A comfortable feeling

Winter in eastern Hokkaido draws undefeatable energy from the animals.

Deepening encounters

Winter in Hakodate

Enter the light, enter dreams.
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Those who travel to Hakodate during winter are expert travelers. Why? Because, they know that the city where the night view is beautiful becomes even more radiant during this season.

Corridors of light and an exotic atmosphere.
The fan shaped city surrounded by the sea on three sides enters winter, where even the light of snow is heartwarming illumination.

Hakodate, a midwinter night’s dream.
Set out on a journey into loquacious light which envelopes the city in silent stimulation.
An illuminated tree floats on the ocean.
The one who sheds light on the winter appeals through “words.”

The first community radio station in Japan was established about 18 years ago on Christmas Eve. It was named street corner radio “FM Iruka.” The adoral name was perfect for the port town of Hakodate. Incidentally, a community radio station is aimed at a much smaller municipality, rather than a large city or province, as is FM Iruka, which can be heard in Hakodate city and neighboring towns. You might call it a locally based information transmission station.

On December 24th, the anniversary of the station, we have a special broadcast from a “certain” place.
Ms. Shizen is the DJ for FM Iruka.

While holding down a regular program, she is also busy rushing to report for another program twice a week. Furthermore, she multitasks by helping out as an assistant director for yet another program. She is also a citizen of Hakodate.

“This "certain" place is in fact the venue for the "Hakodate Christmas Fantasy" that is held in the Hakodate Bay area each year. During the month of December, every city decorates with illuminating lights, but Hakodate’s main feature is the Christmas tree. Not only is it a Christmas tree, but this fantastic tree floats in the ocean.”

The Hakodate Bay Area is the port area located between Mt. Hakodate which is famous for its night view, and JR Hakodate Station. Every December in front of the red brick warehouses, the face of the area, a large fir tree measuring 20 meters in height appears. The tree, loaded onto a boat as its foundation, is wrapped in 50 thousand lights, and as evening arrives it becomes an enormous tree of lights which looms over the dark sea, painting the port with Christmas glee.

"In addition to the contrasting red brick and snowy white city streets, the lit Christmas tree floating on the ocean makes the scene an absolute fantasy.”

If you wish to spend a white Christmas with that someone special, I would suggest seeing the illumination at the Bay Area.”

The tree is lit up every day between December 1st and 25th, with fireworks to add to the grandeur. Live stages and soup bar booths where chefs from all over the city show their prowess appear on site, making it an event to enjoy.

"If you apply in advance, even travelers can have a chance to push the light switch at the ceremony.” For most, the image of snow sculptures comes to mind when thinking of winter events in Hokkaido. However, the lead role in the sanctity of a night view is “light.”

There are several cities within the country where the night view is famous, but the night view of Hakodate in the winter is a cut above the rest. It is most likely because the temperature drops below zero and when the air is clear, it is almost as though it clears the mind as well; maybe it is the same with light. The refreshing crisp winter air of the northern territory makes the light even more vivid, and alluringly beautiful. And one more thing, it may be because houses in Hakodate do not have window shutters."

Warm light from the houses flood the streets, making the entire city shine brightly. This could probably be a typical Hakodate night view.

The real thrill of taking a stroll lies within the alleys. Little discoveries bring great joy.

FM Iruka, where Ms. Shizen works, is located in the Motomachi district at the foot of Mt. Hakodate, a renowned sightseeing spot. To think that her route to work every day is a cobblestone path through an exotic part of town is enviable. So, we asked her what she, a local herself, thought was the most appealing aspect of Hakodate.

"Beginning with Nijukken Zaka where FM Iruka is located, many of the main hills in the Motomachi district like Motomi Zaka, and Hachiman Zaka are lined with trees which are decorated with lights during winter. Even a local like me thinks it is beautiful. Compared to Sapporo or Niseko, Hakodate has little snow, so negotiating hills is easy, making strolling fun even during the winter. Churches and foreign residences are illuminated and the white walls of the residences against the back drop of blue sky create an exotic atmosphere.”

The city streets where the Hakodate Russian Orthodox Church, the Hakodate St. John’s Church and Catholic Motomachi Church, all different denominations of religion, are built next to each other, is typical of Hakodate where once its ports flourished with international trade.

“Although the sunny winter skies are refreshing, I like snowy nights. The quiet falling snow illuminated by the lights is extremely mystical.”

The city streets filled with a foreign scent are bathed in winter light. The countenance is different from that of Motomachi during summer. And because the amount of snow fall differs each year, each winter scene you encounter is a once in a lifetime experience.

"I am sure many have seen the night view of the city from Mt. Hakodate during summer, but I strongly urge people to see the night view of the city enveloped in snow too.”

Because Mt. Hakodate protrudes into the Tsugaru Straight, it rubs elbows with the sea on 3 sides, the contrast of dark sea and white snow helping to define the fan shape of the city.

“But that is not all! The thrill of strolling Motomachi is in exploring the alleys.”
A great star glitters in a snow veiled city.

Here in the Bay Area and Motomachi district are changing winter landscapes, and a variety of in-depth ways to enjoy each one. For this reason, many visitors who visit Hakodate are mesmerized every time.

"This year, the Hakodate Magistrate Office opened, so Goryokaku Park is gathering more attention," said the mayor. The Magistrate Office was opened during the final years of the Edo period by the Tokugawa Shogunate for the purpose of maintaining both security in the northern area and international negotiations with neighboring countries. The city opened renovations of the office in 2006, and after 4 years of construction was reopened this summer. The office is now a new tourist attraction.

"In December, the moats around Goryokaku Park are illuminated with lights which make out the shape of a giant shining star at night. Every year between December and February the illumination, named "Dream of Stars", takes place, and I would recommend seeing the park from high above, perhaps from the Goryokaku Tower."

The Goryokaku Tower, a landmark of Hakodate, was opened just 4 years ago. From a height of 107 meters, the sight of the remains of the star shaped European style castle, coupled with the story of the violent final years of the Edo period, illuminates deep emotion.

"I also recommend the view toward Mt. Hakodate that can be seen from Goryokaku Tower. Especially in the evening when Mt. Hakodate gradually becomes only a silhouette, or the view of the sun setting in Hakodate Port where many foreign ships make berth are both magnificent."

Any part you cut out of Hakodate would make a beautiful picture. During winter, from 4 p.m. when twilight begins and 6 p.m., the gradation of blue changing into bright light presents a picturesque night view.

"How about taking a walk down to Omori Beach after the sun sets and you have enjoyed the illumination? The white lights of the squid fishing boats floating on the horizon on a windless evening are calming to watch."

Ms. Shizen, who was born and raised in Hakodate, moved to a city without sea for two years for educational purposes, realizing for the first time how special the sea and scenery of Hakodate was.

Gokko Soup for winter!
A great Hakodate dish for women.

Finally, one mustn’t forget one of the greatest aspects of Hakodate, gourmet dining! We asked Ms. Shizen what she suggests.

"Let me see, there are many delicious foods in Hakodate, but how about "Gokko Jiru"?"

Gokko Jiru (soup) is a popular local dish from the Eikan area of Hakodate. "Gokko" is a fish similar to Angler fish, called "smooth lump sucker", and is dark and slimy but the taste of the fish is very lean with a mild sweetness. Because it is gelatinous it melts in your mouth.

"Locally, it is eaten with tofu and Japanese peas seasoned with light soy sauce. Gokko is high in collagen, which is why it is recommended for women."

Another thing we recommend for women are Hakodate confections. There are many of confections made with high quality local ingredients that are perfect for souvenirs too. Among them is Ms. Shizen’s favorite, the bite sized cheese cakes. The rich flavor and moist texture are addictive, according to her.

"Of course the sea food donburi and salt flavored ramen at the Hakodate Morning Market are something you should try as well. Each shop has its own signature flavor so comparing tastes is also fun. At the cafes and sweets shops you will want to enjoy the atmosphere of each shop as well."

In the Bay Area and Motomachi district there are a number of old houses and Western-Japanese style historical buildings that have been converted into restaurants. Rich flavor meets ancient architecture. A delicious walk through history can be indulged upon here in Hakodate.

"From December, the bullet train line will extend to New Akomori Station, making access from Honshu easier, and bringing Hakodate much closer. Please experience your white Christmas in Hakodate! (smile) I hope to see you near the floating Christmas tree on December 24th!"

Ms. Shizen, the great adorer. Her goal is to spotlight locals and the activities they are working on through radio, a form of media. For this reason, her "heart’s antennae" must always be sensitive. The things she values most perhaps are related to consideration for ways to enjoy travel.

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* Currently the shortest travel distance from Tokyo and Hakodate is 5 hours and 58 minutes. Due to the opening of the New Akomori Station in December, the time will be shortened to 5 hours and 45 minutes.
Winter in Hakodate
Enter the light, Enter dreams.

Mythical lights are flown around the week of Goryokaku castle. From the heavens, a large paraglider dances in the snow.

Hakodate candles lend light to the city streets in the “Paths of Candle Light.”
Around 4:00 pm, the hiking trail up Mt. Hakodate is transformed into a mystical world.

There are many streets made with great quality Icy Light in Hakodate.

A star’s dream
Goryokaku, the stage for the famous battle of Hakodate where Matsumi Emnews and his men stood their ground is the first year of the Meiji period. The 1.4 km circumference of the first European style castle in the nation is lit up at night. During the event, Goryokaku Tower will extend admission to the observatory until 6:00 PM. The light of the giant star seen from 107 meters above ground is remarkable.

Lights on: 5:00 pm – 10:00 pm
Location: Special Historical Site Goryokaku Fort Ruins, Goryokaku Park
Inquiries: 0130-40-8009 (Hachinohe-Yutori Executive Committee)

Hakodate Illumination
Motomachi district where a colony of historical monuments and churches are built. The trees that line the steep roads that lead to these buildings are decorated with over 50 thousand lights. Bright light in the clear winter air is illuminating. Relish the romantic view as you look downs the hilly streets toward the ocean.

Lights on: 5:00 pm – 10:00 pm
Inquiries: 0130-27-3135 (Hakodate Winter Festival Executive Committee)

Hakodate “Paths of Candle Light”
A participating event between citizens of Hakodate and tourists who together make wax candles that will light up the night in Hakodate. The candles are then placed in various places throughout the Motomachi District and Goryokaku Park. Gentle light that connects the city streets warms the hearts of those who come and go.

Lights on: 4:30 pm – 2:00 pm
Location: Motomachi Park, Minato-ga-Oka Ave., Goryokaku Park, and Mt. Hakodate hiking trail.
Inquiries: 0130-27-3135 (Hakodate Winter Festival Executive Committee)
Winter in northern Hokkaido draws undefeatable energy from the animals.

Experience an exhilarating dog sled race as they dash across the pure white fields of snow and through the forests. Natural flowing hot springs that heat to the core a cold body. Furthermore, beat the cold as you tour northern Hokkaido where you can look forward to encountering cute animals as well as enjoying popular local foods and sightseeing spots.

Story: Junji Fujita

So what’s a little severe cold! Be encouraged by the sight of active animals!

Among all of Hokkaido, where winters are severe, the northern area is extremely cold and temperatures are known to hang below zero even during the day. Even so, there is a way to enjoy the winter here that is all its own. That way is by searching for animals that inhabit the area. Our theme in this issue, as we travel to the northern Hokkaido area is "searching for animals."

Although there are many activities to enjoy during winter such as snowboarding, skiing, riding snow mobiles and snow shoeing, dog sledding in Minami Furano is suggested if your objective is to search for animals.

Just watching the dogs that give no care to the cold wind as they dash across the snowy fields is suitable to the great outdoors, and is very moving. But, when you actually board the sled and are pulled across the snow, that emotion is magnified.

The feeling of running across snowy white fields and through snow capped trees is all the more exhilarating because you are in unison with the dogs. A Hokkaido winter landscape, contrary to what you have seen before, can be thoroughly enjoyed.

After you have run with the dog sled across the snowy fields, it is time to enjoy the sights and gourmet food.
You almost want to follow as you watch the penguins' animated walk!

The winter air is crisp and clear as you head toward Asahiya Zoo located in Asahikawa City, approximately 40 minutes by car from Furano.

Throughout the year the zoo is a popular spot, and the animals are full of energy, even in the winter, as they welcome you. The polar bear's behavior, as they wander and roll around the snow, is so interesting you will forget the cold and want to stay and watch.

Another winter event at the zoo you don't want to miss is the penguin's walk. Children and adults alike will be glued to the sight of cute penguins toddling through the zoo. The walks are scheduled to take place between late December and mid March; however, the event is subject to cancellation in case of severe weather or heavy snowfall.

Finally, you mustn't forget Asahikawa Ramen which is boasted in all of Japan. Many shops line the Asahikawa Ramen Village, and other shops compete in flavor throughout the city. Features of Asahikawa Ramen include pork broth and fish broth mixed with soy based soup, an item guaranteed to warm a cold body from within.
Forest Story
Stroll through the forest, feel the forest

The entire facility of Mori-no-Uta, a new style resort spa which opened this summer in a pocket of the Joankie forest, is full of forest stories. Each guest who stays here becomes the lead character in their own story.

We hope you will enjoy a pleasant and peaceful time in a space saluted in the healing forces and playful nature of the forest.

Forest Lounge
The Forest Lounge where you can take off your shoes and relax is a symbolic feature of Mori-no-Uta.

The iron craft work that covers the fireplace represents mighty trees that grow toward the heavens, the carpet grass and soil, and the curtains of water, rain. On the walls below the rain, is a mural of seeds which look as though they are about to sprout. The lounge is an expression of the entire environment of the forest.

Forest Guest Rooms
The guest rooms, designed with a concept of "deep sleep", are color-coordinated to bring forth a peaceful atmosphere. Choose the perfect pillow for you at the pillow gallery and enjoy a restless sleep.

Forest Buffet
As the rabbit who jumped into a hole. If you step into the narrow tunnel where the wine cellar is you will find the Mori-no-Uta restaurant. Here you can enjoy fresh oven-baked pizzas and baked meats as well as jams made from the fruit of the forest. This is a dreamy restaurant where any delicious feast you read about in fairy tales can be found.

Forest Spa
The relaxing spa is an oasis in the forest. An aesthetic room filled with light and a large public bath and an outdoor bath surrounded by heavy foliage offer a feeling of being embraced by the forest. Relax and listen to your mind and body.

Inquiries pertaining to tourism in Hokkaido.

Hokkaido Tourism Organization
No. 102B, Kita 6 Chome, Sapporo, 060-8656
TEL: 011-231-2902
Visit Hokkaido: http://en.visit-hokkaido.jp/

Hokkaido Sapporo Food and Tourism Information Center
Sapporo Sta. East Concourse North Exit
Kita 6 Chome, Sapporo, 060-8656
TEL: 011-231-5080

Hokkaido Economic Affairs Department Tourism Bureau
Kita 3 Jo, Nishi 6 Chome, Sapporo, 060-8864
TEL: 011-231-8050