



TWO SIDES, TWO RIDES.

LIGHT, DRY POWDER WITH A SIDE
OF SUSHI? STEPHANIE WILLIAMS SAYS
"HAI" TO SKIING IN JAPAN, AT TWO
VERY DIFFERENT RESORTS





WINTER WONDERLAND
This page: the Niseko Grand Hirafu resort. Opposite, clockwise from top: The Barn; carving up the slopes on a snowmobile; Rakuichi's soba master, Rai. Previous page: Niseko and Mt Yotei

WITH A LONG SKI SEASON RUNNING FROM NOVEMBER TO MAY EACH YEAR,

over 600 ski resorts and the lightest and driest powder in the world, it's no surprise that powderhounds flock to Japan. Add amazing food, easy travel options and quality budget accommodation and a visit looks even more appealing.

Niseko is one of the most popular ski destinations for foreigners, with steep runs, consistent powder and pumping night-life. On the flip side is Nozawa Onsen, a smaller resort that treats visitors to a glimpse of traditional Japanese snow life, with historic *onsen* (hot springs), local sushi masters and perfect slopes. Try one resort or try both – the ease of travel in Japan means you can cover a decent amount of ground in one trip.



Niseko: The Powdery North

A quick plane ride from Japan's main island, the north island of Hokkaido is home to Sapporo beer, volcanic hot springs, incredibly good seafood and the skiing heaven of Niseko. Icy blasts from Russian Siberia pick up cloud fuel from the Sea of Japan and shower the resort with an average of over 12m of snow a year – one of the highest annual snowfalls in the country.

ON THE MOUNTAIN

This is a powder-lover's paradise. Steep, groomed runs and exciting off piste action will keep even the most advanced skier's heart pumping, while the gentler and picturesque beginner and intermediate areas are perfect for families wanting to explore. With over 48km of runs from epic tree runs to vast powder fields, there's something for everyone.

Niseko is made up of five resorts – Annupuri, Higashiyama, Hirafu, Hanazono and Moiwā – and an All Mountain Pass provides access to all areas and to the shuttle buses between them (for up-to-date prices, visit niseko.ne.jp/en/lift). Advanced skiers in particular will find it well worth hiring a mountain guide for a day, as visibility is sometimes poor (but who knocks back fresh powder?) and a guide will help you navigate and get the most out of the mountain. Rod White from Ski Japan (skijapan.com) has a team of back-country mountain guides from JPY7,000 (S\$81) who get off piste daily,

in groups between 5 and 7 people.

Alternatively, book a lesson and cover ground while learning some new skills – even intermediate skiers may benefit from a quick hit of on-mountain training here. Niseko has a number of private ski schools: check whether your accommodation is affiliated with a particular school.

And don't forget night skiing – it's big in Japan, as resorts often stay open after dark so that locals can hit the slopes after work. Niseko is open until 9pm daily and has the largest area under lights in the country, though the filtering effect of the trees makes for an extra challenge at the end of the day. A JPY6,900 (S\$81) day pass is already good value: night skiing makes it an even better proposition.

VILLAGE LIFE

Niseko is a big town wedged between the ski slopes and the foothills of Mount Yotei, the Mount Fuji of the north. It has a western feel, too, and until you notice the signage and ramen bars, you'd be forgiven for thinking you'd left Japan. But what it lacks in village ambience, it makes up for in fantastic restaurants, cafés and bars that you just don't get in a smaller resort.

First on your hit list after a day on the slopes should be an ice-cold Sapporo beer at an *izakaya*, a Japanese pub. Try Abucha 1st – it was so popular that the owners opened a second venue, Abucha 2nd. Both are fantastic whether you're after an après snack or full-blown dinner.

Ramen-lovers must visit Otsukisama, above Moon Bar, for deliciously viscous soup – try the pork ramen or, if you're game, the super-hot chilli ramen. For a traditional night out, Shokusai Hirafu serves up fine sushi and sashimi straight from the Sea of Japan. Or blow the budget at Kamimura on a Michelin-starred French degustation with a Japanese sensibility.

Serious foodies will seek out the 12-seat Rakuichi at the base of Annapurni, where soba master Rai



and his wife Midori make simply the finest soba and tempura you're ever likely to eat.

And of course, there's no shortage of drinking dens in Niseko, with something for everyone. You enter Bar Gyu+ (Fridge Bar) through a tiny fridge door that opens, like Alice in Wonderland's rabbit hole, into

Niseko: Quick Facts

Elevation: 1,308m
Steepest run: 37°
Courses: 61
Lifts: 27 chairs, 3 gondolas
Terrain: Beginner 30%, intermediate 40%, advanced 30%
Night skiing: Every night until 9pm
Families and pets: Niseko loves families and the Hilton Niseko Village loves pets. Check with your accommodation before taking your pet.
Day trips: Explore nearby Sapporo (1hr 50m), home of the famous beer and incredible seafood.

another world – a cosy, wood-panelled cocktail bar with open fires and big glass windows, where you can sip your mulled wine or whisky sour looking out at the falling snow. Kick on with the ubercool crowd at architecturally impressive The Barn, for great cocktails, or get rowdy at Wild Bill's or The Edge.

Next morning, head to Green Farm Café to start the day with great coffee, a western breakfast and a good view of Grand Hirafu's bustling central intersection.

OFF THE SLOPES

There's plenty to do around Niseko that doesn't involve skiing. Jump on a snowmobile tour with Niseko Snowmobile Adventures (go-nsa.com) to experience a true winter wonderland, tracking through the birch trees and a few hairy spots and finishing in a huge powder bowl only accessible by snowmobile. Day tours start from JPY30,000 (S\$350).

Onsen are the perfect way to wind down after a day of skiing, and there ➡➡➡

THE NEW CABLE CAR SKY NETWORK

Experience Faber Peak Singapore and Sentosa like never before, on the NEW Sentosa Line (Even the birds can't resist)



DOUBLE THE JOY WITH TWO CABLE CAR LINES

Get onboard the cable car sky network, a fun new way to fly from Singapore's only hilltop destination, Faber Peak Singapore, to over 20 attractions in Sentosa! Soar high above for priceless views of the exciting island, golden beaches and beautiful greenery. Catch this unique *joyride* on the Mount Faber Line and the new Sentosa Line. Get your tickets today at www.faberpeaksingapore.com

FLY WITH CABLE CAR SKY PASS

Mount Faber Line & Sentosa Line

Adult (Standard) \$29 Child (Standard) \$18

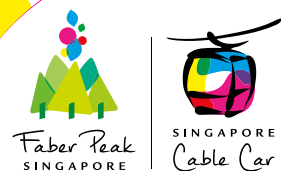
Get **10% OFF*** when you present your airline boarding pass at our Ticketing Counters.

Singapore Cable Car Daily Operating Hours:
8.45am - 10pm (Last boarding: 9.30pm)

Ticketing Counters:

• Mount Faber (Faber Peak Singapore) • HarbourFront Tower 2 • Sentosa (Imbiah Lookout)

*Valid for Cable Car Sky Pass (Standard) only till 31 Dec 2015. For purchase at Singapore Cable Car Ticketing Counters only. Other terms and conditions apply.



High on happiness

www.faberpeaksingapore.com
(+65) 6377 9688

FaberPeakSingapore | SingaporeCableCar

Insight JAPAN SKIING

are a few in Niseko. The Hirafutei Prince Hotel onsen has a great view of the ski runs and surrounding countryside; the Yukoro onsen in the lower village is a completely different experience, with a rustic outdoor bath set in a traditional Japanese garden.

Or drop in to the Niseko Cultural School and take a class in calligraphy, enjoy a Japanese tea ceremony or try dressing in a kimono. Outside the village, head to Takahashi Ranch. The Niseko area is known for its award-winning (and huge) milking cows and the Ranch serves up their divine milk in more ways than you can imagine – try the incredible soft serve ice-cream, pastries and yoghurt.

WHERE TO STAY

There's a place in Niseko to suit every budget – from backpacker hostels through to pipping penthouses. Try Ski Japan (skijapan.com), who rent everything from budget lodges through to whole houses, or Deep Powder Snow Holidays (deppowdertours.com) for great budget options. Save even more cash by packaging up your accommodation, lift ticket and gear rental.

Nozawa Onsen: Small and Sweet

Tucked into the northern pocket of Nagano prefecture, just a four-hour train ride from Tokyo, quaint and traditional Nozawa Onsen offers a beautiful contrast to the bustle of Niseko. The town's cobblestone streets are an Instagrammer's paradise, and with bluebird days and snowy nights, it's the perfect place to take the family or learn to ski. The area is also renowned for its restorative hot springs, with 13 in the village.

Nozawa has tried hard to remain traditional in the face of the western ski invasion – locals love hitting the slopes here come the weekend. The elevation isn't as steep as Niseko, but the powder is perfect, and there are definitely secret pockets for advanced skiers to explore.



SLOPES THEN SUSHI
Left: a panoramic view of beautiful Nozawa Onsen. Below: super-fresh fish is trucked in daily for Hamacho Sushi



ON THE MOUNTAIN

The pretty village is at the foot of Mount Kenashi, with sweeping views of the mountain range. Beginners don't need to stick to the bottom of the slope here though – the best learner runs are quite high up, with a long 2km run to test your skills and an easy gondola ride back to the top.

Advanced skiers should search for the gates at the very top of the hill. While out-of-bounds skiing is

frowned upon, the daring can enjoy a sneaky shuttle run through the trees over the back. (*Shhhhhhh, we didn't tell you that.*) Again, a guide will help you make the most of the mountain; the ski schools take children from three years of age.

The on-mountain dining here is fantastic. Try the *katsu* curry and tempura udon at Hakugin Lodge near Paradise Slope, or Buna for hot chocolate with a panoramic view. Just beware of the locals: some aren't shy about downing a few beers at lunch then getting back out on the slopes.

Nozawa: Quick Facts

Elevation: 1,650m
Steepest run: 39° at the Wall of Challenge
Courses: 36
Lifts: 18 lifts, 2 gondolas
Terrain: Beginner 40%, intermediate 30%, advanced 30%
Night skiing: Until 8pm, but it requires a separate ticket
Families and pets: Families will love the gentle beginner slopes and ski schools. Some lodges and hotels allow pets, but it's best to check.
Day trips: Take the 90-minute ride to visit the cheeky snow monkeys.

VILLAGE LIFE

The food in Nozawa is a highlight – traditional and well priced when compared to Niseko. The stand-out is Hamacho Sushi, where everything is made fresh by sushi master Maru, using ingredients trucked in daily – make sure you get in early and grab a seat



BYO EGGS
Onsen
cooking at
Ohgama
Nozawa

at the bar to enjoy the show. Maru loves his whisky and is often seen with one in hand while he slices fish.

Soba is a Nagano prefecture specialty and Yoshima Soba serve up the best. Nozawa's apples are also pretty special; there's a whole shop here dedicated to the fruit, and don't pass by the vendors on the main street and their steaming *manju* (apple dumplings). Also try Wanryu Ramen for excellent miso ramen soup, Jugem for vegetarian and The Corner for a steak with a side of trendy.

Nozawa is a small village, so night-life is limited but fun. You can kick off with a beer and sport-watching at Foot Bar, then head downstairs to Stay Bar – a live music and bourbon bar. In the morning, to blow out the cobwebs of the night, get a caffeine hit at the new Gondola Café, opening this season at the base of the Nagasaka gondola.

OFF THE SLOPES

You must try an *onsen* in Nozawa – some are traditional (so think about whether you're ready to see the locals in the nude!) and others are inside

hotels where it's acceptable to cover up. Whatever your style, abide by the onsen rules spelt out inside the door, and enjoy the restorative power of the warm baths.

Most visitors know about bathing in onsen, but not everyone knows that the springs here are also used by locals for cooking. You can have a go yourself – just head to the top of the village to buy a few ingredients like eggs and greens and watch them poach in the communal 90°C cooking springs.

Sake distilleries like Mizuho Brewery from Iiyama also dot the landscape near Nozawa; if you're interested, it's well worth booking in at one of the sake-tasting nights offered by some hotels and lodges.

WHERE TO STAY

Nozawa Holidays (nozawaholidays.com) has a range of options from budget to very comfortable and package it up with lift passes and gear rental. Villa Nozawa (villanozawa.com) is a great budget mix between traditional and comfort – choose the Japanese-style *tatami*-matted rooms for a different but comfortable experience sleeping on the floor.

GETTING THERE

Take the Nagano *shinkansen* (bullet train) from Tokyo past must-see Mount Fuji (1 hour 50 minutes). From Nagano, there are a few direct buses each day to Nozawa Onsen (1 hour 20 minutes), or you can take the local train to Togari Nozawa Onsen Station (about 1 hour) and then a 20-minute bus or taxi ride to the resort. The last option may seem a bit complicated, but it's a pretty and interesting journey in itself. ✨

Travel Info ✈️

Jetstar flies up to thrice daily from Singapore to Osaka (via Taipei and Manila), and onwards to Sapporo, also thrice daily.

Visit jetstar.com to book

EXCLUSIVELY FOR THIS ISSUE

Chill out & pick up a copy of Jetshop from the seat pocket in front of you and start shopping now!

