

powderlife

NISEKO | WINTER 2018



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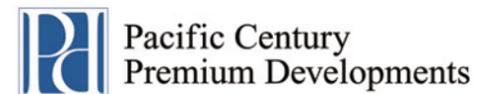
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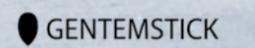
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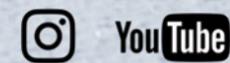
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PHOTO JUN WATANABE

30 ■
SOUTHWEST HOKKAIDO: IWANAI

"With 10 excellent ski-mountain setups within an hour's drive of Niseko, Southwest Hokkaido has the DNA to become a powerhouse destination."

- READ MORE ON SOUTHWEST HOKKAIDO, PAGES 22 - 31



ON THE COVER

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TSUTOMU NAKATA

RIDER
KOHEI KUDO

Tsutomu Nakata is a Hokkaido photographer and publisher of snowboard photo magazine ROOM, available free from selected locations around Niseko.

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These days when friends come to visit in winter, we only ski or board a handful of days in Niseko. Thanks to modern weather forecast technology available online, we're able to get a ridiculously accurate picture of what the coming 12-48 hours' weather will bring off the Sea of Japan across the region.



KRISTIAN LUND

We analyse snow, wind and temperature models and spend the evenings debating which of 10 resorts within 90-minutes' drive will offer the best conditions and skiing/riding experience the following day – whether that means deep powder, fewer crowds, or lighter winds where there's a better chance higher lifts will be running.

These lengthy debates generally kick off with an après Japanese lager or two, and continue over an izakaya restaurant meal and a few tokkuris of hot atsukan sake. By the time we're trudging back through heavy snowfall to the warmth of our old Japanese ski cabin, a unanimous verdict has usually been reached. Welcome to Southwest Hokkaido. I've spent the past decade telling all who will listen (and read), just how incredible Niseko is. For the fiftieth time this year, I'm doing it again in our 50th Issue Special Edition. But since publishing the first issue of Powderlife in 2007, I've come to realise Niseko isn't just about Mt Annupuri,

home to the four Niseko United resorts and the villages around its base. I feel Niseko is increasingly becoming the hub for a much greater picture in both the white and green seasons.

Niseko, as the resort first "discovered" by the outside world, is where it all started, and over the past 20 years it has grown out from this nucleus. What locals have long-known, and that the world is just starting to discover, is that Niseko is much more than one mountain. The island of Hokkaido has thousands, if not tens of thousands of mountains, punctuated by deep blue caldera lakes, hot springs and live volcanoes. Hokkaido recently topped Lonely Planet's Best of Asia list, and where Lonely Planet goes, people follow.

The enigmatic Mt Yotei marks the epicentre of our little corner of the island, Southwest Hokkaido, a fertile, four-seasons basin wedged between oceans east and west, Japan's fifth largest city Sapporo to the north, and

wild, remote mountain ranges to the south. We are deluged with uncanny snowfall in the winter, which in spring melts back and seeps into the earth, feeding local rivers and giving life to summer tourism and a thriving agricultural industry. It's a pretty enticing picture, isn't it?

The major theme running through this magazine is Niseko's evolution from domestic ski resort, to international skiing hotspot, to region-wide four-seasons destination. I hope you learn a lot about where this resort has come from and where it's going, as well as everything going on today. Please take a copy of this special souvenir editions home to relive the memories and help tell your friends about your holiday. Thanks for reading!

- KRISTIAN LUND

THANK YOU FOR READING POWDERLIFE

Powderlife was Niseko's first international magazine, launched in December 2007. In our first five years we published eight bi-weekly issues every winter. For the past six years we've done one premium-quality edition each season, which we distribute all over Niseko, to an increasing number of overseas distribution points, and online via web, iTunes, Google Play and Amazon.

This year we've also made Japanese and Chinese language versions, which can be downloaded free from the above app stores and the Official Niseko app – the one with Niseko logo below. Download free!



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RIDING THE LIGHT

PHOTO NAOKI FUJIMURA
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TOMOKI TAKAKU

20 years sliding & guiding in Niseko

STORY KRISTIAN LUND
PHOTOS KAGE

By the mid-1990s, Niseko was no longer a frontier ski resort. In the 30 years since the resort had opened that early incarnation of Hirafu had now attracted a full complement of resort partners in Annupuri, Higashiyama (Niseko Village) and Hanazono. Snowboard culture, meanwhile, was very much in its infancy. But, in Niseko it had found the perfect canvas on which it would leave an indelible mark, and the world of snowboarding and snowsurfing would be changed forever.

Well before fat skis came along, skiers stuck to the pistes and the fields of deep powder off to the sides were left completely untouched. That was until Tomoki Takaku and a very small band of brothers and sisters came along and

discovered the joy of snow surfing. There was so much untouched powder they didn't need to venture any further than the Ace Quad (Centre 4) lift above the Alpen Hotel to get fresh tracks all day. "There used to be two lift companies in Hirafu – snowboarders weren't allowed to use the Kogen lift (above the gondola)," Takaku-san says. "The skiers used to stay over that side, and we'd ski off the Alpen lift. There were only about five or 10 of us snowboarders. We'd all meet up in the morning and ride untracked powder all day.

"We all had our routines – I used to go up the Center 4 and do 10 laps or so in the morning, have a rest and then go out again in the afternoon. It was a bit like a competition we

"There was so much untouched powder they didn't need to venture any further than the Ace Quad lift above the Alpen Hotel to get fresh tracks all day."

had going between ourselves every day – we compared each other and complimented each other and drove each other forward. It was really fun and a great feeling of comradery amongst our little community."

It was out of this time that the legendary Gentemstick snowboard was born. It was a time of experimentation in snow surf style, board design and setup, where Takaku-san and eventual Gentemstick founder Taro Tamai and others would swap and borrow each other's boards and play with different binding mount positions to best suit riding Niseko's relentless powder. Tamai-san made a few boards in the early 90s before officially establishing Gentemstick in 1998. Takaku-san

would hassle Tamai-san to keep designing new boards for him, which he went on to ride all over the world. During the late 90s and early 2000s, Takaku-san was the poster boy for Gentemstick and one of the most filmed and famous snowboarders in Japan.

As the art of snowsurfing evolved, Takaku-san wanted to start sharing his joy with others. In 1998 he started Powder Company, aka Powcom, which was literally the first powder guiding company in Niseko. While these days it's a backcountry company, it didn't technically start like that. Initially it was simply guiding customers via the lifts around then-secret lines in Hirafu and Hanazono, and if they really wanted to get off the beaten





02

PHOTO YOICHI WATANABE

track, out to Higashiyama, Annupuri or super deep into Moiwa. That was all that was required to get guests into the best powder they'd had in their lives.

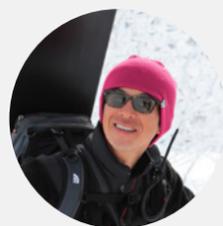
These days of course, it's a different story. If a guide starts in Hirafu, they might get their customers one or two untracked runs before needing to venture further afield. Fortunately, for those who don't mind hiking, the Niseko backcountry between Mt Yotei and the Sea of Japan offers endless opportunities to ski untracked powder like the days of old, any day of the winter.

Takaku-san started the company with just a handful of staff. Now, based out of the

Powcom cabin at the base of the resort of Annupuri, just up from the gondola station, there are 12 guides and a total of 20 staff.

Powcom sets the standard for guiding in the Niseko mountains. Japan could be described as a country of artisans. There is a dedication to the pursuit of excellence in Japanese society unlike anywhere else and it extends from the arts to business and life in general. It's not necessarily possible to reach perfection, but the Japanese artisan will spend every day of his or her life aiming to achieve it.

Takaku-san is very much of this mould. He would rather cancel a trip and refund



"Balance is important. Some people think very much like a businessman. I guess I am more of a craftsman."

- TOMOKI TAKAKU

- 01 Snow-surf style
- 02 Takaku-san in his backyard, Annupuri
- 03 In good hands
- 04 Leading the way
- 05 Hiking Mt Yotei
- 06 Powcom Annupuri base



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06

a customer's money than take them into less than ideal conditions. "Balance is important," he says. "Some people think very much like a businessman. I guess I am more of a craftsman."

Every aspect of the operation is carried out with precision and care, from the way they tune boards for customers, to the way they assess weather reports and plan their routes. Every single aspect of the guiding experience is held to a very particular set of standards that has been formed over of 20 years of dedication to perfection.

Guides also aren't recruited based on qualifications they've gained elsewhere. The

company runs on a senpai-kohai system, which is essentially the underlying principle that governs all relationships in Japanese society. Senpai is senior in rank, kohai is junior. Just like an apprentice sushi chef must spend several years mastering the basics like making rice before they can pick up a knife, so too must the apprentice guide do the hard yards learning the very basics of snowboarding, snow safety and the guiding profession in Niseko before they can take Powcom customers out on the mountain. Add to that the exemplary Japanese "omotenashi" customer service standards, and you can get an understanding for the Powcom experience.

2018 is Powcom's 20th year in business and Takaku-san sees no sign of business slowing down. But it's certain he will not compromise his business practices in the face of increasing demand.

"I guess the size of Japan isn't much compared to the world population, so there is a demand out there. I think people will continue to come here and continue to think that this is the perfect ski resort. I am grateful for this and I hope it continues." ■



01

PHOTO: AARON JAMIESON



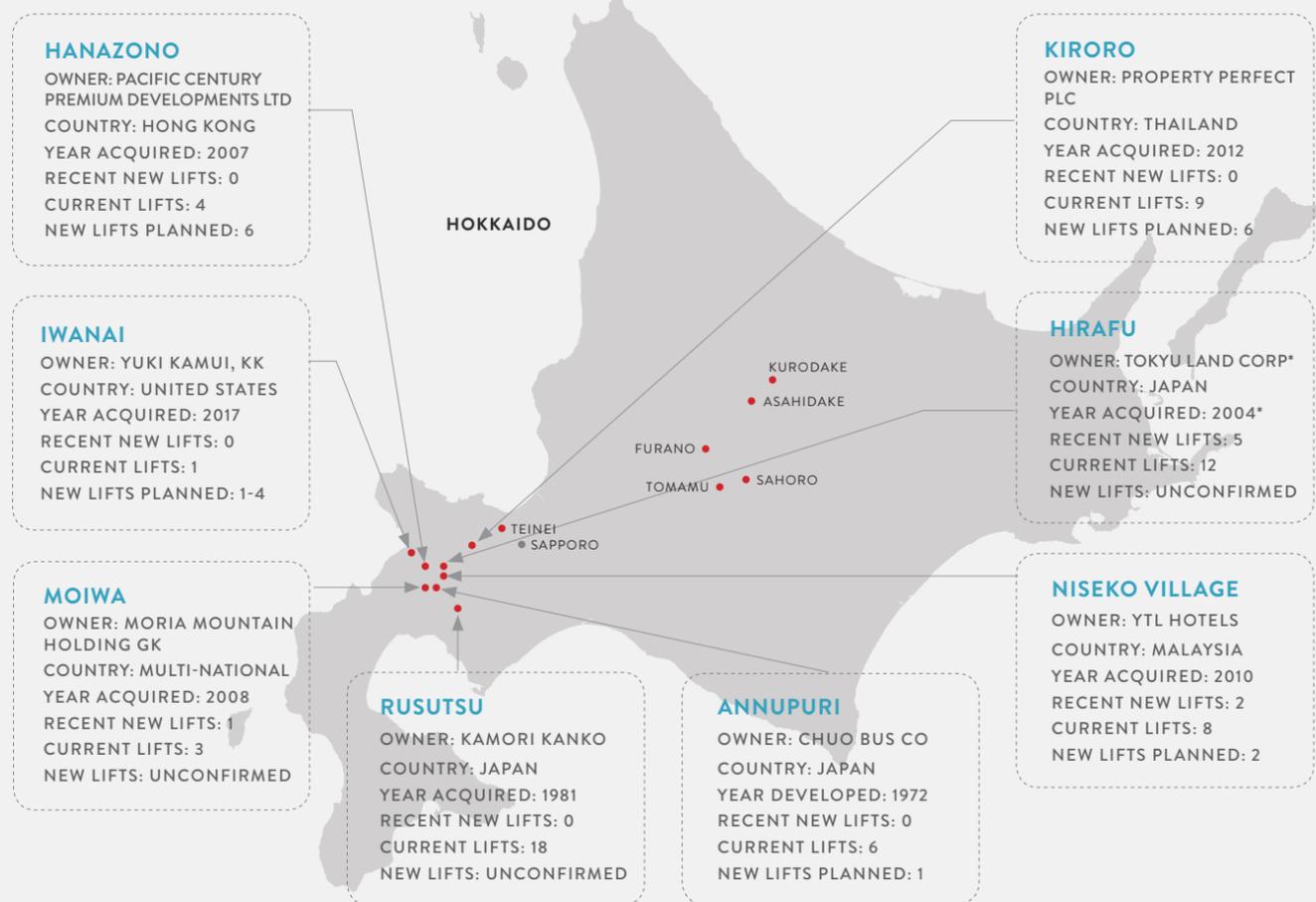
SOUTHWEST HOKKAIDO

SUDDENLY THE WORLD'S COOLEST NEW SKIING REGION

STORY: KRISTIAN LUND

If you go back just 20 years, Japan wouldn't have rated a mention at a dinner party discussion about potential future ski holiday destinations. Sure, Nagano was about to hold the 1998 Winter Olympics so there was obviously snow. But as a place where you'd go for a ski holiday? Japan? Are you serious?

Fast forward to 2017/18 and #japow is the hashtag on every skier's social media feed. Japan has reached almost mythical status for its unrivalled snowfall and the unique cultural ski holiday opportunity it offers. At the centre of it all is the little farming community of Niseko – the nucleus of one of the world's most exciting new ski holiday destinations.



* "Recent new lifts" refers to lifts built or upgraded since 2005 when international skier numbers started increasing significantly
 * Tokyu Land Corp acquired a portion of Hirafu in 1985, and took full ownership in 2004

Whistler has long-been one of the world's exemplar ski resorts. Paul Mathews is the founder of Canadian mountain resort planner Ecosign, responsible for the masterplan that took Whistler to the top of the skiing world's to-do list. The company went on to plan and consult to ski resorts the world over, including many in Japan.

"Whistler was always the Mecca that everybody in the world wanted to come to," Mathews says. "But now the kids from Whistler all want to go to Niseko. What's cool these days is going to Japan."

Being cool has gotten Niseko off to a very good start. This one mountain has become a brand recognised across the skiing world

that encapsulates the Japanese powder experience. The past decade has seen international companies snap up half a dozen resorts in the region (and more across the island) and each is planning or already rolling out major master-planned redevelopments.

There are many international examples of neighbouring resorts combining strengths to become iconic brand-name regions: Whistler Blackcomb, Lake Tahoe, Les Trois Vallées, and even New Zealand's Queenstown in the southern hemisphere. The collaboration creates a buzz, offers customers more variety and options, and makes the entire prospect bigger than any one resort ever could be.

With 10 excellent ski-mountain setups within an hour's drive of Niseko, Southwest Hokkaido has the right DNA to become a powerhouse destination. It also has more snow, consistent powder conditions, a unique cultural experience, Japanese food, onsen hot spring baths, Japanese hospitality... the list goes on. Japan adds a lot of value to the international ski holiday experience. With more and more luxury accommodation options being developed every year, the stage is set for Southwest Hokkaido to become a ski holiday destination that will rub shoulders with the best in the world.

What the aforementioned regions have over Southwest Hokkaido

"With 10 excellent ski-mountain setups within an hour's drive of Niseko, Southwest Hokkaido has the right DNA to become a powerhouse destination."

01 Mt Yotei and Rusutsu over the Annupuri Range
 02 The view from Iwanai
 03 The farming basin surrounding Mt Yotei
 04 Skiing a volcanic peak above Lake Toya

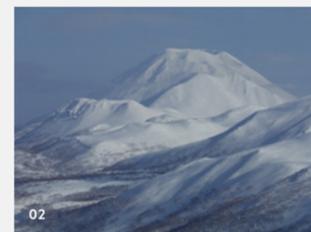


PHOTO AARON JAMIESON / SKIER LENA STOFFEL

at this stage is a big head start. Mathews says while there is a buzz and great snow here, there is still a long way to go before Southwest Hokkaido can hope to offer the same international ski resort experiences as its older, well-established counterparts – pedestrian villages, extensive shopping options, increased in-resort dining options, entertainment. He says masterplans he is developing with Hanazono and Niseko Village will take these resorts to that level and bring world-class hotel brands – Park Hyatt and Ritz-Carlton Reserve – as well as shops and restaurants onto the snow front.

Ecosign is also working with Rusutsu, which has long been

touted as "the next Niseko". Just a short 45-minute drive away, Rusutsu offers a totally different skiing experience to Niseko, with long, wide pistes and plenty of fall-line valley skiing across three gondola-connected peaks. Rusutsu is keeping its cards close to its chest, but it has a vast base area with excellent potential to become a vibrant pedestrian village. It is also in the running for Hokkaido's first casino license adding yet another significant draw card to the region across all seasons.

Meanwhile Kiroro Resort is the other major resort in the Niseko catchment that has an exciting masterplan underway. The resort planner responsible for one of

the US's most prestigious resorts, Beaver Creek, is working with Kiroro's new Thai owners to create a dynamic four-seasons resort offering, complete with vast amounts of beginner to pro-level skiing options.

A 2017 study estimated there was US\$500 million of investment in the Niseko area between 2011 and 2015 – 70 per cent of it foreign. It has boomed exponentially since then, and we estimate there must be more than a billion dollars currently in the Southwest Hokkaido development pipeline.

In the following pages, we've unveiled some of the plans born out of Niseko across the region, giving us a glimpse of things to

come over the next decade and beyond. Where it all ends up? Let's recap in the 100th issue of Powderlife and see. In the meantime, one thing is certain – Southwest Hokkaido is a skier's paradise that will continue to capture the world's attention.

Paul Mathews is the founder of Whistler-based mountain resort planner Ecosign, who drew up the initial plans for Niseko's Hanazono in the 1980s. He has now taken on the job once again with wider scope for a world-standard design, and is also overseeing the planning of Niseko Village with similar vision, as well as other resorts in the region.



HANAZONO

ON THE WAY TO BECOMING ASIA'S BEST-EQUIPPED ALL-SEASON RESORT

Once the baby brother of the Niseko United ski resorts, Hanazono is about to outgrow its older siblings in spectacular style. With the recent purchase of the adjacent mountain, Weiss, and plans for some serious new lift infrastructure including a gondola connecting the two, Hanazono will effectively double the area of its already sizeable ski terrain.

Add to that a masterplan that includes a hotel and residences by one of the world's most luxurious hotel brands, Park Hyatt, as well as more year-round resort-based adventure activities to support its golf course and white water rafting, it's easy to see Hanazono is on its way to achieving its goal of

becoming "the best equipped all-seasons mountain resort in Asia".

The gondola connection to Weiss Mountain will open an entire new area of pristine, untouched powder and wide-open groomed trails, creating an intermediate skiers' paradise just 15 minutes' ride from the Hanazono base. On Weiss Mountain, plans include two quad chairs servicing the mid and higher altitude slopes, with a smaller-capacity lift taking skiers right to the peak. From here ski touring options unlock access to a backcountry wilderness previously beyond the reach of even advanced backcountry day skiers.

Progress is well underway and by winter 2019 guests will enjoy an upgrade of Hanazono's central quad lift to a luxury high-speed, six-seater heated lift with WiFi on board, and the first stage of the Weiss gondola landing at a mid-station. At the same time this will provide access to extensive new beginner and intermediate

- 05 Park Hyatt Niseko Hanazono Residences
- 06 Views of Hanazono and Weiss above the Shiribetsu River
- 07 Extensive in-resort activities
- 08 NISS - the best-equipped ski school in Asia



- 09 Park Hyatt Niseko Arrival lounge
- 10 Park Hyatt Niseko Hanazono Residences living room
- 11 Proposal for planned Hanazono expansion
- 12 Hanazono resort base and Hanazono 308 Day Centre

slopes and night skiing, all within the Hanazono resort proper and feeding directly to new and upgraded facilities around the Hanazono base. This will include more restaurants and what Hanazono says will be the best-equipped kids' ski school in Asia.

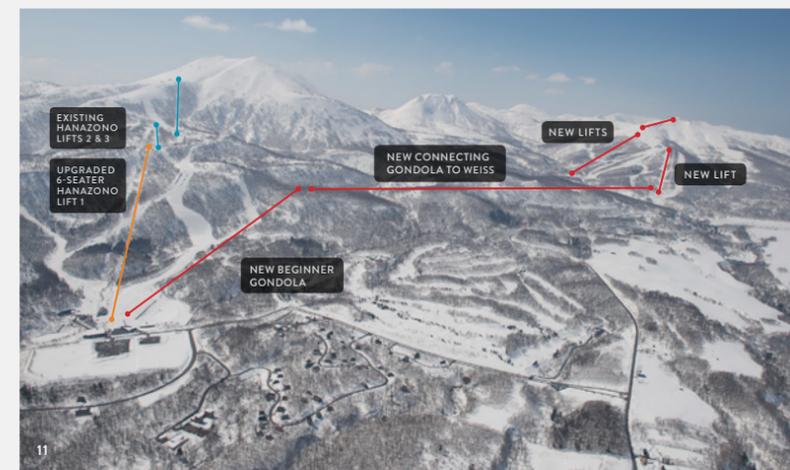
The following summer there are plans for a mountain coaster and over 2.6km of ziplines, including boasting rights to Asia's longest single zipline at 1800m. Linked seamlessly with the golf course, mountain trekking, Segway tours, biking and river activities, Hanazono promises to be an energetic hive of summer activity.

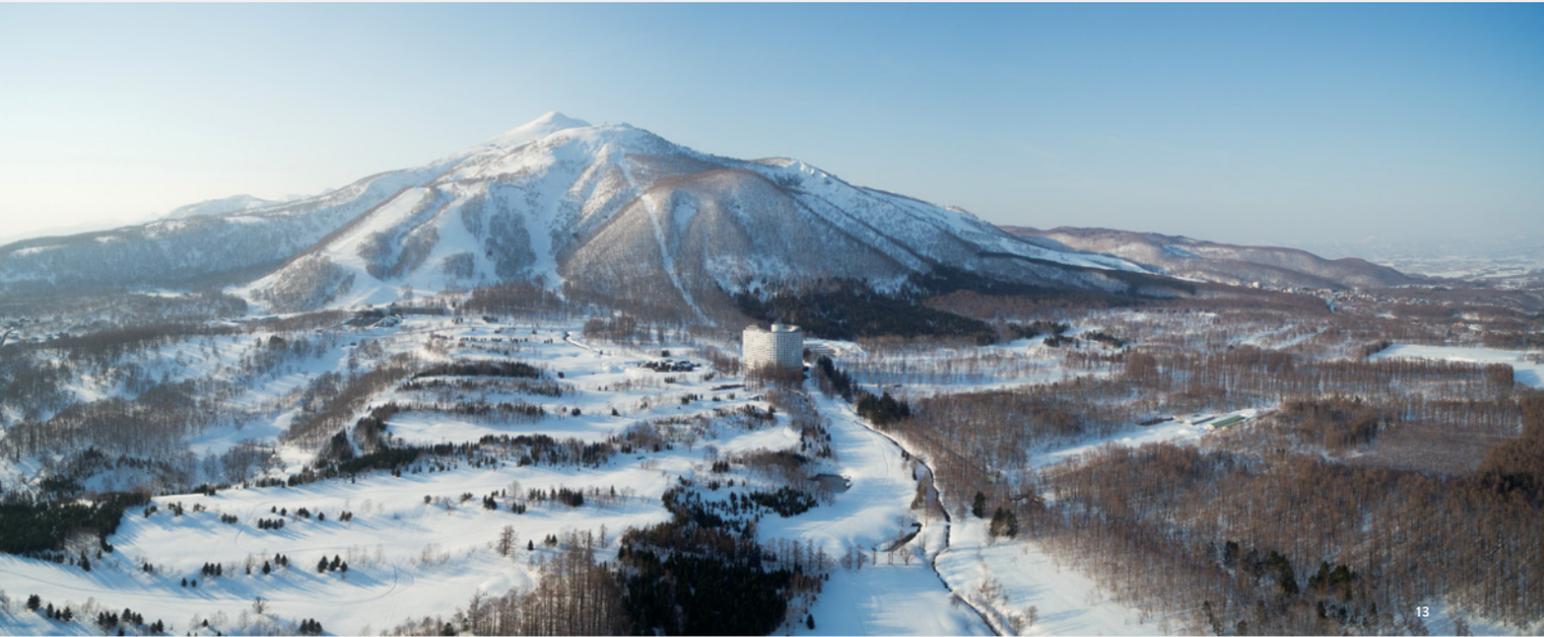
First developed in 1992 by current owner of Hirafu, Tokyu Land Corporation, Hanazono was then sold to a consortium of savvy Australian businessman in 2004. With a crystal ball-like vision of what was possible on their new canvas, they set about

establishing plans to take the resort to the next level and create Asia's premiere international all-season resort. They engaged Canadian mountain resort planners Ecosign to draw up a new masterplan, initiated the construction of modern new base buildings, and started implementing all-season resort infrastructure and amenities.

By 2007, word of this new "Eastern Aspen" on Japan's northern island had spread across Asia, where Hong Kong's billionaire tycoon Richard Li's Pacific Century Premium Developments took an interest in the region and bought the resort, along with a swathe of the surrounding area. With Park Hyatt joining the project in 2019 the pieces of the puzzle are now well placed for the final development of a vision now in its second decade of execution.

"By 2007, word of this new "Eastern Aspen" on Japan's northern island had spread across Asia."





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PHOTO GLEN CLAYDON

- 13 Winter above the golf course
- 14 Old-Japan shopping precinct
- 15 Niseko Village Golf Course
- 16 Pure Adventure Park alongside the Hilton

NISEKO VILLAGE

ALREADY A FULLY FLEDGED YEAR-ROUND RESORT

Niseko Village is the other Niseko United resort with a grand new masterplan, major international hotel plans, and already well and truly established four-season resort offerings. It was also the first to start rolling out its plans in 2015 and is now the most far advanced, with the aim to “develop Niseko Village into one of the world’s greatest all-season resorts”.

Situated between Hirafu and the western-most resort Annupuri, the resort was acquired in 2010 by YTL Hotels, the hospitality arm of Malaysian construction and development powerhouse YTL Corporation. YTL owns the entire base area of the resort, which includes the centrepiece 22-storey Hilton Hotel tower, low-rise boutique hotel The Green Leaf Niseko Village, a pair of new luxury townhouse condominiums Kasara, a new old-Japan-themed shopping and dining precinct, golf course and summer adventure park.



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YTL has already finished rolling out the masterplan’s first stage, which consisted of the development of the shopping precinct, a network of gondolas providing connection between different parts of the resort, and an extremely beginner-friendly new ski run.

Stage 2 of the plan kicked off in mid-2017 with the start of construction on Hinode Hills, a new low-rise ski-in/ski-out condominium hotel which is expected to be managed by a major international hotel group.

Already confirmed of course is what will become the jewel in Niseko Village’s crown – a 50-room Ritz-Carlton Reserve boutique hotel and residences. “Reserve” properties are Ritz-Carlton’s highest tier luxe-level offering, described by the company as “signature, one-of-a-kind boutique resorts positioned in unique settings”.



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PHOTO AARON JAMIESON

- 17 This is what Kiroro is all about
- 18 The view up the valley past the Tribute Portfolio hotel
- 19 Kiroro Resort base
- 20 The Kiroro, a Tribute Portfolio Hotel
- 21 Forests and fields of powder (Photo Mike Richards)

KIRORO

A HIDDEN POWDER-SNOW WONDERLAND

Niseko skiers and snowboarders won the lottery eight years ago when a new mountain pass was completed between Niseko and the seaside port town of Otaru. En route is the powder-snow kingdom of Kiroro, to which Route 393 now provides direct access in under an hour.

Higher and closer to the snow storms that blow in off the Sea of Japan, Kiroro extracts any hint of snow in the atmosphere. Often when there are blue skies and no fresh snowfall in Niseko, the drive out through Kutchan town will herald dark clouds hovering over the Kiroro range. By the time the potato fields give way to the alpine forest, you’ll be in the midst of a classic Hokkaido heavy-snowfall day.



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Soon after Route 393 went through, so too did the sale of Kiroro to Thai resort developer Property Perfect PLC, with plans now well underway to take

it to the international stage. Initially developed by Japanese conglomerate Yamaha in 1991, the music-themed resort was very much of the 1980-90s Japanese resort mould – two standalone hotels offering a handful of restaurants and light entertainment on a picturesque remote mountain backdrop, perfect for domestic clientele coming on a one or two-night retreat.

The new masterplan is being drawn up by resort planners Mountain Works, responsible for North America’s most luxurious ski resort, Beaver Creek, among many others. The hotels have already been refurbished and rebranded under Sheraton and Tribute Portfolio banners, and the first new condominium development goes on sale this winter. Plans include a full-scale master-planned residential and commercial village, with residential precincts to be developed in different areas of the valley.



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But what is most exciting is the skiing potential. With the construction of new lifts, the skiable terrain is expected to double. Much of this will be tailored towards beginners and intermediates, but powder hunters have even more reason to smile. An exclusive ski pass system ensures a limited number of skiers on the mountain and in the backcountry each day, meaning it will take far longer between snowfalls to track out than the more popular resorts in Niseko. Plans are also well underway for cat and heli-skiing on the surrounding peaks, meaning Kiroro will arguably have the best in-house backcountry skiing operation in the whole of Japan.



PHOTO JUN WATANABE



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- 22 Ocean views from the peak
- 23 The rocky Sea of Japan shoreline
- 24 Master planning well underway
- 25 Four colourful seasons
- 26 Old town charm and culture

IWANAI

OCEAN VIEWS AND OLD JAPANESE TOWN CHARM

There's a classic tale of revitalisation unfolding at a nearby fishing port an hour's drive northwest of Niseko. Where the rocky shores of Iwanai meet the turquoise blue waters of the Sea of Japan, a once-thriving fishing town is clinging to life as its population ages and rapidly dwindles. Once 60,000-strong, the townspeople's numbers now stand at about 13,000, with a forecast to drop below 8000 by 2040.

That forecast could soon be in line for revision, however, after an American businessman bought the town's all-but-abandoned ski resort. Opened in 1980 when the domestic ski industry was booming, its main lift was finally turned off in 2002 after years of consistent decline. Since then the town council has kept the very bottom pair lift open for its townspeople, charging a trifling ¥500 for an hour's use. Meanwhile the town has been running cat-ski tours on the old ski runs, which have been popular with international visitors to Niseko.

Enter John Greiner, an Ohio-born, Colorado-bred skier and businessman who just happened to ski and fall in love with Iwanai 30 years ago while working for a computer game company in Sapporo. He's lived in Japan ever since and, keeping an eye on what's been happening around Niseko and with a rock-solid belief in the potential of nearby Iwanai, made a bid for the resort.

Working closely with the town council, Greiner has preliminary plans to reinstate the lifts, build a fully-fledged mountain village complete with several hotels and residential precincts, and also encourage year-round tourism for the historical, coastal town. He's already conducting tours in both summer and winter, and this year will officially reopen the resort with cat ski access. He believes, just like has happened in Niseko, the resort will bring much-needed income and life into the town and reverse its current fortunes. We're confident he's right.



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PHOTO TATSUNORI ABE

- 27 Now that looks like fun
- 28 Check out all that terrain in the distance
- 29 Karibayama range on approach



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SHIMAMAKI

INSPIRING HOKKAIDO'S MECHANISED SKI RESORT POTENTIAL

"Guests experience a true remote Japanese mountain culture and hospitality, staying in traditional onsen hotels and dining out at local restaurants."

Take a slice of Iwanai and cast it 60km down the coastal highway, just past the middle of nowhere, to a picturesque, brown-bear inhabited stretch of coastline where towering mountain ranges kneel to the sea. Introducing, "Wild Shimamaki".

Despite its natural beauty, Shimamaki's many dilapidated and abandoned buildings reveal its economic reality. If Iwanai's future was looking dour, Shimamaki's is on life support. Once a healthy town of more than 5000 employed off the back of a booming herring fishing industry, the population now stands at about 1500, with 20-year forecasts cutting that to 800 or 900.

Several years ago, one of Niseko's mechanised skiing pioneers Clayton Kernaghan decided to pursue a dream of opening up these mountains to cat skiing. His company Hokkaido Backcountry Club teamed up with the town

of Shimamaki to offer visitors possibly the most authentic and extreme cat skiing opportunity in Japan. The cat ski zone peaks at 1520m with runs averaging 450 vertical metres. Terrain is a mix of open alpine bowls and perfectly spaced trees with slopes ranging from 15 to 35 degrees. Guests ski as many runs as they can handle, with an average 4000 vertical meters in a day, and a record of 6500 over 13 runs.

Last winter, the operation took 500 foreign visitors to the

town, bringing much-welcome income to everyone from the local mechanic who keeps the cats climbing, to fishermen who supply mouth-watering catches of fresh seafood for evening meals. Guests experience a true remote Japanese mountain culture and hospitality, staying in traditional onsen hotels and dining out at local restaurants. As an indication of the demand for this type of experience, this winter's tours were virtually booked out by August.

WHAT'S NEXT?

What's really exciting about Shimamaki and everything else happening in these parts is that there are thousands more mountains across Hokkaido, all receiving the same incredible powder snow. And hundreds more communities that could benefit from international ski tourism the way Niseko and its neighbours have. Hokkaido Backcountry Club says they've already been contacted by other towns interested in starting cat ski tour industries. Whether by lift, cat, helicopter, or traditional touring methods, Southwest Hokkaido is all of a sudden one the most exciting new skiing destinations in the world. ■



HOME OF THE MOUNTAIN GODS

PHOTO AARON JAMIESON

LOCATION SOMEWHERE IN HOKKAIDO, JAPAN'S NORTHERN ISLAND OF NEW FRONTIERS AND UNCHARTED PEAKS

HOUSE OF POWDER

The house where the customer always wins

TEXT KRISTIAN LUND



PHOTO GLEN CLAYDON

How do you like the sound of sharing an untracked ski resort for a day with just a dozen or so others? And after six or eight fresh powder runs in the morning, skiing down to a steaming natural onsen and having a traditional Japanese lunch overlooking the scene you've just experienced?

Welcome to the previously abandoned Chisenupuri Ski Resort and boutique cat operation The House of Powder. While far from the most gnarly cat skiing experiences around, THOP has brought an exciting new brand and novel mechanised skiing concept to Niseko, offering visitors an opportunity to try a unique Japanese skiing experience reminiscent of times gone by – when you could get fresh lines all day until sundown straight off the “lift”.

THOP has given old Chise a new lease on life after the town was forced to close the little local backcountry resort due to lack of business. It was a one-lift pony with just 280m of vertical, so it was never a big mountain by any stretch. But what it lacks in extreme, it makes up for in fun. The ride up to the 832m drop-off is over

in 10 minutes, and before you know it you're clicking/strapping in and heading towards a new drop off point. After a short, sharp descent you're back in the cat. If you and your crew are fit and quick, you could do 15 fresh hot-laps in a day.

The terrain is a mix of extinct ski runs, well-spaced trees and glades. It's perfect for mixed groups where more advanced skiers and riders can take tree runs or find small pillows and jibs, while intermediate powder riders can stick to the runs from the old ski resort and duck off to hit enticing patches of powder. Red Bull freeskiier Sean Petit and his crew hit THOP last winter and, after discovering the number of natural hits and lines, ended up staying there for most of their trip. ■

Cost: ¥35,000. Check availability, book and pay online. The price includes pickup and drop off at your accommodation, lunch, onsen and backcountry gear.

www.thehouseofpowder.com

HERDING CATS

A round-up of Niseko cat-skiing opportunities

TEXT AARON JAMIESON

PHOTOS DARREN TEASDALE



PHOTO GLEN CLAYDON



PHOTO HANS-MARTIN KUDLINSKI
SKIERS ROMAN ROHRMOSER

01. BIG WAVE BACKCOUNTRY

The longest running and most raw powder experience around, Big Wave pulls no punches. Tough cats to access tough terrain. Deep powder is their mantra and delivering it is their primary concern. Their cats are retro and radical, complete with diesel fumes and a cabin full of stoke. This operation accesses steep trees and technical terrain. Perfect for pros or skiers and boarders confident they can negotiate the deep stuff.

02. WEISS PLEASURE ZONE

If ploughing mellow powder after breakfast and a late start sounds like your cup of coffee, grab 10 friends and enjoy no crowds at Hanazono's little brother, Weiss. This operation boasts intermediate terrain lead by friendly and professional guides, broken up by a delicious and leisurely lunch at the local onsen hotel. Perfect for intermediate skiers who want fields of fresh in their own exclusive powder paradise.

03. BACKCOUNTRY 101 AT CHISE

Taking one of Niseko's most well-known backcountry areas and providing a cat to access terrain where the old lift used to run, this operation screams of nostalgic pow turns above one of the most raw and authentic onsens available. Shred tree runs alongside the Japanese military, who train on the same mountain. This operation provides great bang for buck with terrain suited to confident tree skiers and competent powder riders.

04. OCEAN VIEWS AT IWANAI

Ocean vistas and 700m of vertical make Iwanai's cat skiing a truly unique experience. There aren't many places in the world where you can ski with an ocean or water view, let alone an above-average chance of powder to go with it. Iwanai is soon to become a premier lift-accessed resort. If you're a powder hunter, head out and experience one of Hokkaido's steepest resorts before the world catches on.

05. SHIMAMAKI POWDER PIONEERS

Charting new frontiers in the greater Niseko region, Shimamaki Powder Cats by Hokkaido Backcountry Club is expanding the horizons of possibility on Japan's northern island. Deep in the until-now unknown mountains of Southwest Hokkaido, Shimamaki offers powder, unique terrain and a deep Japanese cultural experience that world skiers are increasingly searching for.

06. NISEKO VILLAGE FIRST TRACKS

Set out at sunrise in a warm and comfortable cat to the top of Niseko Village for the ultimate pre-lift powder service. Enjoy perfect turns before anyone else and ski untracked runs while the lift lines grow at the base. A great way to grab a few extra powder turns before the lifts. Kicking off at 6.30am on the east side of the mountain, there's also the possibility of catching a priceless Instagram-worthy Niseko sunrise. ■



TIMBERSLED SNOW BIKING

The most fun you can have on snow wheels

STORY & PHOTOS BY DARREN TEASDALE

Imagine ploughing through super-deep Japanese powder on a motorbike. Welcome to snow biking! Timbersled snow bikes are literally dirt bikes that have been converted with a front ski and rear snowmobile-like track system. What you end up with is the agility of a dirt bike with the float of fat skis or a powder board, and the terrain capabilities of a snowmobile. In one word: AWESOME.

From the moment you throw your leg over the bike, to the moment you get off, snow biking is the most fun you can have on snow. I've ridden bikes for many years and was super excited to have a go. It started with some practice laps around the lower potato fields on firmer snow and then we moved up into the mountains and proper powder. We blasted through the trees at similar speeds to what I would have done through a forest on a dirt bike, and every snow mound and wind lip became a natural feature to launch off and wheelie over.

One of the guys with us had never ridden more than a beat-up old scooter in Bali before this and although he was a little worried at first, he took to the sled like a seasoned pro. These things are surprisingly easy to ride and because of the wide rear track they don't fall over when you slow or stop. You actually need to remember not to put your foot down when you do stop – the bike will stay upright on its own but if you lean over and put your foot down you may tip the bike.

The compression of the big four-stroke engine helps to slow the bike so managing your speed is easy by selecting a lower gear and some gentle throttle control. This same big four-stroke screams to life when you open the throttle. The handle bars leap into the air, pulling the front skid up and out of the powder as the rear track sinks deep into the snow and finds traction.



Explore Niseko can book all these activities and plenty more. Go to Explore-Niseko.com, or drop into their booking office at Odin Place, 1F to book now.

The terrain is a mix of open fields, open trees, tight trees, gullies, hill climbs and a secret natural halfpipe, and guides Jens and ex-motocross rider Mat Cox will tailor the tour to your group's desires and capabilities. The bikes are stripped down and oil changed after each tour so your machine will be in top shape for another day of shredding pow. ■

TIMBERSLED FAST FACTS

- Bikes are four-stroke, electric start
- They have extra fuel tanks for longer range
- Bikes all have manual gearing
- Some familiarity with motorbikes helps
- A day in the powder is hard work
- Terrain is a mix of open fields, forests, gullies
- The views are unique and amazing



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ABOVE THE TREELINE

PHOTO: DARREN TEASDALE
RIDER: NICOLAS VANTORRE



10 JAPARCH 2017 / PHOTO AARON JAMIESON

“Then came the end of February and early March and, voila! We got several weeks of the most consistent, deepest, coldest, driest snow days of the season.”

ABOUT LAST #JAPARCH

You know how the script goes, right? When you asked the travel agent when the best time to go to Niseko to score 10-days of non-stop powder was, they copied and pasted from their FAQ response template: January and February is peak season in Niseko and offers the best chance of powder.

Essentially they were right, but hopefully added that Mother Nature rewrites the story every season and you just never can tell. Last season she offered up more surprises than an M. Night Shyamalan movie (remember The Sixth Sense?!).

It got off to a slow start and was also the least Niseko-like snowfall season this magazine’s editors had witnessed since arriving in 2006/7. While the snow was consistent, we didn’t get anywhere near as many big 20-30cm overnight snowfalls as usual. This was despite a prevailing La Nina weather pattern that historically results in more snow than usual. Plenty of times when a storm was forecast to dump for two or three days, we got one decent night and a couple of dustings.

However, then came the end of February and early March and, voila! We got several weeks of the most consistent, deepest, coldest, driest snow days of the season. If you’re on Facebook or Instagram and follow any Niseko or Japan skiing pages you’ve no doubt come across the hashtag #japow, and its offspring #japanuary, #powmageddon and more.

Although somewhat cringeworthy for those who appreciate the tradition and subtlety of Japanese culture, they do succinctly sum up a certain mood.

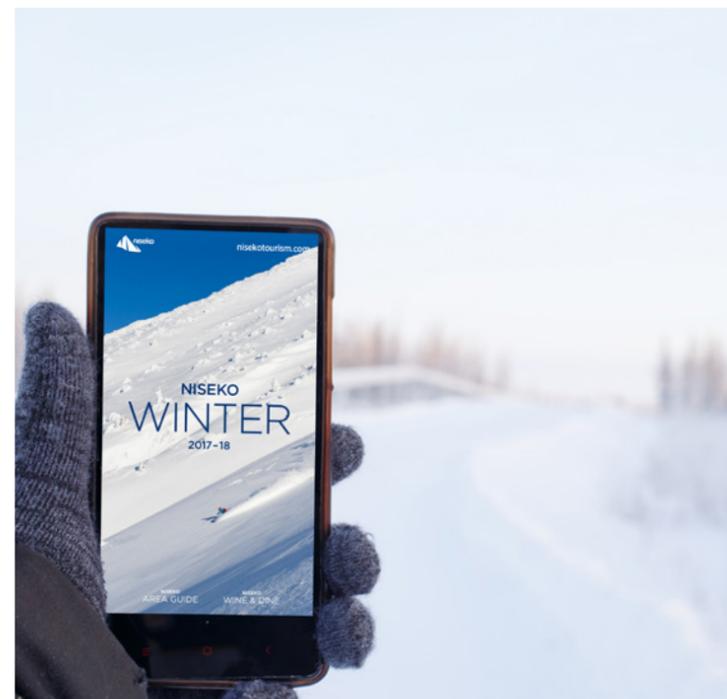
Well, one new entry to the lexicon last March was: #japarch. Not only was last #japarch particularly memorable, but pretty much every #japarch has great periods of snowfall, more blue skies and fewer people. It’s easier to get fresh tracks, it’s not as cold as spring starts to take hold, accommodation is cheaper and it’s easier to get restaurant bookings. Locals love #japarch!

At the time of printing this issue, Instagram showed 125,000 posts tagged #japow and just 52 for #japarch. We think #japarch is here to stay so be sure to consider booking your next trip in this magical month and remember to tag your March posts #japarch! ■

NISEKO JOINS THE MOUNTAIN COLLECTIVE

Joining 19 of the world’s premier ski resorts, Niseko United is now part of the prestigious Mountain Collective – true recognition that our powder haven is widely regarded as one of the best resorts on the planet. The Mountain Collective allows pass holders to ski for free for two days in 20 resorts worldwide and then any additional days at half price. The pass costs US\$489 for adults and just US\$99 for kids, and includes resorts across North America, Chile, New Zealand, Australia and Chamonix in France.

Ski the planet and check out the website for more info: www.mountaincollective.com. ■



DOWNLOAD THE OFFICIAL NISEKO APP



Want to know which lifts are on wind-hold? Looking for somewhere to eat? The Official Niseko app is the ultimate guide for visitors with live weather and lift status and interactive trail map with geolocation – so you know where you are on the mountain and in resort at all times. That ties in with the new Niseko United Shuttle Bus live location tracker. Perfect! There’s also restaurant, business and events guides and taxi caller function.

Most excitingly, you can now read Powderlife on the app in English, Japanese and Chinese. Be sure to share the digital version with your friends at home in your native language. Download from your app store now! ■



SHINTO PRIEST PROTECTING NISEKO SKIERS & BOARDERS

Let's face it, even though that powder is soft, skiing and snowboarding always carry a small amount of risk. So we could all do with someone looking out for us while we're out on the slopes this winter, right? Niseko Town's cool new Shinto priest Akihiko Tamaki has created a good luck charm sticker specifically designed for Niseko's skiers and snowboarders.

The idea is the same as "omamori" amulets that visitors can buy at Japanese shrines and tie to their phones, bags or purses. They are said to put the power of the gods into a pocket-sized blessing. Tamaki-san also wants them to be a nice little souvenir that will remind visitors of their time in Niseko. "If people have a great run and they feel the sticker helped them through it, that would be nice. I'd like it to become a trigger for respect for the mountain and conditions." ■



Stickers can be purchased for ¥700 only from the Kaributo Shrine in the middle of Niseko Town – just a couple of doors down from Seicomart. Look for the giant "tori" shrine gates just off the main road.



PHOTO AARON JAMIESON



WHAT'S YOUR YAMA PLUS?

When grass roots enthusiasm meets cool design and diversity, you're likely to discover a brand that represents all that is the Niseko lifestyle. The brain child of long term locals Koji Furuta and Kentaro Hoshi, YAMA PLUS is a new label landing on shelves in retail outlets around Niseko. Far from ideas of global domination, Koji and Kentaro are driven by a kind of organic passion that gives a brand identity and integrity. They have created a label underpinned by mountain (yama) activities, but then leave it up to the individual to express what their mountain passion is (plus). Yama + ski, yama + snowboard, yama + cycling, etc. Their philosophy is pleasure before profit and powder turns for all! Yama + respect, guys. ■

Grab this year's coolest new Niseko brand exclusively at Niseko Sports, and hashtag your Niseko yama posts #yamaplus.



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THE COLOURED POOLS OF CHISENUPURI

PHOTO AARON JAMIESON
SKIER NICOLAS CRUZ



GOSHIKI ONSEN

Niseko's hidden hot spring baths

PHOTOS AARON JAMIESON

Beyond the Niseko resort area boundaries and Mt Annupuri's unpatrolled, weather-beaten western face, one of Niseko's magical, timeless secrets awaits. A world away from the luxury condominiums and brand-name fashion stores of Hirafu, on the other side of the mountain lies Goshiki Onsen – the hidden hot spring.

At 750m elevation, deep into the Niseko mountain range on a saddle between Mt Annupuri and the neighbouring peak of Iwaonupuri, a collection of rugged, age-wearied wooden structures lies almost entirely buried for most of winter by months of relentless, wind-driven snowfall. In stark contrast, inside these buildings one will find the warmth of a centuries-old Japanese culture and sulfur-rich, turquoise hot spring baths.

From Hirafu it's a 30-minute trip via one of two routes – the first a straight line from the Hirafu Welcome Centre up to the peak via a series of chairlifts and a short hike, and down the other side via a 10-minute ski or snowboard descent. The other is by road, this route a little more than 20km, snaking around the mountain and up into the Annupuri range. ■

[Goshiki Onsen](#)

Public use | Onsen

Tel: 0136-58-2707

Opening Hours: 10:00-20:00 (last entrance: 19:00)





01

PHOTO LAURA VILLI

RELAX

- 01 Tokyo sento bathhouse
- 02 Yukichichibu Onsen, Chisenupuri
- 03 Niimi Onsen, Rankoshi

RELAX

TOMU-SAN'S NISEKO ONSEN GUIDE TO HEALTH AND BEAUTY

There's actually an English word for the treatment of disease by bathing in mineral springs – balneotherapy. Onsen are categorised by law into 10 types of water that have proven medical benefits. Of these, Niseko's onsen contain seven of the 10 water types.

One of the most prevalent minerals in Niseko's onsen is enkabutsu-sen. These salt, chloride and sulphate minerals help the body retain heat, which is perfect for treating tired muscles from skiing. Fortunately for fairer visitors to Niseko, they also have a moisturising effect on the skin and are said to make one more beautiful. One onsen – Onsen Yukichichibu – also has a mud bath from which mud can be gathered off the bottom and used as a skin and face pack.

Particularly higher on the mountainsides in Niseko, another prominent onsen

mineral is iou-sen – sulphur. The next mountain along from Mt Annupuri is Iwaonupuri (or Iwaonupuri) and was originally a sulphur mine. Iou-sen springs give off a pungent egg-type smell which you may have come across skiing up in the backcountry around Iwaonupuri and even in the Onsenzawa ski run of Hirafu, just above the Welcome Centre. The water in iou-sen baths is often cloudy or milky, and is good for the treatment of acne and other skin conditions.



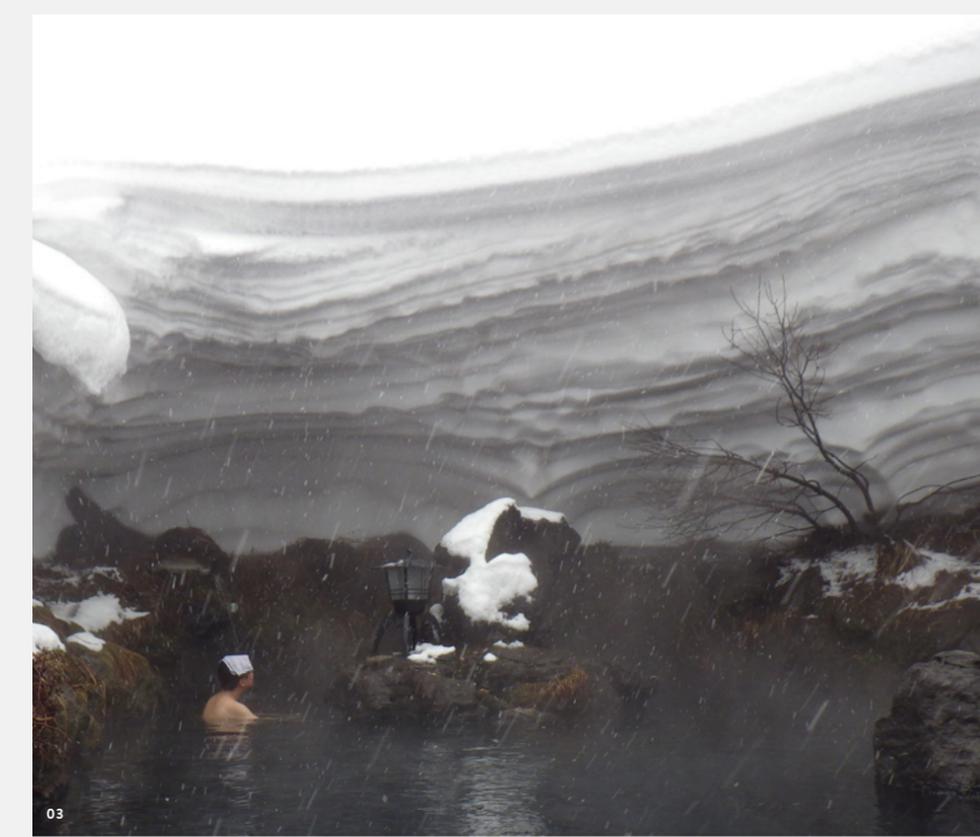
02

"In Niseko each hotel or spa has dug its own bore to the water so even in the same vicinity, the water can be quite different."

spring resorts there's a reservoir underground that all the different hotels in a resort draw water from," explains Tomu-san. "So the water at each of the local onsen is pretty much the same.

"In Niseko, each hotel or spa has dug its own bore to the water so even in the same vicinity, the water can be quite different. You could have two hotels right next to each other that have completely different water compositions. There aren't too many places like this so yumeguri (exploring onsen) is really fun here. And the more you know about the different minerals and their colours and benefits, the more fun it is."

Niseko's onsen are all located around the base of or on the skiing mountain, Mt Annupuri, and the adjoining mountains. Minerals from volcanic by-products, soils and rock components are deposited into reservoirs deep beneath the earth's surface, which then make their way up via springs where we can capture their output in baths and soak up their beneficial properties.



03



TSUTOMU SATO THE ONSEN SOMMELIER

TEXT KRISTIAN LUND
PHOTOS TSUTOMU SATO

In the "sento" bathhouses of Japan's big cities, large murals, usually featuring picturesque Mt Fuji landscapes, adorn the walls alongside oversized, porcelain-tiled bathtubs. In the urban plains where big cities are built, it's not easy to access the mineral-rich, geothermal spring water that defines "onsen" baths. Sento baths are filled with heated town water, rather than onsen water that is believed to give bathers mineral-based therapeutic benefits.

However, when city-weary Japanese visit their local sento and soak in the 40-something degrees Celsius baths, they're given an opportunity for mental respite, momentarily transporting themselves outside their everyday lives. Gazing up at a peaceful Mt Fuji landscape, they can escape to a place of ultimate tranquillity and relaxation – a place like Niseko.

An onsen sommelier is an expert in the mineral content and associated health effects of geothermal water. Niseko pension lodge owner Tsutomu Sato is one of Japan's most highly respected onsen sommeliers, one of

only four people to hold the second-highest official 4-star Onsen Sommelier rating in the country, and the only one in Hokkaido.

Tomu-san grew up in Tokyo and fondly remembers the ritual of visiting his local sento with his family. "When I was a child my family would go together about once a week or fortnight," he says. "There were no outdoor baths, just indoor, and they were only big enough to fit about 10 people or so. I guess I just liked the experience of going out and getting in the big bath with my family. As a kid it was a fun thing to look forward to."

After moving to Niseko in 2002, Tomu-san now lives in onsen heaven. There are more than 25 official onsen in Niseko, and the ski resort area's development has actually created a unique setup which has resulted in a wide variety of onsen types visitors can enjoy.

Niseko's onsen landscape is a marvel for onsen sommeliers and anyone interested in trying out the different types of onsen experiences on offer. "Usually in other hot

RELAX



04



05



06



TOMU-SAN'S TIPS FOR A GREAT ONSEN

- Break your onsen up into three soaks: the first five minutes, then eight minutes, then a final three minutes. This will reduce fatigue and prevent you getting flushed.
- Don't take a shower after you leave the baths for the last time before getting changed. This allows the minerals to further penetrate the skin.
- Wash your face in the onsen water that gushes out from the source. This gives your face the benefit of the beautifying effects of the minerals.
- Drink plenty of water before and after bathing. Be aware drinking alcohol could raise your blood pressure and make you light headed.

SOOTHING TIRED AND SORE LEGS

First, find an onsen with a high enkabutsu-sen content: in Hirafu try Yukoro Onsen; In Niseko Village try the Hilton; and in Annupuri/Moiwa try Kanronomori. Fully immerse yourself in a hot bath and warm up. Then immerse your legs up to your knees in a cold-water bath or shower for 30 seconds so your blood vessels quickly retract.

When you get back in the hot bath your blood vessels will open again, boosting blood circulation and helping regenerate your muscles.

Repeat three to five times. Tomu-san says this will also help you sleep really deeply and feel as recovered as possible for the next day.

TOMU-SAN'S TOP THREE ONSENS FOR...

BEAUTY

Alkaline or bicarbonate salt springs for cleansing

1. **Yuusenkaku Onsen (Rankoshi)**
High in alkalinity which smooths skin
2. **Niseko Grand Hotel (Moiwa)**
Abundant metasilicic acid springs for skincare
3. **Kanronomori Hotel (Moiwa)**
Bicarbonate for cleansing and sulphate for moisture

RECOVERY

Salty springs such as chloride, sulphur and sulphate

1. **Hilton Niseko Village (Niseko Village)**
Chloride fountain reduces pain and inflammation
2. **Yukoro Onsen (Hirafu)**
Abundant chloride induces tissue regeneration
3. **Iroha Onsen (Annupuri)**
Chloride and sulphate combined for extra benefit

CHARACTER AND CULTURE

For a truly unique Niseko experience try these

1. **Koikawa Onsen (Moiwa)**
Opened 1899 with a waterfall in the outdoor bath
2. **Goshiki Onsen (Goshiki)**
750m in altitude surrounded by mountains and snow
3. **Makkari Onsen (Makkari)**
One of the best close-up views of Mt Yotei



07



08



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ACROSS THE WATER

PHOTO CHARLIE WOOD
MT YOTEI - A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE



SHEESA

TEXT MASHA SIMONOV
PHOTOS KATSUhide FUJIO

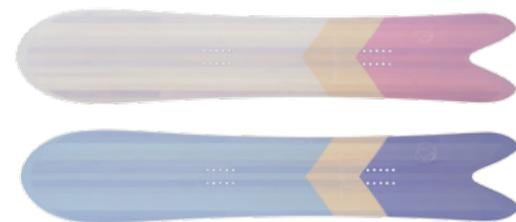
Tomomi “Sheesa” Kuwahara is a formidable lady. Tanned, spry and full of pent-up energy, she looks nothing like her 49 years. Sheesa has won lucrative sponsorships and international acclaim, appeared in countless videos and magazines, has her own signature powder board, and now teaches others how to ride powder like a local.

Sheesa is part of Niseko’s slow life generation – ski and snowboard lovers who fell for endless powder days and a laid-back lifestyle in the mountains of Hokkaido. She did her first season in 1989-1990 aged 21, inspired by a photo of a snowboarder in a ski magazine. A year later she’d moved to Niseko for good. “Back then, Niseko was an ungroomed heaven,” Sheesa says. It was her prowess in the halfpipe that won her the sponsorship of

Burton Japan in 1994, but a long friendship with legendary local snow surfer Taro Tamai inspired her to leave the parks and freeride through the forests. “Burton wanted me to aim for the Olympics on the half-pipe. I said, I want to freeride. I want to go to Alaska.”

After several years competing successfully in the world’s most prestigious freeride comps, Sheesa found a new thrill: boarding for film. Sheesa was sponsored by Gentemstick from 1999, and began running her first coaching camps in the same year. She taught powder riding through the winter, worked through the summer and put aside the humble stipends from her sponsors: everything went towards filming trips to Alaska. “We’d sleep in cars, have dinner parties in our vans. All our money was spent on heli-skiing.”

In 2007 a buried rock sent Sheesa tumbling head over heels over 36 times and her feelings towards hardcore terrain changed. No lasting injuries, but her feelings towards hardcore terrain changed. “Instead of thinking, let’s go sharper, let’s go more extreme, I got interested in a more mellow, surfing descent. I felt I was done with Alaska.” Sheesa turned her focus to the riding camps and has been doing it ever since. As to her own snowboarding, her passion is as strong as it was at 21. “I’ll do two or three runs before lessons start,” she says. “There’s always something to try, and when I get it right I’m stoked. That next run is always calling me.” ■



- 01 Three Niseko icons: Sheesa, Gentemstick and Mt Yotei
- 02 Who said you can't teach style?
- 03 Tomomi Kuwahara signature model Gentemstick Trinity



PHOTO YOSHIRO HIGAI / VALDEZ, ALASKA 2007



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TAKING BACKWARDS SKIING FORWARDS

TEXT KATHY STUART
PHOTOS KRISTIAN LUND

Somewhere along the way Asataroh Akiba failed to hear the old Japanese proverb “the nail that sticks up gets hammered down”. Or he decided to ignore it. Akiba-san skis Southwest Hokkaido’s slopes, and many others around the world, backwards. In the 30 years he has been doing this he has never met such a skiing “fellow traveller”.

Akiba-san decided forward skiing was not for him when, as a novice in the 1970s, he found that even after a few years learning to ski in the regular downhill manner he had not progressed past “pizza stance”, or in the old terminology, a beginner’s snow plough. “I decided that if I was no good at forward skiing I should switch to backwards skiing,” he says. “After a few years of skiing backwards I was as fast as I was skiing forwards, so I customised my skis to make it easier to ski backwards.”

The Chiba city native’s early skiing days were spent around the Yuzawa area – Shiga Kougen and Norikura – an easy Shinkansen ride from Tokyo. His first overseas trip was to France in 1975. Then came Italy, Canada and 10 trips to New Zealand. “When it was summer in Japan it was winter in New Zealand so I could ski all year round,” he says. “I had a lot of fans for my backward skiing there.” In more recent years he has chosen to ski in Hokkaido, especially Rusutsu. “I enjoy the Rusutsu course – it suits



PROFILE

01

my skiing because I can go really fast and ski top to bottom in one run. It usually takes me about three minutes but I can go faster when there aren’t too many people on the runs.”

Are there any advantages to skiing backwards? According to Akiba-san there are many – enough to fill a booklet to encourage others. Good points include: “When you ski backwards you can interact with other skiers face-to face (handy if an attractive person skies by); you can take videos of others more easily; and you can see the tracks you have made in the snow.”

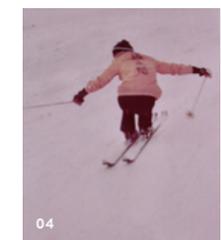
Akiba-san said while most people might be a bit embarrassed by skiing backwards he believes the ski field is a place for having fun. “The kids love it when I ski backwards,” he says. “I thought ‘I can do whatever I like, as long as it is fun.’ I enjoy making other people smile.” ■



02



03



04



05

01 Making tracks at Rusutsu
02 Victory!
03-05 We're going back... waaay back!

POWDER ESSENTIALS



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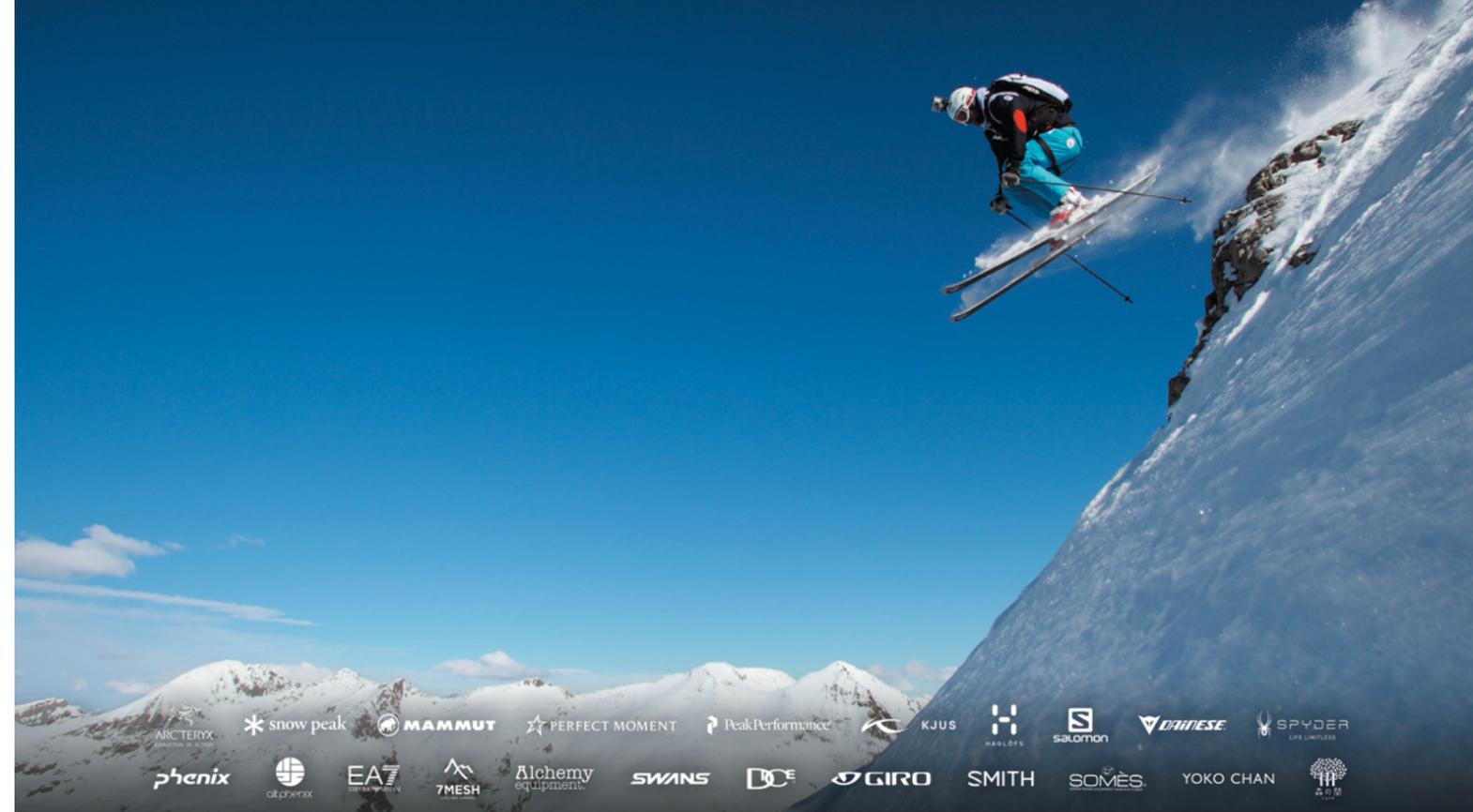
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WINTER WONDERLAND

PHOTO VINCENT SCHNABL
LOCATION MORI-NO CHAIR, NISEKO VILLAGE, HIGASHIYAMA

NISEKO'S MICHELIN STARS

A stellar line up of outstanding local dining experiences

TEXT KRISTIAN LUND

When Michelin published its first Hokkaido guide five years ago, it left an exciting trail of stars and restaurant recommendations in its wake. It didn't reveal any secrets that Niseko locals and regular visitors didn't know already, but it was certainly interesting to see just which restaurants piqued the attention of the global guide's judges, and see many of our friends and favourites receive more well-deserved recognition.

Michelin updated the guide in 2017, reaffirming some of its previous recommendations and adding several more. In total, there are now 15 restaurants that have had stars or recommendations bestowed upon them, or have been newly set up by chefs who operate one or more Michelin-starred restaurants elsewhere and bring the same level of quality and service to their Niseko offerings.

By the time you read this, some of these restaurants may be fully booked for the period you're in town. The beauty of Niseko is that there's so much to experience that it's a destination you can keep coming back to.

If you want to book one of these restaurants for next winter, check with them how to go about ensuring you can lock down a seat. The other option is to come back in the off-season when there are fewer visitors and much greater chance of securing a table.



Hokkaido botan-ebi prawn, half-cooked with pancetta oil, avocado puree and beetroot cooked "papillote style" from Michel Bras Toya

01 MICHEL BRAS TOYA TWO-STARS

Less than an hour from Niseko is this region's best kept secret – Lake Toya. The volcanic caldera lake is almost perfectly round, with crystal-clear blue water and several cone-shaped, deer-inhabited islands rising out of its centre. Overlooking the scene high on a peak of the caldera's rim sits the Windsor Hotel, the host of world leaders for a G8 summit in 2008. It's also home to another of the region's premier gastronomic experiences, Michel Bras Toya. The restaurant is a replica of a three-star restaurant Michel Bras in Laguiole, France, and inherits the unique gastronomic philosophy and world view of the restaurant's namesake via Head chef Simone Cantafio.

www.windsor-hotels.co.jp

02 KAMIMURA ONE-STAR

Kamimura was modern Niseko's first headline restaurant. Opened in 2008, chef Yuichi Kamimura trained under three-star Japanese-born Australian chef Tetsuya Wakuda during a working holiday in Sydney. After returning to Japan he made a splash with his first small restaurant in Sapporo, before moving to Niseko and making waves with a level of dining and service Niseko hadn't seen before. Kamimura's



Sparkling Strawberry with Japanese Herb Salad from Kamimura

colourful, creative degustation menus blend the best local produce from land and sea in a style best described as "Hokkaido French". When Michelin first visited, they gave Kamimura Niseko's first star, which he retained in the second guide.

www.kamimura-niseko.com



Wood Fired Grilled Beef Fillet from Hokkaido in Red Wine Sauce Served with Grilled Turnip and Gratin Dauphinoise from Asperges

03 ASPERGES

THREE-STAR HEAD CHEF, ONE-STAR SISTER RESTAURANT

Asperges Hanazono is the sister restaurant to one-star Hokkaido French restaurant Asperges in central Hokkaido. When this restaurant closes for the winter all its furniture, fittings, cooking and dining utensils are shipped down to Niseko and set up in one of the two base buildings at the Hanazono ski resort to serve an entirely different clientele. While Asperges Niseko doesn't have a star of its own, its pedigree is evident in the quality of the dining experience here. Head chef Hiroshi Nakamichi presides over what was, until this last guide, Hokkaido's only three-star restaurant, Moliere in Sapporo. Asperges is in its fourth year in Niseko and its creative and colourful course menu experience is not to be missed.

www.aspergesniseko.com



Assorted Pinchos from Bistro Kutchan Sakaba

04 BISTRO KUTCHAN SAKABA

FOUNDED BY ONE-STAR CHEF, MICHELIN RECOMMENDATION

After Yuichi Kamimura paved the way for fine dining in Hirafu, he set his sights on the main town centre in Kutchan, 15 minutes' drive away. The town of 15,000 is inhabited by grids of brutally ugly, ageing concrete and plasterboard buildings. It does however have a thriving dining and entertainment precinct, mainly made up of old traditional Japanese izakaya and sushi restaurants and different varieties of bars. Bistro Kutchan Sakaba was the first upmarket Western-style restaurant designed for the international market here, and changed the face of the main street. The warm, tapas-style bistro, headed by Kamimura protégé Tsuyoshi Kawaguchi, combines simple but beautifully presented dishes that showcase the flavours of Hokkaido.

www.kutchansakaba.com

05 RAKUICHI SOBA

MICHELIN RECOMMENDATION

Soba is a simple dish of buckwheat noodles with a small selection of flavours and toppings. Our guess as to why Michelin recommended this tiny, 12-seat restaurant over dozens of others in the area is as much for the exquisite traditional kaiseki dining experience as the quality of food. Upon crossing a long wooden bridge to an old mountain cabin (the first building in the resort of Annupuri), guests are invited inside by host Midori Rai, exquisitely dressed in kimono. Inside, her husband Tatsuru-san, also in traditional garb, prepares the noodle dough and cuts it by hand in view of diners seated for either a simple soba noodle lunch, or nine-course dinner. In a country renowned for exquisite hospitality, it scarcely comes more refined than the Rakuichi experience.



Chuu-Toro Medium-Fatty Tuna Sashimi, Scalded Hokkigai Salt Water Clam Sashimi, and Uni Sea Urchin from Rakuichi Soba



Ika Somen (squid noodles) from Satou

06 SATOU

MICHELIN RECOMMENDATION

Just when we thought we had eaten at all the best restaurants in Niseko, we are introduced to another. In the heart of Kutchan's dining precinct, Satou is a small, traditional sushi bar style restaurant with chef Hirokazu Satou wielding the knives behind the counter, his wife in the kitchen, and one waitress doing a remarkable job waiting the floor on her own. It's only a small restaurant with three tables and half a dozen seats around the counter, and makes for a charming, relaxed evening (there is extra space upstairs if required). Excellent sushi and sashimi is the order of the day, with a small selection of other complementary Japanese dishes also available. Satou is only several years old and not widely known, so this was nicely highlighted by Michelin! ■

OTHER RESTAURANTS MICHELIN SINGLED OUT – and some of our favourites too!



01 DEL SOLE

BIB GOURMAND RECOMMENDED

While we've always loved this unassuming wood-fired pizza joint, it wasn't until an Italian friend said Del Sole was the best pizza he'd eaten outside of Italy that we realised just how special it was. Dine in or take out.

www.pizza-delssole.com



02 MACCARINA

RECOMMENDED

Based in nearby farming village Makkari, this is another restaurant presided over by three-star master chef Hiroshi Nakamichi. In the vein of Asperges but featuring the local produce of the village.

www.maccarina.co.jp



03 HOUZUKI O-UDON CAFE

RECOMMENDED

This one is a little hard to find, but if you make it you will be duly rewarded. At the foot of Mt Yotei, this classic Niseko restaurant serves a variety of udon noodle dishes out of beautiful, heavy ceramic bowls.



04 HANAYOSHI SUSHI

RECOMMENDED

Long considered the best sushi restaurant in Niseko, Hanayoshi serves an extensive menu of fresh sushi in the centre of Niseko Town. Its charming chefs and staff make this a dining experience to remember.

Rounding out the list are: Ishimame (Soba / Makkari); Nakama Ramen (Ramen / Kutchan); Teuchi Ichimura Soba (Soba / Izumikyo); Loft Club (Genghis Kahn / Soga). Note: Due to seasons and constantly evolving menus, some pictured dishes may not always be available when dining.

SUSHI SHIN

Niseko inherits a Michelin-starred sushi prodigy

TEXT KATHY STUART
PHOTOS AARON JAMIESON

As a teenager in central Hokkaido Masaaki Miyakawa was often played “sous-chef” for his mother. But he found the greatest enjoyment was when she served visitors his creations. Seeing the pleasure on their faces was exciting. More than 30 years on Miyakawa-san still derives the same pleasure watching diners as a delicate morsel bursts onto the taste buds. But now he is doing it as a twice-awarded three-Michelin-star shokunin, an artisan who creates for sheer joy.



01



02

CHEF MASAOKI MIYAKAWA

Chef Miyakawa's decades of experience include a tenure as the executive head chef of Hong Kong's most celebrated sushi restaurant, Michelin 3-star-awarded Sushi Shikon. In 2017, Michelin awarded Chef Miyakawa's own recently opened restaurant Sushi Miyakawa in Sapporo with three stars.

01 Head Chef Hironori Satake
02 Master Chef Masaaki Miyakawa

As a teenager in central Hokkaido, Masaaki Miyakawa often played willing “sous-chef” in the family kitchen. But he found the greatest pleasure when his mother served his creations to visitors. He was excited when his fare brought appreciative smiles to guests' faces. More than 30 years on Miyakawa-san still derives the same buzz watching diners as a delicate morsel bursts onto the taste buds. But now he is doing it as a twice-awarded three-Michelin-star shokunin, an artisan who creates for the joy of presenting a perfect product for his guests.

Miyakawa-san is a new entrant to Niseko's burgeoning gourmet restaurant scene. Visitors can experience his special sushi at Anupuri's Sushi Shin. It's his first venture after being awarded three Michelin stars for his three-year-old central Sapporo restaurant, Sushi Miyakawa. Previously, as manager and chef, he steered Sushi Shikon in Hong Kong from two to the coveted three stars.

Over his career, 47-year-old Miyakawa-san has absorbed many influences to develop his Edomae sushi style. Edomae means literally “in front of Edo”, the old name for Tokyo.

While sushi was an early form of Japanese fast food, Miyakawa-san's approach tends in a slower direction, offering an overall experience with entrees, dessert and matching drinks. His choice of Niseko for the new venture combines his love of the sushi restaurant style of eating – at a counter with plenty of feed-back between chef and customer – and his desire to introduce excellent Japanese food to an international audience, a passion kindled during his stint in Hong Kong.

Miyakawa-san approaches all aspects of dining passionately, including the restaurant's ambience. Located in the swish new Kamui Niseko condominium, Sushi Shin is a sensual experience. Its expansive hinoki (Japanese cypress) wood counter fills the intimate

03 Mahata Grouper Nigiri
04 Straw-grilled Akamutsu Rosy Seabass
05 Lightly Seared Kinmedai Snapper with Spring Onion, Ginger and Chrysanthemum Garnish



03



04



05

06 Choose your own sake cup
07 Menu and maple leaf table inset



06



07

atmosphere with forest freshness. Inlaid into the counter are contrasting Japanese momiji maple-leaf-shaped cut-outs crafted in dark kurogaki persimmon. Miyakawa-san says he notices customers absent-mindedly rubbing their hands across the counter as they enjoy its soft, smooth feel.

Having not mastered the art of being in two places at once, Miyakawa-san meticulously trains staff in his ethos. Sushi Shin is in the capable hands of Hironori Satake, a chef of 20 years. The counter seats a maximum of eight within easy conversation distance from Satake-san who flourishes his razor-sharp, 30-centimetre steel Honyaki knife with samurai-like skill.

Satake-san sources his produce from four major centres including Tokyo's famous Tsukiji fish market. His techniques include ageing fish (sometimes for up to two weeks) and other Edomae methods such as marinating

in vinegar or soy, or between sheets of kelp. Dining includes watching him grate a large portion of fresh wasabi, the temperamental root vegetable which is part of the horseradish and mustard family and integral to the taste of sushi and sashimi. The real thing can sell for ¥20,000 a kilo in the markets.

Miyakawa-san's long training encompassed internships at various restaurants, including French and Italian. One was the three-Michelin-star Moliere in Sapporo, run by French-trained Hiroshi Nakamichi. Miyakawa-san said he met Nakamichi-san again at the Michelin awards function earlier this year, but says the master chef didn't remember him! It seems unlikely that will happen again. ■

SUSHI SHIN is available for bookings.

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A SELECTION OF SEASONAL DISHES



01

Marinated Deep-fried Shishamo Smelt Fish with Hokkaido mushroom



02

Daikon Radish Sprout and Hokkaido Herring with Sudachi Jelly Sauce



03

Uni Sea Urchin with Seasonal Vegetables and Chrysanthemum Sauce



04

Sea Bream Sashimi

DESSERT LOVE

The heart of a good meal

BY THE POWDERLIFE TEAM

For many a sweet tooth, going out for dinner is all about the dessert. We rolled up our sleeves and sampled some of the best desserts going in Niseko this winter all for our readers' benefit. Someone had to do it!

01 CRÈME BRÛLÉE

MUSU, UPPER HIRAFU

French chef Thibaut Eulry uses Hokkaido milk, cream and local farm eggs to infuse the flavour of Niseko into this classic French dessert. Can be enjoyed at any time of the day or night in the sexy new Odin Place building at the Hirafu crossroads.



01



02

02 NISEKO FOREST

VALE BAR & GRILL, UPPER HIRAFU

Ski into The Vale Niseko for this exquisite vegan creation which is as much a feast for the eyes as for the taste buds. A chocolate Disonno mousse made with local tofu, chocolate cake, berry sorbet and berry coulis, garnished with berries and fresh mint.



03

03 FROMAGE BLANC ICE CREAM WITH FRUIT

J'AI LA PATATE, OUTER HIRAFU

Paired with the fruit of the season, this dish from the new French restaurant at Country Resort offers a delicate mix of local flavours – ice cream sourced from a local dairy in nearby Kimobetsu and the unique flavour of gelée made with Mt Yotei spring water.



04

04 MATCHA SUNDAE

GREEN SASO, ST MORITZ

For a true taste of Japan, drop into Green Saso to try this unique combination of sweet flavours. Homemade green tea ice cream, fresh cream, dango (mochi rice ball), anko (sweet bean paste), and kokutou (brown sugar) jelly, topped with a little popcorn for fun! ■



"A mixture of precision, elegance and attention to detail defines the work of the Japanese bartender."

TOSHIRO'S BAR

Après cocktails with a twist of Japan

TEXT KRISTIAN LUND
PHOTOS AARON JAMIESON



Just near the central crossroads of Hirafu, with a beautiful view of the ski hill lit up in the evenings, East meets West at Toshiro's bar in the heart of Japan's most international ski town. After a day on the mountain and before or after a meal, one of Toshiro-san's expertly crafted cocktails or whiskies served by his exquisitely kimono-clad wife Yoko-san is a tonic that words cannot describe.

As you may well have realised, the Japanese are good at pretty much everything. And that is most definitely true of bar tending, for which Japan's cocktail shakers are highly prized. A mixture of precision, elegance and attention to detail defines the work of the Japanese bartender.

Toshiro-san defines himself as a shokunin – an artisan rather than a businessman, driven more by a dedication to perfection and service to his customers than profit. The signature cocktail at Toshiro's Bar is the spicy Ginger Gimlet, of which one of Toshiro-san's examples once placed in the top-20 of a Japan-wide competition. For traditional cocktail aficionados, you are sure to enjoy Toshiro-san's take on cocktail standards like the popular Old Fashioned, Manhattan or Moscow Mule.

Another thing the Japanese are particularly good at is whisky, with their single malts regularly winning worldwide awards. Toshiro-san stocks plenty of old and rare vintages that regular visitors would be unable to buy themselves, and find it hard to source elsewhere. ■

TOSHIRO'S BEST APRÈS DRINKS

COCKTAIL RANKING

- 01 Ginger Gimlet JPY1,400
- 02 Toshiro's Tonic JPY1,300
- 03 Bobby's Negroni JPY1,600
- 04 Earl Grey Cooler JPY1,400
- 05 Vesper Martini JPY1,500

JAPANESE WHISKY RANKING

- 01 Limited YOICHI Distillery Series JPY2,100
- 02 YAMAZAKI Series JPY1,000~17,000
- 03 HIBIKI Series JPY1,200~25,000
- 04 TAKETSURU Series JPY900~12,000
- 05 HAKUSHU Series JPY1,000~25,000

*Whisky prices vary based on age and series

Like many bars, seats are limited, however if they are full the next best option is their new bar opening this winter in the Hirafutei Prince Hotel, overlooking the Ace Family Run.

SAKE, NOT STIRRED

There's nothing like sharing a tokkuri of warm sake, sipped out of tiny ceramic ochoko cups, with a view of snow falling outside, to make you realise you're deep in the mountains of northern Japan. Fermented from rice, Japan's national drink is often referred to as rice wine, although technically it's not because wine is made from fermented sugars in fruit. You can readily taste sake almost anywhere in Niseko, and we do recommend trying it warm (atsukan) if the sake suits. You can also do tastings and buy a bottle or two to take home with you from Niseko's very own sake factory, Niseko Shuzo in nearby Kutchan town, just a 15-minute taxi ride away. ■



PHOTO AARON JAMIESON

NISEKO SHUZO | 47 Asahi, Kutchan, Hokkaido 044-0083 | 9am - 5pm
Have a Japanese person call before visiting to check they are open: 0136-22-1040
www.nisekoshuzo.com



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INTRODUCING NISEKO BREWING'S POWDERLIFE PALE ALE

Regular readers of Powderlife might have gathered we're quite fond of an amber ale, and we can't get enough of the local craft beer put out by Niseko Brewing. One of the key reasons it's so good is that it's brewed with Mt Yotei spring water – essentially melted snow and rain that's been percolated through the volcanic layers of the mountain over many years before being released from springs around its base.

While pondering this thought over a glass or three and dreaming of starting our own brewery here, we asked master brewer Shigeru Sakurai if we could work with him to design a special edition beer for international skiers this winter. Based off Sakurai-san's Pale Ale, the Powderlife Pale Ale has a pinch more malt to warm the belly, and a touch less hops to take the edge off a session.

Rounding out at 5 per cent alcohol content, it's guaranteed to kick off and then kick on a lively après ski afternoon or evening! ■

The limited-edition Powderlife Pale Ale is available exclusively at Niseko Taproom in Odin Place in Hirafu; and at Niseko Taphouse, overlooking the ski mountain above Niseko Brewing's microbrewery in Niseko Town. Fantastic food to go along with your ales at both venues!



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MT YOTEI

PHOTO TARO TAMAI



"Plants are quiet and don't talk, but they give out a strong energy. I feel a lot of energy here, because the mountains are so close and there are so many trees."

- SHIGERU TOKUMARU

THE YOTEI EFFECT

HOW THE BEAUTY OF NISEKO IS INSPIRING AN ART SCENE

TEXT KRISTIAN LUND
PHOTOS AARON JAMIESON

Artists have long been known to congregate and set up thriving bohemian communities in beautiful places around the world. What often follows is gradual gentrification, an influx of visitors, mainstream popularity, and eventually off the back of all that, investment.

At the foot of Mt Yotei, with its abundant nature and four distinct seasons, Niseko is undoubtedly one of the world's special places. Long before it was an international skiing hotspot, a plethora of artists, nature lovers, skiers and snowboarders slowly developed a super cool grassroots community, everyone making a living by starting their own restaurants and bars or small businesses, or guiding river rafting tours in the summer.

Once again, investment and development has followed here too. But what is becoming apparent is that artists are now opening more and more galleries, which is in turn inspiring an increasing groundswell of artistic expression.

01



ST GALLERY

“Genki” is a beautifully illustrative Japanese word which essentially means healthy and happy. It’s the perfect adjective to describe 83-year-old Shigeru Tokumaru, the reigning father of the Niseko art scene. He had big shoes to fill when his friend, mentor and one of Hokkaido’s great artists, Shu Ogawara, died in 2002, leaving behind Niseko’s largest art gallery, the Shu Ogawara Museum of Art in Kutchan.

He has a vibrant, eclectic art gallery on the outskirts of Hirafu, alongside the house he had built for himself and his wife 10 years after they moved here 50 years ago. Working as a banker at the time, he moved to Niseko so he could ski shortly after the Hirafu lifts were built. He moved from Obihiro, a flat farming plain in southern central Hokkaido.

Immediately he was inspired by the mountain landscape and the power of the nature here. “Plants are quiet and don’t

talk, but they give out a strong energy,” Tokumaru-san says. “I feel a lot of energy here, more so than Obihiro, I guess because the mountains are so close and there are so many trees.” The energy reminds him of Nepal where he once went trekking. “When I came to this area, I felt the scenery was very like that of Tibet, with the white mountains and the sky. What I feel here is so much like how I felt in the mountains there.”

As you can see now, much of Tokumaru-san’s work is focussed on the nature that inspires him. It’s interesting to note he paints from memory, so his paintings are interpretations of what he sees.

ST GALLERY is located at 74 Aza Yamada, Kutchan-cho, Hokkaido 044-0081
Winter hours 11:00 - 17:00
Have a Japanese person call before visiting 0136-22-1765
www.nisekostdesign.com

“Tokumaru-san has a vibrant, eclectic art gallery on the outskirts of Hirafu, alongside the house he had built for himself and his wife 10 years after they moved here 50 years ago.”

01 The ever-genki Tokumaru-san
02 Tokumaru-san outside ST Gallery
03 Painting in his studio
04 The quaint ST Gallery
05 Shu Ogawara Museum of Art

SOMOZA

About the same time international visitors started flocking to Niseko at the turn of the millennium, the same thing was happening in Bilbao, Spain. The catalyst there – the construction of the Guggenheim Museum. Over a period of just several years, this drab industrial town had turned into one of the world’s must-visit cultural locations.

There’s not a direct parallel between Bilbao and Niseko because it was the discovery of the amazing snow that sparked the international tourism industry here. 20 years on, Niseko is further down the track and already a well-established destination, but more centrepiece galleries are sure to further inspire the art scene here.

An impressive new gallery that just opened in Niseko is Somoza – a 150-year old traditional Japanese farm house that was relocated to a spectacular cliff-top location near the Hanazono ski resort. Created by a long-time local creative, British-born Shouya

Grigg, Somoza is arguably one of the most spectacular additions to the modern Niseko landscape. Housing several gallery spaces, a traditional Japanese tea room, café and dining space, within its first six months after opening it’s already creating a buzz and drawing artists to congregate and discuss the arts in Niseko. It’s destined to inspire other artists to take on their own projects, and draw a new breed of tourist to the area.

It’s early days in the development of Niseko, but more cultural icons like this are surely on the way.

SOMOZA GALLERY is located at 78-5 Hanazono, Kutchan-cho, Hokkaido 044-0084
Winter hours 12:00 - 18:00
Contact 0136-55-8741
www.somoza.jp



06 Somoza in front of Mt Annupuri
07 Somoza overlooks a valley stream to mountains beyond
08 One of the gallery spaces
09 Shouya Grigg



10



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KIYOE GALLERY NISEKO

It's most certainly a sign of the times and place when Hirafu now has a ski-in/ski-out art gallery. After Niseko's latest condo hotel AYA Niseko opened its doors onto the Ace Family Run last winter, it set the standard not just for a new level of luxury in condominiums, but for a new concept of what modern Niseko visitors expected of their ski holiday destination.

Kiyoe Gallery Niseko is a horseshoe-shaped space on the second floor of the building. Curator Kiyoe Hosokawa is an artist from Sapporo who wanted to use Niseko as a springboard to launch local artists into the international market. Most works are by Hokkaido artists with regular guest exhibitions by others from across Japan.

KIYOE GALLERY is located at AYA Niseko 2F, Aza Yamada, Kutchan-cho, Hokkaido 044-0081
Winter hours 13:00 - 20:00
Contact 0136-55-8107
www.kiyoe-gallery.com

Hosokawa-san confirms it's not just guests staying in the building that visit the gallery – skiers do come in off the slopes during the day to browse the collection. AYA Niseko has a ski valet service, so guests can ski to the slopeside door, leave their gear and boots downstairs and stroll up.

There will be several special events held throughout the winter so be sure to keep an eye on the What's On Niseko event flyer or Kiyoe Gallery's website and Facebook page.

10 Kiyoe Gallery Niseko space
11 Kiyoe Hosokawa
12 An exhibited work by Tenshin Kazama
13 Gentemstick founder Taro Tamai
14 Surf-inspired Gentemstick Gallery

GENTEMSTICK GALLERY

Snowboarding and surfing have taken Taro Tamai, founder of Niseko's now-famous Gentemstick snowboards, across the globe. When he first moved to Niseko in 1990 he knew it too would become world famous. He had seen what was happening on his travels in places like Bali and Australia's Byron Bay – beautiful surfing destinations where surf hippies set up the foundations of a bohemian utopia, before mainstream tourism arrived and capitalism took the lead.

The same energy exists in Niseko and Taro continues to be inspired by the beauty of nature in his home town. Last year he opened a gallery showcasing his photography which documents life in Niseko through his eyes.

GENTEMSTICK GALLERY is located at 63-26 Aza Kabayama, Kutchan-cho, Hokkaido 044-0078
Winter hours 12:00 - 19:00
Contact 0136-22-5581
www.gentemstick.com

KATACHI GALLERY

Katachi Gallery is one of the first galleries to open right in a prime location in the centre of Hirafu. Located half-way up Hirafu Zaka street, it's a boutique gallery featuring a range of collectable homewares and functional artworks from local artists – with plenty of smaller pieces that are perfect for taking home as a souvenir and to support the local art scene. The seven artists involved pool their resources to rent the space, and share their time to man it throughout the winter. Although most have limited English, they all love interacting with foreign visitors and explaining their artworks and inspiration.

KATACHI GALLERY is in front of restaurants Bang Bang and Bang 2 on Hirafu Zaka St, Hirafu, Hokkaido 044-0081
Winter hours 11:00 - 19:00
Contact 0136-43-2552

GALERIE RAM

When he moved to Niseko just over 20 years ago, Masafumi Sawada knew he had found the perfect location for his workshop and gallery, Ram Kobo. The "hammer artist", who makes sculptures and furniture out of wood and steel, moved from Sapporo and came across an old building below the Niseko Town bridge, which was due to be knocked down a week later. Right on the banks of the Shirebetsu River with a view of Mt Yotei, this is a place where he knew he could create art for years to come.

In 2014, Sawada-san opened a new boutique gallery in St Moritz, the village on the outskirts of Hirafu, making it easier for visitors to experience his work. Sawada-san's stand-out works have seen him become quite

renowned in Hokkaido. He has had countless exhibitions all over the prefecture and has works on display permanently at Hokkaido's Windsor Hotel, New Chitose Airport and closer by at The Hilton Niseko Village.



20

15 Katachi Gallery on Hirafu Zaka Street
16 Inside Katachi Gallery
17 Shuichi Yoshimitsu, SHU Jewelry
18 Sachiko Hayashi, Frontier Art Farm
19 Masafumi Sawada creating
20 Galerie Ram near Hirafu

GALERIE RAM is located at Lupicia Niseko, 58-5 Kabayama, Kutchan-cho, Hokkaido 044-0078
Winter hours 11:00 - 17:00
Contact 090-2691-9414
www.niseko-ram.com



01 One of Arano's works
02 Making the final stroke
03 Tools of the trade
04 Arano-Sensei

YOKO ARANO

Niseko's premier calligraphy artist

TEXT KATHY STUART
PHOTOS AARON JAMIESON

When Yoko Arano started school in Sapporo at the age of six, her teacher spotted a talent for the usually non-female art of calligraphy. Seventy-eight years later the robust octogenarian is a well-known Hokkaido "shodo" artist who exhibits regularly and teaches students of all ages. She has a special talent for large-scale characters. The Kutchan resident is also a former long-time city council representative. For six terms, over 24 years, she was telling voters, "I'm Arano. Please support me".

The brushes, made from horse mane and tail hair from up to 10 horses, require attention demanding a challenging level of fitness. "After each use I wash them over and over with tap water," she says. "I put them in a big bucket and wash them and it takes about three hours. If you don't wash them properly you can't use them the next time." Arano-Sensei has been using some of her brushes for about 15 years.

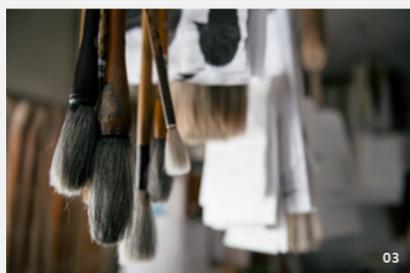
"When I choose a kanji I look at some scenery, or listen to music, and then the choice comes to me naturally. But I often end up writing the same character," she says. These days she paints one of these large paintings about three or four times a year, and especially painted the work on the bottom left of this page for us to photograph and witness her in action. The character she drew was "snow".

Arano-Sensei's political aspirations were sparked by a study trip to the United States and Canada when she was in her 40s. "I saw the independence of women over there, their volunteer work and their participation in politics," she says. She was later involved in a campaign for a Kutchan mayoral election, in which she promised support if the candidate would build the Shu Ogawara Museum of Art in Kutchan. He won. "When the gallery was built I was so happy," she said. ■

"In the old Japan women didn't write much kanji," Arano-Sensei recalls. "Also, there weren't many women who practiced calligraphy." Luckily, she had the encouragement of her teacher and a mother who, though a war widow with two children, supported her talent with classes. "After the war shodo developed as a new art form that, along with ikebana flower arranging, became internationally known with new schools emerging. A few artists began doing larger calligraphy works, and so I thought I'd do the same."

When Arano-Sensei says big she is not exaggerating, particularly considering her diminutive stature. One brush weighs around six kilograms before it's soaked in glue-and-lamp-soot paint, which she mixes herself. "Because I'm in my 80s it's not normally what I would be holding. But because I've been doing it all these years I still can," she explained.

"When I choose a kanji I look at some scenery, or listen to music, and then the choice comes to me naturally."



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RISHIRI

The Floating Mountain

STORY & PHOTOS AARON JAMIESON

Your first vision of the floating mountain is one you will carry with you forever. It rises like a wild sea creature from the ocean floor, standing alone, in a cold and foreboding sea. Lashed by violent winds and tormented by some of the most ferocious weather on earth, Rishiri is a gnarled mass of deadly spines and icy ridges, rimmed by a small swathe of habitable land, and tended by some of the world's most resilient people.

Rishiri Island is the punctuating geographic feature of Hokkaido; the final tip of Japan's string of islands. Beyond here lies the roaring Sea of Okhotsk, whose blanket of frozen sea ice crashes into Hokkaido's northern shores every winter.

Standing on the deck of the rolling ferry, the peak of Rishiri transmits a warning about the harsh and violent nature of the weather in this place. It is wondrous to behold and would feel entirely cut off from civilization, were it not for the ferry service that runs twice daily across the narrow and wild strait between the island and the mainland.

"A soaring peak, steep terrain plummeting, and white plains reaching a deep blue ocean that stretches beyond sight. It is truly a worthy home for a mountain god."



What is it about this remoteness that is so alluring? Something draws me back here every year... yet I have not discovered the answer. I have hiked the treacherous spines, ridden the largest faces, surfed with seals in water just above freezing – but this thrill is not what pulls me back. There is something else, something magical, something unknown and unspoken; perhaps I have begun to feel the energy and the reason that some 5,000 people insist on calling this remote islet home. The magic of the floating mountain.

As with much of Japan, Rishiri's residents are maritime people, living with and from the ocean. Early settlers were blessed with rich oceans and quickly developed a flourishing industry, underpinned by seemingly endless stocks of herring. In more recent times, with stocks depleting, Rishiri's residents have adapted to cultivating and harvesting Konbu – or kelp. This understanding of the need to change with the fluctuations of nature is inherent in the people of the place.

The people move with a relaxed and stoic assuredness, as though their daily lives are under an ever-watchful eye, cast down from the peak, some 1721m above them. They are part of the island and the island is part of them. It is as though they carry a knowledge that while they respect and live within the commands of the weather and moods of the island, they are safe in their lives and sound in their beliefs. It is an intimate connection to the mountain and a harmonious balance with nature that fuels their belief; a belief in something more powerful and something in themselves, irreversibly and intimately woven with the spirit of the mountain.

Our need to understand and move with the seasons in Hokkaido is almost an art form. For those who can adapt, Hokkaido provides a varied and fulfilling lifestyle, ever changing and continually flowing from season to season. To move with the seasons is to thrive on the energy this northern island of Japan provides. Rich in natural resources and a wild nature that



02



03

- 01 The cradle of a Mountain God
- 02 First glimpse of The Floating Mountain
- 03 Birds of Rishiri
- 04 Hooking konbu from the shore
- 05 Konbu drying in the sun
- 06 Oceanside fishing shack

"The fishermen brave the coldest oceans daily, dragging in their kelp ropes and nets of fish."



07



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06



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- 07 Konbu fisherman returns from a morning at sea
- 08 Anchors and buoys
- 09 Drying fish by the shore
- 10 A face of resilience
- 11 Map of Hokkaido

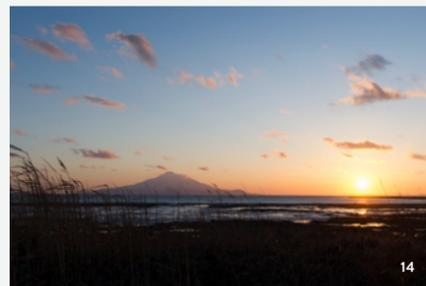
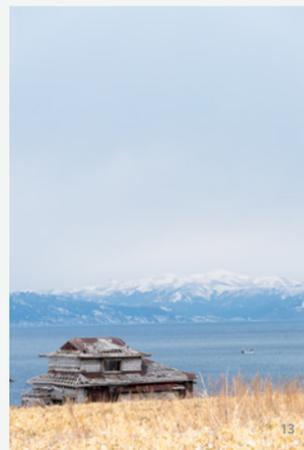
in turn flourishes and hibernates, Rishiri is a natural wonder of its own – like a smaller, more focused, and more concentrated version of Hokkaido itself.

Driving along the coast will introduce you to the characters that give Rishiri its human personality. Smiling, happy, resilient, and entirely open and welcoming. From the fishermen unloading their catch in the many small harbours that dot the coastline, to the old ladies skilfully dragging kelp from the rock-lined edges of the shore with their specialised, home-made hook poles – each one of these people beams with an energetic smile as they carry out their labour.

Be it fishing or Konbu, returns vary with the

season. Success is dictated by weather. Those for whom this provides a sustainable life must remain forever grateful to the island. And forever resilient when it steals their crops and denies them the opportunity. It is a hard life, but a rewarding one, and gratitude underpins the persistence it takes to enjoy such a beautiful and unique island home.

Many of the younger residents of the island balance their arduous labour with equally hard-core recreation, enjoying everything that a snow-covered, ocean-rimmed volcano has to offer. With a population of just 12 surfers, scoring a few waves to yourself isn't as difficult as elsewhere, it's staying conscious in the almost frozen ocean that is more of a challenge.



These oceans are bursting with sea life and the seals sunning themselves on the rocks nearby ensure the fear of orcas is never far from your mind. This is not a tropical island where board shorts and coconuts are the flavour. Paddling out through the thick kelp, constantly threatening to drag you into the dark depths below, I quickly understood why there were only 12.

A trip around the island to check the surf is quick. Spanning less than 20km from coastline to coastline and only a little over 60km to drive the entire circumference, means off-shore winds on the opposite side are only about 30 minutes away. The same is true when selecting which side of the mountain will present the least treacherous weather for a day of hiking and skiing some of Rishiri's epic terrain. Interpreting the ever changing weather maps and forecasts can result in a blissful day on the mountain.

The mountain itself can shelter you from the ever present wind and while it does you will

be enjoying unparalleled views over steep and challenging terrain, blanketed in perfect Hokkaido snow, tumbling into the endless sea. A poor decision or sudden change in weather will not only ensure a horrible day hiking and skiing, it can also quickly become life threatening.

Unlucky enough to have experienced the unpredictability of Rishiri's weather changes I can provide a first hand account of a terrifying Rishiri white-out. A three-hour hike in warm sunshine with a light, welcome breeze quickly turned treacherous, with the unexpected arrival of a demonic gale. Tearing snow from the ridges above us and blinding us to the treacherous cliff bands that called out below.

This is a place where the weather and Mother Nature make your decisions for you. You must exist within the confines of what the weather allows, every day. This is where the inexplicable connection to the island and the spirit of the mountain is born.

12 Perfect rights
13 Abandoned
14 Rishiri sunset from the mainland
15 Empty lineup



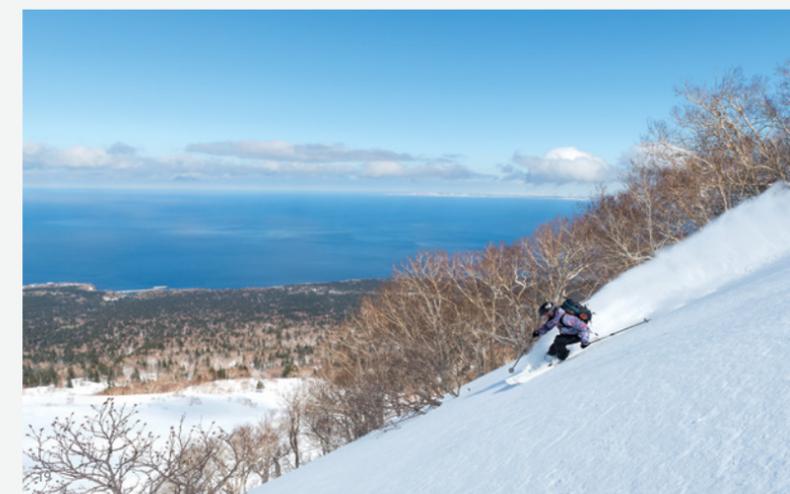
"With such wild, unwelcoming, and unpredictable weather, there is something entirely magnetic about this solitary volcano, floating in the sea."

16 Long approaches and ocean vistas
17 Mathias Kögell & The Wind.
18 Big mountain lines above the ocean / Lena Stoffel
19 Powder turns in the sky / Lena Stoffel

Hiking from the flat, oceanside lands, through sparse forest, and into the lower hills of Rishiri provides you with time to appreciate where you are and the size and scale of your undertaking. Rishiri is not open to all comers and may, or more likely may not, provide you with the weather to approach it's peak.

The initial approach is like walking through the unmarked gates of some god's halls. As you ascend, the ridges divide and then re-join in a complex labyrinth. Cresting some of the lower alpine ridges and approaching the throne of the god of the mountain, perched far above, we are allowed some of the most incredible winter vistas I have ever seen. A soaring peak, steep terrain plummeting, and white plains reaching a deep blue ocean that stretches beyond sight. It is truly a worthy home for a mountain god.

With snow arriving as early as October and persisting through to April, Rishiri transforms from a somewhat temperate island into a frozen volcanic rock, surrounded by frigid seas where the sun rarely breaks the cloud.



- 20 Ocean villa
- 21 Riding the last light to the sea / Lena Stoffel
- 22 A golden snow storm engulfs the bay
- 23 Silhouetted reflection



20



21



22



23

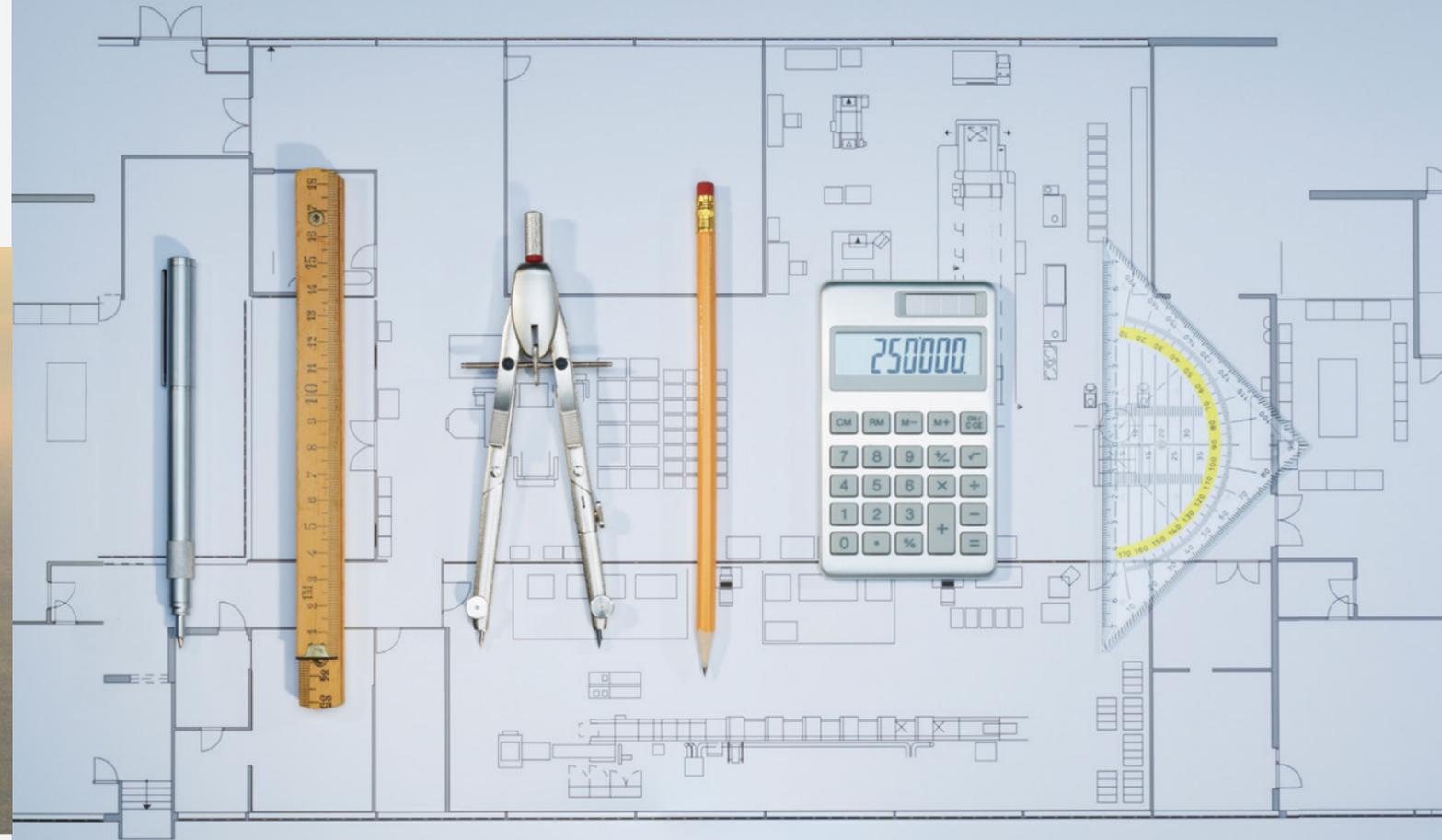
"With a population of just 12 surfers, scoring a few waves to yourself isn't as difficult as elsewhere, it's staying conscious in the almost frozen ocean that is more of a challenge."

The mountain itself creates a microclimate and controls the weather, drawing clouds in from the horizon and creating its own. November to February can see as few as four or five sunny days and it's not unheard of for January to have none whatsoever.

With such wild, unwelcoming, and unpredictable weather, there is something entirely magnetic about this solitary volcano, floating in the sea. It attracts the pioneers, the strong, the resilient. It rejects the feint of heart, and returns those who lack the fortitude to the less demanding lands of their origins.

Perhaps this is where Rishiri's magic lies – that it is not for everyone, it is still truly a frontier of an otherwise heavily populated land, in a seemingly ever-shrinking world.

Or perhaps it is far less complicated and it truly is the god of the mountain that decides who can and who can't reside here and eke our an existence from the resources she provides. Whichever it is, there is no denying the special feeling that settles upon the visitor, uncertain of the mood that awaits you, as you roll towards the floating mountain. ■



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PHOTO GLEN CLAYDON
RIDER WILL JACKWAYS
LOCATION NISEKO ANNUPURI OSAWA BOWL

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01

- 01 Yukikage against the backdrop of the ski slopes of Mt. Annupuri
- 02 Panoramic views from the terrace on the third level
- 03 A material palette of glass, concrete and timber
- 04 Play of texture, darkness and light
- 05 Living area
- 06 Cantilevered timber staircase with a dramatic chandelier



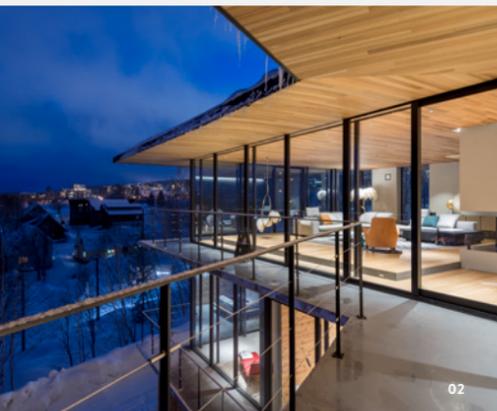
03



04



05



02

YUKIKAGE

TEXT LUO JINGMEI
PHOTOS AARON JAMIESON

Darkness and light, solidarity and transparency, softness and strength – Yukikage is a study in contrasts, wrapped up in a striking edifice wedged into the base of a sloping forest. Its angular plan and soaring eaves mimic the gesture of flight as if a physical metaphor of a skier ready for action.

"Its dynamic form was conceived from defining important sightlines – the most significant of which is the enigmatic Mt Yotei."

It's an apt image for the holiday home of a Singapore-based client and his family in Hirafu. "We're all avid skiers so the house had to be not just an occasional ski house but a real, liveable home for potentially two to three months in the winter and in the green season too," the owner says.

To realise this vision, he engaged Tomoyuki Sudo of SAAD, a Tokyo-based architecture and design office founded in 2015 and which is incorporated under the century-old construction and architecture firm Sudo Construction/Home Co., Ltd. [Hokkaido Tracks Resort Properties developed the property](#) and the interior design was put together by design agency Sanctuary Niseko.

Notably, the house was the first to be built in the ELEVATION estate – a prestige gated estate just below the Hirafu Gondola, master planned by one of Japan's pre-eminent architects, Kengo Kuma. The 240-450 tsubo blocks were priced from US\$1.3 - \$2.5 million and all but sold out within one winter after launching in 2015.

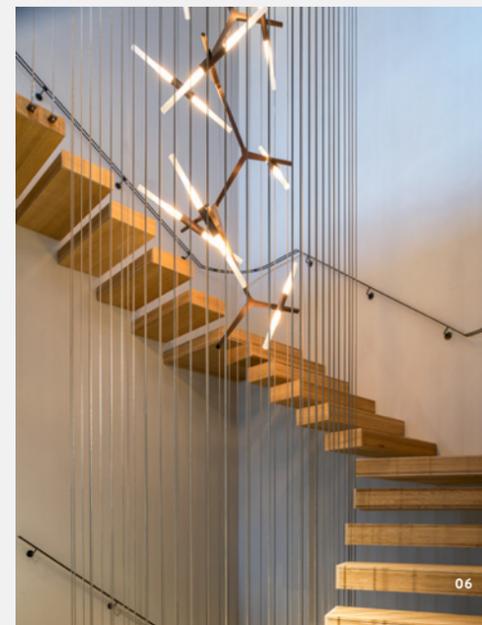
Yukikage's experimental expression attests to Sudo's pedigree as a student of the progressive Southern California Institute of Architecture (Sci Arc) and England's Architectural Association School of Architecture (AA). Its dynamic form was conceived from defining

important sightlines – the most significant of which is the enigmatic Mt Yotei. "This project is mainly focussed on the views and openness. The site provides both characteristic surroundings and views...the brief was about creating a harmonious relationship with the natural environment, established through the size of the openings," says Sudo.

The 2.8m-high floor-to-ceiling windows on the second and third stories provide seamless connectivity with nature. Aside from panoramic views, natural light floods the interior. The L-shaped plan peels open the building even more, maximising the covetable views of Mt Yotei to all rooms, and barely-there balustrades lining the perimeter balconies further extend the indoor-outdoor feeling. The house's name, provided by the client, in fact alludes to this concept. Meaning 'snow' and 'shadow' in Japanese, one is invited to contemplate the scenery under the extended eaves, as if perched beneath the shade of trees, says Sudo.

Béton brut and timber used in its natural form melds brutalism and the traditional Alpine chalet aesthetic. The warmth of the latter tempers the reticence of the former, and the panelling of the Japanese cypress and cedar lend rhythm and a sense of movement to the building. The way the materials are used won over the client. "SAAD welcomed the focus on locally sourced building materials and the desire to have the house 'grow' out of its surroundings with a shift of emphasis from concrete and stone in the lower floors to wood and glass in the upper reinforcing this."

Indeed, the selected materials not only direct the mood but also the function. The first storey contains the car garage, locker room, utility rooms, and shower-cum-sauna where after a day on the slopes, the owner can immediately recover from the fatigue of the day. In the corner, a hanging staircase illuminated with a dramatic chandelier cuts through the vertical void making for a delightful welcome from shadow to shine, its branch-like forms referencing the forested

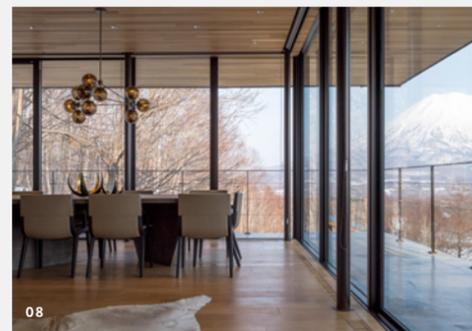


06



- 07 The sculptural Lee Broom Hanging Hoop chair
- 08 The dining area with a magnificent view of Mt Yotei
- 09 Master en suite bathroom with a custom-made stone bath

"In the dining area, a bronze chandelier with smoked glass globes dances above the custom-designed corten steel dining table designed by Sudo, filling the space with a palpable mood of playfulness."



silhouette outside. "The owner experiences the different spaces through the staircase, which rises through the three storeys...and stainless steel wires reflect light and show the direction of the lights," explains Sudo on the staircase design.

The second storey contains two master en suite bedrooms that cap both ends of the plan, with another bedroom and guestroom sandwiched in between. The en suite bathrooms, separated from the outside by only walls of glass, offer the most intimate relationship with nature and its changing sceneries.

On the third and highest storey, the living room takes up almost half the footprint – a perfect space for entertaining family and guests. The generously sized Minotti Yang sofa is fitting for this purpose, its low-slung structure contrasting with a brass, brush-plated Lee Broom Hanging Hoop chair that hangs from the ceiling like a floating sculpture. In the dining area, a bronze chandelier with smoked glass globes dances above the custom-designed corten steel dining table designed by Sudo, filling the space with a palpable mood of playfulness.

The curation of the furniture and furnishings sits well within the interior design, where hard and soft textures and the use of natural materials complement the architectural expressions. Stone and concrete are used for the bathrooms and oak flooring for the main area flooring. Western Red Cedar planks on the ceilings draw the view outwards. here was a focus on the architecture and architectural skin, with the melding of the exterior and interior incorporated in the interior spatial expression. For example, furniture pieces were intentionally set away from the glass façade and walls to give the feeling of lightness and porosity.

The client – regular guests of Aman properties – had requested a house that would provide an experience akin to their favourite hospitality environments where the subtlety and thoughtfulness of design allow for rest and rejuvenation. And Yukikage does just that. ■

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by ZEKKEI





01

- 01 Living room looking to dining
- 02 Entrance and artworks
- 03 Living & Mah Jong sofa
- 04 Dining area
- 05 Glimpse of master bedroom

"In winter this home evokes whimsical cheerfulness, in contrast to the brutal but beautifully white snowscape outside."



03



04



02

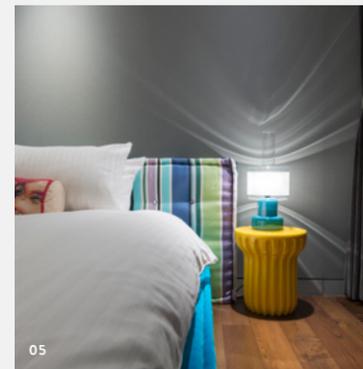
CABANE DU TAUREAU

TEXT & PHOTOS AARON JAMIESON

With its name a French derivative, Cabane du Taureau translates to Cabin of the Bull and is a vibrant expression of the personality and passion of its owner. Born in the Chinese zodiac year of the Ox and being a Taurus, the owner's original intent was a very masculine house externally, with a touch of the mystical within. Nothing that you see externally prepares the visitor for what to expect inside, but after walking through its cavern-like entrance the enchantment begins.

Two charcoal-etched artworks adorn the entrance hallway on the first level, fairytale-like depictions of a fox and rabbit humanoid figure caricatures. Originally intended by the artist as an interpretation of the plight of Italian immigrants in Australia, it is a clever parody of the contributions of numerous "immigrants" towards the development of what Niseko has become today. This thoughtful articulation of design follows you throughout the house.

Summitting the stairs to the second floor your subconscious is immediately immersed by what is most unique about this home. The spaces were built around the furniture, a methodology described by architects as "inside out". Each room is intentionally arranged to accommodate the furniture, with the spaces calculated and planned to the exacting dimensions of each individual item. An intriguing experiment as the furniture was ordered before the final plans of the house were complete.



05

Undeniably, the key element for this is the living room and the Roche Bobois signature Mah Jong sofa, an eight-piece arrangement upholstered in a variety of fabrics from the Missoni and Sonia Rykiel collections. It was the first element of the house that was decided during the concept phase and themes the interior, resonating an undoubtedly strong but underlying bohemian streak.

Ascending to a mezzanine level you move into the master bedroom where the explosion of colours continues. The Mah Jong bed upholstered in Missoni, and a matching turquoise carpet immediately flood your vision, accessorised with further elements from Roche Bobois with obligatory vibrant turquoise and canary yellow lamp and side table.

The deliberate use of colour to influence emotion is balanced by carefully planned lighting to create the appropriate atmosphere according to the occasion. An essential element

with great consideration taken to ensure an array of dimmers and lighting options were installed for full control over a wide range of moods and evening ambience.

This home was envisioned as a private retreat for the owner and their inner circle of friends to escape city life. The outcome is a very private and personal space but with an intimacy and connection, encapsulated by the glass opening between the dining room and master bedroom.

In winter this home evokes whimsical cheerfulness, in contrast to the brutal but beautifully white snowscape outside. Yet in spring, summer and autumn, the interior also emulates nature's myriad of colours, bringing a sense of nature inside. It is an informal bohemian oasis and an interior that provides contrast, yet blends with nature depending on the season. ■

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Natural clay | Mano | JPY7,560 | www.atelier-mano.com



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Timber | TSUJIAKI |
JPY7,560 | www.akitsuji.com



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JPY9,720 | www.akitsuji.com



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Solid wood | Hiroaki Shimizu |
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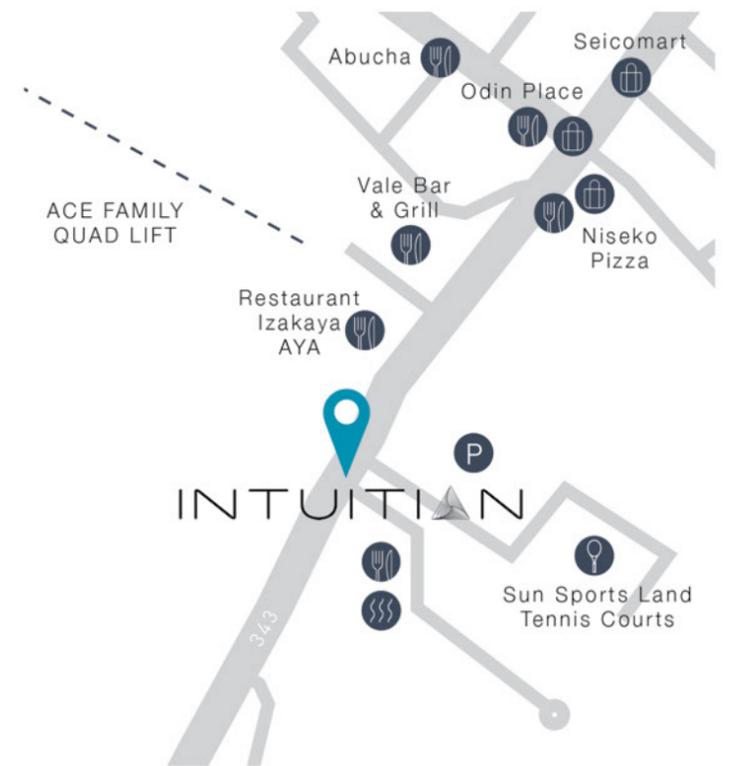
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Located in a peaceful forest, steps from AYA and the Ace Family Quad Lift, Intuition is a sister development of Elevation Hirafu, the pre-eminent estate master planned by Kengo Kuma & Associates, which was sold out in one season. Intuition now offers ten individual spacious sites for custom homes, each benefitting from the same high-quality infrastructure including underground power, eight-meter wide private road with sidewalks, landscaping and onsen water supplied directly to each villa.

At the top of the hamlet, the Intuition Apartments, expected to complete by winter 2020, will house dining, onsen and fitness facilities, and concierge services exclusive to the Intuition residences.



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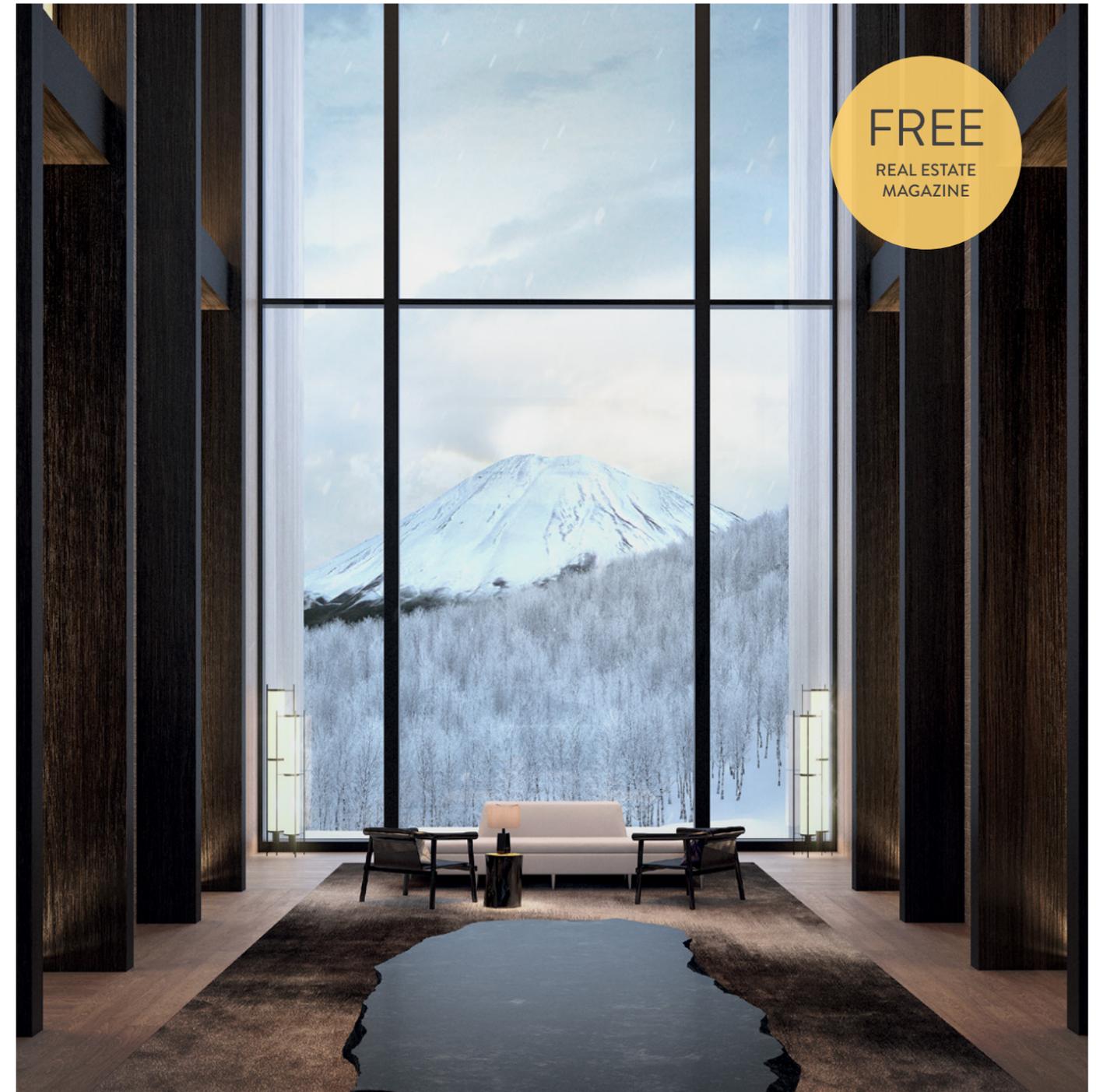
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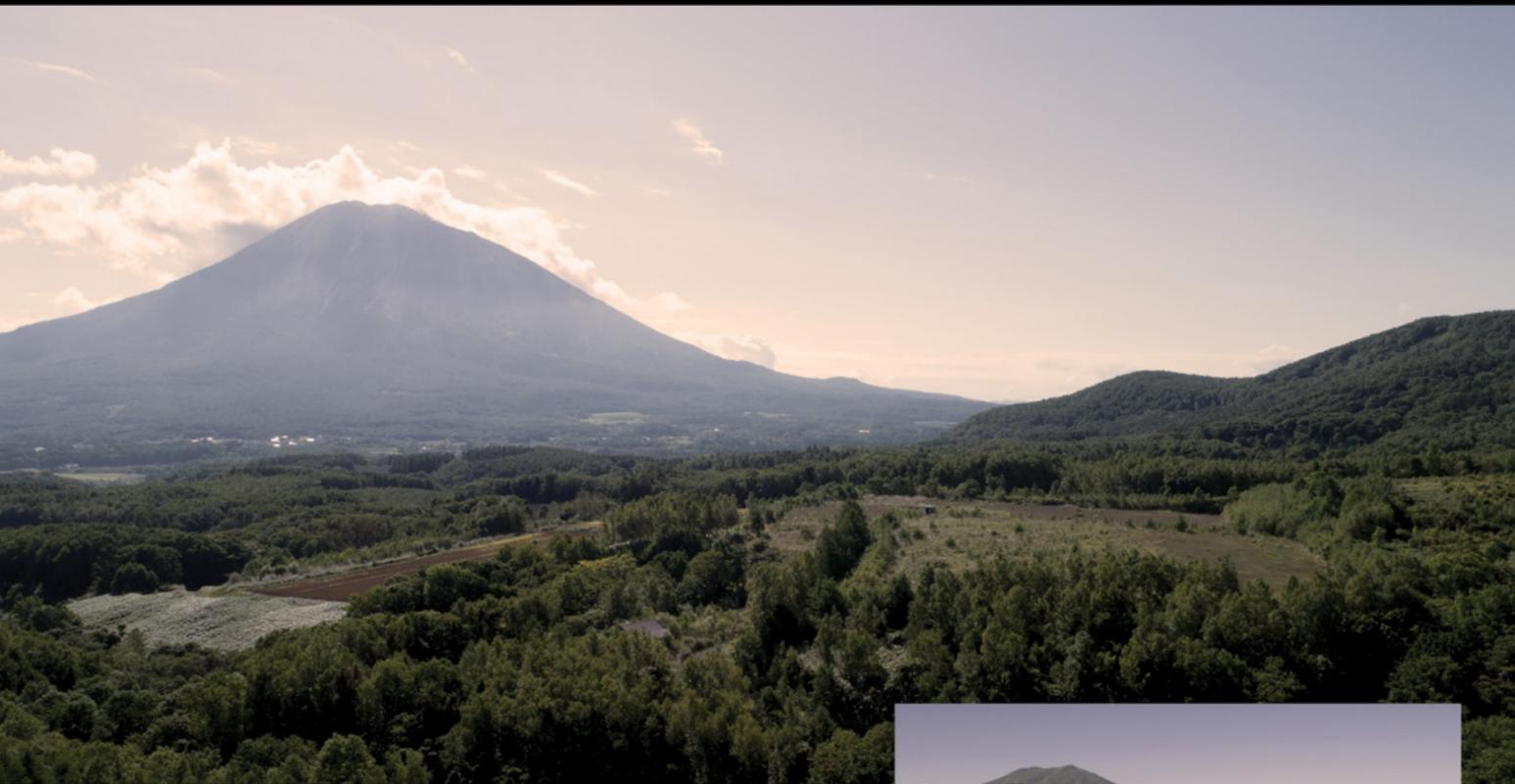
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LATEST DEVELOPMENT NEWS

FROM THE EDITOR

Thanks for reading the second issue of Powderlife Real Estate. While Powderlife has been the main independent real estate and development news source since we first published in 2007, last year we launched this advertising feature section as an official real estate-dedicated insert inside last year's Powderlife magazine.

It was a roaring success with huge interest from people wanting to learn more about the Niseko real estate and development landscape from an independent source, as well as the plethora of major new developers in Niseko wanting to inform visitors and the Niseko business and investment community about their projects. So this year we're printing it as a standalone magazine as well. Pick up a copy or two to take home to your friends.

— KRISTIAN LUND



PARK HYATT NISEKO WELL UNDER WAY

Construction on the Park Hyatt Niseko commenced soon after the snow melted at the end of winter 2017. Along with the Hanazono masterplan, which will include six new lifts and gondolas, the hotel and residence project is the largest single development in Niseko's history with an estimated cost of \$US600 million. The hotel will comprise 114 luxury residences for sale. Park Hyatt offers the highest service and luxury among the Hyatt hotel brands.

www.hanazono-residences.com

THE PAVILIONS BREAKS GROUND

Bespoke international resort developer The Pavilions broke ground on its hotel and residence development in Ginto Hirafu, a new precinct opposite Izumikyo II in the east of Hirafu. Set in national forest land just minutes' shuttle to the Hirafu ski slopes, the centrepiece 42-suite, five-star boutique hotel is being developed right next to The Ginto Residences and is scheduled to open in summer 2019.

www.pavilionsginto.com



NISEKO VILLAGE ROLLING OUT

Stage II of Niseko Village's masterplan is well underway with construction of a new ski-in/ski-out condo-hotel development progressing this summer. Hinode Hills is a six-storey luxury condominium with studios and studio-plus-hotel-room suites for sale off the plan this winter. Meanwhile, plans for the Ritz-Carlton Reserve luxury hotel are progressing with new details to be released soon.

www.niseko-village.com

LATEST DEVELOPMENT NEWS CONTD

THE MAPLES PROGRESSES

Upper Hirafu's next major ski-in/ski-out condominium The Maples is set to open in time for winter 2018. The six-storey, ski-in/ski-out condo is located in the heart of Hirafu's main street Hirafu Zaka and backs onto the ski slopes just above the new Ace Family Lift. It features 69 studio, 2 and 3-bedroom apartments with penthouses, and features retail, commercial and a café.



The project is a joint collaboration between long-time local developer NISADE and Singaporean Cathay Group. Cathay Group says: "The Maples bridges the best of both worlds in Niseko as it marries the urban life of Hirafu Zaka with the grand natural landscape of the national park. With the Ace Family Lift at its door step, The Maples boasts one of, if not, the best ski-in/ski-out locations in Hirafu."



www.themaplesniseko.com

INTUITION LEADS TO ANOTHER ESTATE

The developer of the highly successful ELEVATION gated community in eastern Hirafu has announced plans for another high-end subdivision amongst forest on the opposite side of Hirafu Village, adjacent the new Ace Family Lift. Intuition Niseko will comprise an apartment/hotel with onsen and restaurant facilities, along with 10 villa sites. Each villa will have access to onsen water and can also use the onsen facilities in the apartment/hotel.

www.intuitionniseko.com



DOWNTOWN GOING UPMARKET

One of Niseko's prime real estate locations on a corner of the Hirafu intersection is to be redeveloped. The current building on "Downtown Corner", housing Green Farm Café and other businesses will be knocked down next spring with development to start on the new six-storey building in summer 2018 for completion December 2019. The building will be a mix of commercial and accommodation managed by Holiday Niseko with two floors of parking.

www.holidayniseko.com

SC GLOBAL'S BIG NEW CONDO

A huge block of land opposite Hirafu's Lawson convenience store will be developed by high-profile Singaporean luxury developer SC Global Developments. Detailed plans are yet to be announced but the company has confirmed it will be a "luxury condominium hotel residence... uniquely designed around a central courtyard", and promises "luxury living in Niseko is set to be turned on its head."

www.scglobal-niseko.com

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LATEST DEVELOPMENT NEWS CONTD



HAKUVILLAS PICKING UP WHERE HAKUCHŌZAN LEFT OFF

The developer of Niseko's most exclusive fully catered chalet is planning a similarly high-end condominium development, Haku Villas, just below the Hirafu Gondola. Chalet Hakuchōzan has a team of six full-time staff on hand throughout its guests' stays, offering unprecedented levels of service in Niseko for its ¥1.4 million (US\$12,000) per night price tag. Each of the four units in seven-storey HakuVillas will have its own outdoor onsen, butler/chauffeur and chef.

www.hakuchozan.com | www.taigaprojects.com

LOOKING BEYOND THE SLOPES

The developer of ski-in/ski-out condos AYA Niseko and Ki Niseko is this year taking on a villa estate project on the outskirts of Hirafu. Niseko Real Estate announced Panorama will consist of 12 villas with a clubhouse, restaurant, cafe and deli onsite. The move is indicative of a trend from slopeside apartments towards larger estate developments outside the resort areas. Many more such properties are in the planning phase across Niseko.

ANNUPURI GARDEN

One of the first large-scale developments in Annapuri is underway, with construction of the first building on approximately 50,000sqm of land on Route 66 opposite the turnoff to the ski resort. Developed out of Hong Kong, Annapuri Garden is a mix of dining, retail, apartments and large luxury home sites. The building under construction is alongside the road and will house two restaurants, a luxury retail shop, and potentially a supermarket on the ground floor, with units above.



NEW UPPER HIRAFU HOTEL

Plans are underway for a privately owned ski-in/ski-out hotel towards the top of Upper Hirafu, just below the Alpen Hotel just two minutes walk from the Ace Quad lift. Sansui Niseko will be an upmarket Japanese hotel designed by renowned local firm Nakayama Architects. The hotel is expected to be six storeys with about 60 rooms and with a target completion date of December 2019.

www.hirafucapital.com



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NEWS + TRENDS

ERA OF THE TROPHY HOME

1000sqm is set to become the new benchmark for luxury in Niseko. Over the past couple of years, top-end homes started to break the 500sqm mark, raising the bar for what constituted an impressive home here. Since then, a dozen or more foreign millionaires and billionaires have commissioned architects to design houses that rival those in the world's top resort destinations, with plenty more in the pipeline. Several properties with build costs towards US\$10 million have already been completed, with more under construction and in planning.

Thai billionaire and heir to the Red Bull energy drink empire Chalerm Yoovidhya is currently building a 1000sqm+ home (pictured bottom) that spans three housing blocks on Hokkaido Tracks' premium development, The Escarpment

Estate, an exclusive residential enclave perched on the edge of Hirafu Village. The mega-chalet dwarfs anything that has been built in Hirafu so far and will house the village's second private pool.

Not far away, cantilevered over the cliff above the Shiribetsu River at the bottom of Lower Hirafu Village, Clearwater (pictured below) is another of Niseko's most impressive homes. With unprecedented views up two stretches of the river and Mt Yotei looming above, the 665sqm home was designed by architect Naoki Seshimo for high-profile Singaporean businessman and racing team owner Weng Sun Mok. Another multi-storey home that looks more like a condominium than a private residence is under construction by a Hong Kong owner in Higashiyama, with more slated for Annupuri and elsewhere.



RUSUTSU READY TO ROLL

Interest in nearby Rusutsu Resort is at an all-time high on the back of its application for a casino license and rumours its Japanese owner is preparing it for sale. Niseko and other developers are moving into the area, as are real estate land speculators. Hokkaido company Kamori Kanko owns the resort but is yet to confirm any plans to further develop. Leading ski resort planner Ecosign is consulting to the group, with major Niseko developer NISADE announcing plans for the first ski-in/ski-out condominium hotel for the resort.

MOIWA MASTERPLAN MOTTED

The dark horse of Niseko is starting to reveal its cards, with Niseko's neighbouring Moiwa Ski Resort confirming a masterplan underway that will include two new condominiums at the resort base – one high-end and the other family oriented. Further, they have acquired an old hotel beyond the mountain's peak at Goshiki, to which there is potential to connect by lift. Moiwa would not confirm but Aman and other major international luxury hotel and resort companies are known to be looking at the resort.

HIGASHIYAMA ON THE UP

The existing village alongside the resort of Niseko Village has taken off in the past year. Following the announcement in 2015 that Ritz-Carlton would build their premium "Reserve" tier hotel in the resort, real estate sales started a slow and steady rise, increasing more rapidly in the past year. Several medium and large-scale developments are now underway, and new bar, café and entertainment venue The House of Machines as well as other new restaurants and shops are indicative of potential activity in the area.

A HOME FOR ALL SEASONS

PARK HYATT NISEKO HANAZONO RESIDENCES

LOCATION
HANAZONO

LUXURY APARTMENTS FOR SALE



01

Ground breaking for not only Niseko, but Japan, Hanazono is privileged to be the selected world class destination for the first Park Hyatt branded residences in Japan – introducing a luxury brand of Hyatt Hotels & Resorts, previously unknown to Hokkaido. The residences will proudly bear the Park Hyatt name, a privilege granted to only a handful of properties located in the world's most desirable locations.

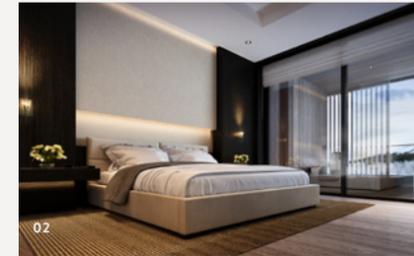
Celebrated as one of the world's leading luxury hotel brands, Park Hyatt hotels cater to the discerning taste of every guest at more than 40 premier locations in major cities and resorts around the world. Renowned for their world-class architecture, timeless design, artworks by globally-acclaimed artists and personalized service, Park Hyatt hotels welcome guests to a world of exquisite moments. For travellers who expect nothing but the best, Park Hyatt hotels offer the irresistible promise of intimate luxury.

Park Hyatt hotels are located in the world's most desirable destinations. In Japan, this resulted in the first Park Hyatt hotel

in Shinjuku, Tokyo and soon on a truly exceptional site – a fabled Asian ski resort area and dream destination for skiing cognoscenti around the world – Niseko, Hokkaido. Famed for its legendary powder snow, Hanazono, Niseko is a ski haven graced with a breathtaking view of Mount Yotei from its forested nest at the base of Mt Annupuri.

Forming the nucleus of the Hanazono all-season resort, the Park Hyatt Niseko Hanazono Residences encapsulates all that is Niseko lifestyle with a premier golf course and mountain and river activities of fishing, trekking and rafting in a breathtaking setting. For seekers of extraordinary experiences, this

- 01 Living room
- 02 Master bedroom
- 03 In room onsen
- 04 Ensuite bathroom with walk-in closet
- 05 Open kitchen
- 06 Sense of arrival
- 07 Lobby



02



03



04

is the promise of all-season mountain resort living without peer.

The jewel of the prestigious Hanazono area in Niseko, these ski-in, ski-out residences will set a new benchmark for luxury living. As the owners of one of these 114 luxury residences, you can enjoy next-door access to the hotel's world-class gourmet dining, wellness/spa facilities and the five-star services and amenities including the Park Hyatt's first ever private hot-spring. For connoisseurs of sophisticated luxury resort living, this residence is the promise of an inimitable blend of home and holiday.

EXQUISITE LIVING WITH PARK HYATT SIGNATURE HOSPITALITY

Park Hyatt hotels provide discerning, affluent business and leisure guests with elegant and luxurious accommodation and offers them highly attentive personal service in an intimate environment.

Located in several of the world's premier destinations, each Park Hyatt hotel is custom designed to combine sophistication with a distinctive regional character. Park Hyatt hotels feature well-appointed guestrooms, meeting and special event space for groups, critically acclaimed art, food and beverage programmes, and signature restaurants featuring award-winning chefs. There are currently more than 40 Park Hyatt hotels around the world.

Owners of Park Hyatt Niseko Hanazono Residences will be pampered with a world of privileges, including the prestigious World

of Hyatt Globalist Membership, the highest tier of Hyatt's loyalty programme only accessible to an elite few. Members will be able to access benefits at participating Hyatt hotels and resorts and their affiliates. At the Residences, a dedicated fleet of dream cars – with brands such as Bentley, Mercedes and BMW – will be on standby to transport owners to their preferred destinations in Niseko. Explore more about Park Hyatt at www.parkhyatt.com.

World of Hyatt is built on the simple idea that a little understanding goes a long way. Listening, noticing others, extending a meaningful gesture can make all the difference in helping you be your best. Understanding also inspires loyalty. Your new loyalty program connects you to the people, places and experiences at the heart of your world. Explore World of Hyatt at world.hyatt.com.



05



06



07

SELLER Harmony TMK	CONCEPT AND INTERIOR DESIGNER Beck and Robertson, "Bar Studio"	DESIGN CONSULTANT Nikken Sekkei Ltd	DESIGN & BUILD CONTRACTOR Fujita Corporation	EXPECTED COMPLETION DATE End of 2019
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SHOW SUITE
Park Hyatt Niseko Hanazono Residences
Located opposite Hanazono 308, Niseko Hanazono Resort
(By appointment only)

ENQUIRIES
Hong Kong +852-2878-8878
Japan +81-136-55-6228
www.hanazono-residences.com



PARK HYATT NISEKO™
HANAZONO RESIDENCES

SPECIAL FEATURE:
THE VALE
RUSUTSU
RELEASED



V
the vale rusutsu

01

A NEW HORIZON THE VALE RUSUTSU ON SALE NOW

With Southwest Hokkaido already globally recognised as one of the world's best snow destinations, the offering of world class resorts is about to take another giant leap forward. With the largest ski area of any resort in Hokkaido, Rusutsu is partnering with NISADE, Niseko's premiere hotel developer, to deliver The Vale Rusutsu – broadening the scope of Niseko to an entirely new horizon.

- 01 Panoramic view to Rusutsu's west mountain and The Vale Rusutsu site.
- 02 An already thriving summer resort



A DEEP NATURAL HISTORY

Rusutsu Resort is owned by Japanese company Kamori Kanko, Hokkaido's largest resort operator with the strongest history of resort and entertainment development on Japan's northern island since their establishment in 1956.

Kamori Kanko has a vast and impressive history of international ski resort ownership, at one stage being the largest ski resort owner in the US, owning both Lake Tahoe's Heavenly Mountain Resort and Colorado's Steamboat.

With more than 50 years doing business in Japan and over 25 years internationally in countries such as the US, France and Australia, today Kamori Kanko operates more than 30 companies worldwide. Still a family business, the company has kept nature close to its heart and strives to work with natural environments and local

cultures living together in harmony, and driven by an underlying determination to deliver the wonders of nature to the people of Japan and right across Asia.

LEADING THE WAY TO THE FUTURE

Rusutsu is the largest and most dynamic ski resort in Hokkaido and is excited to release its next stage of development. Created as a master-planned ski resort over 30 years ago, the focus has always been on a four seasons resort and, as such, boasts four golf courses, an amusement park and a water park. Through this folio of recreational diversity, they have built a solid and sustainable summer business.

As the snow starts to fall Rusutsu adds to this one of the most amazing ski experiences on offer. With wide-open ski runs, endless powder, grooming perfection and excellent on-mountain

facilities, Rusutsu is truly a skier's paradise. The articulate, long-term masterplan is moving into its next phase and includes upgrading existing facilities, increasing bed numbers and launching new international food and beverage outlets. At the centre of this is a new village plaza with beautiful interactive spaces housing commercial and retail outlets catering to clients seeking a true year-round nature experience.

Complementing this, Rusutsu Resort is one of three Hokkaido areas bidding for an Integrated Resort (Casino) license. Being the only privately owned, fully integrated resort in the bidding enhances the likelihood of adding yet another dimension to the resort, further elevating its truly unique position as a multi-faceted, year-round resort.



RUSUTSU, A PLACE OF DIFFERENCE

While many winter resorts still continue to strive for solid year-round trade, Rusutsu's summer operations and business are well-matured after years of experience, with some summer months stronger than winter months. Like the fabled resorts of Europe and North America that boast summer strength with a multitude of activities, Rusutsu has been able to deliver that, with more to come.

Many are yet to discover the amazing ski slopes of Rusutsu and currently, with even more uphill lift capacity than Whistler Blackcomb, lift lines will remain non-existent long into the future. With the planned expansion and new lift capacity, Rusutsu is capable of being a world beater. Comprising four mountains and almost endless expansion opportunities, Rusutsu is set to emerge as a world-class skiing destination in the already globally recognised Southwest Hokkaido region.

03 Rusutsu Amusement Park
04 Atmospheric common spaces
05 The Vale Rusutsu

THE VALE RUSUTSU

Teaming up with the multiple award-winning team at NISADE, a unique product was designed to bring a new premium luxury accommodation and vibrant village atmosphere into the heart of Rusutsu Resort. Coupling the success and strength of The Vale Niseko with a world-class ski resort, The Vale Rusutsu is now ready to launch.

Building on long-standing company values, the vision is to capture the essence of nature. Designing the hotel with its natural surrounding in mind, the architecture is fashioned to bring the morning sunlight of the east-facing mountain slopes into the interiors, matching this to the subtle hues of the setting sun as the resort drifts into twilight. With natural earth elements of sun, water and earth formulating the initial design criteria, The Vale Rusutsu brings alive the true meaning of "one with nature".

06 Rusutsu village
07 On piste - Grooming perfection
08 Off piste - Perfect powder snow

Nestled at the base of the West Mountain, on the upper fringes of the existing village, The Vale Rusutsu is a truly ski-in/ski-out property. The new hotel offers breathtaking views to both East and West Mountains and is linked directly to the main resort.

The Vale Rusutsu is a fully encompassing resort hotel with its own reception, ski storage and rental location built in conjunction with a new multi-million-dollar onsen complex. It is this natural immersion that underpins the functionality and flow of the site design in allowing immediate access to the wonders outside the door, and also to the internal spaces, bringing nature inside.

INVESTMENT & OWNERSHIP

As an entirely new option for investors seeking a lifestyle opportunity with a return in the natural wonder of Rusutsu, The Vale Rusutsu apartments will be keenly sought after. With The Vale Niseko a resounding success, this sister hotel presents a unique and enticing opportunity for investors looking to a new horizon.

Driven by investment fundamentals, a focus on floor area and bed count has ensured that owners will enjoy strong returns along with continued enjoyment from using their property. This is all backed with an owner-privilege package catering for lifestyle investors who plan to visit at any time of the year for its myriad of recreational options.

Apartments range from studios through to exquisitely finished and impressive four-bedroom penthouses. Pricing is designed to attract astute investors to gain entry level investment at this first stage of the master-planned resort. With future stages allocated to 6-star hotels, the capital gains growth profile offers strong potential.

Finance packages are available for purchasers making this an affordable investment into the growing market of Hokkaido resort properties. With experienced and professional management by NISADE, manager of the multiple-award-winning The Vale Niseko, this opportunity is backed by credibility and past success.



THE VALE RUSUTSU – at a glance

- World class & award winning resort
- Ski in / Ski out luxury property
- Studio – 4 bed Penthouse options
- Year round destination
- First apartment release of Rusutsu masterplan
- Entry level pricing with first to market opportunity
- Whole ownership
- Future capital growth
- NISADE managed
- Owner privileges
- Finance packages

NISEKO ALPINE DEVELOPMENTS [NISADE]

NISADE is Niseko's most innovative high-end property developer, providing luxury accommodation and premium Niseko Property sales. Nisade's success is based on creating a product to suit the individual, rather than a market. Challenging Niseko's existing market, Nisade prides itself on providing Asia's best luxury alpine experience.

For enquiries and more information, go to www.thevalerusutsu.com



AT ONE WITH NATURE

THE PAVILIONS NISEKO – GINTO RESIDENCES

LOCATION
GINTO HIRAFU

LUXURY RESORT RESIDENCES



Leading bespoke luxury hospitality brand, The Pavilions Hotels & Resorts, has unveiled The Ginto Residences in Niseko, as the company introduces an elite series of stunning hotel and residential projects in aspirational travel destinations across Asia and Europe.

The Ginto Residences broke ground and launched sales amidst the striking autumn colours of 2017, and will create a whole new

high end residential resort quarter minutes from Niseko's premier resort, Grand Hirafu – introducing Ginto Hirafu.

The Pavilions Niseko is being developed right next to The Ginto Residences and is scheduled to open in 2019. The luxury boutique hotel will feature 42 suites and will offer a spa, indoor/outdoor onsen, gym, yoga studio, and a fine dining restaurant. Owners of the residences will enjoy privileged access to all the hotel's luxurious facilities, and will be well placed to take advantage of the amenities available at Ginto Village, the destination's boutique shopping and entertainment centre.

The Pavilions Niseko will promote Hokkaido's all seasons resort offerings while offering Owners acclaimed hospitality experience, known for its inclusive approach to art, culture, romance and adventure, enhanced by privacy, luxury and mindful service. With 50% of the plots sold, The Pavilions Niseko will debut *Land + Villa* packages this season. Contact to arrange an inspection of Ginto Hirafu.

GINTO RESIDENT PRIVILEGES

- Manicured hiking trails
- National forest
- Complimentary shuttle service to & from ski lifts
- Indoor / Outdoor Public Onsen
- Fitness Centre & Yoga Room
- Exclusive signature spa treatment & services
- Fine dining at signature hotel bar & restaurant
- Ski Valet & Lounge
- 24-hour concierge

- 01 The Pavilions Niseko Hotel
- 02 The Ginto Residences living and dining areas
- 03 The Ginto Residences bedroom

Through the love for romance, adventure, culture and the arts, The Pavilions Hotels and Resorts live to create beautiful memories for their guests, with luxurious all-villa resorts at The Pavilions Phuket, The Pavilions Bali and The Pavilions Himalayas, as well as stunning boutique hotels in Amsterdam, Rome, Madrid (2018) and Lisbon (2019).



SALES OFFICE (HONG KONG)
The Pavilions Hotels & Resorts
Corporate Office Room 1601, Floor 16, Wilson House,
19-27 Wyndham Street, Central, Hong Kong

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+852-6285-9283
residences@pavilionshotels.com

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HONG KONG & NISEKO

DESIGNER BUILDS

FOXWOOD NISEKO

LOCATION
HIGASHIYAMA

LUXURY HOMES WITHIN A
MASTER PLANNED ESTATE



In signature style, Hokkaido Tracks Resort Properties is breaking trail at Higashiyama with the first masterplanned house and land development in this rapidly rising area. Just two minutes from the lifts of Niseko Village and nestled between Hirafu and Annupuri, Foxwood is an enclave for families seeking the tranquillity of a beautiful home, outside of the buzz of the main Niseko centres.

Having developed Niseko's first modern property in Hirafu in 2003 and pioneering the development of the resort towards the one we know today, Hokkaido Tracks Resort Properties is again at the forefront of meeting the demands of an increasingly savvy and articulate market.

After 14 years of specialised expertise in Niseko they have an innate understanding of design, construction and an inside know-how of how to deliver a beautiful product that is built perfectly to enjoy Niseko's wonderful winters and sublime summers.

With foundations set in Sudo Construction's century of building experience, fused with the brilliant architectural minds of SAAD, Hokkaido Tracks Resort Properties have already completed the first display home – open and ready for inspection. Individually designed house and land packages include 3 or 4-bedroom homes as well as 5-bedroom, 2-key options.



"As development continues to pile into Hirafu, we recognised the growing demand for tranquillity but with the ease of modern comfort and amenity. Listening to what our clients wanted, we're proud to unveil Foxwood – strikingly modern, distinctively Japanese and designed for families."

- SIMON ROBINSON



- 01 Foxwood exterior
- 02 Hokkaido red fox
- 03 Masterplan
- 04 Aerial view
- 05 Simon Robinson, President, Hokkaido Tracks Resort Properties

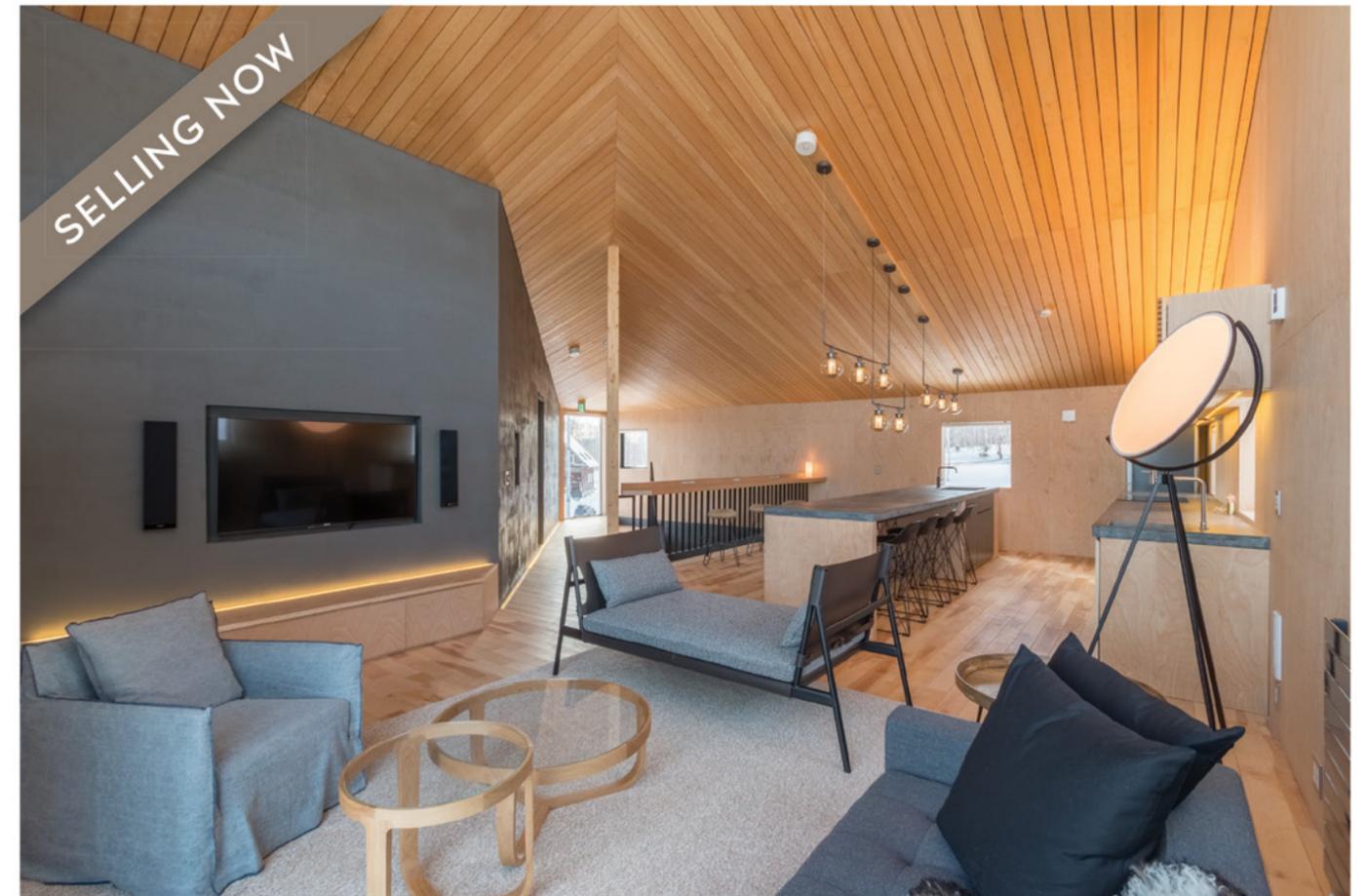
DEVELOPER ENQUIRIES WEB

Hokkaido Tracks Resort Properties
+81-(0)-136-21-6960
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www.foxwoodniseko.com



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ULTIMATE LUXURY

HAKUCHŌZAN

LOCATION
MIDDLE HIRAFU

FULL-HOSPITALITY LUXURY VILLA



Hakuchōzan delivers the most exquisitely designed chalet experience in the world. Located in Niseko, Japan and nestled in the heart of Hirafu Village, this masterpiece combines fine architecture, modern functionality, and personalized service.

The four-storey, lift-serviced chalet sets a truly original agenda for luxury accommodation in Niseko. While the building is spectacular, what really sets it apart is the service.

All guests of Hakuchōzan will receive a holiday experience that rivals the most famous luxury properties in Courchevel, Zermatt, Aspen, and Whistler. With a fully dedicated staff of butlers, chauffeurs, and a private chef, there is nothing else like it in Niseko.

To inquire about how to experience HakuLife @ Hakuchōzan or how to bring HakuLife services to your property, please contact our Chalet Manager, Yuuki Tonai at +81-90-6261-0015, yuuki@hakuchozan.com. www.hakuchozan.com

HAKUCHŌZAN HIGHLIGHTS:

- Nominated for World's Best New Ski Chalet 2016 and Japan's Best New Ski Chalet 2017
- In-chalet ski and snowboard fittings
- 10-seater and 7-seat passenger vans
- Nearly 500 sqm of living space
- 7 generously-sized en-suite bedrooms
- Outdoor jacuzzi deck with fire pit
- Man cave bar with shuffleboard table
- Mahjong table and professional karaoke system

STANDARD AMENITIES AND SERVICES INCLUDE:

- In-chalet breakfast, canapes and dinner
- Complimentary beer and soft drinks
- 4 bottles of house spirits
- Airport transfers
- Daily maid service
- On-demand towel and linen changes
- Complimentary local cellphone for each room
- Chalet manager, butlers, chauffeurs and chef on property

A CONVERSATION WITH KEITH RODGERS OF TAIGA

FOUNDER AND CEO, TAIGA

What is a cornerstone of your designs?
Recognizing that guests and owners are coming from so far away to enjoy Niseko, we at Taiga strive to create a sense of arrival, of touching down in a unique space that reflects this alpine, Japanese milieu.

What is the next step?
Stylistically, for years I have been wanting to bring alpine chalet styling into the context of a larger building. Successful examples of this are few and far between, which makes the challenge even more interesting.

What's different about working with HakuDevelopment?

Working with HakuDevelopment on Hakuchōzan, we saw how the fanatical focus on delivering elite service and memorable guest experiences can produce truly special design and spaces. We are extending this distinct combination of style and service that started with Hakuchōzan to create four mountain retreats within the seven-story HakuVillas.



HAKUVILLAS

Opening in 2019, HakuVillas will set a new standard of luxury in Niseko. Located just steps away from the Grand Hirafu Gondola in Upper Hirafu, HakuVillas was conceived with the guest experience as the central guiding influence over every design decision. Consisting of only 4 luxury villas, this 7-story masterpiece fully integrates Mt. Yōtei into its design from volcanic stone and rich natural woods to the breathtaking vistas, and has been conceived of from ground up to be fully compatible with HakuLife service.

Encompassing an entire floor, each villa gives the owner and guests utmost privacy and space. The limited number of villas also means the lobby, private dining room, gym, and other building amenities are more intimate. Even the dry rooms for each villa are totally private.

Each villa has its own rotenburo, an outside natural onsen hot spring located on a covered terrace, with expansive views to Mt. Yōtei.

The Taiga collaboration combines distinctive Japanese alpine design with unprecedented spaciousness and lavish comforts. These exceedingly private villas provide intimately personal and restive retreats for owners and guests.

Each villa will be staffed with a dedicated butler/chauffeur and chef to complement the most generously planned luxury development in Niseko today.



LUXURY VILLA FEATURES

- Full-floor luxury villas, each with over 300 sqm of living space and its *own natural onsen*
- 4 en suite bedrooms, plus en suite nanny / maid room
- Massage room
- Family / game room
- Separate living and dining spaces with unobstructed view of Mount Yōtei
- Wet bar
- Gym and state-of-the-art golf simulator included in building amenities
- Ground-floor private ski storage and private dry room
- Ample owner's storage
- Just 200 meters from the Grand Hirafu Gondola
- HakuLife services including 10-seater luxury Grand Cabin van



If you are interested in learning more about HakuVillas, please contact Keith Rodgers at keith@taigaprojects.com / +81-80-3233-0262.

ABOUT

Taiga offers a comprehensive service in real estate sales, project management, development, design, and accommodation.

ENQUIRIES

Taiga Real Estate
keith@taigaprojects.com

WEB

www.taigaprojects.com



DIVINE LIVING

THE KAMUI NISEKO

LOCATION
ANNUPURI

APARTMENTS FOR SALE

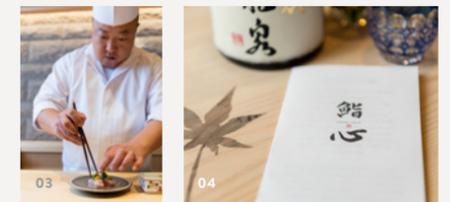


01

The Kamui Niseko offers buyers an opportunity to secure a spacious, luxury condominium by a Japanese developer in the sought-after resort of Annupuri. This prestigious low-rise development of seven luxurious condominium apartments and penthouses is set off the main road to the Annupuri Gondola and lifts. The architectural design is strongly influenced by the surrounding environment. By using the same colours for the materials as the snow and trees, the building blends with the unique tranquillity of the Annupuri area.

The Kamui Niseko has only seven units, ensuring each unit enjoys ample space and privacy. Interiors create a comfortable yet luxurious space that blends with the majestic scenery of Annupuri. Each unit boasts floor-to-ceiling windows, individual ski storage and high-end furniture by Alfrex and Molteni & C. The 240sqm penthouse features a gourmet island kitchen with Miele appliances leading to an open living room with EcoSmart fireplace.

01 Front entrance
02 Interior
03-04 Sushi Shin



SUSHI SHIN

On the ground floor of the building is one of Niseko's most exciting new restaurants – Sushi Shin. The traditional Tokyo-style restaurant features the same exquisite menu served at Master Chef Masaaki Miyakawa's Michelin 3-star restaurant in Sapporo, Sushi Miyakawa.

Guests may enjoy observing and interacting with our master chefs across a splendid hinoki (Japanese cypress) wood counter, as they construct each dish from Niseko's finest produce and the world's choicest seafood ingredients sourced daily from Hokkaido and Tokyo's famed Tsukiji market.

FACT SHEET THE KAMUI NISEKO PROPERTY FEATURES

- Studio, 1, 2, 3, 4 Bedroom Apartments
- Dual key options
- Reception area, concierge
- Full-height glazed windows
- Ducted air-conditioning
- Individual ski storage
- 1-min drive to lifts
- Premier sushi restaurant



02

DEVELOPER

B-lot Co.,Ltd (Tokyo)

ARCHITECT

Matsunaga Architect Firm

DESIGN

M&M Design Company

PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

Ski Japan

ENQUIRIES

info@kamui-niseko.com
www.kamui-niseko.com



the kamui niseko



the kamui niseko



life with majestic beauty of Annupuri
1BR+Studio, 3BR & 4BR are on sale now.

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with



Sushi Shin is Master Chef Masaki Miyakawa's first branch restaurant, featuring the same exquisite menu served at his renowned "Sushi Miyakawa" in Sapporo.

NISEKO REALTY
A PASSION FOR PLACE
 REAL ESTATE AND
 THE NISEKO LIFESTYLE



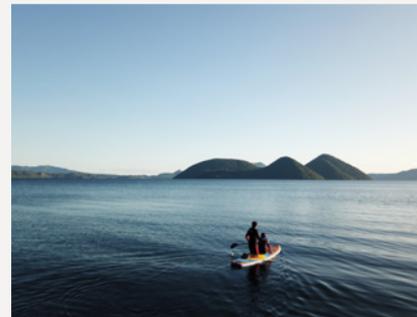
CRAIG MEIKLE & BRIAN LYSNE / PHOTO AARON JAMIESON

If a week book-ended by a cycle around Mt Yotei and day on the water at Lake Toya sounds ideal, then you share the same lifestyle values that first brought Niseko Realty founder Craig Meikle to Niseko in 1995. It's this lifestyle that keeps him and his family here to this day, and these days he's happiest sharing the same passion he feels for Niseko with his clients, many of whom he now calls friends.

Life in Niseko is pretty simple – it's about making the most of the pristine nature that surrounds us and not missing a chance to take advantage of a good weather day to get outdoors and make the most of it.

Craig and partner Brian Lysne share a combined passion – a passion for place. Genuine integrity and professionalism underpin Niseko Realty's company philosophy and is the perfect blend when it comes to working in the real estate market here. If you can't reach them on their mobiles on the weekend, there's a good chance it's a genuine passion for snowboarding, golf, cycling, hiking or other lifestyle pursuits that are temporarily consuming their attentions.

Another key member that makes up the Niseko Realty team is Brian's wife Takako, who is the agency's licenced real estate notary. Both have been working in real estate here since 2005, and collectively the team's portfolio of experience is wider and deeper than Niseko's longest operating agencies. For them, selling is easy because when you're selling something you believe in, the rest takes care of itself. It's this belief that has brought them success and a foundation of clients and friends that regularly return for a cycle or a spin around the lake on the boat.



Niseko Realty specialises in representing buyers with a wide selection of high-end homes, condominiums and land. Whether you're looking for your dream home, first home, rental income property or something to allow you to enjoy what Niseko has to offer with your family, Craig, Brian and the team can help.



If you're searching for your own piece of this four-seasons wonderland, speak to the guys who understand it better than anyone else – people who live the lifestyle everyday. Well, they do actually go to the office sometimes!

Call them old fashioned, but Craig and Brian prefer a handshake and face-to-face conversation. Pop into their office in the heart of Hirafu – down the street between Rhythm and Boot Solutions, just above the traffic lights.

ABOUT

Niseko Realty is a boutique real estate agency that focuses on the sale of premium property throughout the Niseko region.

ENQUIRIES

Niseko Realty
craig@nisekorealty.com

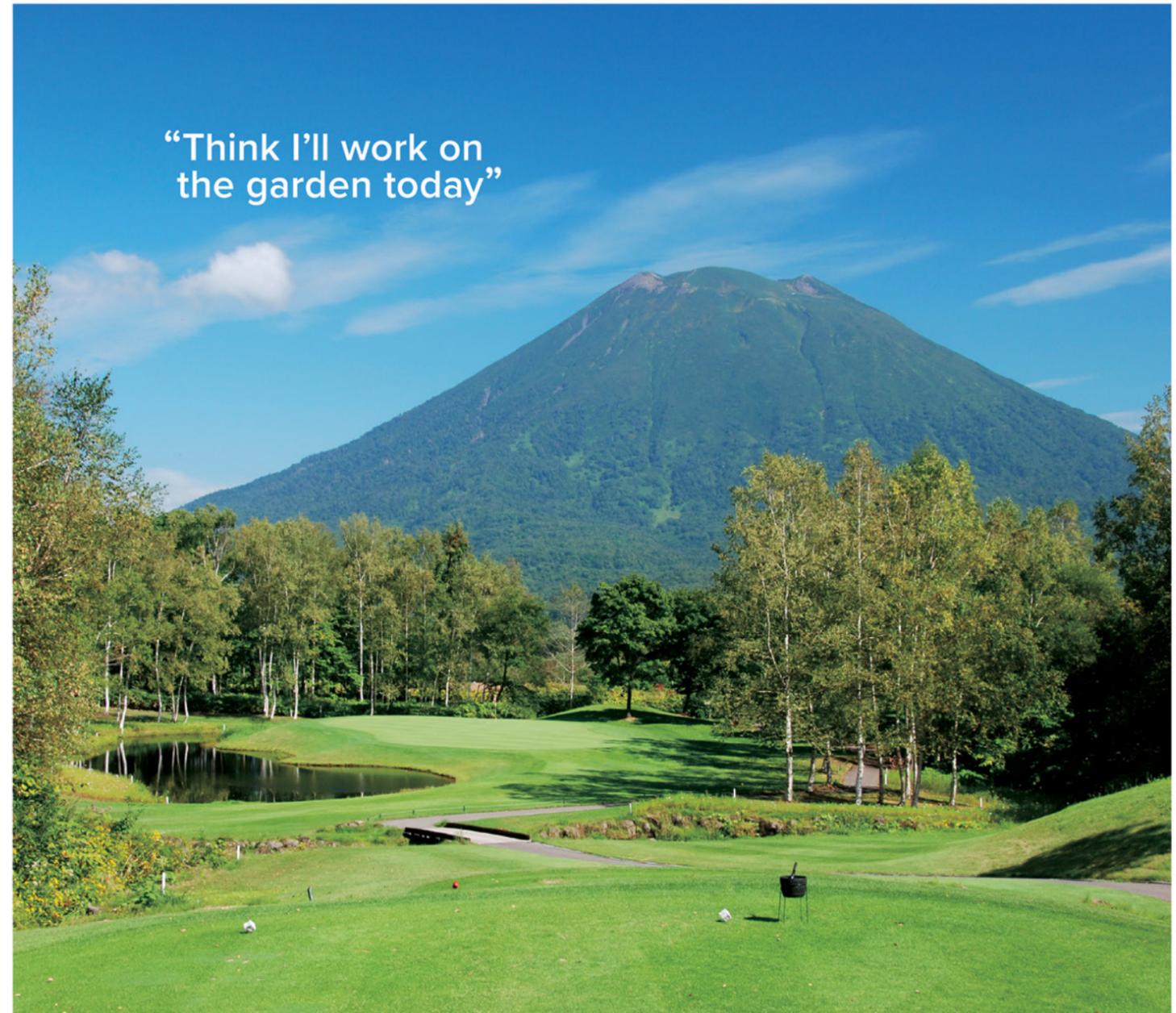
WEB

www.nisekorealty.com



SKYE
 NISEKO
 EXCLUSIVE AGENT

www.nisekorealty.com



“Think I’ll work on the garden today”

Skiing, snowboarding, fishing, cycling, rafting, paragliding, supping, golf, hiking, or just relaxing. Life in Niseko is full of tough decisions. Choosing a real estate agent shouldn't be one them.

Start your move off right with Niseko Realty.

Visit our sales office located off Hirafu-zaka at 190-31 Aza Yamada (behind Rhythm)
 Email sales@nisekorealty.com Web www.nisekorealty.com Phone +81 (0) 1365 5877



**NISEKO
 REALTY**





01



02



03

GRANT MITCHELL / PHOTO AARON JAMIESON

NISEKO PROPERTY
THE REAL ESTATE
POWERHOUSE
 ACROSS NISEKO

From the moment you shake hands with Grant Mitchell until he passes you the keys, the team at Niseko Property will be with you every step of the way.

01 The Haven Penthouse (Photo: Ski Japan)
 02 360 Degree Views House
 03 Grant Mitchell

Long before Niseko gained world attention as a skiing destination, Grant Mitchell was taking professional Japanese skiers and snowboarders to his native New Zealand to train in their off-season. These days he's doing the opposite – introducing skiing and snowboarding investors from all over the world to Niseko.

Niseko Property was one of the first foreign real estate companies in Niseko. With the widest range of listings, two convenient office locations in central Hirafu and one in Kutchan, Niseko Property's mantra is to offer a complete service from start to finish. They have a passion for finding buyers the perfect piece of land and helping uncover sites where people can build their dream home or larger scale development.

Niseko Property staff speak English, Japanese, Cantonese and Mandarin with a dedication to walking you through the entire process from finding the perfect site to finishing your dream home. With a wide-ranging understanding of Niseko and Japan and a team of six full-time sales staff with their finger on the pulse, Niseko Property is available all through winter to meet and discuss your requirements.

2018 PROPERTY TIPS

- **WHAT'S HOT?**
 Sales in Hirafu and outskirts continue to make up the bulk of real estate sales.
- **THE NEXT BIG THING?**
 Outlying areas such as Annupuri and Hanazono are showing increasing levels of interest due to developments underway, with corresponding price increases. These areas still represent great value and buyers should move fast before prices reach Hirafu levels.
- **WHERE'S THE BEST VALUE?**
 Per square metre, land outside Hirafu is much lower in price and comparative bargains are still available. However, due to the large amount of agriculture-zoned land, top plots are relatively rare and buyers should quickly seize the opportunity to secure these when they arise. Areas to look out for are Soga and across the river near Niseko Town.



360 Degree Views House | 100,000,000 JPY | Annupuri / Higashiyama | 3 beds, 1 bath | Floor Area 272.83 sqm | Land 7,616 sqm (approx. 2,303 tsubo)

– OWN THE DREAM –



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ABOUT
 Niseko Property was founded in August 2006 with the aim of providing Niseko with a professional property agency.

ENQUIRIES
 Niseko Property
 sales@nisekoproperty.com

WEB
www.nisekoproperty.com



A TRUE WINTER WONDERLAND

KIRORO RESORT

LOCATION
AKAIGAWA

RESORT DEVELOPMENT



- 01 Lots of powder for everyone
- 02 The Kiroro, A Tribute Portfolio Hotel
- 03 Villa design by Property Perfect
- 04 Ground Kiroro

In the late eighties, the Yamaha Corporation had a vision to create the best ski resort in Japan. Akaigawa Village is located south of the famous port city of Otaru and an hour's drive northeast of Niseko. The original plan included 2000 beds, villas and twice the number of lifts that now exist, sprawling across the valley in which Kiroro is located.

With close proximity to Otaru, just over an hour to Sapporo, and less than two hours to New Chitose Airport in winter, Kiroro has a distinct advantage over other Hokkaido resorts for international travellers. Furthermore, Kiroro boasts more snow than other resorts in Hokkaido, with the lighter powder and unique weather system that pulls the snow from the nearby ocean.

As well as winter, summer in Kiroro is beautiful, with a new mountain bike project in development as well as hiking trails, camp sites, festival venues and unique outdoor activities. Its central location means it's also the perfect summer destination to explore Hokkaido.

Kiroro was acquired in 2012 by Property Perfect PLC, among the top developers on the Thailand stock exchange. Property Perfect's main areas of business are residential real estate, including housing and condominiums as well as hospitality and retail. Kiroro is the first full scale project to be developed in Japan by a Thai real estate developer.

Building on their experience in Japan, Property Perfect have recently announced a joint-venture with Sumitomo Forestry (Singapore) for a future development in the heart of Bangkok, totalling 400 units and 38,000sqm. The Company also hopes to embark on more projects with Sumitomo Forestry in the near future.

The original masterplan for Kiroro produced by Yamaha was revisited by renowned resort planners Mountain Works, responsible for resorts such as Beaver Creek, Are in Sweden and Vail, Colorado. The new masterplan aims to elevate Kiroro to one of the best alpine destinations in Asia.

Kiroro has already partnered with Starwood Hotels to add the Sheraton to the mountain area, providing ski in/ski out access to the incredibly well-designed base area. Furthermore, the Tribute Portfolio brand has taken over the former Piano Hotel and is now The Kiroro.

In addition, Kiroro has partnered with more than 40 resorts worldwide, offering incredible deals to season pass holders at overseas destinations and offering fantastic deals for visiting season pass holders. In 2018, the resort is due to launch its new condominium development and new lift connecting the base area and The Kiroro Hotel and Kiroro Two, and expansive area with activities, swimming pool, retail, restaurants and onsen. With truly international developers at the helm, Kiroro is at the start of a new adventure and 2018 represents the start of a new era for the sleeping giant.

ABOUT
Kiroro Ski Resort is one of the world's snowiest ski resorts, boasting nine lifts, 21 ski runs and two luxury hotels.

ENQUIRIES
info@kiroro.co.jp

WEB
www.kiroro.co.jp



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THE KIRORO
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NISEKO



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UPPER HIRAFU



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NISEKO TOWN



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HIRAFU IZUMIKYO 2



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WONDER DEVICE



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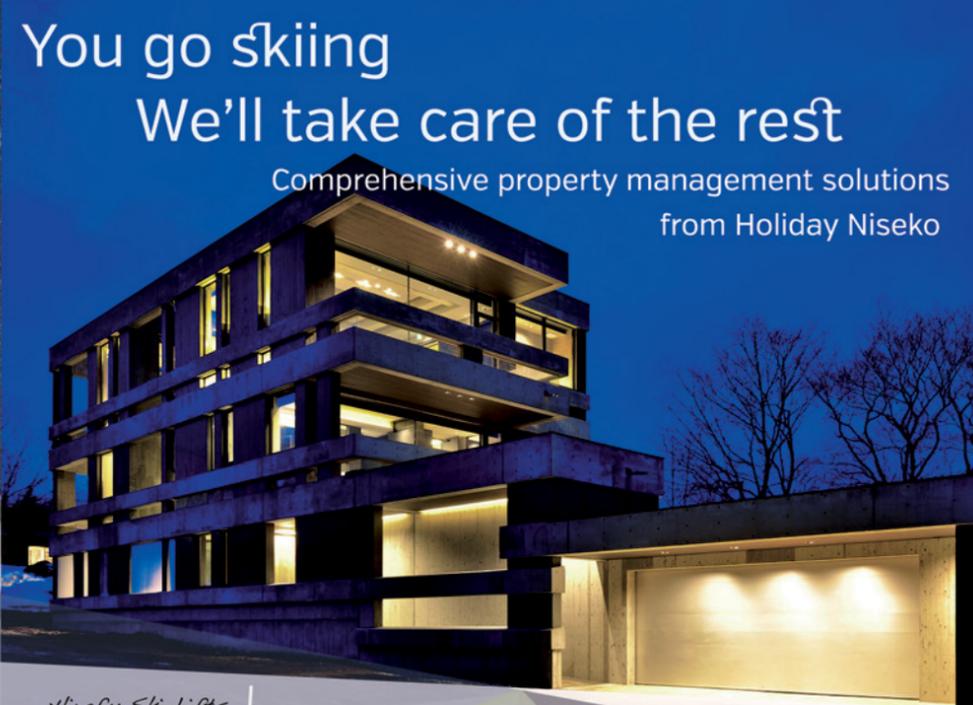


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Property Management





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VILLAGE**

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GOURMET GUIDE

ISSUE .01

niseko | winter 2018



FREE
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GUIDE




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LATEST GOURMET NEWS

FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to the first edition of Powderlife Gourmet Guide. There are a handful of key reasons we think Niseko is so popular. At the top is snow, and very closely following is FOOD. The delicate balance of Japanese cuisine and the mastery of umami flavouring are one thing; the dedication to perfection in hospitality carried out in so many different interpretations by the eclectic mix of Niseko chefs is another.

There are several restaurant guides in Niseko, from the official Niseko restaurant bible the Wine & Dine Guide, published by the local tourism authority the Niseko Promotion Board, to In Niseko put together by long-time local food and beverage business owner and advocate Cezar Constantin, as a smaller alternative guide to the local dining scene.

We put this guide together primarily to add another medium for restaurants to get their message out. It's just eight pages this year, but we'll build it in coming years and hope to keep bringing as much of the best local restaurant information to visitors (and locals) as possible. We hope you find some useful information in here and get out to support our hard-working restaurateurs!

– KRISTIAN LUND



REBOOTING ROBATAYAKI

A centuries-old Hokkaido fishermen's cooking style is being revived in Niseko this year. Hana Robatayaki is a new restaurant in the main street of the nearby town of Kutchan that is sure to be a hit with visitors looking for a taste of local culture and a lively night out. Robatayaki – literally translated as fireside cooking – is a style of cuisine that originated in Hokkaido fishing villages. Fishermen would cook their catch over a red-hot barbecue on the shore, while their wives would bring

vegetables from the farm to fill out the meal. Hana Robatayaki will take the form of a traditional robatayaki restaurant, with a horseshoe-shaped counter surrounding the grill. Two lively grillers will take orders and hand diners their dishes on long oars, as is the custom in robatayaki restaurants.

HANA ROBATAYAKI is located in Kutchan, Ekimaedori (beside Hokuyo Bank)
 Opening 15 December 2017



UWAMUKI ROLLS INTO STATION PRECINCT

There are dozens of super-cool, grass-roots izakaya (Japanese tapas) restaurants run by long-time local skiers, snowboarders and surfers dotted across Niseko. As of this year, we have another to add to the mix: Uwamuki. Cool name, even cooler vibe. Run by long-time locals who love the slow life and good times of the Niseko seasons, Uwamuki offers plenty of traditional izakaya style favourites, with some creative modern twists – the apricot bacon rolls are a standout!

Uwamuki is in the until-now little-known Niseko Station precinct, which is fast becoming a hot new dining and entertainment area with Farmer's Kitchen PonPon, Niseko Brewing's Taphouse restaurant and several other great izakaya close by. Jump in a cab and check it out!

UWAMUKI I is located at Niseko Tyuoudouri 142-5 (Adjacent Niseko JR Station)
[Facebook @Uwamuki](#)

*2017 statistics on booking.com

SOMOZA GALLERY & SEKKA LAB

CHEF'S TABLE + EVENT SPACE

LOCATION
HANAZONO (SOMOZA)
KUTCHAN (SEKKA-LAB)

MODERN JAPANESE



SOMOZA GALLERY

EVENT SPACE & CHEF'S TABLE, HANAZONO

A one-of-a-kind new venue in Niseko this winter offers more than an ordinary dining experience. Somoza is a 150-year-old Japanese farmhouse perched on a cliff above a babbling stream deep in the mountainside beyond the Hanazono ski resort. Created by long-time local artist and creator Shouya Grigg, Somoza takes guests on a journey of the mind and senses.

Upon arriving at the entrance of the property, guests' senses will go to work as the sound of a distant mountain stream blends with the aroma of firewood and the scent of dried 'toba' salmon from the onsite smokehouse. Flames flickering from a giant steel bowl fire pit lead to a pathway cleared through the snow, with candles set into the metres-high snow walls. The sound of the stream filters up from the valley below and by the time guests cross the bridge into the building itself, they might realise the evening's experience is already well and truly underway.

Before dinner, guests may browse the various gallery niches, ceramics space and upstairs tea-room. There is also an open gallery space

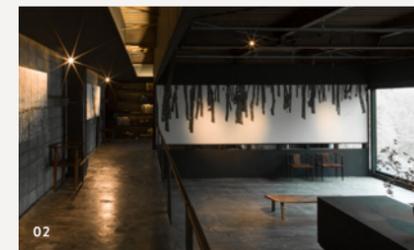
downstairs where special events and pre-dinner gatherings can be held. Local Chef Ryo Horie's Italian course meal is finally served at the huge, circular 12-person centrepiece dining table. The entire venue can be booked for any number up to 24 people (or 32 for lunch), offering the kind of experience that a group of family or friends will be talking about for seasons to come. With only a limited number of evenings available, this is the most exclusive experience on offer in Niseko this winter.

SOMOZA is available for bookings. Japanese tea ceremony + lunch box - booking required. Min. of 2 guests. ¥5,000 per person
Chef's Table - 3 days min. advanced booking required. ¥20,000 per person

RESTAURANT	ADDRESS	BUSINESS HOURS	RESERVATIONS
Somoza Gallery	78-5 Hanazono, Kutchan	Lunch 12:00 - 16:00 Dinner 18:00 - 22:00 (Dinner by reservation; Closed Sun and Mon)	info@somoza.jp



- 01 Somoza Chef's Table
- 02 Downstairs gallery/function space
- 03 Green tea preparation
- 04 Somoza dining
- 05 Renovated warehouse void
- 06 Fusion dining at SEKKA lab
- 07 SEKKA lab restaurant



DINING AT SOMOZA

Lunch
Course menu
Reservation recommended

Chef's Table Dinner
Italian-style set course menu
¥20,000 per guest + drinks

3 days min. advance reservation required
Could be booked for private group, for further information please contact Somoza
Dinner includes complementary pick up and drop-off - Kutchan, Hanazono and Hirafu only (subject to availability)

RESTAURANT	ADDRESS	BUSINESS HOURS	RESERVATIONS
SEKKA lab	Minami 1 Jo 2 Chome 15-2, Kutchan	Dinner 17:30-23:00 (LO 21:30) (Closed on Sundays)	www.sekka-lab.com (online bookings only) 0136-23-1139 (after 16:00 for the same-day booking)

SEKKA LAB

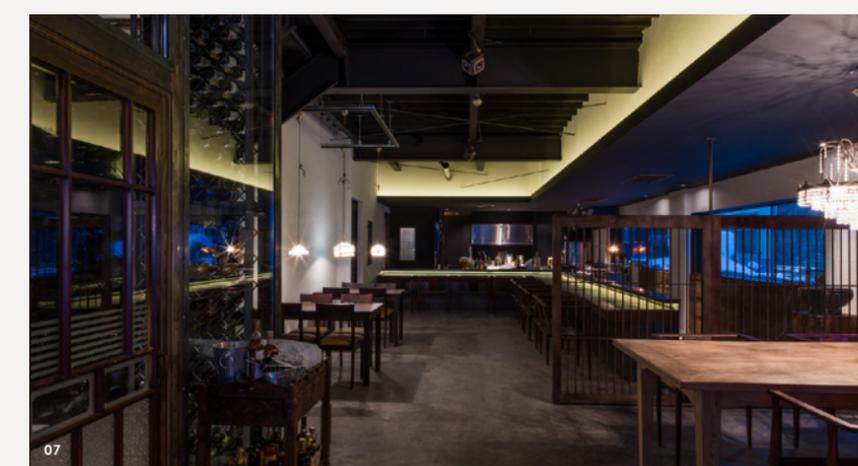
RESTAURANT & GALLERY, KUTCHAN

SEKKA lab restaurant and lounge has been designed and created using a combination of antiques and found objects that give a rustic yet modern earthy feel.

Newly opened last winter, SEKKA lab brings a fresh new concept of dining, art and chilling out to the otherwise rudimentary main street of Niseko's "CBD", Kutchan. Working with local craftsmen, Shouya totally transformed a disused old warehouse near the train station into a unique dining and cultural location. Diners can enjoy viewing the artistry of the chef and staff of experts working in their open kitchen from

the wrap-around bar counter seating in front of the kitchen area. Before or after the meal, guests can relax around the fire in the SEKKA lab lounge bar, newly opened this winter. Intimately seating about 20 guests, the bar offers an excellent selection of wine and local whisky, as well as a range of local produce smoked in the Somoza smokehouse, the speciality being cured and smoked Hokkaido "toba" salmon.

Bookings required for holiday/groups and for the Chef's Selection "Omakase" Course. ¥5,000 per person. Average meal prices range from ¥4,000 - ¥20,000 per person.



RESTAURANT	ADDRESS	BUSINESS HOURS	RESERVATIONS
SEKKA lab	Minami 1 Jo 2 Chome 15-2, Kutchan	Dinner 17:30-23:00 (LO 21:30) (Closed on Sundays)	www.sekka-lab.com (online bookings only) 0136-23-1139 (after 16:00 for the same-day booking)



CHALET IVY DINING

SNOW CASTLE & HIRAFUZAKA

LOCATION
UPPER HIRAFU

MODERN JAPANESE INSPIRATIONS



Inspire the senses & discover the seasonal splendour of Hokkaido, known throughout Asia for its delectable produce, in the comfort of Chalet Ivy in the centre of Hirafu. Chalet Ivy is a cosy boutique hotel situated in the heart of Hirafu with the backdrop of the astonishing Mount Yotei. Our restaurants are open for both in-house guests and those staying elsewhere.

SNOW CASTLE

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- 01 Snow Castle selections
- 02 Hotpot at HirafuZaka
- 03 Dining room at Snow Castle
- 04 HirafuZaka



HIRAFUZAKA

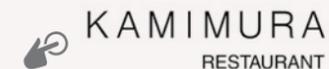
Grab a bite to eat at HirafuZaka, our very own izakaya restaurant on the second floor of the hotel. Offering enticing Japanese casual dining that is high in quality, the restaurant is open for lunch and dinner to staying guests as well as visitors looking for casual Japanese dining with a satisfying menu variety. Popular for lunch are ramen noodles and katsudon pork cutlet over rice, and hot pot for dinner. The spacious and modern dining hall with a beautiful Hirafu slope view offers a relaxed dining experience for guests to Niseko.



SNOW CASTLE WINTER PROMOTION

Omakase (Chef's selection)
Special winter menu
Go to www.chaletivy.com to find out more!

RESTAURANT	BUSINESS HOURS	ADDRESS	RESERVATIONS
Snow Castle HirafuZaka	18:00 – 22:30 (Closed Wed) 12:00 – 21:30	188-19 Yamada, Kutchan, 044-0081 Hokkaido	0136-22-1123 reservations@chaletivy.com www.chaletivy.com (online booking)



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Shiki Niseko, 1F . Hirafu Village, Niseko, Hokkaido



NEWS FLASH "Wakatake Sushi" one of Maruyama in Sapporo's best sushi restaurants will be moving to Hirafu in Niseko and opening in December 2017.

Odin Place 3F, 190-13 Aza-Yamada, Kutchan-cho, Abuta-gun, Hokkaido
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for more information, visit our website <http://greensaso.com>



MOMIJI NABE & SAKE

SHABU-SHABU HOTPOT AND JAPANESE CUISINE

LOCATION
MIDDLE HIRAFU

AUTHENTIC JAPANESE AND LIVELY RESTAURANT AND BAR



The best restaurants are the ones where the locals eat. And one of the most exciting new restaurants in Niseko this season is Momiji Nabe & Sake. Headed by a team of fun-loving and friendly Hirafu Japanese and international chefs, there is sure to be plenty of action behind the bar and from the Teppanyaki grill. Pop in for a drink, stay for an incredible Japanese meal and make new friends along the way.

Shabu-shabu is one of the best social and cultural Japanese meals there is, especially after a cold day on the hill. Shabu-shabu gets its name from the supposed sound of thin slices of prime-grade beef being swished in a boiling hotpot (nabe) until they're lightly broiled. You dip these in a selection of light Japanese sauces and eat along with the vegetables boiling in the pot.

Located in the very heart of Hirafu (diagonally opposite Seicomart) at the top of Momiji Zaka Street, Momiji Nabe & Sake specialises in hotpots, but also offers a wide range of Japanese favourites to kick off your meal or to top it off – think edamame, sashimi, tempura, gyoza, Japanese fried chicken, huge Akkeshi oysters, taraba king crab and teppan menu. Their other speciality is wagyu steak from nearby Shiraoi, one of Hokkaido's prime wagyu producers, which is expertly cooked in various ways such as shabu-shabu and on a teppan. Culinary directors Ikari-san, Tobi-san and James-san love their sake and can recommend the perfect drink to accompany your chosen selection.

- 01 Fresh local sushi
- 02 Sake selection
- 03 Wagyu beef and vegetable Shabu-shabu
- 04 Izakaya menu



MOMIJI NABE & SAKE PROMOTIONS

Omakase (Chef's Selection)
 Sake pairing and recommendation menu
 Wagyu selection menu
 Go to www.mgroupniseko.com/niseko-restaurants/momiji-nabe to find out more!



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RESTAURANT	BUSINESS HOURS	ADDRESS	RESERVATIONS
Momiji Nabe & Sake	15:00 - 17:30 Après Ski 17:45 - Last Order Dinner	170-136 Yamada, Hirafu	0136-55-5989


 THE M GROUP NISEKO



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Open 7 Days

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0136 23 1432

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Dinner 5pm - 11pm (Food LO 10pm)
Open 7 days

cotobar.com
0136 25 4438

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UPPER HIRAFU VILLAGE



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Lunch 11am - 3pm (Last order 2.30pm)
Dinner 6pm - 1am (Last order 10.30pm)
Open 7 days

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0136 23 0700

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(Last order 10.30pm)
Open 7 days

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POWDERLIFE NISEKO UNITED TRAIL MAP

Please enjoy our easy-to-read course map to review your day or plan your next assault on the mountain. Niseko United is the name given to the four independently owned resorts on different faces of Mt Annapuri. The Niseko United Shuttle fleet connects the resort bases, and intermediate and advanced riders can ski or board between resorts from the upper lifts, weather permitting.

This map is to be used as a guide only and we take no responsibility for any incident occurring as a result of its use. Please refer to the official Niseko United Trail Map for full official mountain details.

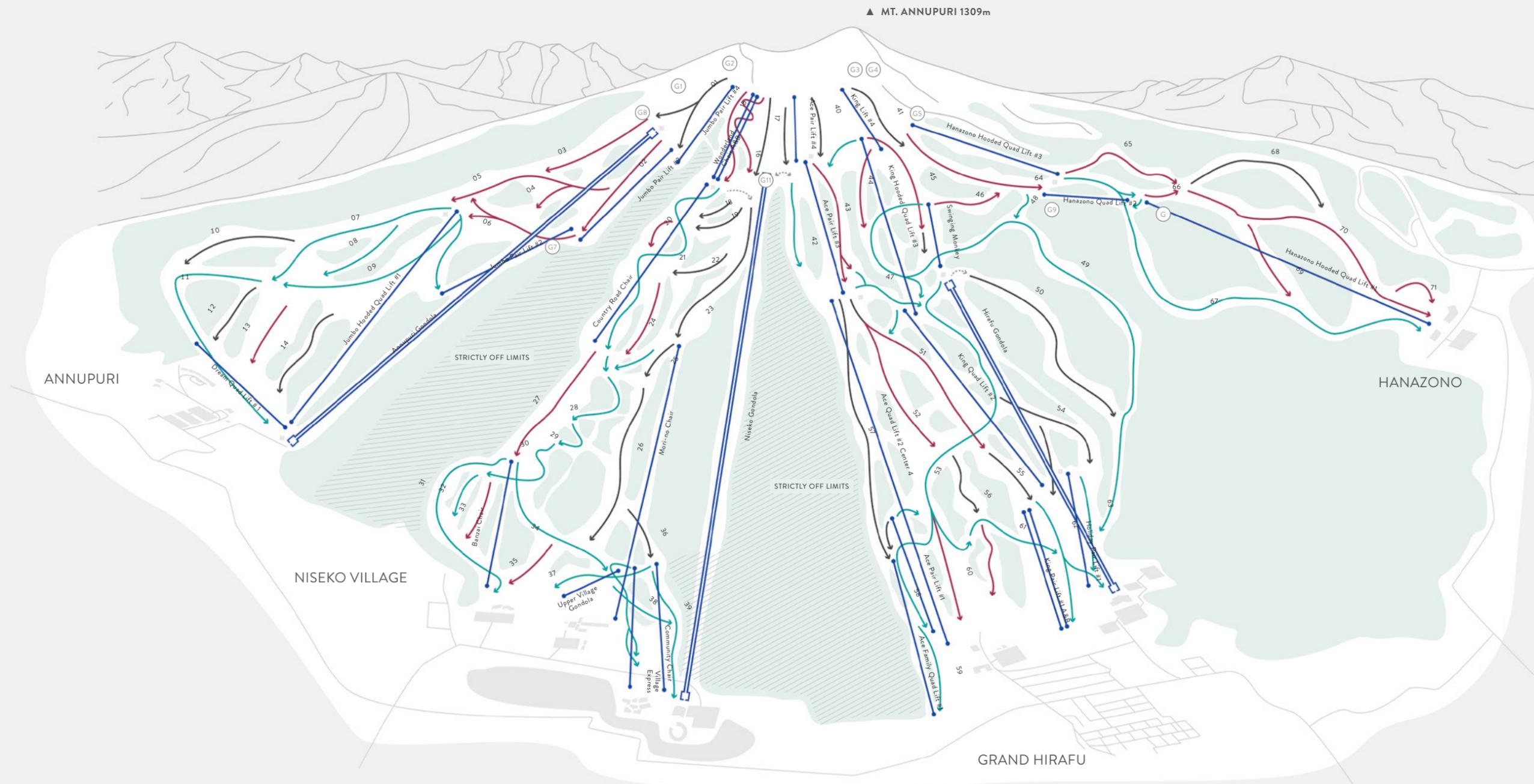


ILLUSTRATION SANCTUARY NISEKO

LEGEND

- Gondola
- Lift
- Slope (easy)
- Slope (intermediate)
- Slope (advance)
- Gate to uncontrolled area

SKI RUNS

01 Champion	12 Challenge	23 Superstition	34 Banzai	45 Jumbo	56 Onsenzawa	67 Silver Dream
02 Utopia	13 Dynamic	24 Junk Yard	35 Don't Blink	46 Parallel	57 Super	68 Legend of Shinya
03 Panorama	14 Fukayuki-rinkan	25 Jagaimo	36 Yard Sale	47 Beginners access	58 Sennoki	69 Hanazono Park
04 Silver	15 Wonderland	26 Misoshiru	37 Next Stage	48 Renraku	59 Family	70 Stairway to Heaven
05 "S" ji	16 Ukairo	27 Namara	38 Shaky Knees	49 Holiday	60 Alpen	71 Hanazono Adventure Park
06 Shirakaba	17 Snorkel	28 Enchantment	39 Final Fling	50 Miharashi	61 King Access Pass	
07 Paradise	18 Joppin	29 Make sense	40 Large	51 Kokutai	62 Kogen	
08 Family	19 Zangi	30 Unforgettable	41 Dynamic	52 Furiko	63 Boyo	
09 Family	20 Nekko no Kabe	31 Cruiser	42 Shirakaba	53 Green	64 Yotei Sunset	
10 Merchen	21 Dabesa	32 Pure Magic	43 Center	54 Konayuki	65 Crystal Garden	
11 Junior	22 Konbu	33 Koguma	44 Rinkan	55 Ni-kabe	66 Setsuzoku	

BACKCOUNTRY SAFETY

KNOW EVERYTHING ABOUT SKIING AND SNOWBOARDING?

So your buddy took a different route down the mountain and now you're both lost and it's getting dark. You can't hike back up all that way. Where are you? How do you build a snow cave? What's the emergency phone number in Japan? Oh... does your phone even work?

Niseko works harder than almost any resort in Japan to allow safe, controlled access to the backcountry and off-piste areas. Sadly, every year we are brought stories of accidents and avalanches caused by the actions of skiers and boarders. The good news is that the motivation of the resorts to provide more freedom to ski and ride off piste has never been greater.

While every effort is made by the combined resources of the ski patrol, resort operations and avalanche reporting to control the

"high-risk" areas, the people most in control of safety are you and me – the skiers and boarders. Our decisions and actions determine our own fate, every day. Quite often it's the actions of one that triggers an avalanche that causes serious consequences for others. Ducking a rope early before the gate, or traversing further across the face of a bowl are two classic mistakes that constantly endanger the lives of others. The truth is that the individual making the mistake probably just didn't know better... this is an easy fix!

Niseko allows backcountry access through specific gated points on the ski area boundary with careful management and a 'ski-at-your-own-risk policy'. It's important to note that crossing through the open gates does not mean the mountain is safe. It means that the risk is

deemed manageable by sensible and informed skiers and boarders.

Stemming from the desire to create freedom for all mountain users, the Niseko Rules have been implemented by the local community thanks largely to local legend Akio Shinya. For 20 years, Shinya-san has been assessing avalanche conditions in Niseko. Without him, Niseko may not have such a liberal backcountry policy, and there would be much less terrain to ride.

So, before your powder lust sets in and you find yourself at the bottom of a gully with no idea where you are, take five minutes to set yourself and your friends up for a safe and enjoyable holiday. ■

WE'VE COLLECTED A FEW TIPS FROM LOCAL EXPERTS TO HELP KEEP YOU SAFE IN THE SIDE AND BACKCOUNTRY

1. OBEY THE NISEKO RULES

Listed on the official trail map and other places around the resort - read them and heed them.

2. CHECK AVALANCHE REPORTS

Know what weather to expect and be sure to read the avalanche report online or at the gates.

3. LISTEN TO & OBEY SKI PATROLLERS

They're the experts – they know what they're doing and are there to ensure everyone stays safe

4. HAVE ESSENTIAL EQUIPMENT

If you're going out the gates, you need a beacon, probe and shovel... and know how to use them.

5. PLAN YOUR TRIP

Study the area you plan to ski and let someone know when you expect to be back.

6. DON'T ENTER CLOSED GATES

If the gates are closed, they're closed for good reason. Don't just duck down and go under a rope nearby.

7. NO GO ZONES

They slide and several people have died in avalanches here. Don't even think about it.

8. DON'T DUCK ROPES

They are the boundary between safe and potentially unsafe. Play by the rules for everyone's enjoyment

9. HIRE A GUIDE

A reputable guide will keep you safe, but also get you way more fresh than you'll get on your own.

10. GO WITH RELIABLE PEOPLE

Everyone in your party should have done an avalanche safety course if going out the gates. ■

Check the daily avalanche report: <http://niseko.nadare.info>



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AVALANCHE SAFETY TRAINING

BY FAITH ROBINSON

Enjoying the backcountry is one thing, but being able to mitigate risk or respond to an emergency situation is quite another.

People love snow for many different reasons. The ice-cold, exhilarating thrill that runs through the mind of anyone deep in the silent ripples of Hokkaido powder is without doubt a very strong one – while adventure, exercise and straight-up fun are others. Some people love snow for its magnificently simple beauty. But one thing that connects us all is the overwhelming force that snow has to humble even the most experienced backcountry rider on a sunny afternoon.

After years of following others into the off-piste (with little more than adrenaline and an excited sense of confidence), it might be time to make a real effort in appreciating the ever-changing mood of the mountain. If every day is a lesson, then the more we ski, the more we know. But if you aren't blessed with the luxury of a lifetime to absorb that necessary knowledge through experience, then investing in a basic avalanche skills course is an awesome way to make the most of your time in the snow. What's more is that this opportunity is available to anyone spending time in Niseko, whether on holiday or here for the season.

Several companies in the area run these courses, with the most accessible option



PHOTO ANDY COLE/RISING SUN GUIDES

being the two-day AST 1. This accredited qualification (formulated by Avalanche Canada) delivers a carefully structured survival kit of theory and experience – and another huge bonus is that it can also serve as a wonderful tour of the local backcountry areas. The first day is based primarily in the classroom with terrain evaluation, weather analysis, snowpack assessment and risk analysis forming the essentials of an intense pen-to-paper learning experience in the morning, followed by an afternoon of companion rescue training. On the second (and final) day of the course, you'll head into the mountains for real to embrace the previous day's learnings while studying snowpack, hiking techniques, and the real-life protocols of an emergency situation.

Avalanches are a very real part of freeride skiing or snowboarding wherever you may travel in the world, and beyond the typical backcountry aspirations of face-shots and amazing views for Instagram, the study of them is essential to becoming an accomplished mountain maverick. Japan's powder offerings are some of the best in the world, and with that, it demands the respect of well-informed riders to safely wonder at the beauty and the bounty available. If every day is a lesson, then getting ahead in theory means getting to the top of the summit, rather than the classroom. ■



01 On-location training
02 Digging a snow pit

2018 AST 1 & 2 COURSE DATES

Rising Run Guides runs several courses over winter. More info at RisingSunGuides.com.

AST 1
December 9-10 / 14-15
January 3-4 / 18-19
March 3-4 / 10-11

AST 2
December 11-14
March 6-9

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NIGHT SKIING

Niseko's night skiing is among the best in the world



PHOTOS NISEKO PHOTOGRAPHY



PHOTO GLEN CLAYDON

Nocturnal skiers and snowboarders in Niseko are arguably treated to some of the best flood-lit night terrain in the world. After dark, three of the four Niseko United resorts are still open for business – Hirafu, Niseko Village and Annupuri.

The mountain is a completely different world in the hours of darkness. The flood-lit atmosphere and the way the shadows are cast on the mountain make it a spectacle worth experiencing. With the lights pointing in from all directions, it's like a 3D fantasy land. Many would be surprised to hear that visibility at night is often crystal clear – much

better than during the day, when white-outs can make things a little hazy. With a good pair of goggles, clarity at night is constant. The lights also make it easier to see all the lumps and bumps.

Late afternoon and early evening are also often when harsh weather goes to bed, meaning it can be calm and eerily still. And with temperatures lower, it frequently makes for lighter, fluffier, better quality powder.

Hirafu is arguably the all-round king of night skiing. The resort has been offering night skiing for almost 50 years, so it's no wonder

BEGINNERS

The beginners' runs are very well lit at all three lit resorts – Hirafu, Niseko Village and Annupuri. Take your pick!

INTERMEDIATES

Annupuri's long, wide runs are almost always empty, meaning some nights you can practically have the resort to yourself with a range of terrain and park to enjoy.

POWDER HOUNDS

Unless you're happy to cruise with the family, head to Hirafu. Literally most of the mountain is lit up either directly or ambiently. If it's snowing hard, your tracks will very often be filled in by the time you get back up. You haven't experienced all Hirafu has to offer unless you've skied it on a night like this.

they've got it down pat. 1287 metal halide lamps have been erected strategically around the resort lighting everything from the beginners' slope to vast swathes of the resort's off-piste powder stashes. In all, there are about 70ha open to explore.

Most resorts have selected lifts operating up to 8.30 every night when the weather is cooperating so get out there! ■



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188-19 AZA YAMADA, KUTCHAN HIRAFU-ZAKA, CENTRAL HIRAFU

TRANSPORT GUIDE

There are basically three options for getting around Niseko: shuttle bus, taxi and rental car. If you're staying in Hirafu, pretty much everything you need will be on the free village shuttle bus route. If you want groceries or to head out of town at night you might want to take a taxi. And if you want ultra mobility, think about hiring a car.



TAXIS

Taxis are at capacity during winter and very often it's not possible to book at short notice.

Therefore, at the same time as you make a restaurant booking out of town, you need to confirm you can get a taxi to the restaurant and back to your accommodation.

COST

Starting fare approx ¥550 for first 1.4km
Approx ¥240/km after that.

General tips

Book as far in advance as possible
Pre-bookings taken up to 3-days in advance
Be ready for pickup when calling
Drivers wait two minutes before cancelling
Cancel bookings if plans change
Most taxis stop 2am, last bookings 1.30am
Taxis only accept cash
If roof light is on, taxi is available
Do not jump in front of taxis to stop them

SPRINT Taxi | 0136 555 400

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Things to note:

Operates 5am - 2am
Has best English customer service – press 2
Book on smartphone via Official Niseko app
App pinpoints position & sends closest taxi
Once booked, you can feel confident you have a taxi
Pay by credit card within app



OTHER OPERATORS

If you can't get the app or there are no SPRINT Taxis available, try calling:

Hachiriki 0136 21 2508

Niseko International Transport 0136 22 6180

Niseko Hire 0136 44 2635

Smile Kanko Taxi 0136 48 2700

Yotei Hire 0136 45 2740

Things to note:

Ask a Japanese person to call if possible
Have pickup and drop off address ready
Call from quiet area, speak slowly & clearly
Be polite, patient and understanding

BUSES AND SHUTTLES

Shuttle buses connect the resorts and different areas of Niseko including nearby Kutchan. Full details in Wine & Dine Guide.

Niseko United Shuttle

Connects Hirafu, Niseko Village and Annupuri. Free with an All Mountain Pass; one point on a point pass; or ¥500/¥300.

Hirafu Grand Shuttle

Free Hirafu and Izumikyō shuttle every 15 minutes in peak season 8.30am-8.30pm.

Hanazono Shuttle

Circles Hirafu Village then heads out to Hanazono for kids and non-skiers.

Kutchan Night Go Bus

Leaves Hirafu to Kutchan Station so you can drink, dine or just look around Kutchan Town.

Yumeguri Onsen Bus

Two departure times for this bus that runs past various local onsens for ¥500.

Other Resorts & Transfer

We recommend our advertising partner Hokkaido Resort Liner for all your longer distance trips (see ad opposite page).

RENT-A-CAR

Rental cars are readily available but can become fully booked in peak periods.

Toyota Rent-a-Car | 0136 21 2005

Located opp Niseko Adventure Centre, Hirafu

Nippon Rent-a-Car | 0136 23 0919

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SNOW SURF STYLE

PHOTO AARON JAMIESON
RIDER TATSUMI KONO

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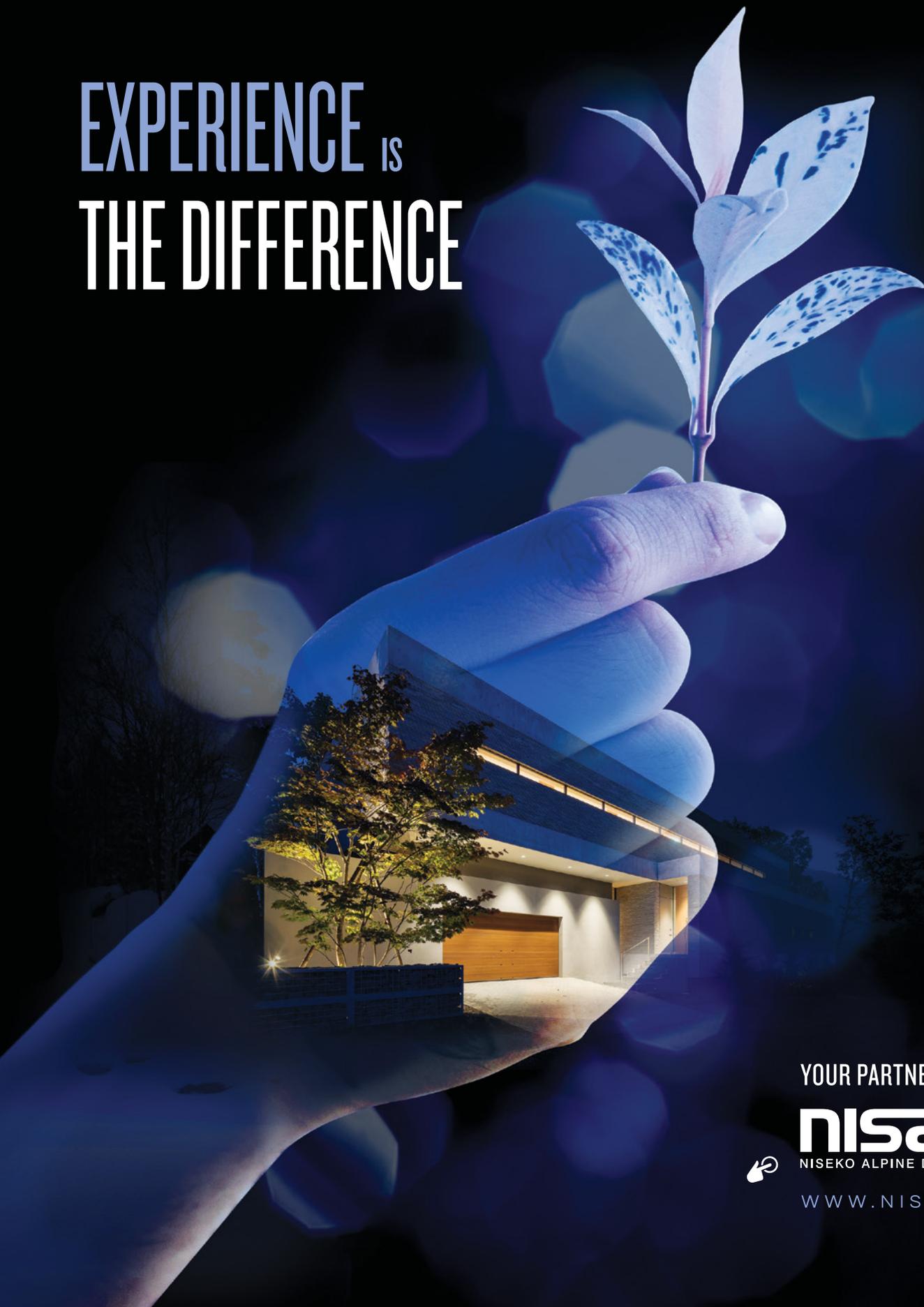
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