

Winter Wonderland Hokkaido

Hokkaido is a paradise for people of all walks of life during winter, not only for skiers and snowboarders. In addition to world renowned courses and backcountry slopes, Hokkaido also boasts a remarkable variety of winter events which take place right across the prefecture. From the middle of November until the beginning of April, the north, south, east, west and central regions of Hokkaido play host to visitors from their local area, other regions of Hokkaido, other prefectures of Japan, and often other countries. In fact, many of the events are actually based on the participation of people from different countries.

Like many northern regions around the world, the month of February in Hokkaido is characterized by short days and long nights. However, Hokkaido



The **Sapporo Snow Festival** is a week-long celebration of the winter season in February which allows visitors to enjoy the refined skills and talents of participants from all over the world.



has demonstrated very clearly that this reality is no reason to stop having fun. Lights, candles, and an array of props used together with snow and ice in novel ways keep Hokkaido aglow all through the cold, dark winter.

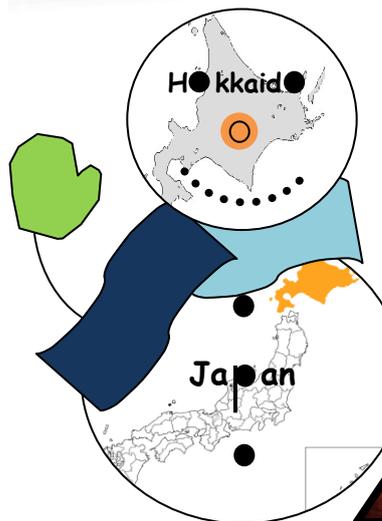
The cold is refreshing. It also leads to an abundance of snow and ice which create breathtaking winter seascapes and landscapes, cityscapes and townscapes. Whether simply marveling at the beauty of snow and ice, playfully sliding down a hill, or skillfully sculpting blocks of snow or ice into an extraordinary piece of work, Hokkaido is an ideal place to celebrate the winter. Snow and ice are gifts of winter and bring smiles to the faces of people of all ages. The wide selection of winter events in Hokkaido proves that a harsh winter climate is more a reason to celebrate outdoors than an excuse to stay indoors. Bundle up and join in the fun!



Asahikawa Winter Festival



Otaru Yukiakari no Michi

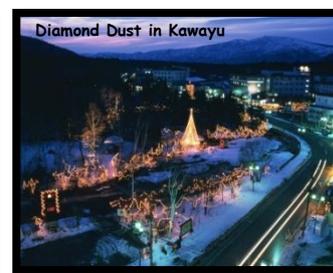


Shimokawa Ice Candle Festival

EVENT LISTING	
Otaru Long Christmas	Mid November - Christmas Day (Otaru)
Toyoko Onsen Illumination Street	Mid November - late March (Toyoko Hot Spring)
German Christmas Market in Sapporo	Late November - Christmas Eve (Sapporo Odori Park)
Sapporo White Illumination	Late November - mid February (Sapporo Odori Park)
Open Air Penguin Exhibit	Late November - early April (Asahiyama Zoo)
Hakodate Christmas Fantasy	December 1 - Christmas Day (Hakodate)
Diamond Dust in Kawayu	Mid December - February 28 (Kawayu Hot Spring)
Snow Night Fantasy "Furano Kankan-mura"	Late December - March 10 (Furano)
First Sunrise Viewing	January 1 (Cape Chikyu, Muroran; Cape Nosappu, Nemuro)
Lake Shikaribetsu Kotan	January 22 - March 31 (Lake Shikaribetsu)
Drift Ice Viewing *Drift Ice Festival	January 20 - March 31 *February 10 - 13 (Abashiri)
Frozen Falls Festival	January 22 - March 27 (Sonkyo)
Chitose Lake Shikotsu Ice Festival	January 28 - February 13 (Lake Shikotsu)
Tokachi River Swan Festival "Sairinka"	January 22 - February 27 (Tokachigawa)
Lake Akan Ice Festival "Fuyu Hanabi"	January 22 - March 31 (Lake Akan)
Otaru Yukiakari no Michi	February 4 - 13 (Otaru Canal)
Shiretoko Fantasia	February 5 - March 21 (Shiretoko)
Sapporo Snow Festival	February 7 - 13 (Sapporo Odori Park)
Asahikawa Winter Festival	February 8 - 13 (Asahikawa)
Shimokawa Ice Candle Festival	February 19 - 20 (Shimokawa)
Mt. Showa Shinzan International Snowball Fight	February 26 - 27 (Mt. Showa Shinzan)



Chitose Lake Shikotsu Ice Festival



Diamond Dust in Kawayu

A Town Close to Home – Tokoro (district of Kitami City since 2006)

The town of Tokoro is situated on the north-eastern coast of Hokkaido. Not only is the area abound with beautiful views of the Ohkotsk Sea and Lake Saroma (the largest in Hokkaido), Tokoro also has a very rich history. In fact, there are numerous archaeological sites and some where stone implements have been uncovered which date back as far as 20 thousand years. For example, the Gifu Archaeological Site Number 2 takes visitors back to the ancient Jomon era.

Building upon an intriguing ancient history, Tokoro has continued to move forward in a variety of fields in the present era. Japanese settlement of the area began in 1883 and the town of Tokoro was created soon after the merging of different districts in 1915. Tokoro now has a population of approximately 4900 people and was most recently amalgamated in 2006 with four other towns in the area and Kitami City.

Although this led to Tokoro becoming a part of Kitami City, Tokoro has continued to maintain its well established industries of agriculture and



(Built in 1983 to celebrate Tokoro's centennial - 100 m above sea level; 100 steps to the lookout deck.)

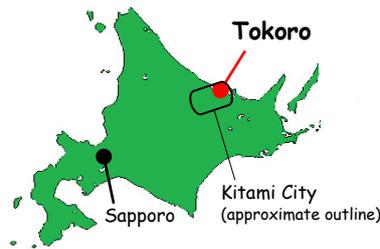
fishing. This means an abundance of fresh produce and seafood is available in the area. Tokoro also found a way to stay busy during the winter lull in between periods of intensive work during the spring, summer, and fall.

In 1980, the twinning of Alberta (Canada) and Hokkaido spurred a series of exchanges in a wide range of fields such as sports. At that time, the Northern Regions Center (Japanese NPO) invited a former world champion curler from Alberta to introduce the sport of curling to Tokoro. In 1988, the first fully equipped indoor curling hall in all of Asia was built in Tokoro. This has led to Tokoro playing



Canadian Alex Nicholls (right) curling in Tokoro's curling hall.

Map of Hokkaido



host to a wide variety of regional, domestic, and international tournaments, including the 2005 Pacific Junior Curling Championships.

Tokoro also signed a twinning agreement with Barrhead (Alberta) in July 1991. Since then, a number of delegations comprised of people of all ages from both towns have participated in a variety of exchange programs, most notably the high school students. July 2011 marks the 20th anniversary of their vibrant relationship!



Tokoro is a town full of energy with a love for sport. Not only does it play host to a 100 km ultra-marathon and a two-day 212 km cycling tour, Tokoro also cultivates Olympic caliber curlers. While its name is derived from the indigenous Ainu people's language and means "root of the mountain," Tokoro has now become the root of curling in East Asia, thanks in large part to the Hokkaido-Alberta relationship.

Canadians

Now 25 years old and living and working in Tokoro, Hokkaido as an Assistant Language Teacher through the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme, Alex Nicholls has had a long and unique history with Japan.



Full of energy and anxious to share her story, she tells me how it all began in Ile Des Chenes, Manitoba (Canada) as a curious fifth-grader. It was here where a young teacher assistant from Japan had come to gain elementary school teaching experience before going on to become an English teacher in her native country of Japan. The impact this Japanese woman had on the 10-year old Nicholls was profound. Nicholls learned much about Japanese pop and traditional culture, including Japanese cartoons and the language. In fact, she still keeps the paper on which she first wrote her name using *katakana* (one of three Japanese scripts).

At the University of Manitoba, Nicholls majored in Asian studies and minored in anthropology. She also participated actively in the international



students program by serving as an English tutor. The presence of many Japanese students heightened her interest in Japan, and she was hired as an English teacher in the prefecture of Niigata following graduation. At the same time, her close friend had been placed in Hokkaido.

During the winter of 2008, Nicholls visited this friend. The cold, dry weather and snowy backdrop together with the vast landscapes overwhelmed Nicholls with nostalgia. She visited her friend and became fond of Hokkaido dishes such as miso-flavoured soup with ramen noodles. She also visited Sapporo and found it to be void of any unfriendly big city feel while still boasting all the conveniences of one.

Nicholls returned in the summer of 2010 and had her first encounter with *Hokkaido charm*. Falling seriously ill one night, Nicholls was driven



by her friend's neighbour to a hospital out of town. Despite having no prior relationship with Nicholls, the neighbour also comforted her during the hospital visit and even checked up on her periodically in the days to come.

It is no wonder Nicholls was ecstatic to learn she would be living and working in Hokkaido beginning in August 2010. Since arriving in Tokoro, Hokkaido's warm and welcoming people have continued to impress her. She claims her Japanese skills have improved more in the past five months than during her two full years spent in Niigata because Hokkaido's people are so ready and willing to engage her.

**"Hokkaido made me feel like home...
Everyone is so welcoming!"**

Tokoro has become Nicholls' favourite place in Hokkaido. Despite growing up in Manitoba, Canada, it is Tokoro where she was invited to join a curling team and works alongside former Olympic curlers. While honing her curling skills, Nicholls is also studying *sado* (Tea Ceremony), and aims to participate this year in the annual *sado* demonstration made on *Culture Day* (Japanese national holiday in November). In love with teaching English and facilitating cultural exchange in Tokoro, Nicholls dreams of staying and working there.

All issues of the The Red Brick Bulletin can be accessed at http://www.pref.hokkaido.lg.jp/ss/tsk/akarenga_eng.htm