

Follow the Hokkaido Garden Way

Invitation to Eight Gardens

The eight gardens along the 250-kilometer Hokkaido Garden Way offer a panoply of sightseeing opportunities: diverse terrain, spectacular natural environments, outdoor adventure, hot spring bathing, fascinating people and communities, and delectable local dishes and drink. Visitors are sure to find attractions and experiences that deepen their appreciation for the Hokkaido landscape.

Seafood and Sake

Asahikawa is the logistics center for most of Hokkaido. Because of this, visitors will discover crab, shrimp, oysters, and fish on the menu even in the mountains in the middle of the island. Asahikawa is also one of the few areas in Hokkaido that grows a lot of rice. Rice is the primary ingredient in *nihonshu*, usually known abroad as *sake*. Some of Hokkaido's most famous *sake* breweries are found in this area.

Phenomenal Nature

There are many places a traveler going from garden to garden and through the mountains between Asahikawa and Tokachi should find noteworthy. Aoiike is a surreal blue pond that gained fame after it became the default wallpaper for Mac OS Mountain Lion. The otherworldly blue hue of its waters is the result of minute particles of aluminum. A bit upstream, Shirahige Waterfall has some of the same properties.

Daisetsuzan National Park offers an equally rare phenomenon known as *unkai*, which means "sea of clouds." This phenomenon typically occurs in midsummer when clouds sink down into the valleys overnight. On certain mornings, the mountaintops jut out from the clouds. Seeing this particular sight requires an early start and a ride on a ski resort ropeway. Unkai Terrace, at Hoshino Resorts Tomamu, is a prime spot to observe *unkai*. The Cloud Walk here puts visitors directly over this vast cottony sea.

Vivid Vistas

The Furano area boasts another of the most famous vistas in Hokkaido. At Farm Tomita, fields of lavender and other flowers form vast ribbons in seven vivid colors over gentle hills. Images for Hokkaido tourism frequently show these fields.

Obihiro is considered a frontier town with the feel of the American West. This is partly because it is the center of an agricultural area that takes pride in raising livestock and horses. Milk and dairy products from Tokachi are famous throughout Japan,

including ice cream and soft-serve ice cream in unusual flavors. Goat cheese is common, too, as is mutton and venison.

Ainu Heritage

Hokkaido is the only major region in Japan where the names of places and foods often come from the indigenous Ainu. Although the Ainu have mostly been assimilated, there are many ongoing efforts to revive Ainu culture and history. There is an Ainu settlement at the foot of Mt. Daisetsu near Asahikawa.

Riding and Rafting

Outdoor adventure is another prime draw in Hokkaido. There are many horseback-riding facilities along the Hokkaido Garden Way, for example, and Hokkaido even has its own native breed of horses called *dosanko*. Another recommended leisure sport here is whitewater rafting, most notably on the Sorachi and the Tokachi rivers.

Hands-on Experiences

There are many places along the Hokkaido Garden Way that offer hands-on farming experiences, including milking cows, making butter and cheese, digging potatoes and picking strawberries and haskap berries. There are also facilities where visitors can plant trees to help preserve the environment.

Hot Springs and Waterfalls

Many people visit Hokkaido to relax at a hot spring resort. The volcanic activity and moving continental plates in this region provide a hot milieu for groundwater to absorb minerals and bubble up to the surface.

Just a 30-minute drive away from Daisetsu Mori Garden is Sounkyo, an onsen resort town with a traditional look and modern facilities. Set in a deep gorge and flanked by forested cliffs, it has hot springs indoors and out. There are plenty of lodging possibilities as well. Even better, there are stunning waterfalls just a few kilometers away.

One of the most unusual onsen is the moor hot springs in Tokachigawa, near Obihiro. These waters contain dissolved organic matter. Moor hot springs have such healthful properties that the Ainu considered them medicinal waters.

Access and Information

A road trip to the eight gardens is the fastest way to get around and allows the greatest

freedom of movement. Alternatively, travelers can fly to two different airports and tour the two areas of Obihiro and Asahikawa in separate stretches. The Hokkaido Garden Way gives visitors the opportunity to see, experience, and gain insight into Hokkaido and the natural world.

Follow this link [\[link to About the Hokkaido Garden Way page\]](#) to find out what is special about the eight gardens of the Hokkaido Garden Way.