



It is almost March, and the sun is out longer each day. In less than one month, southern parts of Japan may see the cherry blossoms showing off its pink petals. While there is still some time before Hokkaido sees these flowers representing spring, the frequency of snowfall has been somewhat decreasing, and it looks like we are slowly on our way out of our long, white winter. Now is perhaps a good time to take a step back and look at what Hokkaido can offer during winter aside from the quality snow for winter sports, and even start preparing a to-do list for the next winter to come!

*All photos within this issue are taken this winter.*

Photo: Nakajima Koen (Central Ward, Sapporo City)

## WHAT CAN HOKKAIDO OFFER IN THE WINTERTIME?

### Sapporo Yuki-Matsuri (Snow Festival)

This is perhaps the most well-known winter festival in all of Hokkaido. Every year, the festival attracts some 2 million people not only from all of Japan, but from all around the world, too. At the Odori Park Venue, there are one or two large- and mid-sized sculptures that are created with help from Japan Ground Self-Defense Force, as well as more than a hundred small sculptures, some of which are created by residents and international groups.

*February 5 – 11, 2016, Odori Venue (Ended)*

Photo: Main sculpture of the 2016 festival, “Attack on Titan”



### Asahiyama Zoo Penguin Walk

Are you into animals? If so, Asahiyama Zoo should be on the very top of your Hokkaido to-do list. The famous zoo, located in Asahikawa City which is a couple hours of drive away from Sapporo, holds this unique event called “Penguin Walk” once enough snow piles up in December. Almost every day, once in the morning and once in the afternoon, a number of penguins are taken out of their usual residence to walk, run, or slide on the snow grounds, right in front of the eyes of visitors who stand by behind red lines drawn before the march. It is mostly the king penguins who are taken on this walk, but a much smaller Gentoo penguin, who is always full of curiosity and loves to walk out of the course, sometimes joins them, too.

*Started on December 23, 2015 (Currently ongoing)*

Photo: Penguin March on Jan. 23, 2016



### Lake Shikotsu Hyoto-Matsuri (Ice Festival)

At this festival which is one of the main winter events representing Hokkaido, a number of ice sculptures small and large appear at the lakeside of Lake Shikotsu, famous for its clear water. These sculptures are made using the lake water, whose colour is nicknamed “Shikotsu Blue” due to its clarity. Nightly fireworks, lakeside onsen, butter-baked potato, hot sake... These are just some of the things you can enjoy at this festival.

*January 29 – February 21, 2016 (Ended)*

Photo: View from the ice lookout, 2016 Hyoto-Matsuri





### Sounkyo Onsen Hyobaku-Matsuri (Ice Festival)

Numerous ice sculptures and igloos are built at the riverside of Ishikari River for this festival representing the winter in Sounkyo. The sculptures are lit up in seven colours every night, including inside of an 80m-long cave made of ice, where a countless number of long icicles hang from the ceiling. Several events are held throughout the festival, such as taiko performance, Hyobaku wedding, Winter Yuru-chara (regional mascot characters) Olympic and weekend fireworks, and festival visitors can enjoy these performance while sipping on hot sake and other hot drinks from an ice bar in an igloo.

January 23 – March 27, 2016 (Currently ongoing)

Photo: 80m-long, illuminated “Ice Cave”, Hyobaku-Matsuri 2016

## CANADA COLUMN: “ALBERTA ABROAD” EXTERN INTERVIEW

### WHAT IS ALBERTA ABROAD?

Alberta Abroad is a project launched by the Alberta Government in Canada that provides talented young Albertans the opportunity to work in international organizations through short-term work opportunities called “externships”. There are currently two externs working at Hokkaido Government as of the publishing of this issue.

<http://www.albertaabroad.alberta.ca/>

### GLORIA LIM (FROM CALGARY, ALBERTA)

Alberta Abroad Extern / Associate for International Relations  
International Affairs Division, Hokkaido Government

- **So, first of all, what made you decide to apply for Alberta Abroad?**

I really wanted to go to Japan as I had never spent a really long time in Japan before, and when I was about to graduate from university and was looking around for opportunities, my Japanese professor found out about this program and recommended that I apply. As I figured this would be a chance for me to use Japanese outside of school, I decided to go for it!

- **Well, here you are! How has your experience been so far?**

It has been quite interesting, overall. It hasn't always been easy, especially the initial adjustment period into the new life and new culture. It was very overwhelming in the beginning because it was a very big jump from a Canadian university right into a very Japanese workplace, and it took me a while to understand what the Japanese work culture entails, but everything has been a good learning experience so far.

- **What is your most memorable moment in Hokkaido?**

Not exactly a moment, but I enjoy seeing the change of seasons in front of Akarenga (Red Bricks, the Old Government Building) whenever I come to work. We see the beautiful snow right now, and in spring, we'll be seeing the cherry blossoms. Green trees in summer, colourful leaves in fall, it's always very beautiful.

- **What is your favourite thing about Hokkaido?**

The food (*laughs*). The seafood, sushi, ramen... So good.

- **I have to agree with you on that. Thanks for your time, Gloria!**

**BIOGRAPHY** Gloria Lim was born in Singapore in 1993, and raised in both Singapore and Alberta, Canada. She arrived in Sapporo in June 2015 after graduating from University of Calgary, and has been working as an extern for the International Affairs Division of the Hokkaido Government. Her favourite Japanese food is sushi (especially hotate, ikura, salmon, and ebi, she says) and miso ramen, and she likes to read books with a cup of coffee in her hand, or explore around the city, during her free time



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