

# Niseko

A well-kept secret just a few years ago, today Niseko is booming thanks to consistent falls of great powder, a burgeoning infrastructure and less crowds than in many Honshu resorts.

There are three resort areas: Hirafu, the most popular, and Higashiyama and Annupuri, both smaller and quieter. Between them they give you 48km of slopes to check out, with all 38 lifts included on a single lift pass. Access couldn't be easier, with many hotels and pensions offering ski-in/ski-out convenience and the Higashiyama Prince Hotel even having a gondola running directly out of the foyer.

Besides the infrastructure, one of the big stories here is the amount of backcountry to explore, with great tree runs and oceans of untracked powder just waiting to be scored. And if a day on the slopes isn't enough, you can come back and do it all again in the evening with the world's biggest night lit area.

## Getting there

Fly to Sapporo's Shin-Chitose airport then take a train to Niseko (2hrs 30mins, US\$40)

## Contacts

Fresh Tracks, [www.nisekofreshtracks.com](http://www.nisekofreshtracks.com)

Niseko Annupuri Ski Resort Office,

tel: (81-136) 58 2080

Niseko Holiday, [www.nisekoholiday.com](http://www.nisekoholiday.com)

Niseko Kokusai Hirafu Ski Resort Office,

tel: (81-136) 22 0109

Niseko Powder Connection, [www.niseko-hirafu.com](http://www.niseko-hirafu.com)

Scott Adventure Tours, [www.nisekoholiday.com](http://www.nisekoholiday.com)

SkiJapan.com, [www.skijapan.com](http://www.skijapan.com)

JAPAN



While most people in Japan are content to await the coming of spring and the much-loved cherry blossoms, there are those who favour hyperactivity over hibernation. You'll find them out in the mountains, thrilling to the on-piste and off-piste action, living it up at world-class ski resorts or settling into some apres ski in quaint hot spring inns in snowy mountain villages.

Nagano and Niigata on the main island of Honshu, and the northern island of Hokkaido are the top choices for serious snow enthusiasts. Hakuba in Nagano, the site of many of the 1998 Winter Olympic events, and Yuzawa in Niigata, with lightning quick train access from Tokyo, are hugely popular. Then there is the monster resort complex at Shiga Kogen, and the much smaller Niseko in Hokkaido, regularly touted for its endless powder and lively après fun.

Japan's got everything from local, single-lift operations to luxurious hotels that offer plush spa treatments after a day on the mountain. Many outdoor operators feature backcountry training and tours in search of fresh powder as well as snow shoeing and other winter sports activities. If you include the great food, rich culture and renowned hospitality, winter in Japan is hard to beat.

But skiing in Japan is about more than just great ski

