

POSTCARD

Hokkaido

Japan's snowy ski slopes offer steamy springs and supreme cuisine, writes **Jacob Lewis**

Steam rises from the mineral-rich waters around me, fogging the floor-to-ceiling windows that frame the snow-drenched Daisetsuzan peaks on Hokkaido, Japan's northernmost isle. I'm floating in Kitoushi Forest Kitoron, a hot spring that opened in 2023.

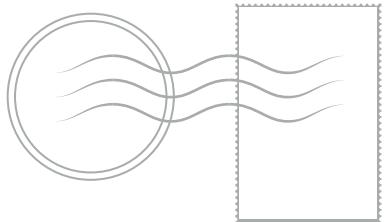
For decades, I've been visiting Japan to chase its powder skiing, but the onsen culture pulls me back just as strongly. There's a particular joy to bathing in volcanic waters after a session on the slopes, snowflakes dissolving on your shoulders while the day's runs replay in your mind.

Set in a natural basin surrounded by mountains, Asahikawa is one of the snowiest, coldest cities on Earth. Siberian air funnels into the depression, producing champagne powder prized by skiers and snowboarders that stays exceptionally light and dry, even by Hokkaido's high standards. Asahikawa sits within easy reach of more than a dozen ski resorts, from the thrilling steep runs of Kamui Ski Links to the backcountry paradise of Mount Asahidake. Without the long lift queues that plague popular Niseko and Furano, these resorts offer legendary powder with a fraction of the crowds.

That morning, I'd driven half an hour on straight roads across flat, frozen farmland from my hotel in Asahikawa to Canmore Ski Village – one of the area's smaller operations, with just six runs. A four-hour adult lift pass costs from just £2.50 for access to pristine tree runs that would cost 20 times that in the European Alps.

After an afternoon dip at the new onsen next door, the spa's restaurant delivers something remarkable: six courses with unlimited green tea are included in my £10 entry fee. There's charcoal pork shabu-shabu salad, miso-marinated black cod, Aomori scallops, duck and burdock root potato salad, plus tuna with grated yam – each dish a celebration of regional ingredients.

On the drive back to Asahikawa, I work out what the day has cost. It's almost absurd: under £13 for gourmet dining, world-class skiing and bathing in a luxurious landmark. Why do I keep skiing here? I'll leave you to do the maths. **TW**



BOOK IT

InsideJapan Tours offers a tailor-made 10-night Hokkaido trip visiting Tokyo, Sapporo, Otaru and Asahikawa, with four nights at the Asahikawa OMO7 hotel. Prices start at £2,669, based on two sharing for departures from December to February, and includes domestic flights, car hire, B&B accommodation, some dinners and guiding. insidejapantours.com



TOP: Furano ski resort, Daisetsuzan
ABOVE: The set meal at Kitoushi Forest Kitoron

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