



WHITE & WILD JAPAN



Steller's sea eagles in air-to-air combat above the sea ice off the coast of Hokkaido.

Squiver

Steller's sea eagle on the sea ice off the coast near Rausu. We will take no less than 6 boat cruises to maximise our photo opportunities with these stunning birds. In the mornings we will sail out before sunrise and try to get shots like this.



POSSIBLE HIGHLIGHTS:

- Japanese cranes
- Steller's sea eagles
- White-tailed sea eagles
- Whooper swans
- Blakiston's fish owl
- Red fox
- Lake Furen
- Lake Mashu
- Lake Kussharo
- Shiretoko Peninsula
- Boat cruises
- Black-eared kites
- Hot springs
- Snow-capped mountains
- Sika deer
- Snow landscapes
- Japanese cuisine
- Mystery bowls
- In the field instructions
- Image reviews
- Post-processing tips & tricks
- You may have some fun too

WHITE & WILD JAPAN

Date: 16 February - 28 February 2019 (13 days)
Tour leaders: Marsel van Oosten & Daniella Sibbing
Genre: wildlife
Fee: 6,345 EURO from Nakashibetsu, Japan
Single Supplement: 895 EURO for a single room
Deposit: 1,500 EURO per person
Group size: min. 8, max. 12 guests
Level: all experience levels

A WILDLIFE WINTER WONDERLAND

Winter is a great time to visit Japan. The stunning snow-covered landscape is the perfect backdrop to photograph Japan's photogenic wildlife. On this spectacular trip we will focus our attention on the wildlife of the northern island of Hokkaido, Japan's Alaska. We will photograph the rare and beautiful red-crowned cranes performing their graceful winter dances, large groups of whooper swans on misty ice lakes with dramatic mountains in the background, and white-tailed and Steller's sea eagles on the floating pack ice from Siberia. Join us for a truly unique adventure that blends a vast array of fascinating wildlife with the exquisitely beautiful landscape of Japan in winter.

OVERVIEW

Japan is an island country in East Asia. Located in the Pacific Ocean, it lies to the east of China, Korea and Russia, stretching from the Sea of Okhotsk in the north to the East China Sea in the south. The characters that make up Japan's name mean 'sun-origin', which is why Japan is sometimes identified as the 'Land of the Rising Sun'. Japan comprises over 3,000 islands, the largest of which are Honshu, Hokkaido, Kyushu and Shikoku. Most of the islands are mountainous, many volcanic; for example, Japan's highest peak, Mount Fuji, is a volcano. Japan has the world's tenth largest population, with about 128 million people. The Greater Tokyo Area, which includes the capital city of Tokyo and several surrounding prefectures, is the largest metropolitan area in the world, with over 30 million

YOU KNOW IT'S COLD OUTSIDE WHEN
YOU GO OUTSIDE AND IT'S COLD.

//ANONYMOUS





TOUR ITINERARY

DAY	PROGRAM
1	Drive to Nemuro
2	Lake Furen (eagles)
3	Lake Furen, drive to Rausu (eagles)
4	Rausu (eagles)
5	Rausu (eagles)
6	Rausu, drive to Lake Kussharo (eagles & swans)
7	Lake Kussharo (swans)
8	Lake Kussharo (swans)
9	Lake Kussharo (swans)
10	Lake Kussharo, drive to Tsurui (swans & cranes)
11	Tsurui (cranes)
12	Tsurui (cranes)
13	Flight Kushiro - Tokyo



A whooper swan flies by on a cold winter morning. The relatively warm air rising from the nearby hot springs freezes instantly once it touches the branches of the trees, creating a magical backdrop.



> The Steller's sea eagle (*Haliaeetus pelagicus*) is one of the largest raptors.

> The typical size range is 86.5-105 cm (34-41 inches) long and the wingspan is 203-241 cm (6.8-8 feet).

> On average, females weigh from 6.8 to 9 kg (15 to 20 lb).

> Males are considerably lighter with a weight range from 4.9 to 6 kg (10.8 to 13.2 lb).

> An unverified record exists of a huge female, gorged on salmon, having weighed 12.7 kg (28 lb).

>The eyes, the bill, and the feet of adults are all yellow in colouration.

> This species is classified as vulnerable.

> The main threats to its survival are habitat alteration, industrial pollution and over-fishing.

> The current population is estimated at 5,000 and decreasing.

WHAT'S THE PHOTOGRAPHY LIKE?

HOKKAIDO

Although Hokkaido is at about the same latitude as southern France, prevailing winds from Siberia transform this northern island into a beautiful snow-filled wonderland in winter.

CRANES

At this time of the year we have the exceptional opportunity to witness and photograph, at close range, large flocks of Japanese cranes, or red-crowned cranes, as they leap, pirouette, and trumpet loudly in their dramatic courting and greeting rituals.

We will visit several of the areas where the cranes are regularly fed, and we should expect to see and photograph flocks of 100 or more of these magnificent birds at ranges down to just 50 feet or less! We can also expect to see and photograph white-tailed eagles, black-eared kites, and possibly red foxes that visit for a free meal.

SWANS

Another highlight will be a visit to a stunningly beautiful scenic crater lake where we will photograph flocks of whooper swans gliding

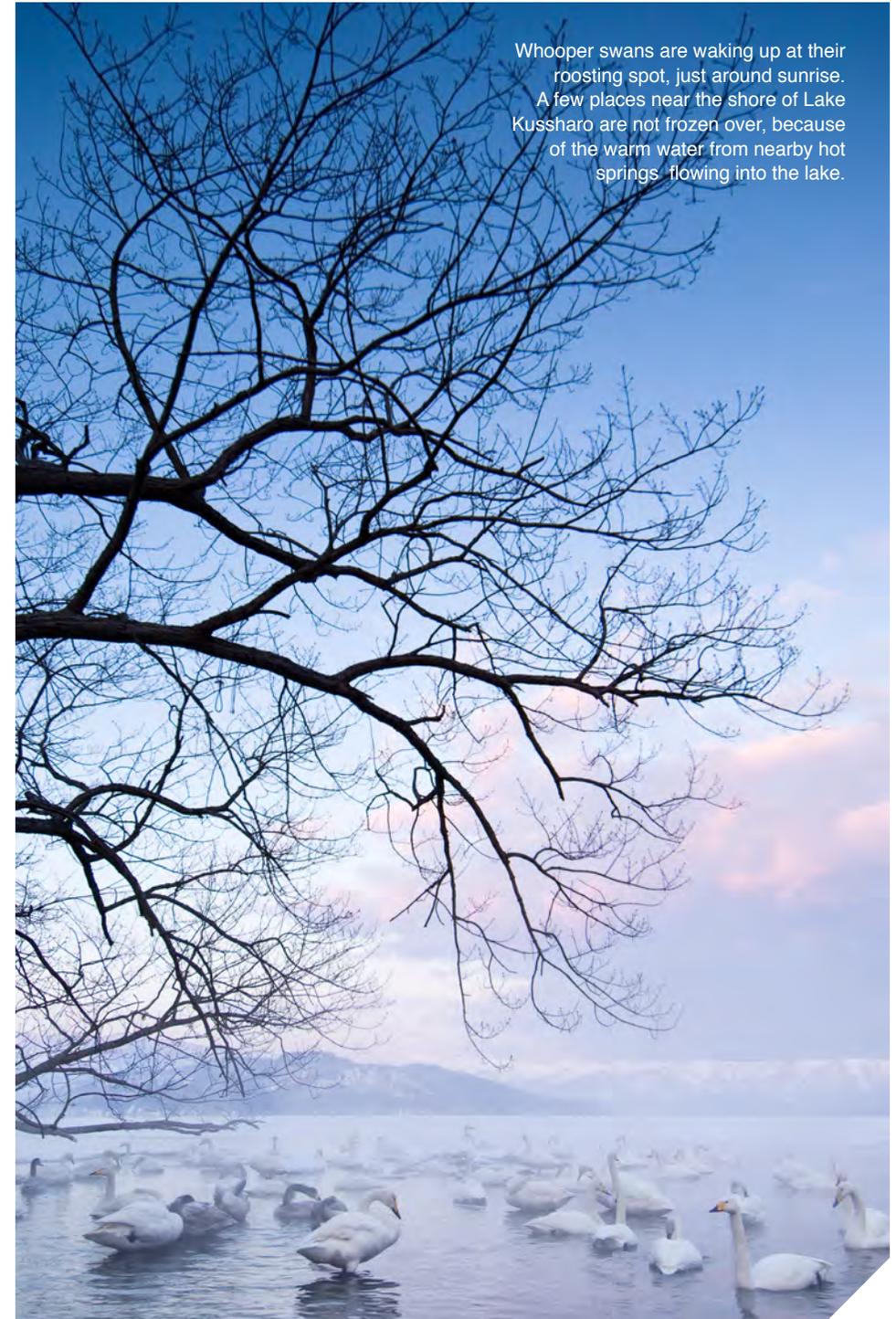
through the early morning mist. We can get quite close to the swans, enabling us to photograph them with a wide angle lens to include the fairytale-like habitat.

EAGLES

On the Shiretoko peninsula we'll take no less than 6 boat cruises (weather permitting), of which 3 private afternoon cruises with just our group! We will sail through the pack ice to photograph Steller's sea eagles, the planet's largest and most powerful raptor, as well as the impressive white-tailed eagles. We will photograph the eagles from our boat in the pack ice field on different days subject to weather conditions.

This is a very rewarding and beautiful area with opportunities for spectacular eagle in flight shots. There will also be opportunities to photograph eagles roosting on various areas of the pack ice. The pack ice is diminishing in this area and is only available during a very short window in February and early March. If there is no pack ice, we will try to get eagles in flight shots over the water.

Whooper swans are waking up at their roosting spot, just around sunrise. A few places near the shore of Lake Kussharo are not frozen over, because of the warm water from nearby hot springs flowing into the lake.





WHITE-TAILED EAGLE

- > The white-tailed eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) is also known as sea eagle.
- > It is considered a close cousin of the American bald eagle and occupies the same ecological niche in Eurasia.
- > The white-tailed eagle is a very large bird. It measures 66–94 cm (26–37 in) in length with a 1.78–2.45 m (5.8–8.0 ft) wingspan.
- > The wingspan, with a midpoint of 2.18 m (7.2 ft), is on average the largest of any eagle.
- > This large eagle breeds in northern Europe and northern Asia.
- > The territory of the white-tailed eagle ranges between 30–70 km², normally in sheltered coastal locations.
- > The white-tailed eagle makes use of a number of barking calls, frequently fairly quiet and unimpressive for the size of the bird.
- > Because of the wing size this bird is often called 'flying door.'



WHAT TO BRING?

CLOTHING

The most important clothing advice for Japan is: dress in layers and make sure you have enough warm clothing with you. This means thermal underwear (long pants and long sleeved shirts), insulated (ski)pants, thin liner gloves to work your camera with, warm gloves to put over the liner gloves, a warm (down) jacket, a warm hat and most importantly: warm shoes. Invest in good shoes, because you will be standing still in freezing temperatures in the early morning. You will receive a detailed packing list after booking this trip.

OTHER USEFUL ITEMS

Bring hand warmers with you, so you can put them in the pocket of your jacket or your gloves in order to keep your fingers warm. You can also buy these in every super market on Hokkaido, so don't worry if you can't find them. A balaclava can be comfortable on the boat to shield your face from the cold wind. In order to avoid falling on slippery ice or snow, we recommend to bring some crampons. There are very cheap and lightweight versions available, consisting of rubber soles with steel spikes, which you simply pull over your outdoor shoes.

PHOTO EQUIPMENT

If possible you should consider bringing a back-up body in case something happens to your primary camera - we have seen expensive equipment shatter into thousand bits on the ice, and you definitely don't want to be in Japan without a camera! Also, make sure you have enough cards, because you will be shooting a lot more than you think.

We recommend you bring a sturdy tripod. You will be able to use it at almost all locations.

For landscape and animalscape shots a wide angle (zoom) lens or a 'standard' (zoom) lens will be your best choice most of the time. A polariser will deepen the colours, increase contrast and reduce reflections off the water.



For the cranes (zoom)lenses in the 70-200 or 200-400 range will be sufficient most of the time. For extra reach you can bring a 1.4x or 1.7x teleconverter, or you can even bring a 500mm or 600mm. Remember though that you'll have to carry it all yourself!

We will be shooting the Steller's sea eagles from a boat. We will not be able to use tripods on board because of limited space, so you will be handholding your lens or using parts of the boat to support it. A (zoom)lens with vibration reduction or image stabilisation in the 400mm range would be perfect for this kind of photography.

For the whooper swans you can use long lenses for flight shots and even a wide angle for habitat shots.



You can bring a flash, but very few people actually use one.

Camera equipment should be carefully protected from snow or rain, so bring rain covers. StormJacket and RainCoat offer very good products that are both compact and lightweight. Also bring some lens tissues and a blower brush to clean your lenses regularly - if we get snow, it will get onto the lens.

The low temperatures can drain your batteries quickly, so make sure you bring some spare ones.

If possible, bring a laptop for the image review sessions and to download your cards onto. And don't forget to bring an external drive or image tank to make regular backups - hard drives do crash occasionally.

If you have any questions on what equipment to bring, don't hesitate to drop us an email.



> The Whooper swan (*Cygnus cygnus*) is a large Northern Hemisphere swan.

> It has a length of 140-160 cm (55-63 in), a wingspan of 205-235 cm (81-93 in) and a weight range of 8-15 kg (17.6-33 lbs).

> Whooper swans require large areas of water to live in, especially when they are still growing, because their body weight cannot be supported by their legs for extended periods of time.

> The whooper swan spends much of its time swimming, straining the water for food, or eating plants that grow on the bottom.

> They have a deep honking call that gave them their name.

> Despite their size, whooper swans are powerful fliers. They can migrate many hundreds of miles to their wintering sites in northern Europe and eastern Asia.

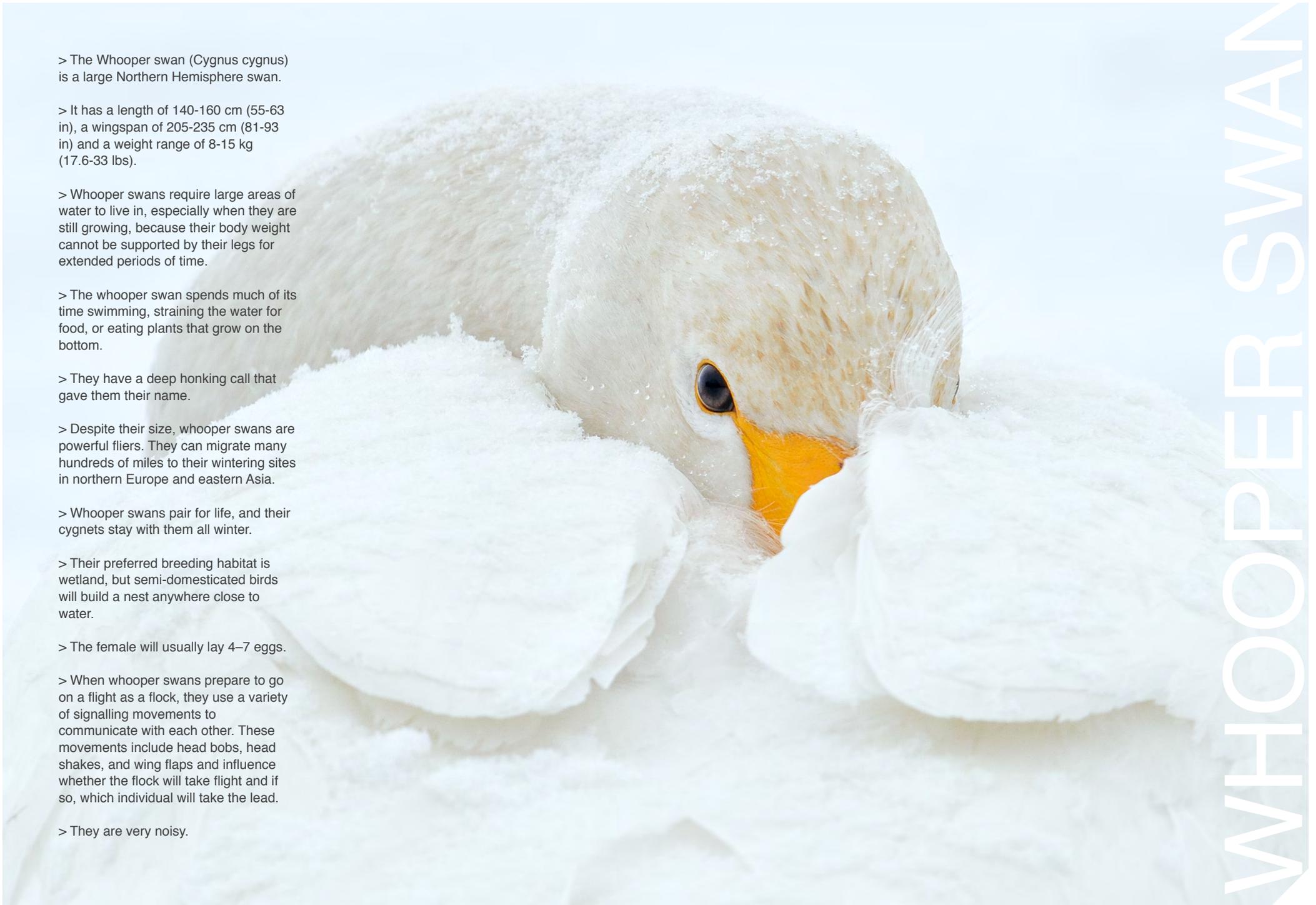
> Whooper swans pair for life, and their cygnets stay with them all winter.

> Their preferred breeding habitat is wetland, but semi-domesticated birds will build a nest anywhere close to water.

> The female will usually lay 4–7 eggs.

> When whooper swans prepare to go on a flight as a flock, they use a variety of signalling movements to communicate with each other. These movements include head bobs, head shakes, and wing flaps and influence whether the flock will take flight and if so, which individual will take the lead.

> They are very noisy.



WHOOOPER SWAN

Crows are smart. They know that if they stay close to the eagles, they may get lucky with some of the leftovers, so you will often see them following an eagle. Not always as nicely synchronised though.



CLIMATE

Hokkaido has a temperate climate with long, cold winters and cool summers. Precipitation is not heavy, but the islands usually develop deep snow banks in the winter. In most of Honshu, the rainy season begins before the middle of June and lasts about six weeks. In late summer and early autumn, typhoons often bring heavy rain.

WEATHER

February is a nice time to visit Japan; the air is crisp and it is usually dry. It will however be quite cold, with temperatures in Tokyo of 0 to 10°C, to very cold in Hokkaido, with up to -25°C at night with days around 0°C. During our visit it is possible that it will also be snowing. Make sure you bring very warm clothing, but most importantly: bring warm boots!

ACCOMMODATION

A combination of traditional Japanese Ryokans and more western style hotels. Some of the hotels offer the option of bathing in natural hot springs, some of those are outdoors. An experience you should definitely not miss.

VISAS AND ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

All visitors require a passport, which is valid for at least six months after they are due to leave, and an onward ticket of some sort. Visitors from most western countries do not need a visa to enter Japan, but it is always best to check online for the latest status of immigration policies.

CAMERA INSURANCE

Most travel insurance policies are poor at covering valuables, including cameras. Make sure your camera equipment is well insured against damage or theft when traveling abroad. We speak from experience.



HEALTH

There are no specific health issues involved with travelling to Japan. As long as you are in good health yourself, there should not be any problems. The water in Japan is safe to drink, but bottled water and mineral water are also readily available. If something unforeseen does happen to you on your trip, the hospitals and medical facilities are among the best in the world. But we always recommend you to make sure your travel insurance is valid and appropriate.

SAFETY

Japan is one of the safest countries in the world. The actual crime rate is very low and you can walk around everywhere without any problems. Of course common sense should be applied anywhere in the world, but you will feel completely safe everywhere (including in Tokyo). While at times many Japanese do not speak English, most people are extremely hospitable and will go out of their way to help travellers find their way around and make the most of their trip to Japan.

LEVEL OF FITNESS

Easy. Most locations are arrived at by bus. One word of warning though: there will be lots of snow around, and in some places it might be iced up. This means it can be very slippery so be careful and use crampons.

EAGLES MAY SOAR, BUT WEASELS DON'T GET SUCKED INTO JET ENGINES.

//JOHN BENFIELD



Whooper swans are large birds and need a long runway for take-off. Getting a low perspective is easy here.



PARTICIPATION FEE & ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The participation fee for this trip is 5,995 Euro per person, based on sharing. The group consists of a minimum of 8 and a maximum of 12 participants. The group is lead by Marsel van Oosten and Daniella Sibbing.

A single room is available with a single supplement of 895 Euro. If you would like to share a room but we cannot find a roommate for you, we will have to charge you the single supplement.

COST INCLUDES

Local transport, meals, drinks, accommodation, entrance and park fees, 6 boat cruises, local guide, private bus, in the field instructions, image reviews, processing tips & tricks.

COST EXCLUDES

International flights, insurance, snacks, Louis Vuitton bag.

DOMESTIC FLIGHTS

We usually include all transportation in our tours, but in this case we start and end the tour in Hokkaido. The reason for this is that ANA offers a Sky Pass to foreigners, which is called the 'Experience Japan' fare. When you use this Sky Pass for your flights from Tokyo to Nakashibetsu, and from Kushiro back to Tokyo, you will get a highly discounted rate of around 100 USD per flight! And that is a lot lower than we can get for a standard group rate.

This is the reason why we want you to book your own tickets for this tour to and from Hokkaido. We do however ask everyone to come in on the same flight, and depart at the

same time, in order to keep the pick-up and drop-off for the start and finish of the tour synchronised. We will give you more details when you book this tour! And we will of course help you in case you have any questions.

Please note that adverse weather and other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the trip, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

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> The red-crowned crane (*Grus japonensis*) is also called the Japanese crane or Manchurian crane.

> It is the second rarest crane in the world.

> In East Asia, it is known as a symbol of luck and fidelity.

> When it matures, the red-crowned crane is snow white with a patch of red skin on its head.

> This patch of skin becomes bright red when the crane becomes angry or excited.

> Normally the crane lays 2 eggs, with only one surviving.

> All red-crowned cranes migrate, except for a flock that is resident in Hokkaido.

> The crane eats small amphibians, aquatic invertebrates, insects, and plants that grow in marshes and swamps.

> The estimated total population of the species is only 2,750 in the wild, including about 1,000 birds in the resident Japanese population

> The crane eats small amphibians, aquatic invertebrates, insects, and plants that grow in marshes and swamps.

> The habitat used is marshes, riverbanks, rice fields, and other wet areas.

> The red-crowned crane is endangered and received this status on June 2, 1970.

> The most pressing threat is habitat destruction.





We left our hotel very early to be at the lake when the swans would still be asleep. When we arrived, we had to work our way through a massive wall of snow, all the way trying not to wake the swans. As it got brighter, a true winter wonderland unfolded in front of our eyes. Pure magic.

A Steller's sea eagle dives down to catch a fish.



WHY VISIT JAPAN WITH SQUIVER?

We have been leading photo tours in Japan since 2008. Over the years we have tweaked the itinerary endlessly, always looking for ways to make it better. The one you're reading about now, is a special one. It was requested by guests that have traveled with us before, and even on this same trip. That tells you two things: they must have really liked the Japan tour, and they like to travel with us. We feel very fortunate to have such a fine group of people who travel with us again, and again, and again. To us, they are much more than guests, they are Squiverati.

JAPAN AT A GLANCE

- >Location - Japan is an island country in East Asia.
- >Located in the Pacific Ocean, it lies to the east of China, Korea and Russia, stretching from the Sea of Okhotsk in the north to the East China Sea in the south.
- >Size - 377,873 km²
- >Time - GMT +9
- >Terrain - Rugged, mountainous islands
- >Electricity - 100V
- >Weights and measures - Metric
- >International telephone code - 81
- >Status - Monarchy
- >GDP - \$38,633.71 per capita
- >Currency - Japanese Yen (¥), equivalent to €1=¥119,37; \$1=¥113,53; £1=¥141,09 (February 2017)
- >Population - 126,143,443
- >Density - 336/km² (5796/km² in Tokyo)
- >Population growth per year - -0.2%
- >Life expectancy in years at birth - Japan has one of the highest life expectancy rates in the world: 83.1 years
- >Economy - Japan is the second largest economy in the world, after the US, at around \$4.8 trillion in terms of nominal GDP and third after the United States and China in terms of purchasing power parity.
- >Banking, insurance, real estate, retail, transportation and telecommunications are all major industries.
- >Capital - Tokyo
- >Other cities - Yokohama, Osaka, Sapporo, Kyoto, Fukuoka
- >Language - Japanese
- >Religion - 95% practise Buddhism or Shinto

IF IT LOOKS LIKE A DUCK AND SOUNDS LIKE A
DUCK, IT COULD BE A REALLY UGLY SWAN.

//TIMMOTHY RADMAN

Whooper swans are starting their morning routine on a cold morning. This is usually when the swans are most quiet and it's a beautiful, tranquil moment to watch them.

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