



# Chapter 1 Let's drive in Hokkaido!

1-1. Vastness of Hokkaido·····	<b>04</b>
1-2. Seasonal charms of Hokkaido·····	<b>06</b>
1-3. Regional charms of Hokkaido·····	<b>11</b>
1-4. Useful pieces of knowledge for comfortable driving·····	<b>16</b>
1-5. Observe rules and local customs!·····	<b>17</b>
Information on useful Web sites·····	<b>18</b>

# 1-1. Vastness of Hokkaido

Hokkaido boasts an incredibly large land area, with horizons that stretch as far as the eye can see and very long straight roads. It is a place where travelers can fully enjoy the vastness of nature. However, underestimation of how big it is has led to difficulties in the past so you must plan your trip keeping this in mind.



## Arrive at the hotel before sunset.

Roads at night are extremely dark in Hokkaido! The number of street lights decreases the further you travel from an urban area. Roads in the mountains are pitch-black. In darkness, travelers may lose their way due to not being able to see signposts and landmarks. Avoid driving at night and make sure you see the place where you will stay before sunset. Remember that sunset in Hokkaido in winter is early, around 4:00 p.m.



Travel time in Hokkaido

## Distance and travel time

While the distance may seem to be short on a map, it might actually be far away in real terms. Since speed limits may change according to climate-influenced conditions on some roads, it is important to plan your driving trip in vast Hokkaido free from time constraints.

The total area of Hokkaido is approximately 83,000 km<sup>2</sup> (South Korea: 98,000 km<sup>2</sup>, Taiwan: 36,000 km<sup>2</sup>, Hong Kong 1,000 km<sup>2</sup>, Singapore: 700 km<sup>2</sup>)

The maps below are on the same scale so that readers can fully understand the vastness of Hokkaido in comparison with Taiwan and South Korea.



- A New Chitose Airport ↔ Furano Approx. 170 km  
It takes approximately 2.5 hours even with an average speed of 60 km/h
- B Taipei ↔ Taichung Approx. 140 km
- C Seoul ↔ Daejeon Approx. 150 km
- D Hong Kong ↔ Guangzhou Approx. 130 km
- E Singapore ↔ Mersing Approx. 120 km

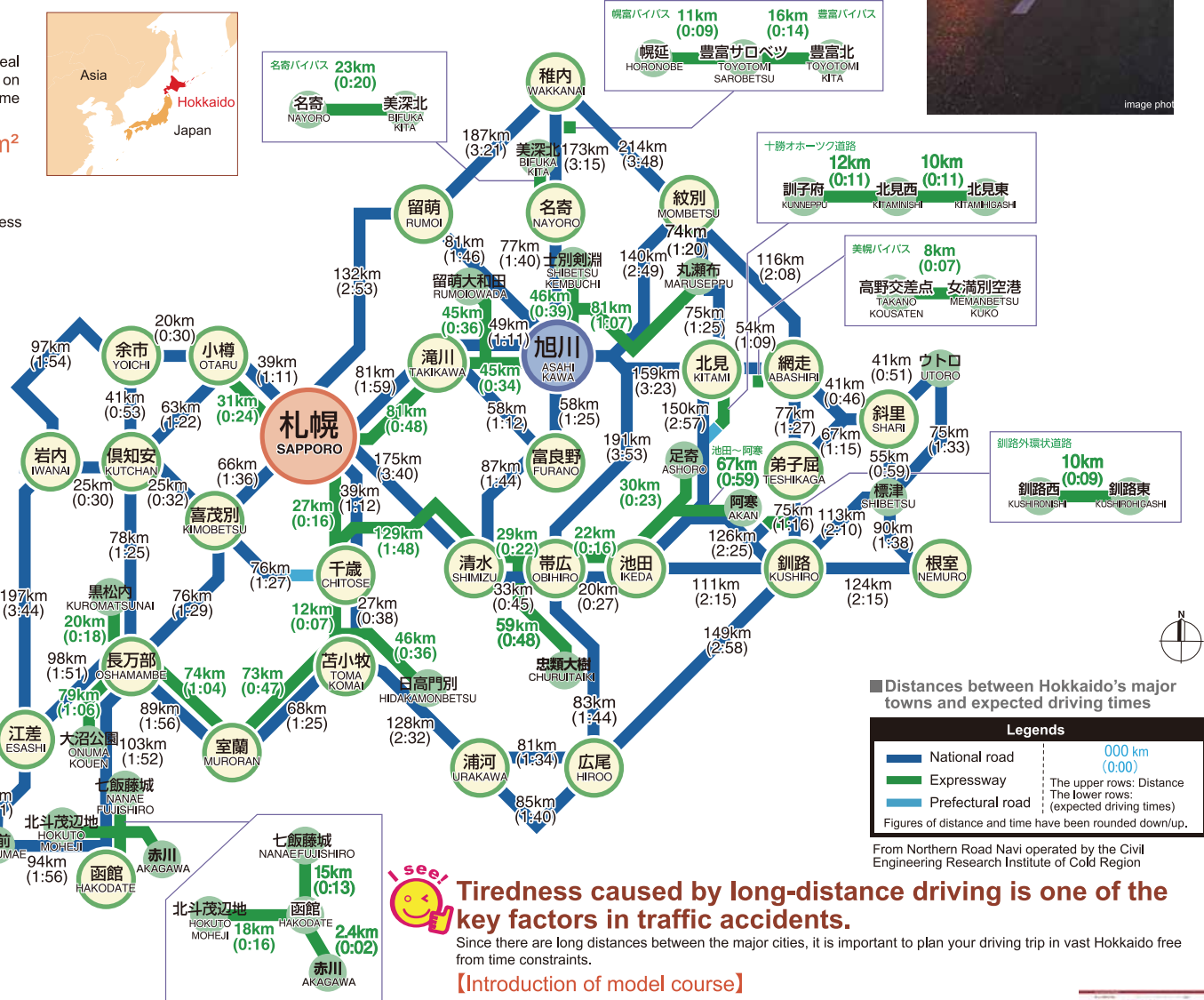


### How to use the Northern Road Navi system (confirm the distance and the expected driving time)

- Select the departure place and destination by using the tabs for cities and tourist attractions.
- Determine the conditions such as "usage of expressways" and "priority of time"
- Search starts  
Civil Engineering Research Institute for Cold Region's Northern Road Navi System <http://northern-road.jp/navi/eng/>



**Quick Tip** "Michi-no-eki" are facilities where travelers can relax safely and freely and allows them to take a comfortable break during long-distance drives. The facility also serves as an information centre offering information on sightseeing spots and roads in each area among other things. Since Hokkaido has more than 100 Michi-no-eki, please utilize them when driving. Michi-no-eki in Hokkaido (Web site of the Ministry of Land's Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism Hokkaido Regional Development Bureau) [http://www.hkd.mlit.go.jp/zigyoka/z\\_doro/station/index.html](http://www.hkd.mlit.go.jp/zigyoka/z_doro/station/index.html) (Japanese)



Distances between Hokkaido's major towns and expected driving times

Legends	
<span style="color: blue;">—</span> National road	000 km (0:00)
<span style="color: green;">—</span> Expressway	The upper rows: Distance
<span style="color: lightblue;">—</span> Prefectural road	The lower rows: (expected driving times)

Figures of distance and time have been rounded down/up.

From Northern Road Navi operated by the Civil Engineering Research Institute of Cold Region



## Tiredness caused by long-distance driving is one of the key factors in traffic accidents.

Since there are long distances between the major cities, it is important to plan your driving trip in vast Hokkaido free from time constraints.

### (Introduction of model course)

- Recommended Courses in Spring (3 courses)
  - Recommended Courses in Summer (2 courses)
  - Recommended Courses in Autumn (4 courses)
  - Recommended Courses in Winter (3 courses)
- Hokkaido Tourism Organization

<http://en.visit-hokkaido.jp/playyourtrip/modelcourse/> [日英簡韓](#)



# 1-2. Seasonal charms of Hokkaido

One of the reasons why Hokkaido is so popular with international drivers is that the four seasons are clearly defined in Hokkaido and visitors can enjoy each season's natural wonders. Enjoy your trip to Hokkaido even more with a little knowledge of the charms of each season. It is also important to know what influences seasonal weather conditions such as snow storms and icy roads can have on driving.



## Spring – Hokkaido's charm in spring – Period: April to June

The first signs of spring are found in Hokkaido in April. Butterbur sprouts come up despite the remaining snow, and visitors can enjoy sunshine while watching rivers swollen with water by the melting of the snow. Spring finally arrives in towns despite snow still on the mountains. Cherry blossoms and ume (plum) blossoms are all in bloom together in early May, and after that, lustrous fresh green leaves start to sprout.

### Scenery

Cherry blossoms bloom between late April and mid May. Go to see cherry blossoms in full bloom by checking the flowering-time information on the Web site.

Schedule of the cherry-blossom season	April		May	
	late	early	middle	late
Central Hokkaido		←	→	
Southern Hokkaido	←			→
Northern Hokkaido		←	→	
Eastern Hokkaido		←	→	



Cherry blossoms



Moss phlox

●Japan Weather Association (Japanese only)

<http://www.tenki.jp/sakura/expectation.html>

### Experience

The appeal of spring skiing in Hokkaido, which can be enjoyed until early May in Niseko, and Mt. Kurodake in the Taisetsu mountains is the abundance of prime quality snow. Sunglasses need to be worn as Hokkaido's sunshine in May is strong. Thrilling rafting during the snow thawing season is also fun. In spring, the volume of water due to meltwater flows increases dramatically. Rafting is available from April to late May.



Rafting



Spring skiing

### Food

With the melting of the snow, Hokkaido's delicious seafood and gifts from the land begin to be available and served up on the table. Asparagus and horsehair crab are typical foods that herald the arrival of spring in Hokkaido. Asparagus is delicious when fried as tempura or with a knob of butter. Horsehair crab is popular for its delicious brown miso.

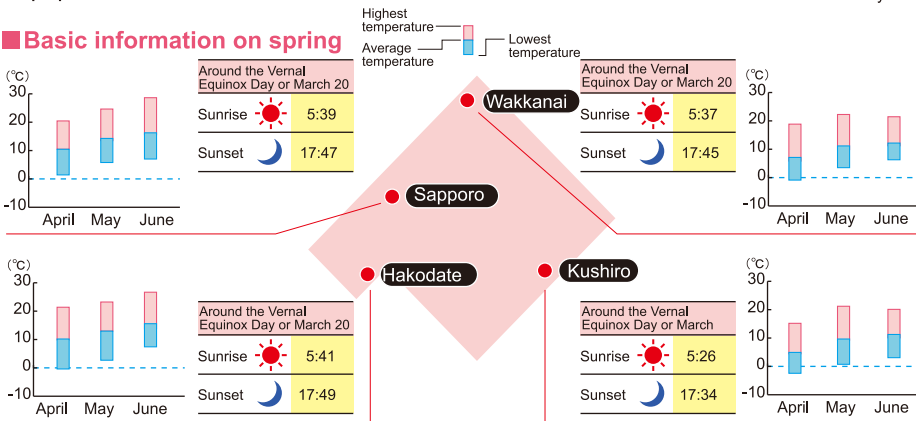


Hairy crab



Asparagus

### Basic information on spring



#### April

Snow starts to melt and skunk cabbages bloom in the wetlands. A coat or jacket is necessary.

#### May

Although the sunshine is warm, the wind is still cold. Climate is similar to that of Tokyo in April. It is advisable to bring jackets.

#### June

A series of fine weather days are experienced, and many kinds of flowers begin to bloom all together. Although short-sleeved shirts can be worn occasionally, long-sleeved shirts should also be brought for trips at night.



### Important points regarding driving trips in spring

- 1 A number of winter-season road closures are applied on some roads until late April.
- 2 Roads may be frozen up around mountain passes until early May.
- 3 Roads may be frozen near the entrance of tunnels and on bridges.
- 4 Be sure to arrive at the places you plan to stay overnight before sunset.





## Summer – Hokkaido's charm in summer – Period: July to August

Hokkaido's summers are short but, because they are dry and not so humid, provide a popular retreat from the heat of other parts of Japan, and are ideal for driving trips.

### Scenery

In summer, Hokkaido hosts flowers of red, yellow, pink, purple and other hues all blooming together and painting the vast land with their beautiful colors. All scenery spots of Hokkaido in summer become photo spots.



Koshimizu-gensei-kaen



Sunflowers



Blue Pond

### Experience

Many local and unique events are offered in the regions all over Hokkaido to take full advantage of its short summer. Active outdoor programs are recommended to enjoy the vast nature.



Sapporo Summer Festival



Sea kayak



Auto-camping

### Food

Shrimps, crabs and sea urchins are Hokkaido's finest products. It is the season of mouth-watering delicacies, with the sweetest melons, watermelons and sweet-corn freshly harvested from the fields.



Unidon (rice topped with sea urchin)

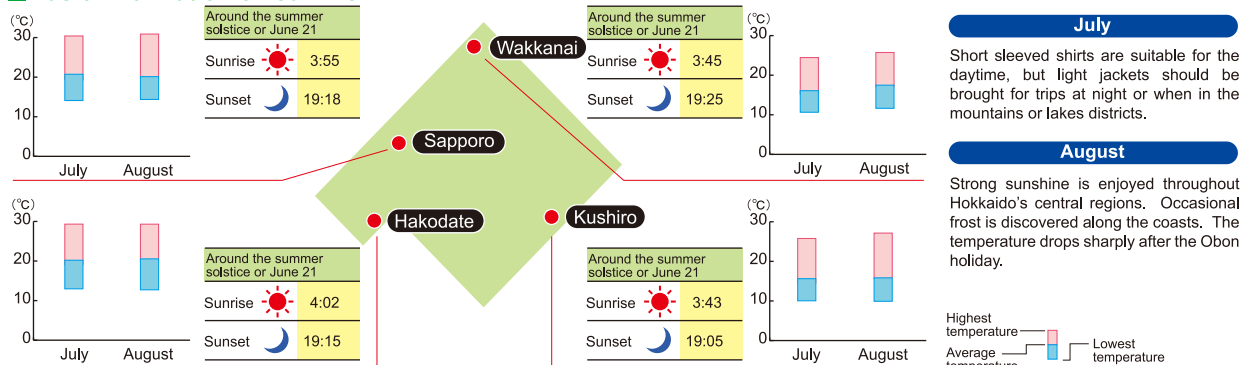


Melon



Corn

### Basic information on summer



### Important points regarding driving trips in summer

- During the Obon holiday, many people go back to their hometowns and also many tourists visit Hokkaido, and so immigration and departure procedures may take longer than usual. Since sightseeing spots are crowded, it is important to plan your driving trip free from time constraints.
- Roads may be closed (especially when road traffic regulations are introduced) and trains and airplanes can be delayed or cancelled due to natural disasters such as typhoons.  
⇒Refer to Chapter 4.
- Parking lots at sightseeing spots may be crowded, causing traffic jams on the roads nearby. It is important to plan your driving trip in Hokkaido free from time constraints.



# Autumn – Hokkaido's charm in autumn – Period: September to November

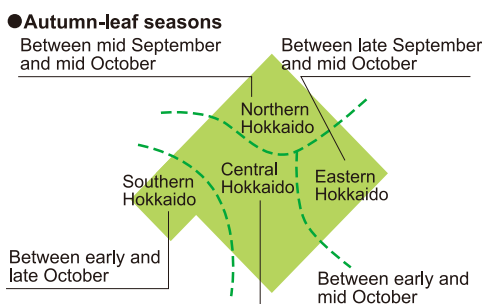
Hokkaido in autumn has colorful autumn leaves and is a treasure house of food with a bountiful harvest being produced from the mountains and seas. Visitors can enjoy Hokkaido's seasonal products including potatoes, onions salmon, saury, apples and grapes. Festivals are held throughout Hokkaido, providing excellent opportunities to taste local specialties. Trying the in-season delicacies is highly recommended while you are there.

## Scenery

Since the best season for autumn leaves differs by area as well as depending on the climate that year, it is essential to do some research on the Web.

● Japan Weather Association (Japanese only)

<https://tenki.jp/kouyou/>



Autumn leaves



Cosmoses in Takikawa and Shibetsu



Canoeing



Hands-on harvest (Apple picking)

## Experience

Mashike, Yoichi and Niki towns among other areas are famous as places where fruit-picking programs are available, with apples and grapes the main fruits to be harvested. Among other outdoor events, going canoeing on the beautiful lakes is also recommended.

## Food

The autumn harvest season is when farm produce such as potatoes and buckwheat are most delicious. What's more, autumn to winter is one of the best seasons for delicious seafood such as Pacific saury and salmon.

Ingredients	Harvesting areas	September			October		
		early	middle	late	early	middle	late
Pacific saury	Eastern Hokkaido	○	○	○	○	○	○
Salmon	Every area in Hokkaido	○	○	○	○	○	○
Atka mackerel	Eastern Hokkaido	○	○	○	○	○	○
Smelt	Mukawa				○	○	○
Japanese Flying Squid	Hakodate	○	○	○	○	○	○
Hokkai shrimp	Notsuke Bay				○	○	○
Oyster	Akkeshi	○	○	○	○	○	○
Potato	Every area in Hokkaido	○	○	○	○	○	○
New soba noodles	Shintoku, Horokanai	○	○	○			
New rice	Central Hokkaido				○	○	○
Apples	Western part of Central Hokkaido				○	○	○



Sushi



Apple

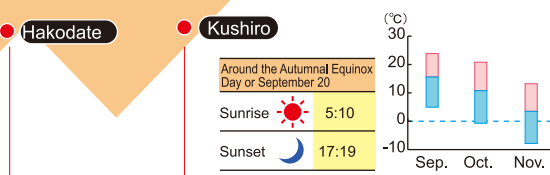
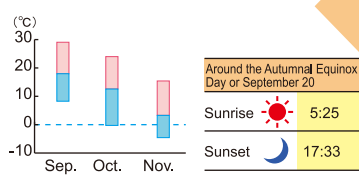
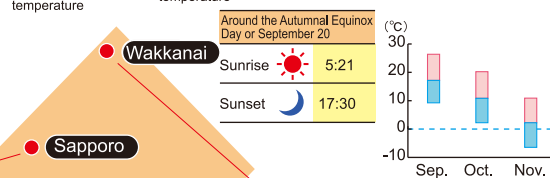
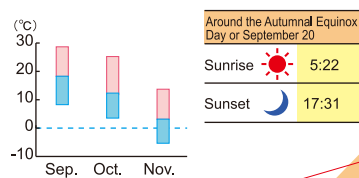


Seafood



Hot buttered potatoes

## Basic information on autumn



**September**  
It becomes chilly in the morning and evening around mid September, and the autumn season begins late in the month.

**October, November**  
Mid-October is the best season for autumn leaves on the plains, just as the first snow falls in the mountains. Your breath turns white, and sweaters and coats are necessary.



## Important points regarding driving trips in autumn

- 1 Sunset happens early. Be careful to know the time for sunset between autumn and winter
- 2 Take care not to slip in the first snows from mid to late October in Northern Hokkaido, in late October in Central and Eastern Hokkaido and early November in Southern Hokkaido.
- 3 The first snow falls on the mountain passes in early October, which is earlier than down on the plains, and some roads are closed for the winter after early November.





## Winter – Hokkaido's charm in winter – Period: December to March

In December, not only mountain regions but also urban areas are covered with snow. Although it is the beginning of a long and cold winter, travelers have the chance to enjoy driving in winter while visiting a lot of local events that are held only in winter.

### Scenery

Silvery landscapes of beautiful pure-white snow makes travelers feel as if they have come to another dimension, well beyond the ordinary experience. Mysterious and romantic silvery landscapes attract visitors.



Ice floe



Flying swans



Flying Japanese red-crowned cranes

### Experience

The most popular winter activities in Hokkaido include skiing and snowboarding amid the highest-quality powder snow. In eastern Hokkaido, "Drift Ice Watching" can also be enjoyed from boats. Various winter events such as the Sapporo Snow Festival are provided in each region in Hokkaido. It may be fun to plan to visit these events during your trip by referring to the Web sites.

Name of events	Approx. seasons	Contents	Places
Sapporo Snow Festival	Early Feb.	Around 300 large- and mid-size snow and ice statues, International Snow statue Contest, etc.	Sapporo Odori Park venue, Susukino venue, etc.
Asahikawa Winter Festival	Early Feb.	The world's largest snow and ice statues as well as <i>objets d'art</i> of lights are created. Various events including nightly fireworks and winter activities are provided.	Riverfront of the Ishikari River and Asahi Bridge in Asahikawa, Tokiwa Park, Heiwa Avenue Kaimono Park, Nana-jo Ryokudo
Winter Circus	Early Feb.	Various landmarks are created using snow and these showcase the Taisetsu-Furano Route of Scenic Byway Hokkaido program in winter.	Along the Taisetsu-Furano Route of Scenic Byway Hokkaido program (Asahikawa City, parking areas along expressways, etc.)



Skiing



Sapporo Snow Festival

### Food

Winter is the season of delicious seafood in Hokkaido. Shellfish such as oysters and scallops, as well as red king crabs and herrings are highly recommended.

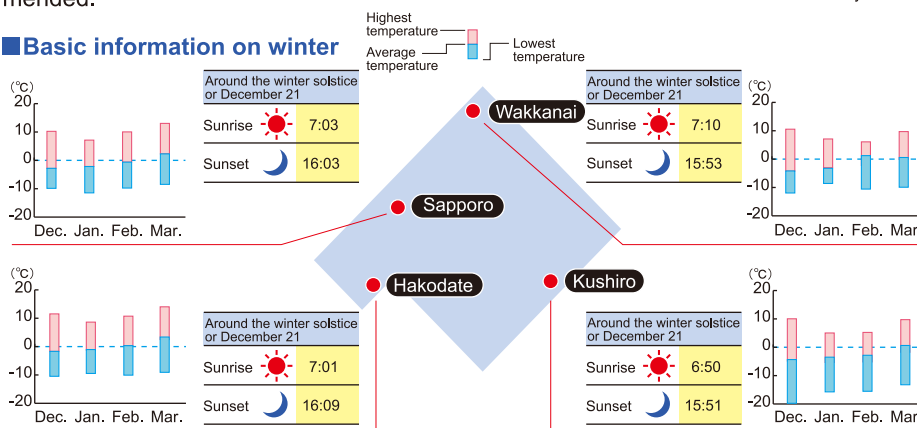


Oyster



Red king crab, horsehair crab, hanasaki crab

#### Basic information on winter



#### December

From late in this month, snow stays throughout the season. Overcoats, mittens and winter or nonslip shoes are necessary.

#### January

The period with the heaviest snowfalls. Snow accumulates significantly in central Hokkaido and the Taisetsu region. Temperatures in Tokachi and eastern and northern Hokkaido regions are particularly low.

#### February

This is the last month of the coldest season. The clothes you will need are the same as those in December and January.

#### March

Snow begins to melt, and white arm blooms in the wetlands. At night, the same clothes as those worn in winter are recommended.



#### Important points regarding driving trips in winter

- During the Snow Festival season, immigration and departure procedures at airports may take longer than usual. It is important to plan your trip free from time constraints, especially on days of departure and arrival.
- Road conditions are bad due to compacted snow and ice that looks black on the roads (black ice). Since the traffic moves slowly in urban regions due to traffic jams, it is important to plan your driving trip free from time constraints.
- Public traffic facilities may be at a complete standstill because of closed expressways due to heavy snow, severe snowstorms, drifting snow, etc. and with aircraft delay and/or cancellation of flights and trains as well. Local streets are also crowded.  
⇒Refer to Chapter 4





**THE FOUR SEASONS  
OF HOKKAIDO**

