

## Sydney October 5<sup>th</sup> Visit Japan Campaign Presentation

Furano is a small town with a great ski area; it is not a ski resort with a small town.

26,000 residents, 2 hospitals, 5 kindergartens, a bunch of schools from Primary to farming and nursing colleges, over 100 restaurants and bars, concert halls and a vibrant community spirit all make Furano first and foremost a beautiful Japanese country town.

The mountains and the snow, the flowers and rivers, the volcano and the adventure, the agricultural products which go to make the amazing food and wine, the culture and art, make this one of the most popular tourism destinations for Japanese and international guests alike.

It is the people who groom the runs, brush the powder off the chair lifts each morning, the farmers who plant and cut the lavender, the pension owners who may sit around and offer you a drink and a story, the station master who greets you as you get off the single carriage trains, the kids on the hill who welcome you, the locals who volunteer their time to ensure you can enjoy skiing and visiting Furano, experiencing a cultural ski holiday and return home with stories of everything that makes Furano so special.

A little effort can go a long way in Furano with magical experiences just around the corner, a new friend on a lift, a great bar tucked behind a rice paper door. This magical little town is the perfect location for so many of you and your guests.

Furano is a town which takes pride in itself. Nature and the environment are of the utmost importance to all. Furano is the strictest town in Japan in terms of recycling, with 17 separate garbage collections. We love our environment.

Furano's magic lies in its **location, the experiences, variety, culture and warmth**. Furano has perfected the balance between so many of these crucial elements.

### **Location**

Furano's ski area and downtown are practically one and the same. Just a river and a kilometre separate the ski area lodgings, dining and entertainment area and downtown.

Furano is the centre of Hokkaido and it is this location that ensures amazingly light snow and some wired and wonderful festivals.

Downtown you can see a large rock indicating the geographical centre of Hokkaido. The weather patterns ensure around 8 to 9 metres of light snow fall on Furano each season, and yet also ensure long blue sky days where you can see the smoke from the volcano spiralling upwards across town. Furano's location results in very little wind most days. This has enabled the area to become popular for hot air ballooning with flight days being an incredible 80% during February and March due to the great conditions.

This also enables the ski area to receive fresh snow falls and then bask in the cool sun under a clear blue sky; perfect skiing conditions.

It was Furano's location that was the inspiration for a local to come up with the idea of a Belly Button festival. The first Belly Button festival was not a great success only attracting 7 dancers some 37 years ago, but has grown into a massive festival for the town. Now, the locals have truly embraced the image and you may even come across locals with their shirts off and a face painted with their breasts as eyes and the belly button as the mouth.

### **Experiences**

During mid March Furano puts on a show for the International Snowboard community by hosting the World Cup. Furano doesn't disappoint providing the perfect location, variety and warmth to make this leg the perfect experience for competitors and travellers alike.

Whether it be traditional style lodging, hot springs, homely pensions or even high class hotels, Furano has it all and they are all situated practically ski-in ski-out next to one another. You can generally ski to all your lodgings and it is not uncommon to see kids skiing back down the road and over the bridge into town after their PE lessons on the hill.

Every week through the ski season the New Prince Hotel hosts concerts attracting some top talent from a variety of music genres from around Japan.

At the base of the Kitanomine side of the ski area, Furano locals build a festival site where we hosts small festivals every Saturday evening from Christmas to the end of March. The Snow Domes here are the focus of the festivities with beer parties and firework displays regularly entertaining the guests.

This is also the site of the annual Winter Festival held on the first weekend of February. 2 days of events and festivities culminate in one of the peculiar celebrations in Furano. Teams of 5 pull and push a horse laden sled over the gravel for the prize money and the title of Banba Jin World Champions.

There are 2 top quality wineries in Furano producing delicious wines with full body reds and ice wines being their specialities. The cold night temperatures and long sunny days provide the perfect environment for the local agriculture.

Over 100 restaurants and bars ensure you eat with variety and pleasure. You can choose to drink in style on the Prince 12<sup>th</sup> floor, aptly named, the Top of Furano or in any one of the charming bars downtown. An array of bars and relaxing and interesting spots to have a drink or experience Furano at night keep travellers busy and happy right up to going to bed with the dreams of that day's powder in their minds and the expectations of yet another perfect day to follow.

Down the road in Asahikawa we have an amazing zoo where polar bears play and penguins are exercised each day by taking a walk around the zoo with visitors allowed to waddle along. We don't walk the polar bears.

## **Variety**

Furano's 4 distinct seasons make this area one of the most picturesque towns in Hokkaido. Winter travellers include non-skiers who come for the other activities, or just for the hot springs and the amazing views.

I asked the top Japan juniors why they trained here and each had a different response,

- ?? The best snow
- ?? The best courses
- ?? Cold temperatures help them concentrate
- ?? The long season
- ?? A town and not a resort

This ski area is truly one of the best in Japan and has an amazing mix of terrain, great snow and a good lift system.

There are 12 lifts, including a 6 person gondola, 101 person 10m/ second cable car, a covered quad and other lifts well placed around the hill to help you access areas of the hill perfectly suited to your skiing.

The ski area has two bases. The self contained New Furano Prince Hotel and the Kitanomine side which are connected by either skiing down from the cable car or catching the lift back up from the Kitanomine side.

Both sides appeal to different skiers with long groomers up to almost 5 km, some long steep unpacked powder areas, exciting world cup groomed courses, night skiing until 9 on both sides and well situated beginner areas on both sides of the hill.

Once your legs are burning from the long runs and deep snow, Furano then gives you the chance to try a variety of outdoor sports and activities such as dog sledding, snow mobiling, powder tours, nature trekking, ice fishing, onsen tours, horse trekking, hot air ballooning and even a dedicated area for kids called Snow Land. We often see adults having more fun here than their kids however.

There is even variety in how to get to Furano, with mountains taxi services, buses, and trains all running right into the middle of town or to the base of the ski area. These services run from Sapporo, 2 hours and a half away, New Chitose Airport, 2 hours and 10 minutes away and Asahikawa Airport, 55 minutes away.

## **Culture**

New Years Eve in Furano sees locals gathering at the temple downtown, just a kilometre from the gondola. There, along with travellers they drink some of the temples offerings, ring the huge bell by swinging a log attached from the ceiling and generally laugh and welcome in the New Year.

Furano's size belies its fame, with a number of dramas which have been set in Furano ensuring few people in Japan have not made the pilgrimage to see the houses and scenes where the shows were filmed. 'From the Northern Country' ran for 20 consecutive years with the same 3 main characters. It was a tasteful mix between something like a Home and Away and a Neighbours. The atmosphere of the town ensured the longevity of the show and its popularity, along with more recent dramas that have chosen Furano's location and character around which to base their shows.

These dramas have left Furano a legacy of skilled actors and drama industry workers. Throughout the year, plays, events and concerts are held in Furano, ensuring guests an amazing cultural experience.

Furano is the home of one of Japan's most famous artist's paintings. At the base of the volcano, over 150 of Goto Sumio's works are permanently on display. These works contain images from Europe and from around Japan. The paintings stretch up to 8m long and 2m high.

Ninguru Terrace is a favourite and I imagine there are many foreign guests who will take a stroll through this area more than once during their time in Furano.

Tucked in amongst snow covered trees is a fairly light illuminated arts and crafts village. Here you will find an array of craftsmen and artists creating their works in the little cottage style shops. There is a café serving baked milk and a cocktail bar with a sign stating, 'For Miserable Smokers?', somehow I think this may have been lost in translation.

The Saturday festivals see events as wide ranging as Jump Competitions, traditional food fairs and the art of rice cake demonstrations to drumming shows and concerts inside the Snow Domes.

### **Warmth**

Furano's locals welcome all to come and experience this little town throughout the year. If the greeting from the locals is not welcoming enough please try Fukiyake onsen, one of the most famous onsen in Hokkaido.

Here you wander down an unkempt path in amongst the forest on the volcano, through the deep snow until you come across a few pools of some of the hottest spring water you could imagine. Naturally emerging from the volcano with no management or controls, the temperature dependent on the volcano's feeling.

The Tourist Association and the Prince Hotels have begun a volunteer ski host system where first timers along with repeaters to Furano, can be welcomed by a local English speaking volunteer who will show them the ski area or answer any questions they may have. This service is free and is available each morning from the gondola and cable car.

Children, groups, beginner and advanced skiers and snowboarders alike are encouraged to use these hosts. You can meet a local, make a friend and quickly get to learn more about Furano, the ski area and the people.

This is the first year with a fully qualified European ski instructor brought in by the official ski school of the Prince Hotel to ensure guests receive a high quality and enjoyable ski lesson. English speaking Japanese instructors are also available.

Locals are going to lengths to ensure the skiers who make the journey into Furano will enjoy it and remember it for the warmth of the people.

Daily ski area/ weather/ event and cultural tip sheets are printed out for all guests and forwarded to all accommodations each morning to assist you to make the most of everyday with all the information you need.

Locals are going to an effort to preserve Furano for the future and yet make it as welcoming to you as possible.

Menus are being translated into English and simple English signs appear each day explaining things such as, 'the gondola is giving up smoking?'. I am sure you all wish the gondola success.

Locals are making the effort to retain Furano's beauty and magic, and yet to also ensure you can still have the adventure and cultural experience that is so inherent to any holiday into Japan. This is the balance we are attempting to achieve and believe will make Furano an International ski destination whilst retaining the charms which exist today.

As I got on the plane yesterday, the top peaks were covered with snow, the council workers were starting to tie up the trees and their branches in preparation for the coming snowfalls. Farmers were getting ready for winter and harvesting the last of their crops for this season. It is a cycle that goes on each year and one which the locals have asked me to welcome you and your guests to become a part of.

We look forward to welcoming you and showing you the Furano we live in so you too can enjoy what the locals have known about for years but has been but a secret unknown to so many skiers worldwide. We hope you will take the opportunity to come into this land and take home memories and stories to tell your friends about, along with the desire to come to Furano again.