total slope length of 24.7 kilometers. About 35% of the area enjoys ungroomed snow, or snow slopes untouched by any machinery. It is the only ski resort in the Daisetsuzan area equipped with a gondola, allowing the skiers to go up to its 752-meter peak and then challenge a 1,000-meter competition course recognized under FIS (International Ski and Snowboard Federation) and SAJ (Ski Association of Japan) rules.

Its inland location effectively traps the fresh snowfall, keeping the fine powder dry and undisturbed. With its raw appeal, Kamui is geared toward more advanced skiers. The courses and topography of the resort offer highly technical runs through the woods and rough, snowy terrain.

While it is about a 30-minute drive from Asahikawa, the lack of large-scale hotels in the vicinity makes the area relatively remote, and thus a favorite among locals and foreigners for backcountry skiing. During the ski season, there are bus services from Asahikawa Station and the city's major hotels to Kamui Links. The fresh morning snow and tranquil weather provide ideal conditions for adventurous skiers to try a deep run through the pristine white forests. Open from early December to late March, its low crowds mean fresh tracks stay longer than at mega-resorts.

[Kamui Ski Links](#)

Frozen fairy tale: TOMAMU Ice Village and Sounkyo Gorge



© Hoshino Resorts TOMAMU • Ice Village



©Sounkyo Tourist Association

Hokkaido's winter offerings don't stop at Japow. After a day of conquering the snow, the after-ski activities await. Visitors can elevate their sense of wonder at TOMAMU Ice Village, a

fantastic-looking frozen town that is scheduled to emerge nightly from December 10, 2025, to March 14, 2026, this season at Hoshino Resorts TOMAMU. Here, everything is made of ice — from a bar to a chapel and even a hotel! The Ice Hotel's 8.5-meter diameter dome offers a chance to sleep comfortably in a deep-cold environment. For kids, the Ice Slide is free to use, while the Ice Rink is open for those who want to glide on ice.

For more ice magic, head to Sounkyo Gorge at the foot of Mt. Daisetsu, about a 90-minute drive from Asahikawa, to see a frozen wonderland bathed in dreamy colors. Held from late January to early March, the Sounkyo Ice Fall Festival (also known as the Hyoubaku Festival) invites everyone to marvel at the frozen Ginga and Ryusei waterfalls. During the festival, ice sculptures fill the area and are lit every night with various colors, creating a kaleidoscopic, fairy tale-like experience.

[Ice Village/Hoshino Resorts](#)
[Sounkyo Ice Fall Festival](#)

Diversity of Japan's ski resorts a key asset for international skiers

Sakuno Yoshinori, founder and managing director of Sydney-based doq® marketing agency, has spent years promoting the Hokkaido Powder Belt ski areas to international skiers. He does this



through snow expos, digital marketing, and tailored messaging to Australian skiers and snowboarders seeking undiscovered Japanese snow experiences. Last year, he was assigned the tourism ambassador for Asahikawa.

The responses have generally been positive. "Australians already know Niseko and Hakuba well, but many feel those resorts have become dominated by Australians themselves. They are seeking destinations that offer a more

authentic Japanese local experience," Sakuno says.

Niseko, one of the first areas in Hokkaido to be developed for international ski tourism, has decades of foreign investment and an entire ecosystem of customers, investors, and communities. By contrast, Asahikawa — the hub of the Powder Belt snow resorts — remains largely rooted in its local community, which is why it is not yet as well known internationally. "This is changing. Niseko is already reaching a saturation point, and global investors and skiers are beginning to look for alternatives," he said, adding that Asahikawa, with its advantages in accessibility, quality of snow, and the local food culture, stands out as one of the most attractive emerging destinations.

According to Sakuno, what makes Japan's powder snow experience compelling for overseas skiers is not just the snow, but also the diversity of resorts, the cultural depth of après-ski experiences like onsen, and the accessibility of world-class skiing at a competitive price.

There are many different types of ski visitors in Japan. "You have families, non-skiers, beginners, advanced skiers, snow bums who practically live on the mountain, freeride enthusiasts, and snowboarders. Each of them comes with different expectations," he said. "One of Japan's greatest strengths is variety. With around 450 to 500 ski resorts across the country, Japan has the capacity to cater to all of these different segments."

In fact, this diversity is a unique potential of Japan's ski resorts that has not been fully utilized, Sakuno pointed out, noting that segmentation — each resort analyzing the specific needs and the value drivers of the customer segment it serves, then designing services, operating models, and ideas that raise satisfaction for the target segment — should be the way forward.

2. Enjoy the premium "aspirin snow" at Appi in Iwate



In Tohoku, Iwate Appi Kogen Ski Resort boasts what it calls an exceptionally fine "aspirin snow," the dry, low-humidity powder resulting from its proximity to Hachimantai, where cold Siberian air masses collide with moisture from the Sea of Japan, producing abundant snowfall. This legendary snow quality delivers a sensation of effortless, weightless gliding, especially on unpacked slopes, drawing powder enthusiasts who crave the lightest and driest conditions.

The skiing here will appeal to the most passionate and discerning ski aficionados with its world-class powder and meticulously crafted terrain. The resort covers 21 courses totaling 43.1 kilometers in length, with the longest run of 5,500 meters from the summit to the base. Elevations span from 620 meters at the base to 1,304 meters on Maemori Mountain and 1,328 meters on Nishimori Mountain, yielding vertical drops up to 708 meters. The terrain balances 30% beginner, 40% intermediate, and 30% advanced slopes, with steep gradients reaching 34 degrees on certain sections, challenging skilled skiers and snowboarders.

Powder seekers particularly prize the Nishimori Mountain zone, reachable via "Nishimori CAT," a snowcat vehicle that ferries groups to high-elevation, pristine backcountry terrain. Here, the "Attack" tree run zone offers steep pitches, moguls, and dense tree lines blanketed in deep, dry

snow, allowing for fresh tracks and immersive off-piste adventures. These zones remain ungroomed, preserving the natural powder for a raw, exhilarating experience that emphasizes Japan's geographic advantage in producing such superior snow. Additional tree run areas like Magic Forest and a dedicated snow park add variety, enabling freestyle elements amid the powder.



Led by Minagawa Kentaro, a former Japanese Alpine Ski Team member and Olympic skier, the resort has earned Japan's Best Ski Resort title at the 2022 and 2023 World Ski Awards, with a 2025 nomination highlighting its global allure. For ski enthusiasts, Appi embodies the pinnacle of Japan's powder heritage, where its aspirin snow merges with expertly crafted terrain to deliver unforgettable, high-caliber descents that elevate the powder experience. After a day of skiing, the resort's large Shirakaba-no-Yu onsen draws natural hot spring water from the beech forest, rich in meta-silicic acid and sodium ions that clear and tone the skin for a rewarding beauty boost after skiing.

[Appi Snow Mountain Resort: Course Guide](#)

[Appi Resort](#)

Top skier on a mission to turn Appi into “global standard” ski resort



As a former Olympian who has visited more than 1,800 ski areas around the world during his athletic career, Minagawa Kentaro is confident that Appi can be a top-notch luxury resort on par with the world's premier ski areas. That's his mission as resort business leader of Iwate Hotel and Resort, which runs the Appi resort.

He also aims to revitalize ski resorts throughout the country as the chairman of the Winter Industry Revitalization Agency. He said the project he has undertaken to upgrade Appi into a “global standard” ski resort can serve as a role model for the struggling industry as a whole.

Since he took up the current position at Appi in November 2021, the number of annual visitors to the resort has increased from about 200,000 to 300,000, and its earnings last year have reached the highest levels over the past decade. These prove that the direction of his reforms, through new investments and services geared toward high-end skiers, has not been wrong, he said. Symbolic of the new services for luxury customers is the introduction of the “Black Pass” premium lift ticket (¥33,000 a day, limited to 30 guests each day, and available on weekends, holidays and yearend-newyear period), which features access to first tracks and the Nishimori CAT.

The number of visitors to Appi is still short of the target of 500,000 set under the Appi Valley Plan, an integrated tourism and town-building project. By rebuilding the ski resort and the resort town community through improving education, employment, and housing infrastructure, the plan seeks to increase the area’s resident population to 10,000.

The point of the project, Minagawa says, is to redesign the local community as a tourism town with the ski resort at its core — like in many famous overseas ski resorts. Together with the development of hotels, villas, and housing, an increase in visitors will stimulate related sectors like restaurants and shops, making the whole town richer. Minagawa says his primary job is to revive the Appi ski resort as an attractive core of this local economy.

Japan’s ski and snowboarding population combined is estimated to have declined to around 4.6 million in the 2020s — roughly one-fourth the peak of 18 million in 1998. As the market kept shrinking over the past two decades, most of the ski resort operators across Japan struggled to keep their businesses afloat and could barely afford to refurbish their aging facilities, Minagawa pointed out.

As such, Japanese skiers lacked the motivation to return to winter sports. But it also means that with proper investment in attractive facilities and services, there is a potential for many of them to come back, he said. In addition, winter sports demand in many other countries, particularly those in Asia, remains strong. Combined with the rapidly growing interest of international skiers in Japan, there’s a good chance for the revival of the Japanese skiing market, he added.

Minagawa says the strength of Japan’s ski resorts lies in the abundance of snow resources — thanks to the country’s distinct seasons — and easy access to top-quality snow by way of lifts and gondolas. The regional differences in weather conditions, such as humidity and temperatures from Hokkaido to Tohoku and central Japan areas, make for a wide variety in the quality of “powder” snow, he said, adding that this diversity is the extra charm of skiing in Japan.

3. Snow and hot spring paradise — in Gunma and Niigata

Manza Onsen — Powder snow haven within easy access from Tokyo

For Tokyo-area residents and visitors craving the thrill of powder skiing, Gunma Prefecture’s Manza Onsen Ski Resort offers an accessible alpine escape. Located at 1,800 meters on the slopes of Mt. Kusatsu-Shirane, this high-altitude haven ensures abundant, high-quality powder snow even when lower regions falter. Though compact, the resort’s 14 courses deliver a

satisfying range of terrain, catering to beginners and seasoned skiers alike, with off-piste zones perfect for carving through Japan's renowned dry powder. Manza combines convenience with the allure of Japow, making it an ideal retreat for enthusiasts seeking exceptional snow without venturing far from the capital.

(*Due to circumstances, Manza Onsen Ski Resort is operating with substantially reduced courses and capacity during the 2025-2026 season.)



Manza Onsen Ski Resort offers a unique winter experience by combining excellent powder snow with its renowned hot springs. Manza's onsen waters are among Japan's most sulfur-rich, giving them a distinct milky-white color and volcanic scent. At locations like the Manza Kogen Hotel's Sekitei Rotenburo, outdoor baths draw from multiple springs, allowing guests to relax in warm, mineral-rich water while surrounded by the snowy landscape. The outdoor baths are available (at a fee) for visitors not staying at the hotels. This combination of thrilling powder skiing and restorative onsen relaxation makes Manza a top choice for winter sports enthusiasts seeking both adventure and peace.

[Manza Onsen Ski Resort](#)

Myoko Kogen — Powder paradise in Niigata

Myoko Kogen in Niigata Prefecture is a premier winter sports destination celebrated for its profound and consistent snowfall, often getting up to 14 meters annually. The resort's season runs from mid-December to early April. The expansive ski area is not a single resort but a collection of resorts (some of them interconnected), including Akakura Onsen, Akakura Kanko, and Ikenotaira Onsen.



The combined terrain offers a diverse experience across its extensive network of lifts and runs. Akakura Onsen Ski Resort, for instance, features three distinct zones that link directly to Akakura Kanko, providing a total of 32 runs and 14 lifts. The slopes are primarily tailored for beginner and intermediate skiers, making it an ideal location for developing skills in deep snow, but advanced options and extensive off-piste areas are available for more experienced riders. The area is also known for its night skiing and panoramic views that extend to Lake Nojiri.

Complementing the skiing experience is Akakura Onsen, a historic hot spring village at the foot of the ski areas established in 1816. Sourced from the volcanic Kita Jigokudani near Mt. Myoko, the natural springs provide restorative, mineral-rich waters. The village maintains a traditional atmosphere with numerous restaurants and bars. This fusion of a deep snow powder paradise and a historic onsen village offers a complete and culturally rich winter experience, combining the thrill of the slopes with the serenity of a volcanic hot spring.

[Myoko Ski Resort](#)

[Akakura Onsen Ski Resort](#)

For media inquiries, including requests for interviews, coverage of a story, or use of images related to facilities or individuals whose contact information is not listed on the content sites, please contact us at media_inquiry@jnto.go.jp.

If you'd like to download photos and videos of Japan's tourist attractions, please visit the [Japan Photo & Video Library Links](#)



Japan National
Tourism Organization



Copyright ©2025 Japan National Tourism Organization. All Rights Reserved.

※If you no longer wish to receive our email newsletter, please [click here](#) to unsubscribe.