

# Eternal Japan

Nicolas Wauters



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序文

# Foreword

**T**his book is a personal journey in which every image tells a story and each street corner unveils a world of its own. It is a celebration of the creativity born from the meeting of two cultures and a heartfelt tribute to the country that welcomed me as its own.

My passion for Japan began long before I ever set foot there — it all started when I was three years old, in front of the glowing screen of a video game console. The vibrant pixels of the '80s and '90s were my first glimpse into Japanese pop culture. What began as a fascination with imagined worlds soon blossomed into a deep love for a real country — rich, complex, and endlessly captivating.

In 2009, this passion took an unexpected turn when I met a young Japanese woman in Brussels — an encounter that would change my life. After several years of a long-distance relationship, marked by travel and mutual discovery, I made the bold decision to leave everything behind and move to Tokyo in 2013. It was as much a leap into the unknown as a return to a place that, in many ways, already felt strangely familiar.

A few months after arriving in this vast metropolis, one thing became clear: many foreign visitors seemed overwhelmed — if not completely lost — by the sheer scale of the city and the complexity of its transport system. With that in mind, I founded Tokyo Trip, a tour guide company aimed at providing travellers with a more personal and accessible experience.

At the same time, eager to promote my business through visuals, I began wandering the streets of Tokyo with a modest camera in hand, gradually teaching myself how to work with light, compose a shot, and capture the city's unique energy. What started as a practical necessity soon blossomed into a deep and lasting passion.

Photography provided me with the perfect opportunity to explore Tokyo — and eventually the entirety of Japan.

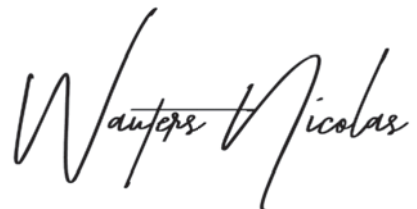
Each walk transformed into an adventure, with every photo representing a new discovery. Since 2013, I have had the chance to document Japan in all its richness — from the narrow alleyways of Tokyo to the breathtaking landscapes of the countryside — always aiming to move beyond clichés. My goal is to tell diverse stories and reveal an authentic, vibrant, and multifaceted Japan.

Though I am in awe of Japan's majestic mountains and dramatic waterfalls, it is the urban landscapes — the concrete, the glass, the glow of electric lights — that truly captivate me. These places are where people and technology coexist in fascinating harmony. Through my images, I strive to capture this urban soul and reveal the hidden beauty in the details of everyday life.

For me, Tokyo is much more than just a city — it is an endless playground, a living, breathing organism in constant flux. Its streets shift, its buildings evolve, and its neighbourhoods continuously reinvent themselves.

Whether you are passionate about Japan, a photography enthusiast, or simply curious and seeking a bit of escapism, I invite you to explore these images with the eye of an adventurer. Tokyo and Japan are much more than their most famous landmarks — it is the overlooked corners, the unexpected angles, and the fleeting moments that give the country its true depth and magic.

I hope this visual journey evokes in you the same sense of wonder and emotion that it has in me.



Nicolas Wauters





### **Toyosaki Konpira Shrine.**

Perched on the coast of Hokkaido, the Toyosaki Konpira Shrine is renowned for its iconic red *torii* standing in the water. The shrine exemplifies traditional Japanese architecture beautifully. These wooden gates, marking the entrance to Shinto shrines, symbolise the boundary between the sacred and the profane, with their red hue thought to ward off evil spirits and disasters.

# 北海道

## Hokkaidō Japan's Untamed Wilderness

**I**n the northernmost reaches of the Japanese archipelago, where nature reveals its full grandeur, lies Hokkaidō – an island that is both wild and captivating. Japan's second-largest island after Honshū, it is a haven for those who crave open spaces and adventure. With its rugged mountains, dense forests, crystal-clear lakes, and vast green plains, the landscape here showcases pristine and raw beauty. Hokkaidō is also a land rich in traditions, home to the Ainu, its indigenous people, and steeped in a history that stands in stark contrast to the modern urban vibe of Sapporo, its bustling capital.

**Area.**

Hokkaidō is the second-largest island in Japan, covering an area of approximately 83,456 km².

**Demographics and Population.**

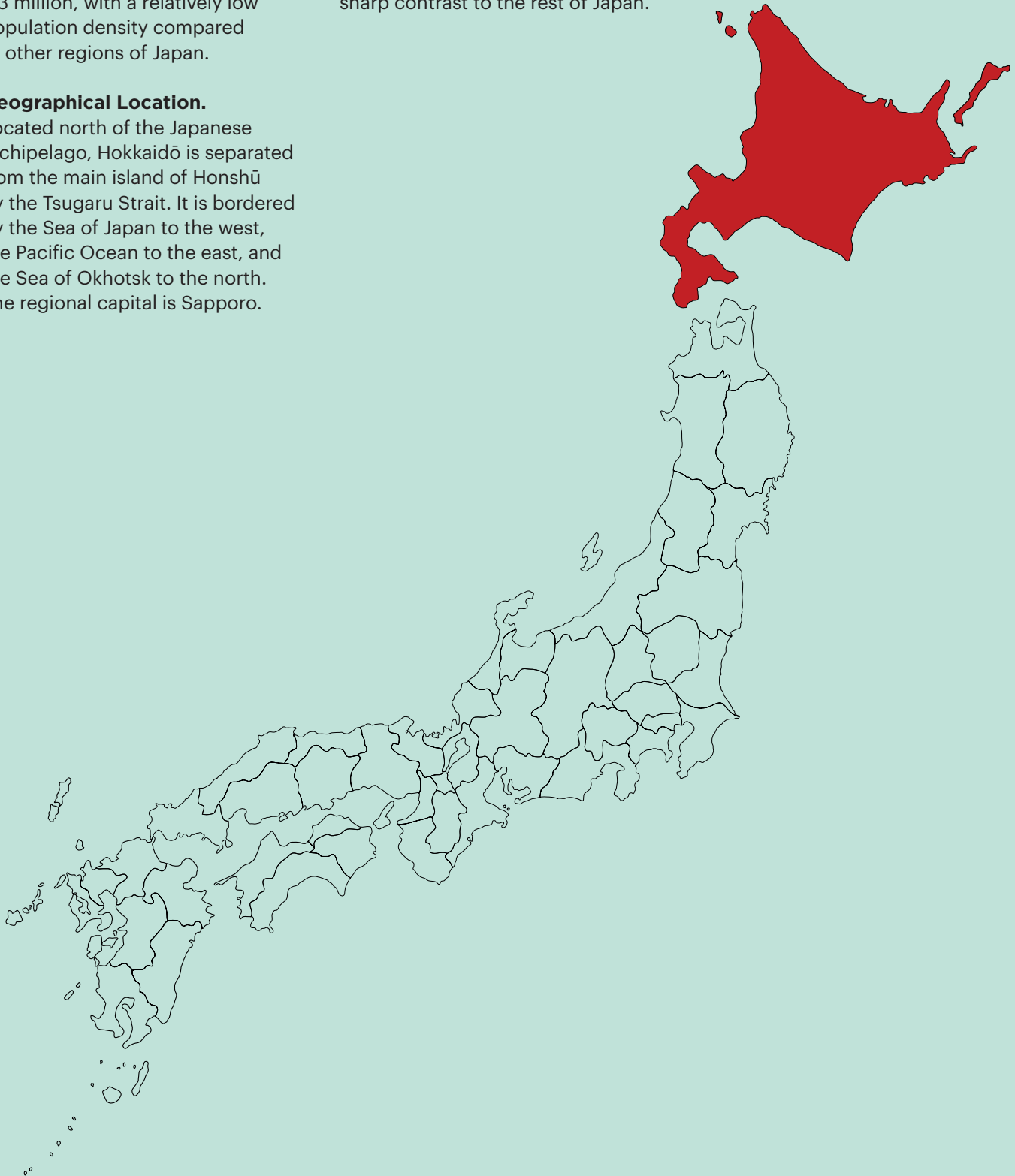
As of 2020, Hokkaidō's population was estimated to be around 5.3 million, with a relatively low population density compared to other regions of Japan.

**Geographical Location.**

Located north of the Japanese archipelago, Hokkaidō is separated from the main island of Honshū by the Tsugaru Strait. It is bordered by the Sea of Japan to the west, the Pacific Ocean to the east, and the Sea of Okhotsk to the north. The regional capital is Sapporo.

**Climate and Seasons.**

Hokkaidō has a humid continental climate, characterised by long, harsh winters with heavy snowfall, and short, cool summers. Winter temperatures can plunge well below freezing, while summers remain pleasantly cool, providing a sharp contrast to the rest of Japan.





# 北海道

## Sapporo, the Vibrant Heart of the Island

Sapporo, the largest city in Hokkaidō, is a modern metropolis nestled among stunning natural landscapes. Renowned for hosting the 1972 Winter Olympics, it perfectly balances the island's energy with a deep respect for its natural surroundings.

In winter, Sapporo transforms into the stage for the iconic Snow Festival (*Yuki Matsuri*), where towering ice and snow sculptures attract visitors from around the globe. Odori Park, the heart of the festival, sparkles with enchanting lights, while the Mount Moiwa ski resort presents a breathtaking panorama of the snow-covered city below.

In summer, Sapporo captivates with its lively festivals, lush green parks, and bustling markets. A visit to Nijo Market is essential for tasting local delicacies such as crab, sea urchins, and fresh salmon. And let's not forget Sapporo beer – one of Japan's oldest and most beloved brews – celebrated at the Sapporo Beer Museum.

## The Natural Splendour of Furano and Biei

In central Hokkaidō, the towns of Furano and Biei reveal landscapes reminiscent of an impressionist painting. During summer, the vast lavender fields of Furano create a breathtaking sea of purple, while the gentle hills of Biei, adorned with vibrant flowers, captivate photographers and those seeking peace and tranquillity.

In winter, this region transforms into a paradise for winter sports. The Furano resorts are renowned for their impeccably maintained slopes and pristine powder snow, making them a haven for both skiers and snowboarders.

## Hakodate, Historic Charm

Situated in the southern part of the island, Hakodate is a port city abundant in history and culture. It was among the first Japanese cities to open to foreign trade during the Meiji period, giving it a unique cosmopolitan flair.

Mount Hakodate, which is accessible by cable car, offers a breathtaking view of the city at night and is often ranked among the top three most beautiful night views in Japan. In the morning, visiting the Asaichi Market (Morning Market) is a must for tasting fresh seafood, particularly *donburi* – rice bowls topped with raw fish.

The Motomachi district, featuring colonial-era buildings and churches, bears witness to Western influence. Meanwhile, Goryōkaku Fort, a star-shaped fortress encircled by cherry trees, serves as an iconic landmark, particularly popular during the spring.

## Daisetsuzan National Park, Nature in Its Purest Form

Daisetsuzan, Japan's largest national park, is a haven for hiking and exploration enthusiasts. Known as "the roof of Hokkaidō", this mountain range features towering peaks like Mount Asahi, glacial valleys, and hidden hot springs.

The hiking trails, accessible in summer and autumn, showcase a variety of flora and fauna, where brown bears, deer and foxes rub shoulders with forests of birch, pine, Japanese maple and vast alpine meadows. In winter, the park transforms into a pristine wonderland, attracting adventurers in search of breathtaking scenery.

## The Shikotsu-Tōya Lakes, Mirrors of Tranquillity

In the southwest of Hokkaidō, the lakes of Shikotsu and Tōya offer a serene and picturesque escape. Lake Shikotsu, a lake of volcanic origin, is renowned for the extraordinary purity of its waters, which remain unfrozen even in winter. Visitors can kayak, fish, or simply relax in the nearby *onsen*.

Lake Tōya, surrounded by mountains, is famous for its summer fireworks and the central island accessible by boat. Nearby, Mount Usu, an active volcano, provides stunning views of the area, along with remnants of past eruptions.

## Abashiri and the Drifting Ice

Located on the northeast coast of Hokkaidō, Abashiri is among the best spots to witness the drifting ice that floats in from the Sea of Okhotsk each winter. Visitors can board icebreakers for an up-close view of this breathtaking natural spectacle, which is unique to Japan.

The Drift Ice Museum offers an intriguing look into polar ecosystems and their ecological significance. The area is also known for its historic prison, which recounts the story of the settlers who endured harsh conditions while working to develop Hokkaidō.

## Kushiro and the Eastern Marshes

To the east of Hokkaidō, the town of Kushiro serves as the gateway to the Kushiro Marshes, Japan's largest wetlands. This rich ecosystem is home to remarkable wildlife, including the Japanese crane, which symbolises good fortune and longevity.

Panoramic views of the vast marshes can be enjoyed from observatories such as *Kushiro Shitsugen*, while canoe trips provide the opportunity to navigate the winding rivers and experience nature up close.

## Wakkanai, The Far North

Nestled in the far north of Hokkaidō, Wakkanai is a remote town dominated by nature. On clear days, you can catch a glimpse of the Russian island of Sakhalin in the distance. Cape Sōya, Japan's northernmost point, is steeped in symbolism.

Nearby, Cape Noshappu offers breathtaking sunsets, while the island of Rebun, often referred to as the *Island of Flowers*, enchants visitors with its vibrant flower-filled landscapes and scenic hiking trails.

## Noboribetsu and Its Hot Springs

Noboribetsu is renowned for its *onsen*, particularly Hell Valley (*Jigokudani*), a volcanic landscape where sulphurous fumes rise from rocky cracks. The town's thermal baths, celebrated for their therapeutic properties, attract those seeking both relaxation and rejuvenation.

## Ainu Culture

Hokkaidō is also home to the Ainu people, the island's indigenous inhabitants. In the village of Ainu Kotan, near Lake Akan, you can explore their traditional crafts, songs, and dances – testaments to a culture that has endured the challenges of history.

# 北海道

## Best Times to Visit

### – Winter (December to February).

Perfect for winter sports lovers, featuring ski resorts with excellent powder snow.

### – Spring (May).

Cherry blossoms create stunning landscapes, although the season is slightly later than in other regions of Japan.

### – Summer (July to August).

Ideal for escaping the oppressive heat found in other parts of the country, offering comfortable temperatures and fields filled with blooming flowers.

### – Autumn (September to October).

Autumn foliage paints the landscape in vivid colours, providing opportunities for hiking and photography.

## Top 5 Must-See destinations

### 1. Shiretoko National Park.

UNESCO World Heritage Site, this park features pristine and untouched landscapes that are ideal for hiking and wildlife observation.

### 2. Sapporo.

The regional capital, renowned for its modern architecture, vibrant festivals such as the Snow Festival, and an exciting culinary scene.

### 3. Furano and Biei.

Famous for their stunning lavender fields and charming rural scenery, these areas are particularly magical in the summer months.

### 4. Lake Toya.

A picturesque caldera lake that offers tranquil views, soothing hot springs, and a variety of outdoor activities.

### 5. Hakodate.

A historic port city with strong western influences, celebrated for its breathtaking night view from Mount Hakodate and its bustling morning market.



# Gastronomy

Hokkaidō is a region rich in culinary specialities, shaped by its cold climate and abundant natural resources. Below is a list of the region's culinary highlights, organised by city, complete with detailed descriptions for each dish.

## 札幌

### Sapporo

#### [札幌味噌ラーメン]

##### **Sapporo Miso Rāmen**

This rāmen is renowned for its thick, umami-rich miso broth. It is frequently topped with corn, butter, *chāshū* (braised pork), and sautéed vegetables, which together create a unique and comforting flavour.

#### [スープカレー]

##### **Soup Curry**

A spicy, light curry featuring a fragrant, fluid broth. It's typically garnished with fresh vegetables such as potatoes, pumpkin, and peppers, and is often served with chicken or pork.

#### [ジンギスカン]

##### **Jingisukan**

A lamb barbecue grilled on a domed cast-iron plate, accompanied by vegetables like cabbage and onions. This dish is popular in Sapporo's *izakayas* and specialised restaurants.

## 函館

### Hakodate

#### [函館塩ラーメン]

##### **Hakodate Shio Rāmen**

Unlike Sapporo's *miso rāmen*, Hakodate's version features a clear, salty broth, often made with seafood. It's light, subtle, and perfect for showcasing the local ingredients.

#### [いかめし]

##### **Ikameshi**

A signature dish from the nearby city of Mori, *Ikameshi* is a squid stuffed with glutinous rice and simmered in a sweet soy sauce. It's commonly sold as *ekiben* (train station bento).

#### [塩焼きそば]

##### **Shio Yakisoba**

This is a lighter version of yakisoba, in which the noodles are stir-fried with seafood and seasoned with salt rather than the usual thick sauce.

## 旭川

### Asahikawa

#### [旭川醤油ラーメン]

##### **Asahikawa Shōyu Rāmen**

A soy sauce-based *rāmen*, often enriched with a thin layer of pork fat to keep the broth hot. It's loved for its balance of intense *shōyu* and the richness of pork.

#### [旭川大雪ビール]

##### **Asahikawa Taisetsu Beer**

A craft beer brewed in Asahikawa, known for its purity and refreshing taste, thanks to the region's crystal-clear water.

## 帯広

### Obihiro

#### [豚丼]

##### **Buta Don**

A rice bowl topped with grilled pork slices lacquered in a sweet soy-based sauce, this dish originates from Obihiro and offers a local alternative to *gyūdon* (beef rice bowl).

## 釧路 Kushiro

### [勝手丼] Kattedon

A rice bowl where you can select your fresh seafood at the Washo Market. Customers can create their donburi with salmon sashimi, tuna, shrimp, scallops, and ikura (salmon roe).

### [釧路秋刀魚] Kushiro Sanma

*Sanma* (Japanese mackerel pike) is an iconic fish in Kushiro, often grilled whole and served with grated daikon radish and lemon.

## 根室 Nemuro

### [根室サンマ寿司] Nemuro Sanma Zushi

A unique sushi made with the region's fish, *sanma* (Japanese mackerel pike), marinated in vinegar and served on rice.

## 稚内 Wakkanai

### [稚内カニ飯] Wakkanai Kanimeshi

A rice bowl topped with crab meat, often seasoned with soy sauce and served with wasabi and pickled ginger.

## 石狩 Ishikari

### [石狩鍋] Ishikari Nabe

A hot pot made with fresh salmon, simmered with miso, cabbage, mushrooms, and tofu. This dish is inspired by recipes from Ishikari's fishermen, who used freshly caught salmon as an everyday fare.

## 夕張 Yubari

### [夕張メロン] Yubari King Melon

*Yubari* melons are renowned across Japan for their exceptional sweetness. They are often eaten as they are or used in desserts and ice creams.

## 富良野 Furano

### [富良野チーズ] Furano Cheese

Made with fresh milk from Hokkaidō's meadows, *Furano* cheese is famous for its high quality.

### [オムカレー] Omu-Curry

A Japanese curry topped with a fluffy omelette. This Furano speciality blends Japanese curry with omelette, offering a creamy and delicious texture.

## 紋別 Monbetsu

### [紋別タラバガニ] Monbetsu Tarabagani

Monbetsu's royal crab is one of the region's most excellent delicacies. It's often enjoyed grilled, boiled, or as sashimi.

**Hakodate.**

The Hakodate region, located at the southern tip of Hokkaido, captivates with its blend of rich history and stunning landscapes. From the Mount Hakodate observatory, visitors can take in one of the world's most beautiful night views, where the city sparkles between the mountains and the sea.





### **Goryokaku.**

Located in Hakodate, Goryokaku is a star-shaped fortress renowned for its unique Vauban-inspired architecture and pivotal role in the Boshin War. Now a public park, it offers beautiful scenery, especially in winter when the moat freezes or in spring when the cherry blossoms are in full bloom. ➤













### **Lucky Pierrot.**

In Hakodate, the beloved Lucky Pierrot restaurant is a local legend, famed for its quirky vibe and iconic burgers. With its brightly coloured signs and delightfully kitsch décor, it attracts both locals and curious travellers.

### **Susukino Crossing.**

In the heart of one of the world's snowiest cities, the iconic Asahi billboard – promoting the famous Japanese beer – overlooks the intersection, starkly contrasting with the frozen ground where trams and pedestrians navigate the cold.



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