

SUPER CHEAP HOKKAIDO

The Ultimate Budget Travel Guide to Sapporo and the
Hokkaido Prefecture

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Welcome to Hokkaido



The beautiful flower fields of Furano in central Hokkaido

Welcome to Hokkaido, Japan's northern island, just waiting to be discovered by the masses. It's a quieter, more spacious and most importantly cheaper place to visit than the rest of Japan, and is full of unspoiled mountains to hike, hot springs to relax in and plenty of local delicacies to enjoy. From historical cities such as Hakodate, to huge ski resorts such as Niseko, to the beautiful flower fields of Furano, Hokkaido really stands out from the rest of Japan. With this guide, you'll find out how to really enjoy it on a reasonable budget.

Compared to the rest of Japan, especially Tokyo and Kyoto, visitors can find some unbelievable prices in Hokkaido. While hostel rooms are often around \$30 in Tokyo, don't be surprised to be paying half that in rural Hokkaido. The island still has cheap convenience stores, supermarkets and chain restaurants, it's just that when traveling around you may be a little further away from them than if you were in the big cities down south. Guesthouse owners and locals also appreciate more that visitors from abroad have made the effort to come up to the north too, so don't be surprised to get a random free tour from a local!

The geography and less developed transportation infrastructure can make traveling here challenging at times. This book has been designed so you can see the top sights, as well as experience off-the-beaten-track spots, and all in an affordable and stress-free way.

A little bit of history

Up until the 15th century, Hokkaido was mainly populated by the aboriginal Ainu people, who had their own unique culture, language and traditions, some of which can still be seen today. It's highly recommended to visit towns such as Abashiri to see the Ainu culture in person and to see what makes Hokkaido unique from the rest of Japan. There has also been a surprising amount of western influences over the years, such as the westerners who founded Hokkaido University in Sapporo. Hokkaido did change a lot as mainlanders came over nearly 1000 years ago and forced their customs on the Ainu, with much of Hokkaido's traditions lost or faded, but there is now a concerted effort to protect and display these for tourists and locals alike.

How to save on your holiday with this book

Things to do

With this book you'll be shown plenty of options for free things to do, as well as information on available discounts or places to try free samples. Try to do the cheaper or free activities first, then if you feel you need to do more, try the more expensive things in the area. For example, you may find after doing a free walk somewhere that taking that expensive ropeway up another mountain for a hike isn't worth it.

Sample itineraries and discount passes

While Hokkaido has a smaller number of tourist spots to choose from than the rest of Japan, planning a trip can be difficult because of the infrequent bus or train routes. If you are a bit stuck, use the sample itineraries in this book to help you out.

Budget food

Hokkaido does have budget restaurant chains in the big cities, but you are just as likely to enter a cheap family-owned joint here. These are included on the maps, as well as in the Budget Food sections, as they can be tricky to find if you're not a local. Don't forget to consider buying food from supermarkets or convenience stores, especially if in a tourist town populated mainly with expensive restaurants.

Most of the budget restaurants have water jugs to refill your bottle. The 100-yen shops (around \$1) are also listed, as you can buy almost anything, from microwavable curry to essential travel items. Japanese pharmacies and drugstores often have even cheaper prices for drinks and snacks as well. Tap water is drinkable.

How to use the maps

For hard to navigate towns, maps are provided to help you get around, with handy icons to show you exactly where all the cheap shops, restaurants and more are located. Landmark buildings and major hotels have also been included to aid in navigating around. A plus is that most of these landmarks have toilets if needed, plus many have free water fountains, which can be used to refill your water bottle and save on the cost of drinks. You can also save on transportation by using the recommended walking routes.

Map Legend



Convenience store



Tourist information



Parking



Cheap supermarket



Recommended walking route



Post office



100 yen store



Budget accommodation



Drug store

Free wifi locations

There is free wifi in many tourist spots and at most tourist information centers in Hokkaido, but there may be slim pickings elsewhere. If you feel you will definitely need the internet at all times, get yourself a data SIM card at the airport or a large electronics store (such as Yodobashi Camera in Sapporo), with prices starting at around 4000 yen a week.

Hakodate (函館)



One of the traditional western-style buildings in Motomachi

One of the first cities in Japan to open up to international trade, Hakodate offers visitors something different from the rest of Hokkaido. Dutch, American, English and other traders came and settled here when Japan opened up more than 150 years ago, creating a rich history and places to visit that feel like a fusion of east and west. Give yourself at least a day to enjoy it all and make sure you try the succulent seafood rice bowls at the morning market.

How to get around Hakodate

Hakodate has a simple tram network that will get you to within a short walking distance of the tourist spots. The sights are a bit far away from each other to do the city solely on foot. Using one of the passes below is highly recommended to save on money and cut out any hassle as you'll need to use public transportation a lot to pack in as many spots as you can.

Discount passes and tickets

Tram One-Day Pass

Allows unlimited use of the trams in Hakodate for one day. As the city is best traveled via tram, this is a must purchase that can take you to all the tourist spots. You'll easily save money as single tickets start at 210 yen. It also comes with a handy city map showing visitors exactly where to stop off for each tourist attraction. Buy at the Hakodate station tourist information center or at some hotels. *Adults 600 yen, children 300 yen.*

Hakodate Bus One-Day Pass (Kanpass)

If you want to be dropped off right outside every tourist spot rather than walk from the nearest tram stop, then this pass would suit you. It allows unlimited use of city buses for one

day, including to Goryokaku, Motomachi, the bay area and up Mount Hakodate. There is also a combined ticket that includes the tram too. Buy at the Hakodate station tourist information center. *Kanpass: Adults 800 yen, children 400 yen. Bus + tram combined pass: One day 1000 yen*

Things to do



Preparing fresh crab for a morning meal at the Hakodate Morning Market

Hakodate Morning Market (函館朝市)

Known in Japanese as Hakodate Asaichi (literally morning market), this has to be the best fish market in Hokkaido, and one of the most interesting in Japan. An enormous array of all kinds of fish are on offer from more than 250 stalls and restaurants. Make sure you get here early in the day. *FREE • 6am-2pm (January to April), 5am-2pm (May to December) • Just outside Hakodate station*

Bay area (ベイエリア)

A relaxing spot to come for a stroll any time of the day, but especially atmospheric in the early evening. The bay is lined with the historic Kanemori Red Brick buildings, which more than 100 years ago were used as warehouses, but have now been refurbished as shopping complexes with lots of window shopping and some tax-free shopping opportunities at the many boutique shops. *FREE • 24h • Short walk from Jujugai tram stop • Mapcode: 86 041 583*41*

Mount Hakodate (函館山)

This 334-meter high mountain provides an amazing view at night, and while it's a little pricey going up this mountain, it's not to be missed. The view from the top is considered to be one of the three top night views in Japan. A cable car takes visitors to the top, while the observation desks are free. *Ropeway (round trip): Adults 1280 yen, children 640 yen • 10am-10pm (25/4 to 15/10), 10am-9pm (16/10 to 24/4) • By tram: Ropeway is a 10 minute walk from Jujugai or Horaicho tram stops. By bus: There are direct summit buses from Hakodate station for 400 yen (does not operate in winter). By car: Parking spaces are very limited at the top, but there is a road up • Mapcode: 86 009 717*30*

Motomachi (元町)

Hakodate was one of the first ports to open up to foreign trade in Japan. Many foreigners settled in Motomachi, which has created an impressive collection of western-influenced

buildings. Some are lit up in the evening, while from December to February the trees lining the streets are decorated with Christmas lights, so it is worth coming back after everything is closed for the day. Some historical buildings require an entrance fee, but you can save money by buying multi-pass tickets at participating buildings. Below are some highlights. *Take the tram to Suehiro-cho or Jujigai. Most sites are about 10 minutes on foot from these tram stops. All the sights are well signposted from the tram stops*

Old Public Hall of Hakodate Ward (旧函館区公会堂)

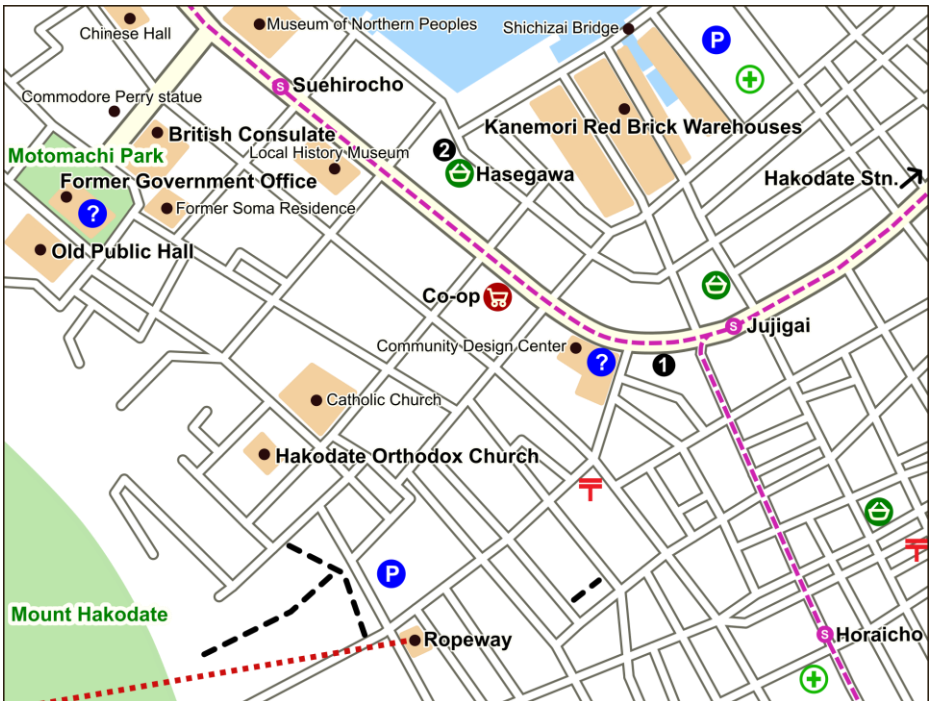
Designated as an important cultural property, this building has a grand hall and very posh rooms that were used for special guests, such as royal families. Even if you don't go inside, it's worth taking a picture of this magnificent building from the outside. *Adults 300 yen, children 150 yen • Up Moto-saka Dori from Suehirocho tram stop • 9am-7pm (until 5pm November to March). Note that major renovation works are scheduled until 2021 • Tel: 0138-22-1001 • Mapcode: 86 040 434*41*

Hakodate Orthodox Church (函館ハリストス正教会)

Founded by the Russian Consulate in 1859, it's often considered the most visually stunning building in Motomachi. *200 yen donation • Towards the ropeway from the Old Public Hall • Weekdays: 10am-5pm, Saturdays: 10am-4pm, Sundays: 1pm-4pm (closed December 26 to mid-March)*

Old British Consulate (旧イギリス領事館)

Used as the British Consulate from 1913 to 1934, this complex is known for its classical tea room where guests can enjoy a good old cup of British tea while looking over the rose garden. The exhibitions inside are also a great way to learn about the opening of the port and how Hakodate was radically changed due to all the new trade, culture and skills brought over. *Adults 300 yen, children 150 yen • Across from Old Public Hall • 9am-7pm (until 5pm November to March)*



Goryokaku (五稜郭)

Very impressive fort, the first one to be built in Japan based on western designs and structures. There is also the Hakodate Magistrate's Office, which has good English explanations about the fort's long, violent history. Nearby is the tower, which provides splendid views of all the cherry blossoms during that time of the year. *FREE entry to park.*

*Goryokaku Tower: Adults 900 yen, children 450-680 yen, under 5s FREE • 10 minute walk from Goryokaku-koen-mae tram stop • Park: 9am-6pm (5pm in winter). Tower 9am-7pm (6pm in winter) • Mapcode: 86 165 087*55*

Yunokawa Hot Spring foot bath (湯の川温泉足湯湯巡り舞台)

Worth visiting at the end of the day, especially if you have a tram pass, Yunokawa Onsen is towards the end of the line. There is a free foot bath near the tram stop that you can soothe your feet in after all the walking you have hopefully done to save money! *FREE • 24h • Just outside Yunokawa Onsen tram stop • Mapcode: 86 110 366*11*

Hakodate Park (函館公園)

Take some time away from the busy city center and say hello to some local deer at this huge park. It's also a decent place to visit during the cherry blossom season if you happen to be here at that time. *FREE • Short walk from Aoyagicho tram stop • Mapcode: 86 011 281*33*

Volunteer guides and tours

The Hakodate Goodwill Guide Association is an official service that can provide English speaking volunteer guides to take visitors around Hakodate and surrounding areas. Booking before traveling to Hokkaido is advised. Get more information and book at

<https://hakodategoodwill.wixsite.com/hakodatesgg> or email hakodategoodwill@yahoo.co.jp.

Budget food

Most of the national budget restaurant chains don't have stores in central Hakodate, so after the morning market closes definitely consider getting food from a convenience store or cheap supermarket, which are all over the city. Motomachi has some cafes and sweet stores, but they are not really aimed at the budget-conscious travelers looking for a proper meal.

Hakodate Morning Market (函館朝市) - Many of the places in this market will cook or prepare the food in their stall for you, to eat within minutes. It's not just fish here, they have produce from across the prefecture to suit all tastes. Super fresh and super tasty, make sure you don't miss out on this treat! *Fish and rice bowls from around 500-600 yen • 6am-2pm (January to April), 5am-2pm (May to December) • Just outside Hakodate station*

Ajisai Ramen (函館麵厨房あじさい) - Old school ramen joint with an inventive range of toppings. *Ramen bowls from 750 yen • 10am-9:30pm • In Hakodate station and outside Goryokaku Tower*

Mister Donut (ラーメン横丁) - Cheap donuts and light meals. *Donuts from 100 yen • 7am-10pm • Just outside Goryokaku-Koen-Mae tram stop*

Gindaco (築地銀だこ) - Takoyaki (octopus balls). *Light meals from 580 yen • 9am-9pm • Inside the Supaakusu supermarket (スーパーアークス) in the Polestar shopping mall outside Goryokaku station*

Naruto (小樽なると屋) - Traditional Japanese set meals. *From 600 yen • 10am-9pm • In the Polestar shopping mall outside Goryokaku station*

Hasegawa (ハセガワストア) - Convenience stores with a large selection of ready-made meals, such as fried noodles, sushi bowls and yakitori (skewered chicken). *From 600 yen • 24h • 1) West end of bay area, past parking lot. 2) Near Hakodate station, head a few minutes down eastbound tram lines. 3) Near Goryokaku Tower. Head down the road where Ajisai Ramen and Lucky Pierrot are situated, then turn left at second block and walk down a bit.*

Motomachi

1) Sakuraiya (櫻井家) - Welcoming ramen spot with all the classic ingredients. *Ramen bowls from 680 yen • 11am-2pm, 5:30pm-8pm (closed Mondays) • Near Jujigai tram stop*

2) Lucky Pierrot (ラッキーピエロ) - Famous Hakodate burger chain. *Burgers from 350 yen • 10am-9pm • Near to Hasegawa in the bay area. Also one outside Goryokaku Tower*

Cheap supermarkets (スーパー)

Co-op has stores near Jujigai tram stop, towards Suehirocho (9am-9:45pm) and just outside Hakodate Arena-Mae (9am-9pm). Budget supermarket chain MaxValu (マックスバリュ) has stores near the Hakodate Dock-Mae (7am-10pm) and Showabashi (7am-11pm) tram stops.

Shopping

Kanemori Red Brick Warehouses (金森赤レンガ倉庫) - There are countless stores here offering tax-free shopping. Shops specializing in local foods, Japanese toys, trendy souvenirs and cheap cosmetics are scattered around the warehouses. *Various times, but usually 9am-5pm • Near Jujigai tram stop*

Marui (丸井今井店) - Large department store with tax-free store-wide, specializing in fashion and luxury food items. Pastry Snaffles in particular is recommended for those with sweet tastes. *10am-7pm • Outside Goryokaku-Koen-Mae tram stop*

T.O. Department Store (テーオーデパート) - Slightly more down-market than Marui, you'll definitely find some tax-free bargains here. *10am-9pm • A ten minute walk west from Goryokaku-Koen-Mae tram stop along the main road*

100-yen shops

Daiso (ダイソー) - In the Pole Star shopping mall, on the west side of Goryokaku station and inside the T.O. Department Store (函館テーオー店). *10am-8pm*

Drugstores (ドラッグストア)

Daikoku has a store in the morning market (6am-3pm). Sapporo Drugstore has a larger store around the back (7am-5pm), with smaller branches scattered around the tourist areas. Tsuruhadoraggu has a huge store near Omachi tram stop in Motomachi (9am-10pm).

Recommended cheap accommodation

Hakodateyama Guest House (函館山ゲストハウス)

Great, friendly service and reasonably priced Japanese rooms. They also have loads of food and drinks to buy, all for 100 yen each. *Dorm beds from 3000 yen, private rooms from 4500 yen (open April to October) • Ten minutes walk from Yachigashira tram stop • <https://hakog-e.cloud-line.com/> • Mapcode: 951 296 432*41*

Eye Cafe (アイ・カフェ)

Internet café and entertainment complex with large selection of comics and cheap food (showers 350 yen extra). *6 hours (6 時間ナイトパック) from 1250 yen, 9 hours (9 時間ナイトパック) from 1650 yen (100 extra at weekends) • Across the road from T.O. Department Store (函館テーオー店), which is a 10 minute walk west from Goryokaku-Koen-Mae tram stop along the main road • Tel: 0138-55-7771*

Capsule Hotel Hakodate (カプセルホテル函館)

Sleep in small capsules and save on expensive hotel fees. Reasonably modern, with cheap drinks and snacks available, plus free bicycle rental and car parking spots for 500 yen. *Capsules from 3000 yen • Outside Shinkawacho tram stop • <https://capsule-hakodate.jp/> • Tel: 0138-24-5001*

How to get there and away



The super fast new Hayabusa Shinkansen trains bring tourists to Hokkaido all the way from Tokyo

By air

Just like Sapporo, it will probably be cheaper to fly if departing from outside Hokkaido, unless you're using a rail pass. Internal Hokkaido flights can be pricey or inconvenient from Hakodate if you don't use one of the discounts on offer from ANA or Japan Airlines.

By train

From Onumakoen station (Onuma Park), take a Limited Express train to Hakodate (25 mins, 1160 yen) or a local train, transferring at Onuma station, to Hakodate (1 hour, 540 yen). From Sapporo take a Limited Express train (4 hours, 5720 yen). If traveling from the south via the Shinkansen, first make your way to Shin-Hakodate-Hokuto station. From here take a Hakodate Liner or other Hakodate bound train to Hakodate station (20 mins, 360 yen).

By bus

From Sapporo station, take a bus directly to Hakodate (5 hours, 4810 yen). Buses leave every two hours or so, including an overnight service if you want to save on accommodation for the night. Book at the bus terminal at least a day before departure.

Mapcode: 86 072 498*85 (Hakodate station)

Tourist information

There are tourist information centers in Hakodate station (9am-7pm in summer, 9am-5pm in winter), at the airport (open till last flight), the Hakodate Community Design Center near the Jujigai tram stop (9am-9pm) and in Motomachi (9am-7pm in summer, 9am-5pm in winter). Hakodate Asaichi also has a booth that can help with tax-free shopping and overseas shipping (8:30am-1pm). If transferring at Shin-Hakodate-Hokuto, there is also one there (9am-7pm).

Noboribetsu Onsen (登別温泉)



Relaxing in the free footbath at Oyunuma in Noboribetsu

One of the best hot spring towns in Hokkaido, if not Japan. Noboribetsu is an excellent choice for budget travelers who want to enjoy a Japanese hot spring, or at least see the interesting volcanic activity that creates such experiences. The town is well set up for tourists, with an excellent choice of free things to do, such as plenty of walking routes and a footbath.

Getting around

The best way to get around Noboribetsu is on foot. The paths between each tourist spot are short, plus it's a great way to escape the tour buses. Maps and signs show where to go, so it's also very easy. Most should be able to do all in a day. It's also possible to drive to some spots.

Things to do

Jigokudani (登別地獄谷)

Also known as Hell Valley, this hellish area has volcanic steam blowing out from under the ground and hot spring water gushing out, then down to the local resorts. The water has reacted with the ground to make a hellish yellow, brown and grey surface, which visitors can safely explore on boardwalks. Very atmospheric and a great place to take some amazing pics. *FREE • 24h • Located a short walk from town*

Tessen-Ike (鉄泉池)

Watch the hot spring water bubbling out of one of its main sources. Bring something to wipe your glasses, this place gets steamy! *FREE • 24h • End of Jigokudani*

Oyunuma Pond (大湯沼)

Sulfurous lake approximately 1 km in circumference. You used to be able to take a boat ride on it, but don't get in, it's 130°C at the bottom! Also next door is Okunoyu (奥の湯), a fascinating bubbling volcanic mud bath. *FREE • 24h • 17-minute walk from Jigokudani, via Oyunuma Nature Trail 1+2, or a short drive from the town • Mapcode: 603 318 005*66*

Oyunumagawa Natural Footbath (大湯沼川天然足湯)

A short walk through this lovely forest leads you to a free hot spring footbath. The water is lukewarm, so will suit anyone. There is also an observatory along the way. *FREE • 24h • Head around Oyunuma Pond, then down the Oyunumagawa Sightseeing Pathway for 10-15 minutes. Walk down road at end to return to town, via the blue Oyaku-kizo statue (親子鬼像) • Mapcode: 603 318 005*66*

Gokuraku Shopping Street (極楽踊り)

Sengen Park and geyser (泉源公園の間欠泉)

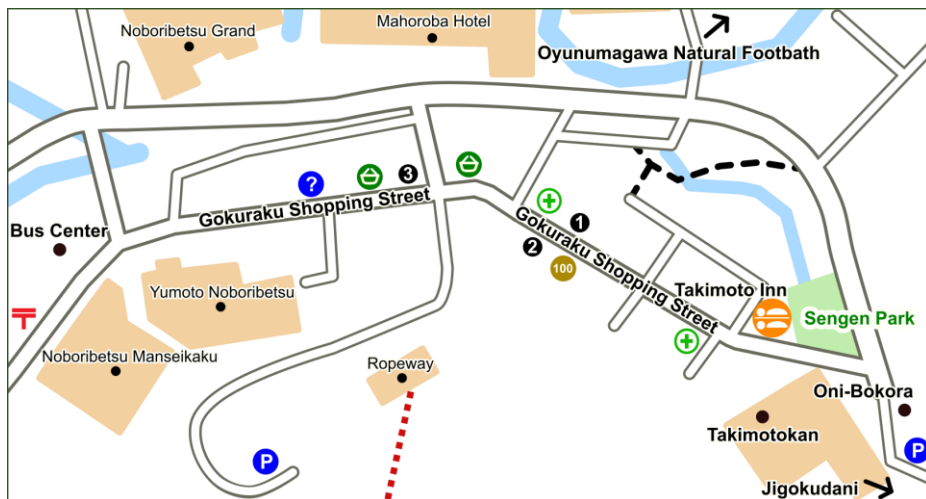
You can't miss this noisy hot spring source. It sounds like a monster and kids and adults alike love to see how close they can get. *FREE • 24h • Center of town*

Oni-Bokora statues (鬼祠)

Get yourself a selfie or two in front of these rather gruesome looking monster statues, just opposite Sengen Park. The little shrine next door is also worth a peek if you have time.

Takimotokan (第一滝本館)

While the rooms at this hotel will be out of the price range of many travelers, Takimotokan has some excellent hot spring baths that day visitors can enjoy. Drinking a beer while enjoying a hot spring with a view over Jigokudani really is bliss. This hot spring is regarded as one of the best in Japan, with a huge collection of different baths and great facilities. *9am-4pm: Adults 2000 yen, children 1000 yen. 4pm-6pm: Adults 1500 yen, children 750 yen. Free 24h access if you stay at nearby Takimoto Inn • Across the road from Sengen Park*



Budget food

Most people staying in one of the expensive hotels here will eat there, so budget travelers should go to one of the convenience stores or check out these places:

- 1) **Isekura (いせくら)** - Old-school Japanese BBQ spot, which also has traditional rice bowls and ramen options. *Bowls from 750 yen, small plate dishes from 540 yen • 6pm-1am • Near 7-Eleven*
- 2) **Tenho Ramen (ラーメン天鳳)** - Classic, unpretentious ramen bar. *Ramen from 750 yen • 11:30am-2pm, 6-11pm • Opposite Isekura on Gokuraku Shopping Street*
- 3) **Pizzeria Astra** - Casual pizza joint. *Pizzas from 500 yen • 11:30am-4pm, 8pm-1am • Between 7-Eleven and Seicomart on Gokuraku Shopping Street*

Cheap supermarkets (スーパー)

While there aren't any big supermarkets in the onsen town, there are a few convenience stores (see map for locations) which sell hot food, as well as sandwiches, cup noodles and microwavable dishes. There is a supermarket on the way from Noboribetsu station called Co-op (コープさっぽろのぼりべつ東店), which is a five-minute walk north up the main road from the station, that has loads of options to stock up on food (9am-8pm).

100-yen shops

CanDo (キャンドウ) - Located halfway down Gokuraku Shopping Street. 10am-8pm

Drugstores (ドラッグストア)

Satudora (サツドラ) has two branches in the town center (10am-10pm).

Recommended cheap accommodation

Takimoto Inn (滝本イン)

Nice budget hotel with reasonably spacious rooms. If you stay here entrance to Takimotokan hot spring is free, just show your room key when entering. Also has a bus service from Sapporo for just 1000 yen. *Rooms from 6630 yen • Tel: 0143-84-2205 • <http://www.takimotoinn.co.jp>*

Noboribetsu Guest House Aka & Ao (登別ゲストハウス赤と青)

Hostel near the train station, with various types of basic dorm rooms. Sometimes includes free breakfast on Booking.com. *Dorm beds from 2800 yen • Tel: 0143-83-7680 • <https://aka-ao.jp/en/>*

Nennomori Porotonomori Camping Ground (白老ふるさと2000年ポロトの森)

Plenty of space for camping, as well as bungalows for reservation, all amongst forest. There are lots of facilities, plus a small shop. Bookings are done over the phone, so ask at a hotel or tourist center before if you want to call. *From 400 yen for adults, 300 yen for children • Tel: 0144-85-2005 • Mapcode: 545 252 612*33 • http://www.ibbqc.com/poroto_camp/info.html*

How to get there and away

By train

There are usually one or two Limited Express trains every hour to Noboribetsu station from Sapporo (75 mins, 3960 yen) or Hakodate (150 mins, 6370 yen). You can also go by local train from Sapporo (2 hours, 2160 yen). Once at Noboribetsu station, take a local bus to Noboribetsu Onsen (340 yen).

By bus

From Sapporo station or the bus terminal there are buses every hour or so to Noboribetsu station (2-3 hours, 1850 yen). From here you can head on the bus to Noboribetsu Onsen (340 yen). Some hotels have direct buses, so be sure to enquire when you book.

By car or motorbike

Noboribetsu Onsen is around three hours from Hakodate, one and a half hours from Sapporo and 50 minutes from Toyako Onsen. *Useful Michi-no-eki roadside stations: To Sapporo via Route 36 at Mapcode 113 413 623 • To Toyako Onsen via Route 453 at Mapcode 321 498 699*

Mapcode: 603 257 766*85 (town center)

Tourist information

The Tourist Information center has lots of extra resources and super helpful staff (9am-5pm).