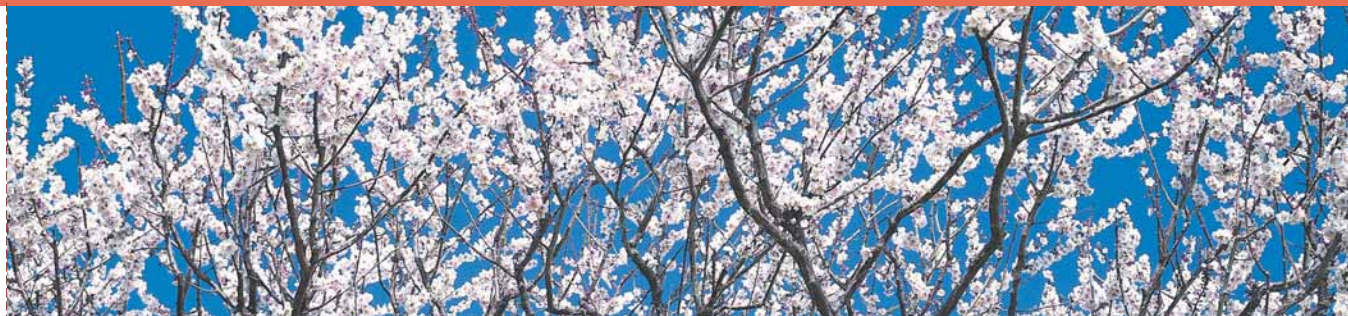


1-2. Seasonal charms of Hokkaido

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. If a traveler does not plan with the seasons in mind, their trip will be ruined. 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		←		→



Shizunai Town, Nijukken Road



Potato field

Experience

Part of the charm of Hokkaido's spring skiing, which can be enjoyed until early May, is that the ski slopes still boast plenty of high-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 that signifies the coming of spring is a product that represents Hokkaido. Although the main food preparation method for asparagus is to fry it in butter, tempura asparagus is also delicious.

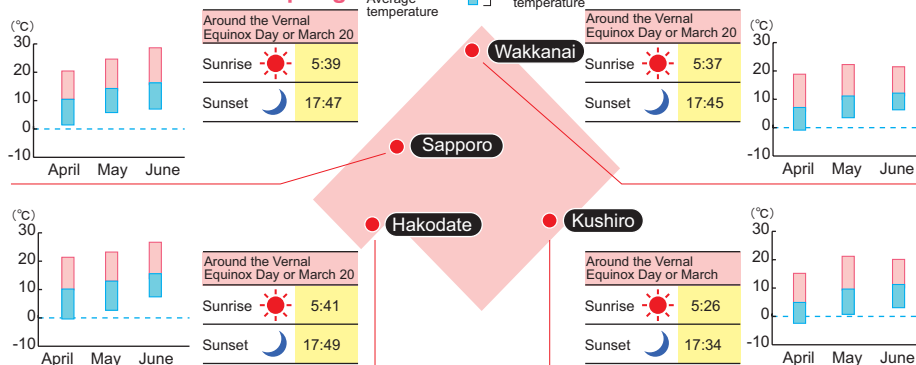


Hairy crab



Asparagus

Basic information on spring



April

Snow starts to melt and skunk cabbages bloom in the wetlands. It is the weather for wearing light coats or jackets.

May

Although the sunshine is warm, the wind is still cold. **This month brings almost the same weather as the main island of Honshu gets 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

Thanks to a non-humid and dry climate, the short summer in Hokkaido creates one of the best summer resort destinations. It is also the most suitable season for driving due to longer hours of daylight.

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 in Hokuryu



Water lilies in Onuma

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

Seafood in Hokkaido increases in flavor in summer. Shrimps, crabs and sea urchins are Hokkaido's finest products. It is a gourmet season with extra-sweet melons, watermelons and white corn being harvested in the fields.



Sea urchin



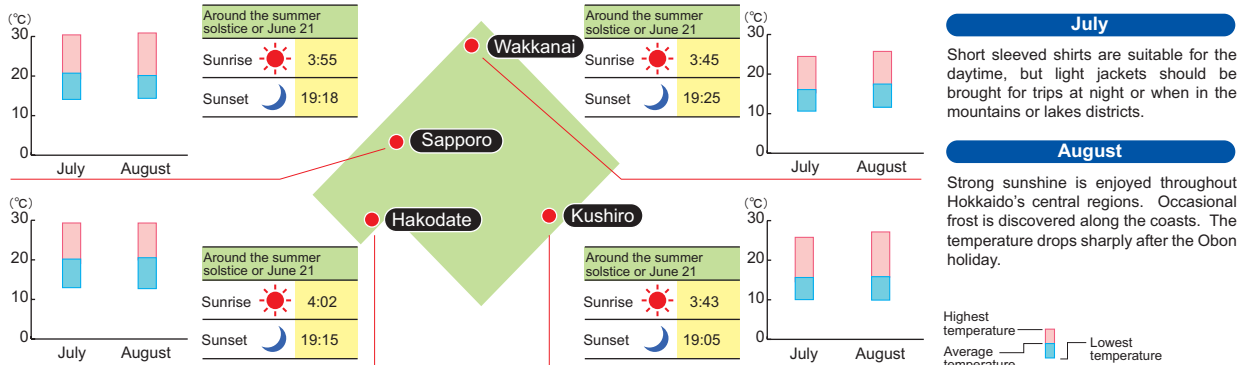
Hanasaki crab



Corn

Melon (above),
Watermelon (below)

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 are often full, and there may be traffic jams (one or two hours waiting in some cases). It is important to plan your driving trip in Hokkaido free from time constraints.

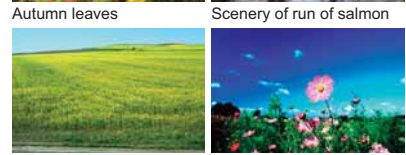
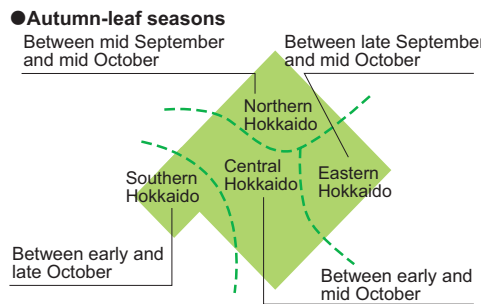


Autumn – Hokkaido's charm in autumn – Period: September to November

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, smelts, apples and grapes. Various festivals are held to celebrate the harvest in the Hokkaido regions, and it is recommended to try the specialties in season.

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.



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.

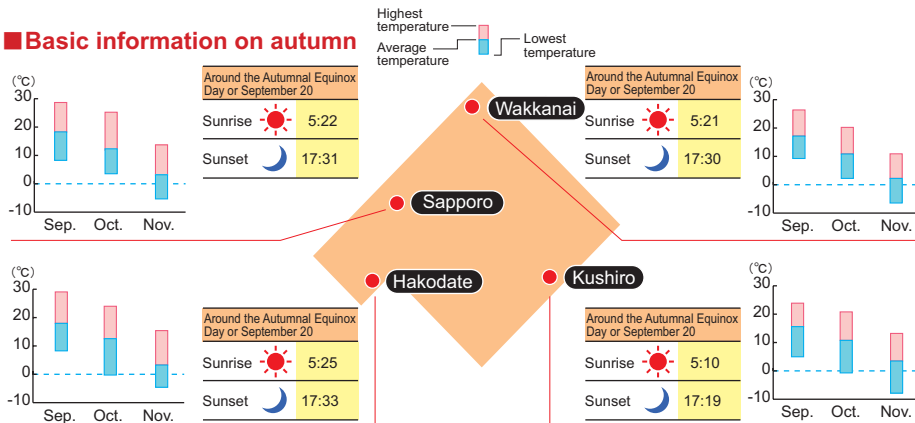
Food

Why don't you find seasonal products that you can eat only at that harvesting area?

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	→	→	→	→	→	→



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

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.)



Hot-air balloon ride



Pond-smelt fishing

Food

Hokkaido's culture is to live lavishly in winter by eating delicious food. Japanese traditional dishes of various hot-pots using seafood are cooked at the table and warm the cockles of your heart.

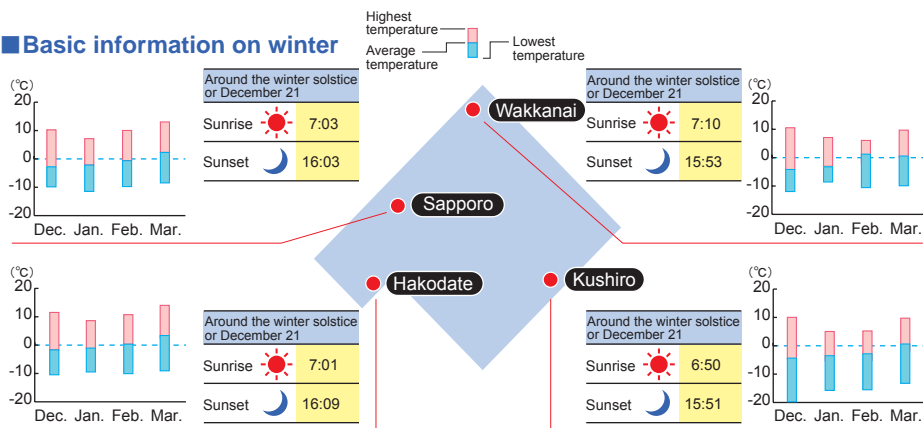


Oyster



Saifin poacher

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

It is the period of changeable weather. Central Hokkaido and the Taisetsu districts have lots of snow, and the temperature especially in Tokachi region and Eastern Hokkaido gets very low. Jackets and coats with hoods are useful.

February

This is the last month of the coldest season. The clothes you will need are the same as those in December and January. The temperature differences between the morning and the evening are large. Clothes which can be put on and taken off easily are recommended (as houses and restaurants/shops etc are so well heated that you can easily be overdressed).

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