

Shiretoko National Park

Shiretoko National Park (609.89 sq km) is a vast wilderness on the Shiretoko Peninsula, along the Shiretoko mountain range. The indigenous Ainu people referred to this area as sir-etok, or “the end of the Earth.”

The peninsula was designated a World Natural Heritage site in 2005 for its irreplaceable wildlife habitats and biodiversity. Today Shiretoko has an abundance of brown bears and is home to the Blakiston’s Fish Owl.

In winter, large amounts of drift ice arrive at the Shiretoko coast. The ice comes from the Amur River in Russia, which feeds into the Sea of Okhotsk. As the river reaches the sea, the ice that covers it for much of winter is broken into chunks by strong winds and currents and carried to the northern coast of Hokkaido. The park is one of the southernmost regions for where this “drift ice” can be observed in the Northern Hemisphere, and several local tour companies offer ice cruises.