



*Wilderness Birding Adventures*

## **Japan in Winter**

**December 7-21, 2026**

**Tour begins and ends in Tokyo, Japan**

**Tour Price: \$9,995    Single Supplement: \$900**

### **Day 1, December 7: Arrival day in Tokyo**

Arrival at Haneda Airport in Tokyo. We will have dinner and spend the night at a hotel at the airport, allowing for potentially staggered arrivals.

### **Day 2, December 8: Birding wetlands and coastlines of Tokyo**

After breakfast at the hotel, we will begin birding at a small wetland on the northeast side of Tokyo. A major attraction here is the possibility of encountering large flocks of Baikal Teal. Other possibilities include Falcated Duck, Eastern Spot-billed Duck, Pochards, Eurasian Coot, Great Crested Grebe, and Little Grebe. Eastern Marsh Harrier and Common Buzzard are also often seen in the area.

After lunch, we'll visit Kasai Rinkai Park. Here we'll sample urban oasis birding not far from central Tokyo. Species diversity is relatively high, with possibilities such as Azure-winged Magpie, Grey Heron, Little Egret, Eurasian Oystercatcher, Eurasian Curlew, and passerines such as Meadow Bunting, Warbling White-eye, Brown-eared Bulbul, and Dusky Thrush.

After dinner, we will again stay near Haneda Airport in preparation for tomorrow's flight.

### **Day 3, December 9: Flight to Southern Kyushu, birding from Kagoshima to Izumi**

Today we will take a morning flight to Kagoshima in southern Kyushu. From Kagoshima, we will drive north to the Sendai River, where we will have lunch and birdwatch. This area supports a good diversity of raptors and passerines, including Eastern Buzzard, Hen Harrier, Eurasian Kestrel, Japanese Wagtail, Oriental Greenfinch, Bull-headed Shrike, and Chestnut-eared Bunting. This location has also proved to attract occasional rarities from Korea and China.

From there, we continue driving north to the city of Izumi, where over 10,000 Hooded and White-naped Cranes spend the winter in nearby rice fields.

### **Day 4, December 10: Full day with cranes and nearby forested reservoir hotspots**

This day will be spent immersed among cranes foraging and roosting in rice fields and wetlands near Izumi. In addition to White-naped and Hooded Cranes, Common Cranes and a few Sandhill Cranes are seen annually, and rarities such as Siberian Crane and Demoiselle Crane are occasionally recorded.

After birding among the cranes in the lowlands, we will take a short drive into the hills to a reservoir to search for Mandarin Duck, White-bellied Green Pigeon, and Crested Kingfisher.

### **Day 5, December 11: Cranes in the morning and mudflats in the afternoon**

Before breakfast, birding will again focus on the cranes and any additional target species in the area, such as Chinese Penduline Tit. After breakfast at the hotel, we will drive north to several river mouths that are productive for overwintering shorebirds such as Common Greenshank.

Flocks of Eurasian and Black-faced Spoonbills roost and feed here, and the relatively range-restricted Saunders's Gull is also found in these habitats.

### **Day 6, December 12: Travel day to Izunuma, Miyagi Prefecture**

After an early breakfast, we will return to Kagoshima Airport and board a flight to Haneda. From there, we will transfer to the Shinkansen (bullet train), which will take us north to Miyagi Prefecture. We will stay at a hotel not far from Izunuma, a Ramsar-listed wetland renowned for wintering waterfowl.

## **Day 7, December 13: Full day birding northern Miyagi Prefecture waterfowl hotspots**

Today we will have a full day of birding around Izunuma, Uchinuma, and Kabukurinuma wetlands. Over 100,000 geese roost and feed in the surrounding rice fields. The majority are Greater White-fronted Geese, but Cackling (Aleutian), Taiga and Tundra Bean Geese, Lesser White-fronted Geese, and Snow Geese may also be found.

In the wetlands, we may see Whooper Swan, Smew, Falcated Duck, Eastern Spot-billed Duck, Eurasian Coot, and the occasional Brown-cheeked Rail. Raptors such as White-tailed Eagle, Eurasian Goshawk, and Eastern Marsh Harrier are also frequently encountered.

At sunset, we will have the opportunity to witness large flocks of geese returning to roost.

## **Day 8, December 14: Travel day to Kushiro**

This morning we will drive to Sendai Airport and board a flight to Chitose Airport, then continue on to Kushiro in eastern Hokkaido. We will have dinner and rest, preparing for cold-weather birding the following morning.

## **Day 9, December 15: Morning with Red-crowned Cranes, traveling in the afternoon to the volcanic highlands**

At dawn, we will visit a roost site for the iconic Red-crowned Crane. We will spend part of the morning exploring the Kushiro Marsh and nearby crane feeding areas, looking for species such as Marsh Tit, Long-tailed Tit, and White-backed, or Great Spotted Woodpecker.

From the Kushiro wetlands, we will drive north toward the scenic volcanic region around Lake Kussharo. We will visit Lake Mashu and the volcanic area of Iwo-Zan en route to our accommodations. This region is known for its good food and hot springs, very welcome after a day of travel and birding.

## **Day 10, December 16: Birding in highland forests in the morning and coastal wetlands in the afternoon**

Today we will continue exploring the region's volcanic scenery and birding in mixed coniferous and deciduous forests. Possible species include Gray-headed Woodpecker, Black Woodpecker, Eurasian Nuthatch, Treecreeper, and Ural Owl.

Lake Kussharo also hosts Whooper Swans, often feeding in hot spring-warmed waters along the shoreline. We will then drive southeast toward Nemuro, stopping at Furen-ko, where White-tailed and Steller's Sea Eagles often gather. We will continue to Nemuro for the night.

### **Day 11, December 17: Birding the capes and coastline of the Nemuro Peninsula**

From Nemuro, we will birdwatch along the peninsula's bays, capes, and rocky shorelines, targeting species such as Spectacled Guillemot, Steller's Sea Eagle, and Asian Rosy Finch.

This area offers excellent seawatching from the capes, with gulls and sea ducks in the harbors and raptors along the coast. It is also one of the southernmost reliable locations for Red-faced Cormorant and Rock Sandpiper, and a good place to see Crested and Least Auklets from shore.

### **Day 12, December 18: Birding around Nakashibetsu, Blakiston's Fish Owl**

Today we will travel inland to Nakashibetsu, where we will stay at a hotel with its own hot spring, located within the territory of a Blakiston's Fish Owl pair.

During the day, we will watch for woodpeckers and other forest species, as well as Brown Dipper and possibly Solitary Snipe along streams. In the evening, we will watch for the Blakiston's Fish Owl, a truly rare and impressive species.

### **Day 13, December 19: Birding the Notsuke Peninsula, returning to Nakashibetsu in the evening**

After breakfast, we will drive to the Notsuke Peninsula, a long spit of land surrounded by rich shallow marine habitats. Both eagle species are often present, along with sea ducks, Brant, and possibly Asian Rosy Finch.

Mammals in the area may include Japanese Deer and Red Fox. After coastal birding, we will return to our hotel for another opportunity to observe the Blakiston's Fish Owl in the evening.

### **Day 14, December 20: Final morning in Hokkaido, travel to Tokyo**

After breakfast, we will depart for Kushiro, making a brief stop to watch and bid farewell to the Red-crowned Cranes. From Kushiro, we will fly to Haneda, where we will have dinner and spend the night at an airport hotel.

## **Day 15, December 21: Departures**

Farewell and departure flights.

### **TOUR DETAILS**

We are excited to guide this trip in partnership with Mark Brazil, a birdwatcher, field naturalist, and author of many books including *Birds of Japan* and *Birds of East Asia*. He is a guide and expedition leader and the author of the single longest running natural history column, *Wild Watch* in the *Japan Times*. He currently lives in Eastern Hokkaido.

**LEADERS:** Aaron Bowman and Mark Brazil

**Group Size:** 11 participants

**TOUR COST:** \$9,995; Single Supplement: \$900

Note: Single supplement may not be available at all locations.

**TOUR BEGINS:** Tokyo, Japan (HND)

**TOUR ENDS:** Tokyo, Japan (HND)

Important: When booking your flights to and from Tokyo, make sure that you use the Haneda International Airport (HND).

**THE PRICE INCLUDES:** Guides, airport transfers, ground transportation throughout the tour, lodging and all meals (beginning with the arrival dinner on December 7 until the final dinner on December 21) and entrance fees to parks and visitor centers.

**NOT INCLUDED IN THE TOUR PRICE:** Your travel to and from Haneda international airport in Tokyo, trip insurance, alcoholic beverages, laundry, phone calls or other personal expenses.

**PAYMENT SCHEDULE:** A deposit of \$1,000 is required upon registration. The remaining balance is due 90 days prior to the tour (September 7, 2026)

**CANCELLATION POLICY:** If you must cancel, your deposit and any payments (minus a \$100 administrative fee) will be refunded with notification to us at least 120 days prior to departure (August 7, 2026.) With 90-119 days notice of cancellation, all but your deposit will be refunded. With less than 90 days notice, no refund is available. We recommend that you obtain travel insurance.

**TRIP CANCELLATION/TRAVEL INSURANCE:** We strongly recommend trip insurance. Trip cancellation insurance covers you if you have to cancel. Travel insurance provides coverages for medical, theft, etc. during your travels. To shop for either, check out [www.insuremytrip.com](http://www.insuremytrip.com).

**TOUR PACE AND STYLE:** On this tour, anticipate much travel from region to region. While traveling in Japan more walking is often necessary than typical in the United States. While we birdwatch you can anticipate a moderate level of walking some of which may occur on uneven or icy ground. Floor seating and bedding are typically encountered in more traditional Japanese style accommodations and restaurants. We will have a driver and vans or micro bus drive us around to birding sites. We will typically eat breakfast and dinner at the accommodations and will have lunches at convenience stores or noodle restaurants while in the field.

**CLOTHING AND EQUIPMENT:** We will travel from cool winter temperatures in the south to frigid conditions in the north. For those familiar to the East Coast of the US, the range of conditions anticipated would be similar to traveling in coastal Georgia to the interior of Maine at the same season. Bringing a variety of layering options is highly recommended. Warm base layers, down or similar jacket with a hood, warm socks and boots, and gloves and hats will be important in the north, while a light jacket and fleece with typical shoes may be all that is needed in the south.

In December in Kyushu, the average low temperature will be about 40F (4C) with an average high of 54F (12C). In Miyagi Prefecture, average lows will be 28F (-2C) and highs 41F (5C). In eastern Hokkaido, we may encounter a variety of conditions, but be prepared for temperatures as low as 5F (-15C) with the potential for wind to make it feel much colder.

Your leaders will have scopes, but you're welcome to travel with your own as well. Make sure you travel with your binoculars and medications in your carry-on in case of any delay or loss of your baggage. Keeping your luggage as light and compact as possible will aid the flow of travel. Laundry machines are often available in the hotels.

**ACCOMMODATIONS AND FOOD:** The hotels will be very comfortable and the food provided will

be excellent. Many hotels will have western style beds, however, there may be some more traditional Japanese accommodations where you will sleep on the floor on a traditional futon. There will often be a variety of food options available, however, western cuisine may not be available at all of the hotels and restaurants we visit. An appreciation for Japanese cuisine will increase your dining choices substantially. A strict vegan diet is difficult to support while traveling in Japan.

**REQUIRED TRAVEL DOCUMENTS:** No visa is required for tourists staying less than 90 days. It is important to have a passport that is valid for at least six months longer than your stay and it must have at least one blank page for an arrival stamp.

Once all your flight plans are made it is advisable to use the following website to register and fill out the declaration card: <https://www.vjw.digital.go.jp/main/#/vjwpl001>  
Once completed it will give you a QR code that will be scanned on arrival. Paper copies of customs declaration forms are also available on the airline if desired.

**VACCINATIONS AND HEALTH:** All participants should bring a good quantity of all prescription and over the counter drugs. It is important to note that there are some prescription and over the counter drugs that are not allowed in Japan even with documentation of a prescription.

These are:

**Stimulants & ADHD Drugs:** Medications containing amphetamines or methamphetamines. **Adderall** is completely banned.

**Certain Painkillers & Cough Medicines:** Products containing **codeine** (over permissible limits), hydrocodone, and certain strong opioids.

**Decongestants & Inhalers:** Medications containing **pseudoephedrine** (found in Sudafed, Actifed, and Vicks inhalers) are illegal.

**Cannabis Products:** All forms of marijuana, THC, and most CBD products. (Note: Products containing CBN are also strictly prohibited).

Medical facilities are common and in general well supplied and staffed with highly qualified doctors and nurses. Beyond what is typically recommended in the United States, there are no additionally recommended vaccinations needed for traveling to Japan in the winter. In crowded environments it is common for people to use a mask as a way to keep from catching a flu or colds and as a means to prevent their spread. Some people also use them to avoid particulates or just as a way to keep the face warm and hydrated. For more information regarding health

related topics in Japan you can visit this CDC link:

<https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/japan>

**CURRENCY:** The standard currency in Japan is Yen. US dollars (USD) are generally not accepted. Credit cards are accepted in many locations but it is advisable to have some Yen in your possession as many small vendors are entirely cash based. ATMs are widely available in convenience stores, banks and post offices. As I write this the conversion rate is 161Yen/1USD.

**TIPPING:** In general serving tipping is not practiced in Japan. It would be considered very strange or inappropriate to tip restaurant servers or in a hotel. If money were left on a table it is likely the server would try to return it to you even if it meant running after you outside of the restaurant. It is perhaps more acceptable to tip a driver who has been with the group for a substantial length of time. In this case, having a nice envelope with fresh bills and possibly some regional birding decals may be appropriate. Tips for the driver(s) and local guides are included in your tour cost, but you may additionally tip as well. Your leaders will help facilitate this at the end of the tour.

**RECOMMENDED READING:**

Brazil, M. (2018). *Birds of Japan*. Helm Field Guides.

Brazil, M. (2022). *Japan: The natural history of an Asian archipelago*.