

# The hills are alive

Japan's fifth biggest city has more to offer than just snow: urban parks and a spate of new galleries, shops and restaurants make this a tremendous city in every season

Sapporo once lived for winter, thanks to its famous snow festival and the surrounding mountains. But a lot has changed since the 1972 Winter Olympics. Today, the capital of Hokkaido – the northernmost of Japan's main islands – is proving itself to be a hotbed of creativity and commerce, thriving on its newfound global attraction. Inner-city greenery, an adventurous spirit and chilled-vibe residents have tourists and start-up businesses flocking. The Hokkaido Shinkansen bullet train service launched in 2016 making this a very accessible

– and desirable – city to visit all year round. And with the city gearing up to host Australia v Fiji and England v Tonga in the 2019 Rugby World Cup, there will be a heightened electricity about it.

## STAY

Luxury business hotel, JR Tower, is situated in the tallest skyscraper in Hokkaido atop the JR Sapporo train station. Wide-view windows look out over a refreshingly green cityscape during summer and its location affords door-to-door airport access. Look out for the 22nd-floor onsen (Japanese hot spring), 100 metres above ground level.

The Cross Hotel Sapporo is a rare boutique property in a city filled with business-focused hotels. Occupying a modern high-rise in the central entertainment and commercial district, this chic hotel stands out for its contemporary, crimson-accented design. Its restaurant 'hache' crosses Hokkaido local culture and international, contemporary dining.

For something a bit different, check in at Zaborin; the secluded luxury ryokan located in Hokkaido's Hanazono woods, two hours drive from Sapporo CBD. Fifteen villas feature private indoor and open-air hot spring baths and contemporary

interiors complement the peace and harmony of the surrounding nature. With Seno's original Japanese fine dining and the nourishing spring waters of the onsen, Zaborin invites you to indulge in an authentic and luxurious Japanese experience.

[jrhotels.co.jp/tower](http://jrhotels.co.jp/tower)

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## DRINKS & DINNER

Q is a stylish subterranean restaurant that opened in 2014, serving ramen by day and upscale yakitori at night. Try the grilled skewers of crisp chicken skin, curried thigh meat and tender tails with salt, as well as the bacon-wrapped egg, which is sliced tableside to allow for the theatre of a particularly oozy yolk.

Hokkaido is a seafood paradise and Tempura Kobashi is a great place to indulge. The

refined tempura restaurant, hidden on the third floor of a nondescript high-rise, offers a sublime omakase meal with delicately fried pieces, presented one at a time.

Be sure to head to the Kouraku Ramen Meitengai in Susukino district – an alley that has been lined with myriad miso ramen restaurants since 1951. The Haskap, a local variety of edible honeysuckle, similar to blueberries is well worth trying for the more adventurous diner.

## Q

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**Tempura Kobashi**

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## SEE

Running for almost the whole of September, the Sapporo Autumn Festival is a conglomeration of Hokkaido Cuisine – a gastronomic delight – attracting more than a million visitors to the city that is used to welcoming tourists with snow boots on.



The main venue is Odori Park, where agricultural and livestock products, wine and sake, and other items from all over Hokkaido are served. Booths feature popular food items like ramen, dishes made from local ingredients, and products from all corners of Hokkaido served by more than 100 municipalities in the prefecture.

Moerenuma Park is well worth a visit. Designed by the Japanese-American sculptor and landscape architect, Isamu Noguchi, and constructed atop a landfill on the northern edge of the city, it features various structures, including a glass Louvre-like pyramid and a fountain, harmoniously placed amid grassy lawns, sloping ridges

and a conical mountain standing over 200 feet high.

Park golf, a sport that was born in Hokkaido in the 1980s, provides an entertaining round at one of the grassy 18-hole courses along the Toyohira River. With one driver-like club and a colourful oversize ball, there is a lot of fun to be had. If it's wet – which Sapporo can be at this time of year – head to the Sapporo Winter Sports Museum, where you can play out bobsled and ski jumping dreams, on simulators developed long before Wii Sports.

Elsewhere, the Sapporo Beer Museum is a must.

**Sapporo Autumn Festival**

[visitjapan2019.com](http://visitjapan2019.com)

**Sapporo Beer Museum**

[sapporobeer.jp](http://sapporobeer.jp)

**Sapporo Winter Sports Museum**

[sapporo-olympicmuseum.jp](http://sapporo-olympicmuseum.jp) ■

Left far: The mountains loom over Sapporo, which is the largest city on the northernmost major Japanese island Hokkaido  
Left near: The glass pyramid Hidamari of Moerenuma park, designed by sculpture artist Isamu Noguchi  
Above: Statue of Dr. Clark at the Hitujigaoka observatory – a famous viewpoint over the city

