NISEKO BACKCOUNTRY LODGE

Please read and understand this entire document!

Download the latest version BEFORE making any arrangements:
https://nisekobackcountrylodge.com/info-pack

Last updated: 5 November 2026

Hi Guys,

Not long to go now and you'll be riding powder in Japan in what is sure to be an amazing experience!

This pack is constantly being updated throughout the year, so it is important to revisit the most recent version of this document before your trip or before making any arrangements.

After another amazing year, we are excited to be preparing for another winter here in Niseko and we want to welcome you to all that the Niseko area has to offer. As Niseko continues to grow and become more well-established as a destination, some things may be slightly different from previous years: a new building here and there, some older buildings or businesses gone, swept up in the progress and change. But the overall scene and feel of Niseko is largely the same: great snow, a wealth of hot springs, and a wonderful variety of food and accommodations.

For some of you this year's trip to Niseko is one of many and you are well familiar with what is involved with a Niseko holiday and the kind of preparations that are necessary. For others this first trip to Niseko will require a little more thought in regards to preparation. For all travellers to Niseko this winter, it will be an opportunity to spend time with family and friends, to meet new people, and to experience the best of Niseko. To ensure that everyone gets the most out of their Niseko holiday and gets to their destination smoothly this winter we have put together some helpful information. So please have a look through and use this as a rough guide to help you pack and prepare.

We look forward to serving you during your stay with us at Niseko Backcountry Lodge.

Pre – Trip Information

The Lodge

Niseko Backcountry Lodge has 2 stories of facilities, including: restaurant, ski room, drying room, TV's, large communal area, wireless internet and laundry facilities.

The lodge has many of the mod-cons, but still has the cool Japanese feel that you come to Japan for. You will be able to keep some of your gear in your rooms but there will be storage provided for your board bags and racks for skis/boards. There is also a boot drying area and drying room.

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Niseko and surrounding resorts

Niseko is on the Island of Hokkaido and is approximately 2.5 hours by road transfer from New Chitose Airport in Sapporo. Niseko itself is a town that you may not even see when you are in the Niseko area, as it is away from the ski resorts, and is only a small country town with a train station, and a few great restaurants.

There are many resorts in the Niseko area. Niseko Backcountry Lodge is located slopeside at the Moiwa ski resort. Moiwa is Niseko's hidden gem, and the reason why we believe Niseko Backcountry Lodge is the best located lodge in the Niseko area. Few see crowds at the resort - in fact most of the time you will be one of just a handful on the mountain, yet the resort boasts some of the best snow and terrain in the area.

Whilst the rest of the crowds are in the busy Hirafu area battling to find the last little bit of powder at 11am, you can be up to your waist in fresh powder for days over in Moiwa. You will not be disappointed!

The most popular resort is the Niseko-United area, which is approx. 3 or 4 minutes away from Niseko Backcountry Lodge. You can ski home from this resort to our door. Access to Niseko-United is via our free lodge shuttle to the Annupuri lifts in the morning. It's about 3-4 minutes in the shuttle to Annupuri, and from there a shuttle trip to Hirafu via the Niseko United shuttle bus. Our shuttles operate each morning and evening to Annupuri, and the Niseko United shuttles operate all day to/from Hirafu. Alternatively, you can ski to Annupuri by using a one-time lift pass for the Moiwa quad.

Niseko-United is regarded as one of Japan's best resorts. The skiing area is made up of four separate resorts – Niseko Grand Hirafu, Niseko Hanazono, Niseko Village (formerly Higashiyama) and Niseko Annupuri. A Niseko-United lift pass gives you access to each of these resorts; however, you can also buy cheaper single resort tickets.

Every one of the Niseko resorts are equipped with efficient lift systems. Lifts are often gondolas and covered chairlifts so even on the most extreme blizzard days, you can ride in comfort. Bad weather does not mean bad visibility in Niseko, as the resorts tend to have an abundance of tree runs and being low in altitude, they rarely experience true whiteout conditions that are often found in North American or European resorts of higher altitude.

Queues are rare in shoulder seasons, except for the Hirafu/Hanazono areas which can have massive lines due to its huge popularity and abundance of accommodation.

There are also plenty of alpine alternatives here to be enjoyed - snowmobiling, snowshoeing, and relaxing in the natural hot springs (called *onsens*). All these activities and tickets can be arranged from our reception.

Our Location

Niseko Backcountry Lodge is located in the Moiwa base area of Niseko, Hokkaido. We are slopeside at Moiwa resort, and within easy walking distance to ski hire, four onsens and various places to eat and drink.

We are NOT located in the busy Hirafu base area, which gives you many benefits:
1: Little to zero lift queues
2: More powder snow than you will experience anywhere else in the Niseko area
3: A more genuine Japanese local experience – away from the crowds.
4: More flexibility in your stay with the ability to ski/ride all of Niseko's resorts during your stay.

Guests who arrive expecting us to be in Hirafu will be disappointed to find that we are 15-20 minutes 'away from the masses'. We stress: Unless you are after 30 different restaurants and a wide selection of bars open until 2am each night, there is little need to go to Hirafu whilst in Niseko. Everything you need is within easy distance from Niseko Backcountry Lodge, all at cheaper rates than Hirafu. Read more on transport around the local area below.

Arranging your Ski Experience

Ski Hire

Many guests rent their gear on arrival to Niseko. It can be a very convenient way to travel, freeing up luggage space, and ensuring the best equipment for the Japanese powder. A popular idea for many is to travel with your own ski boots, and just rent powder ski/poles or board. Every combination/option is available. A 'full set' will include everything you need right down to goggles and hat.

Ski hire can be arranged for your stay through WINTER FIRST ski rental. Their gear is exceptional, and their service is incredible.

Winter First have the best gear and prices in the area, and they will deliver and fit all your gear in the lodge at a scheduled time as part of the service. You don't have to go anywhere. If you are also hiring boots, they will bring numerous sizes to make sure they fit you well. Payment will be processed at the time of fit out at the lodge.

Please book directly with Winter First on their website at: https://winter1st.com/en/

All hire companies in the area have up to date gear. You will not be disappointed with the quality.

PLEASE don't rent from hire places in Hirafu. You'll be disappointed at spending hours trying to arrange transportation, then sorting out how to return your gear at the end of your stay.

Avalanche Gear Rental

Niseko Backcountry Lodge rents full avalanche packs, beacons, snowshoes, collapsible poles, or each piece individually from reception at cheaper rates than other rental companies in the area.

Prices are listed here:
https://www.nisekobackcountrylodge.com/images/doc/Backcountry_Rental_Price_List.pdf

Please book in advance via email, as availability can be limited in peak times.

Backcountry Touring Gear Rental

If you are planning on renting your backcountry touring gear in Niseko, it is best to arrange this through Rhythm Summit in Hirafu. They have the best selection of touring skis, split-boards, skins, and poles in the area. Scan this QR code on your phone to be taken to the Rhythm site. Using this QR code for your booking will also give you a 5% discount on your rental.

Due to the distance to Rhythm and their limited pick-up options, PLEASE only book with Rhythm if you are renting their backcountry touring gear. The normal skis/boards available from Winter 1st gear is terrific, so use them where you can for regular or premium ski gear (see 'Ski Hire' section above).

Warnings on touring gear rental:

1. Many rental outlets in Niseko (including Rhythm) only rent touring gear to their guiding customers during peak season.
2. Trying to arrange touring gear on arrival in Niseko can be almost impossible, so do your best to organise it before you arrive.
3. Stores tend to alter their rental policies on the fly during the season, so don't be surprised if touring gear is suddenly unavailable without a booking.
4. We do not provide any transportation to rental outlets

When you make a booking with Rhythm, and only if your group is large enough, they MAY come and pick you up from Niseko Backcountry Lodge for your fitting. Just call them from the lodge phone when you arrive to

make your pick-up arrangements. If they can't pick you up, you will need to make your way to their store via the Niseko United shuttle bus system. In recent seasons, many stores have been short of staff and services, so expect to have to make your way yourself, but hope for the best.

Other potential options:
https://nisekoskisnowboardrentals.com/
https://risingsunguides.com/equipment-rental/

Lift Passes

Moiwa lift passes are available from reception at Niseko Backcountry Lodge at a discount to the ticket window price.

Many people ask us for Niseko-United 'All-Mountain' lift passes, but we would **not** suggest you get the large multi-day all-mountain tickets as they can be very expensive and limiting.

Our guests over a week would normally ski about 3-4 days at Moiwa (outside your front door), then probably another day at a different resort around the area (like Rusutsu on our regular trips), then the rest of the time at the larger Niseko resorts of Annupuri, Niseko Village, Hirafu and Hanazono. If you buy the big multi-day Niseko United lift pass, you are limited to just skiing Niseko United, yet there are so many other places, with far less crowds and more powder just waiting for you!

For example, if you ski Annupuri and love it, or you just want to ski the Annupuri back bowls, then you can just buy a pass that covers the Annupuri resort - it will save you a lot of money – e.g. Annupuri 5-hour pass is 6000JPY vs a Niseko United day pass of 10500JPY in peak season.

Many of our guests who ride the Niseko backcountry only use a pass for Moiwa or Annupuri as these are where most of the backcountry gates are located – an all-mountain pass will be a waste of money.

If you buy the multi-day passes, you WON'T have the flexibility to decide each morning what you want to do and where you want to go.

Passes for Moiwa are available at our reception at a discount to the ticket window price, whilst Niseko United and other resort passes are available from their relevant ticket windows.

Ski School

Regardless of which ski school you choose, we cannot stress enough how important it is to book early. Ski schools in Niseko can sell out months in advance, so the earlier you can book the better!

Private lessons:

Niseko Ski Club offer native-English speaking lessons at Moiwa ski resort – right outside your door! Based out of Moiwa Lodge, Niseko Ski Club is our sister operation and shares our office, so it's a seamless option for your stay. It's the perfect option for anyone wanting to improve their skiing, discover deep powder for the first time, or is looking to hunt for something more.

You can book via www.nisekoskiclub.com

Remember that with all lessons (whether private or group lessons), the lesson will always be tailored to the lowest standard of skier/rider in the group, so plan your group carefully before booking anywhere.

If you choose to look elsewhere, other options are:
Rhythm: https://rhythmjapan.com/winter-lessons-programs/niseko-private-lesson
ProPeak: https://www.propeak.org/private-lessons
Moiwa Ski School: https://niseko-moiwa.jp/school/

Group Lessons:

Group lessons can be very difficult to come by in the Niseko area. Annupuri has group lessons, however these are exclusively held in Japanese, so are not appropriate for foreigners. There are some group lessons available out of the Hirafu base area, however they can be logistically awkward to get to, and a separate lift pass must be purchased over and above the lesson cost.

The private lessons with Niseko Ski Club listed above are often far better value for money.

If you still wish to look for group lessons, then you can try GoSnow. Note that this requires a morning transfer to Hirafu to make the lesson time.
https://www.gosnowniseko.com/lessons/adult-group-lessons

Kids Ski School
As mentioned above, the best option for most people is to use the Niseko Ski Club. Their lessons are conducted from the lodge, and you have the flexibility to pick and choose break times, when to retire for the day, and there is no need to pick your kids up from their lesson at the end of the day – they can also look after the kids at the lodge in the case that your child is cold/tired from a huge day prior to your return (up to the end of the scheduled lesson time).

If you want to look elsewhere for lesson options, GoSnow have group kids lessons available. You would need to make your way to Hirafu for these lessons, and also purchase a separate lift ticket.

Ages 7-14 - https://www.gosnowniseko.com/lessons/yama-riders
Ages 3-6 - https://www.gosnowniseko.com/lessons/ninja-kids

Guiding

A great way to explore Niseko is with a good guide. There are plenty of guiding companies that operate in the Niseko area - some good, some bad. It's vital to find the perfect fit. Whether you want lift accessed terrain, side-country, or are wanting to go deep into the backcountry with touring gear, we can arrange it.

Importantly, a good guide is not limited to any one resort, so you can travel all through the Niseko area based on the best snow conditions on any given day.

Climbing and riding/skiing Mt Yotei is incredible, and something to seriously consider doing whilst in Niseko - skiing a volcano is a bucket-list item for many. A Yotei trip normally incurs a surcharge on top of guiding rates.

There are two guiding options that we can recommend:

1: Native English speaking guides: Big Fun Guides
For guiding and instruction, we prefer long time locals Todd, Kenji and co. They have all worked in the Niseko area for many years and have been our most requested operators.

Bookings are essential for any guiding company, as all guides in the area generally sell out well in advance – 120,000JPY per day for up to 4 people (2025-26 pricing), and 15,000JPY for each additional person up to approx. 5. Depending on group size and experience, a second guide would be required for more than 5 people at the same 'per day' rate.

Bookings must be made via email to Kenji on kenjifunahashi@gmail.com . He can be slow in the off-season to respond, so

2: Non-native English speaking guides: Niseko Powder Guides
Their lead guide and owner - Naoto Seto – has lived in Moiwa year-round and has been a Niseko local for decades. Naoto and his guides are not native English speakers, so you will not be able to have extended conversations in English, however they are widely respected local guides, and know Niseko as well as anyone. Their pricing is also a lot cheaper.

You can book online on their website at https://www.nisekopowder.info/en/ and guiding starts from 100,000JPY per day for up to 4 people.

Avalanche Safety

Due to the HUGE amounts of snowfall in Niseko, many avalanche hazards can and do exist. Lodge staff have dug many people out of avalanches in Niseko back-bowls and the surrounding areas, and there have been recent deaths in the backcountry. Niseko's backcountry is not controlled or patrolled.

Whilst avalanche packs and beacons are not yet compulsory to access Niseko's backcountry, their use is universally expected. You should carry and be prepared to use avalanche safety equipment to access back-country and back-bowls.

Skiing and snowboarding is fun, but don't under-estimate the dangers mother nature can throw at you! Recent deaths have often been caused by people acting outside of the local rules and regulations. **THE DANGERS ARE REAL!**

Avalanche packs are available to rent from the lodge – see section above on 'Avalanche Gear Rental'.

The Niseko backcountry map and rules can be found here: (Niseko Backcountry Lodge is in the lower left corner of the map): https://moiwalodge.com/assets/Documents/Niseko_Rules_2019-20.pdf

The latest daily avalanche information is available here: http://niseko.nadare.info/

Cat Skiing

Cat-skiing can be one of the best ski experiences in Niseko, however each of the operations have their pros and cons.

Our order of cat skiing operations below is based on advanced skiers and riders and is listed in the order we would choose to go for the day. You can choose to ignore the order of recommendations if you like but do your research to avoid disappointment.

To book any of the below options, please email us.

1. https://iwanairesort.com/ - Iwanai Resort. This has the best terrain. Sometimes there is not quite as much snow as some other areas, but an amazing ocean view and normally great snow regardless. 155,400JPY per person (2025-26 pricing).
2. https://risingsunguides.com/cat-skiing/ - Big Wave/Rising Sun Cat Skiing. They operate in the Shiribeshi mountains. It has short runs (200m), but lots of steep and fun terrain, pillows, etc. 149,000JPY per person.
3. https://www.hokkaidobackcountryclub.com/en/cat-skiing/chisenupuri-snowcats/ - Hokkaido Backcountry Club - Chise terrain can be a bit limited for advanced skiers/riders, but the cats operate like a chairlift meaning you don't need guides = lots of vertical in a day (3360m vertical on average). approx. 175,000JY per person.
4. https://hanazononiseko.com/en/winter/activities/weiss-cat-skiing - Niseko Weiss Powder Cars - a mix of terrain and snow. Good for beginner/intermediates, but advanced customers often complain that the terrain is too flat.
   175,000JPY per person (2025-26 pricing).

Another option is to have a regular ski guide. These tend to be far cheaper and can go everywhere in the local area ... lots of people choose a normal guide as their option.

ABS and BCA Cylinders

There are currently no stores in the Niseko area that rent or sell cylinders.

Do the legwork and research cylinder rentals before arrival – we're local, and we find them hard to source!

Rules for the Mountain

The general rule of the mountain is to observe and abide by all signage and warnings on the mountain. They are there for a good reason and if you disobey them, you will run the risk of having your pass confiscated by the ski patrol.

Stay away from areas that are out of bounds and do not duck ropes that fence off a particular area of the mountain. This is for your safety. Going backcountry is fine, but if you go into an area that is permanently closed, you will find yourself locked up, or worse. The Japanese take this VERY seriously. Do the right thing, ride the backcountry where you should, and you will have more than enough powder to keep you happy. The key message is: Don't be an idiot!

The Niseko backcountry map and rules can be found here: (Niseko Backcountry Lodge is in the lower left corner of the map): https://moiwalodge.com/assets/Documents/Niseko_Rules_2019-20.pdf

Transportation – Arrivals/Departures

Catching a bus from New Chitose Airport to Niseko is the most popular option for travellers to arrive to Niseko. It is fast, convenient, and relatively cheap.

If you have the budget, a rental car will make your experience in Niseko more convenient and enjoyable, as it will provide you the flexibility to visit different resorts or out-of-the-way restaurants, and experience more of the 'little things' that make a Niseko visit so special.

Another good option can be a private transfer. The most up-to-date transfer options are below.

Airport to Niseko bus transfers

Booking options:
Most likely you will be arriving to Hokkaido via New Chitose Airport (Sapporo's main airport). The best way to organise a bus to/from Chitose airport and Niseko is to book it yourself. Please follow the 'Steps to Follow' lower in this page.

Option 1: The first option should be the 'Chuo Bus'. This offers direct services from New Chitose to nearby Northern Resort Annupuri – approx. 5 minutes from Niseko Backcountry Lodge. They operate 4 services each way, and if you find one of their service times appropriate, it is a very convenient and speedy option, with wifi onboard.

https://teikan.chuo-bus.co.jp/en/course/18958

Option 2: If these times don't suit, then another option will be to catch the longer duration 'Resort Liner' service. This service passes via Hirafu and other resort areas before arriving to Moiwa, so takes about an hour longer. Bookings are now available at the link below – remember to book this bus to Kanro No Mori hotel:

https://www.access-n.jp/winter2026/en/skibus/detail/101chitose_rusutsu_niseko.html

PLEASE do NOT book with the 'White Liner' or GoodSports bus company, as it will only take you to Niseko Village. We do not pick up from Niseko Village, and you will need to take a taxi from there to the lodge (which can often be difficult to arrange).

Steps to follow

Regardless of the bus company you book with, we will only pick up guests arriving in the Moiwa or Annupuri areas, so book your bus to Northern Resort Annupuri, or Kanro No Mori hotel in Moiwa.

The steps to follow:

1) Our reception is closed between 10am and 4pm. If you arrive during this time, we will not be able to either pick you up, or check you in. However, you are welcome to leave your gear near reception and explore the area until we re-open.
   The Niseko Area Circuit Bus operates during these times and can pick up from Northern Resort Annupuri and take you to Moiwa Ski Resort for 100JPY. This bus operates until 22 March. The timetable for 2025-26 is here: https://moiwalodge.com/assets/Niseko_Circuit_Bus_2025-26.pdf
2) Book your transfer at least 9 days before arrival and departure, as this is when most companies 'close off' their bookings to new customers. If you need to book inside this time, we may be able to assist - a 1000JPY booking fee would apply.
3) Be sure to allow at least 1 hour between the scheduled flight arrival time and the bus departure time. Your destination should be booked as Northern Resort Annupuri for Chuo Bus transfers, and Kanro No Mori for Resort Liner. We do not pick up guests outside of these two stops.

4) Once you receive confirmation, please email this to us at info@nisekobackcountrylodge.com

IMPORTANTLY:
1. We will NOT be able pick you up if you do not let us know your arrival time at least 24hrs in advance.
2. We do not pick up passengers when the office is closed (between 10am and 4pm), or after 9.30pm. When the office is closed, or if you have not notified us of your arrival time, you will need to make your own way to the lodge.
   You will still be able to arrive to the lodge after 9.30pm and find your bed or room.
3. If you require us to make a bus booking or alteration, a 1000JPY booking fee will apply per person.

Once you have booked your transfer, PLEASE notify us of your arrival time. Please email it to info@nisekobackcountrylodge.com

At the airport:
New Chitose Airport is a nice, modern airport that has plenty to offer. After you arrive, collect your bags and make your way to the relevant bus counter. Once you are checked in for the bus, you should have a bit of time to pick up some cash and snacks for the bus. There is GREAT food on the 3rd floor of the domestic terminal.

The trip to Niseko is approximately 2 hrs 45 mins from the airport depending on snow conditions (3.5 hrs for Resort Liner services).

On arrival in Niseko:
Arrival times to Niseko vary wildly depending on snow and weather conditions. On arrival to your destination, please call or WhatsApp our lodge transfer number: **+81 70 4390 4988**

Don't have international roaming on your phone? Consider an eSIM. See our section on eSIMs in the 'General Information' section later in this document.

We will normally be there in a few minutes to collect you. If there are any significant changes to your arrival time, please let us know via email or call / Whatsapp our transfer number.

**** A reminder – we do not provide a local pick-up/drop-off service between 10am–4pm, or after 9.30pm at night. Make sure you book your internal flights appropriately. ****

If arriving while our office is closed, or later than 9.30pm, you will need to make your own way to the lodge.

Sapporo City to Niseko bus transfers (NOT airport transfers)

If you are travelling to Niseko from Sapporo city, then the best option will be to catch either the Resort Liner or Chuo Bus services. The best way to organise this bus is to book it yourself. Here are the links to the best options to the Moiwa area:

- Chuo Bus (book this bus to Northern Resort Annupuri): https://teikan.chuo-bus.co.jp/en/course/18958
- Resort Liner (book this bus to Northern Resort Annupuri):
  https://www.access-n.jp/winter2026/en/skibus/detail/sapporo_rusutsu_niseko.html
  Due to the bus arrival times, we will NOT be able to pick-up or drop-off for this Resort Liner service.

When booking either of these services, note that we do not provide a pick-up service between 10am and 4pm. The Niseko Area Circuit Bus operates during these times and can pick up and take you to Moiwa Ski Resort for 100JPY. This bus operated until 22 March during 2025-26, but the 2026-27 dates/timetable is not yet decided. The timetable for the 2025-26 season is available here:
https://moiwalodge.com/assets/Niseko_Circuit_Bus_2025-26.pdf .

The steps to follow:
1. Book your transfer on either the Chuo Bus or Resort Liner websites. Your destination should be booked as Northern Resort Annupuri for Chuo Bus and Resort Liner.

2. Once you receive confirmation, please email this to us at info@nisekobackcountrylodge.com

IMPORTANTLY:
You MUST book your transfer at least 9 days prior to your arrival, otherwise they will not accept your booking. We may be able to help in such instances – a 1000JPY booking fee would apply per person.

On arrival in Niseko:
Arrival times to Niseko vary wildly depending on snow and weather conditions.

If you are arriving in to one of the designated stops during operation of our pick-up drop off service, then on arrival to your destination, please call or WhatsApp our lodge transfer number: **+81 70 4390 4988**

Don't have international roaming on your phone? Consider an eSIM. See our section on eSIMs in the 'General Information' section later in this document.

We will normally be there in a few minutes to collect you. If there are any significant changes to your arrival time, please let us know via email or call / Whatsapp our transfer number.

**** A reminder – we do not provide a local pick-up/drop-off service between 10am–4pm, or after 9.30pm at night. Make sure you book your buses appropriately. ****

If arriving while our office is closed, or later than 9.30pm, you will need to make your own way to the lodge.

Private Transfers

If you are early enough with your booking, a private transfer for your group may be worthwhile, especially if you are arriving with a family, or while our office is closed.

Book your private transfer as early as soon as you possibly can, as they fill up very quickly.

Prices vary depending on the transfer company you use and your group size, however, below are our recommendations for transfer companies listed in order. You will need to submit a request and await a response from each of these companies. Please only try one company at a time and await their response before trying the next company:

1: Wheels Transfers:
https://cw4.roomboss.com/cw/gen/ins/order01.jsf?uid=f808ad963a51dbc3013a52ee4f1b05e2&vid=8a80818a7cd840a7017cde436f072942

2: Long Prime:
https://cw4.roomboss.com/cw/gen/ins/order01.jsf?uid=f808ad963a51dbc3013a52ee4f1b05e2&vid=2c98902a5d9a722d015da6a4c29874f9

Remember that our reception is closed between 10am and 4pm. If you arrive during this time, you are welcome to leave your gear near reception and explore the area until we re-open.

Train arrivals

The train to Niseko town station is a less popular option, as generally the bus is a more direct and cheaper. In summary … choose to arrive by train with extreme caution – it's not as easy as it appears, and when it goes wrong, it can spoil your trip!!

Train travel to Niseko is awkward as there are so many train changes involved regardless of where you travel from. Whilst the rail map may make it seem appealing, it's often a long journey, and it still requires a taxi from Niseko station to the resort on arrival (about 15 minutes).

Importantly, many guests choose the 6.38am train services on departure, but it's almost impossible to get to the station at that time of morning. Taxis or buses are NOT available at that time, and it's a 15-minute drive

away from the lodge, so walking is not an option. In such instances, we may be able to drive for a 6000JPY one-way fee depending on staff availability.

See the train timetable as of 1 Dec 2023 here: https://moiwalodge.com/assets/JR-Timetable.png
Purchase your tickets at the station, or in advance on the JR website.

An easier journey from Moiwa is to take the 10.42am Niseko Area Circuit bus from the Moiwa car park, arriving at 10.55am to Niseko station, and then catch the 11.26am train to Sapporo or the airport.

From Tokyo or other areas on Honshu, the shinkansen (bullet train) terminates at Hakodate – the southern-most city of Hokkaido. From there, it's roughly a 4-hour trip to Niseko station (including a change at Oshamambe station).

From the airport (New Chitose) or Sapporo city, it's a rapid train service to Otaru station, then a change onto the Hakodate line train for Kutchan. You will wait 20-30 minutes in Kutchan whilst the train 'splits' into a single carriage or alternatively change to a local train, and then the final trip to Niseko station.

We don't provide any train station pick-ups/drop-offs, however there is a taxi rank at the station, and a 'Niseko Area Circuit Bus' that operates to Moiwa Ski Resort (about 100m from our door). If you're in a taxi and need some snacks or cash from the ATM, do it at the 7-11 on the way up to the lodge … just ask your taxi driver to stop. If you are arriving at night, taxis can be extremely hard to find, and you may end up being stuck.

A cheaper option is the 'Niseko Area Circuit Bus', which operates to/from Niseko station and Moiwa Ski Resort. This bus operates until 22 March. This bus operated until 22 March during 2025-26, but the 2026-27 dates/timetable is not yet decided. The timetable for the 2025-26 season is available here: https://moiwalodge.com/assets/Niseko_Circuit_Bus_2025-26.pdf

Don't make the mistake using Kutchan station as your destination ... it is over 30 minutes away, and it will be an expensive taxi ride to make it out to Moiwa – approx. 8000+JPY.

Remember that our reception is closed between 10am and 4pm. If you arrive during this time, you are welcome to leave your gear near reception and explore the area until we re-open.

Your Own Car

If you have the budget, then we recommend guests rent their own car whilst in Hokkaido. It will allow you the greatest flexibility and allow you to go that little bit further for the authentic Japanese experience that is still available all around the Niseko region.

If you are a group looking to stay in the cottage, then the money you save on your transfers to/from Sapporo will go a long way towards the cost of a rental, and the flexibility will allow you to get your groceries whenever you want them. The savings from your transfers and food costs will offset your car rental expense, and you will gain the best possible experience of the Niseko area.

There are many places within Hokkaido to hire a car. We recommend you rent it from the airport in Sapporo, as you will save money on transfers to/from Niseko.

If you are interested in a rental car, some rental car options from the airport are:
https://www2.tocoo.jp/en/hokkaido
https://www.toyotarentacar.net/english/shop/n-c-airport/
http://www.nisekoauto.com/

There are plenty of free parking spaces in the Moiwa Ski Resort car park. Given the amount of snow we receive in Niseko, the snow ploughs operate very early in the morning to keep things moving. Please be aware of parking in the dumping routes of the snow ploughs – things will quickly grind to a halt if we can't clear the 15m of snowfall each season!

If you are planning on driving in Japan, you MUST have an international driving permit. This is not optional, and you will NOT be allowed to rent a car without one. You need the grey/blue paper

international licence!! Every year we find guests making this same mistake – don't be one of them!

Permits from France, Belgium, Germany, Monaco, Russia, Slovenia, Switzerland, and Taiwan are NOT valid (plus others). With these, you'll need an official translation, so make sure you ask about your requirements before you arrive!! Check before you arrive as to what you need to do.

Sending Luggage

Many guests send luggage to us before their arrival to the lodge. Japan has a wonderful domestic courier system where bags can be sent around the country seamlessly. For example, you can drop your bags at the courier desk at most airports, and the bags will arrive to Niseko roughly 2-days later.

The 'Black Cat' (or 'Yamato'/'Takkyubin') system is a great service for anyone spending a few days in Tokyo, Osaka or Sapporo. It's a way to send your gear ahead of you, allowing you to travel without un-needed bags.

It costs around 4000-6000JPY for a ski bag to be sent from Tokyo to our door depending on size.

Here is a bit of an explainer of the service: https://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2278.html
This is the Yamato service website: https://www.kuronekoyamato.co.jp/ytc/en/send/services/takkyubin/

Send your luggage to:
Niseko Backcountry Lodge, 447-14 aza-Niseko, Abuta-gun, Hokkaido. 048-1511
Ph: 0136 583 222

It is important that you understand the following terms when sending bags to/from Niseko Backcountry Lodge:

Accepting baggage early or sending baggage after your departure is provided as a goodwill service. We do not accept any responsibility for loss or damage to your baggage or ski gear when using this service, or responsibility for loss or damage to any baggage after its arrival or before its departure from Niseko Backcountry Lodge, or any responsibility for delays to baggage at either end of the process. Bags on arrival to or departure from Niseko Backcountry Lodge are stored in unmonitored and unsecured areas, such as the open lobby or in unlocked luggage rooms. Whilst we try our best to keep track of baggage, and whilst we have never had any baggage damaged or 'go missing' from the lodge when using Yamato, it is not our responsibility to care for your bags. Any costs for sending bags is your responsibility.

We normally accept luggage 2-3 days before a check-in, but if you need longer please let us know.

When sending bags, you would need to send them AT LEAST 4 days before your scheduled departure from an airport in Japan. For example, if your flight is on the 5th of February, your bags would need to be sent from the lodge on the 1st of February.

Transportation – Local Transport in Niseko

There are options for getting around in the Niseko area, but its best to be organised. Regardless of where you stay, your own car will always be the best option, but if that's out of your budget, there are still ways to stay connected and mobile.

Moiwa Shuttle

We offer our guests free transfers to/from Annupuri each morning and afternoon. There are numerous services to/from Annupuri in the morning, and 1 service returning in the afternoon.

From Annupuri you can access the entire Niseko-United area quickly and easily via the lift system during the regular season when the 'top lifts' are open (normally mid-December). If you need bus access to Hirafu in the morning, you should take the Niseko United shuttle bus from Annupuri Resort to Hirafu.

From around Christmas to the end of the season, most guests choose to ski back to the lodge at the end of the ski day - It's a very easy beginner traverse from Annupuri back to our door at Niseko Backcountry Lodge, however there is one afternoon transfer available if needed or if the snow does not allow for the trip home.

Moiwa Lodge to Annupuri Shuttle

Shuttle times (subject to change):

Moiwa Lodge	Nook Annupuri	Moiwa Lodge
07:45	07:52	08:00
08:30	08:37	08:45
09:45	09:52	10.00
16:35	16:45 *	16:55

1. Please be at the stop 5 minutes before the scheduled departure.
2. Shuttle will only stop at designated stops.
3. First-come first served basis.
4. The shuttles at 8.30am vary from quiet to incredibly full. Please bear with us in the busy times while we try to get everyone to the hill as quickly as possible.
5. These times may change in our quieter periods during early-season or late-season

The 7.45am shuttle is designed to align with the Niseko United shuttle departing Annupuri at 8am. This will take people to Hirafu for lessons, etc. as required.

***** - Our 4.45pm shuttle from Annupuri departs at 4.45pm, regardless of whether the Niseko United shuttle from Hirafu has arrived. The Niseko United shuttle can sometimes be 20 minutes late or more, and so we cannot wait around for a late arrival. If you are on the Niseko United shuttle and you think you will miss the 4.45pm lodge shuttle, please get off the Niseko United shuttle bus at the 'Annupuri Entrance' stop and make your own way back to the lodge – the driver will know the Annupuri Entrance stop. It is approx. 1.2km from the lodge. The walk home may provide you a good opportunity to stop in and visit the Yugokorotei onsen on the way home.

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info@nisekobackcountrylodge.com www.nisekobackcountrylodge.com

Shuttles to Hirafu

Since season 2024/25 we have ceased our weekly shuttles to Hirafu. Due to the increased local food and nightlife options around the Moiwa/Annupuri area, the difficulty in using Lawsons as a stop, the hectic busyness in Hirafu and lack of availability for restaurants, it is no longer a viable service. If you wish to head in to Hirafu at nights, then the local taxis or the Niseko United shuttle bus are now the best options.

Niseko United shuttle

The Niseko United Shuttle operates throughout the Niseko area and is a way to get over to other Niseko base areas from Annupuri, or when you want to go at unusual times of day. The timetable is available here: https://www.niseko.ne.jp/en/niseko-access/#shuttle

The best way to access Hirafu in the morning is by using our morning Annupuri shuttle, and then connect to the Niseko United shuttle. At other times of the day, the closest stop during the day is at the Annupuri Resort Entrance which is about 1km away from the lodge.

Niseko Circuit Bus

The 'Niseko Area Circuit Bus' operates to/from the Moiwa Ski Area (in the car park near the front door of the lodge) and covers a loop around the Niseko Village, Annupuri, Moiwa and Niseko- town areas. This bus operates until 22 March. The timetable for 2025-26 is here:
https://moiwalodge.com/assets/Niseko_Circuit_Bus_2025-26.pdf

It can be a handy form of transport when you are moving around the area during the day, arriving while our office is closed, or for covering odd trips. This service operates from the start of the season until 22 March.

The route map is here: https://nisekobackcountrylodge.com/images/doc/NisekoCircuitBusMap.jpg

Restaurant Pick Up Services

A fantastic service that many don't expect are the free pick-up/drop off services from local restaurants.

Many restaurants in the Moiwa/Niseko area pick up dinner customers and return you to the lodge after your meal. If you are after a feast, or just a drink, these can be a great way to get out and about without the hassle. Many of these restaurants are away from the tourist traps of Hirafu and provide an authentic local experience without the price tag.

However, MAKE SURE YOU BOOK EARLY, as these fill up quickly. Sometimes we can get you in on the same day, but the earlier you book the better. When booking in advance, some restaurants will require a credit card to secure the table.

Whilst the pick-up/drop-off services are free, many restaurants require at least one person in your group to drink at least one alcoholic drink at dinner.

Walking

We are within walking distance to many of the things you will need during your stay. There are numerous restaurants and Onsens that you can access by foot, as well as ski hire and Moiwa resort.

Niseko's best onsens are in the Moiwa region. Read our recommendations below in the section on 'Onsens'.

Local taxi services.

Historically, the local taxi service in Niseko has had a bad name. Few speak English, they seemed to operate at the whim of the driver's dinner schedule, and they finish way too early at night.

This can still be the case, however there are more taxis than ever before this season in Niseko.

For this winter, the number of taxis has been significantly increased. The taxi app known as “GO” is helping to provide this service, and reservations can be made using the GO App.

Please note that in order for this service to run, a ¥900 surcharge applies when making a booking with the GO App. You can download it using these links:

iPhone: https://apps.apple.com/jp/app/go-%E3%82%BF%E3%82%AF%E3%82%B7%E3%83%BC%E3%81%8C%E5%91%BC%E3%81%B9%E3%82%8B%E3%82%A2%E3%83%97%E3%83%AA-%E6%97%A7mov-japantaxi/id1254341709
Android: https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.dena.automotive.taxibell&hl=en&gl=US

If you are going out late at night into Hirafu, a taxi will be your only option to get home. These can close anytime from around midnight. Don’t be caught out, as you will have no way home!

The best bet is still to be prepared well in advance.

Eating and Drinking

Restaurants

Continental breakfast is served daily and is included in most accommodation prices. Breakfast includes eggs and bacon, ham, cheese, yoghurt, toast, etc.

Our restaurant Matsuri (Japanese for 'Festival') serves terrific Izakaya style food and drink. You will find some Japanese favourite dishes, as well as many traditional local dishes using the finest local ingredients, and cold Sapporo Classic beer.

Reserve a table at Matsuri yourself using TableCheck:
https://www.tablecheck.com/shops/matsuri/reserve?utm_source=tablecheck_qr

Or use this QR code to make a Matsuri booking:

Whilst your seat at breakfast time is assured, you should remember to book your table for dinner. The restaurant is only open to those who are eating.

There are plenty of other restaurants in the area to choose from. Here are just some of our favourites:

The Chairman's Lounge – the best coffee in all of Niseko, toasted sandwiches to keep you going on the hill, and apres until late into the night. Inside a yurt at the base of the Moiwa ski slopes, this is the new heartbeat of Moiwa – don't miss it!.

Kobito – about 1km from the lodge, and our favourite ramen in the area. An izakaya restaurant with free pick-up/drop-off service. Try the ramen, aburi salmon sushi, and for fun in a group, try the Russian roulette gyoza.

Taj Mahal – Indian – about 1km from the lodge, with a pickup/drop off service. They are open late and deliver.

Lucky Fingers – creative Japanese dining. Located in Annupuri, this is a favourite for a nice night out. Try their steak! Normally 2 sitting times for dinner (6 and 8pm), with a paid pickup and drop off service that can be expensive. A great spot if you have your own transport, but check pricing of their pick-up/drop-off if required.

Chez Dou Dou – French – run solely by a lady and her dog, this is a lovely small French restaurant with all home cooked food, and it is delicious! If you are after a quiet night away from the crowds, this may be the place. Note that there are no transport options other than your own car, and bookings are essential.

White Birch – French. Unexpected, but an absolute delight. We marvel at how the chef can produce such fine food out of such a small kitchen by himself. A staff favourite, and not something you would expect in Japan. There are no transport options.

Rakuichi – Soba – One of Niseko's most famous restaurants, this soba restaurant is incredibly difficult to book into. If you want to get a taste of this amazing Japanese dining experience, bookings open 90 days before sitting via their website: https://www.rakuichisoba.com/ . Located about 800m from the lodge.

Raphael – Italian – Located at the end of our street, this restaurant has a great range of Italian food – pasta, pizza, burgers, good coffee, etc. They are open for lunch, so are a good option when skiing/riding Moiwa.

Hanayoshi – Sushi. One of Niseko's busiest and best sushi restaurants. The chef visits the fish markets himself each day, and 3 set menus are available (10,000JPY, 15,000JPY and 20,000JPY). Bookings can be difficult, so get in early! Located in Niseko town,

Average Prices (when eating out)

If you eat modestly ¥5000 per person per day is plenty ... maybe more if you plan on taking down Japan's seafood, sushi & sashimi regularly. Expect to pay around ¥700-800 per pint or schooner once you hit Japan's pubs & bars. Spirits are also available. Tipping is not necessary in Japan in the same way as in North America. Wine is quite expensive and not the quality you may be used to at home.

Lunch on the hill will be about 1500-2000JPY for a meal. Less if you want just a small bite.

Drinking Etiquette

In cozy and friendly Japanese-style bars, customers often pour drinks for each other from bottles of beer as a gesture of companionship. If you are a fellow beer drinker, reciprocate with your own bottle. A whiskey drinker may invite you to drink from his bottle and fix a drink for you. In this case, you need not reciprocate unless you have your own bottle.

If with a group, do not begin to drink until everyone is served. Glasses are raised in the traditional salute as everyone shouts Kampai! (Pronounced Cam-pie!) Which means Cheers.

Eating Etiquette

Mastering chopsticks may be challenging at first, but once you have learned, eating with this simple instrument is a genuine pleasure.

If you make friends with the locals and they happen to invite you out for dinner, there are a few do's and don'ts when sharing a common plate amongst a group of people. If you are selecting food from a dish that others are also selecting from, use the end of your chopsticks opposite the end that you eat with. Move the food onto your plate first, and then flip your chopsticks around. Secondly, once you have picked up food from your own plate it is important that you do not put it down again. It must remain in your chopsticks until you have consumed it.

Smoking

Smoking is not allowed in Niseko Backcountry Lodge; however, smoking is still very much a part of eastern society. Be prepared to find smokers in many bar areas in and around Japan.

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General Information

Internet

We have Wi-Fi throughout the lodge, however in some pockets the signal can be weak.

It's important to remember that Niseko is a rural area. We do not have access to the bandwidth of major cities. Whilst our internet is fast when the lodge is quiet, it can slow down at peak times – for example,7am-9am, and in the evenings.

If internet speed is important to you at these busy times, or if you are considering working remotely while in Japan, you should consider an eSIM (see below).

eSIM's

eSIM's are an extremely effective way to stay online and keep in touch when travelling, and a terrific way to avoid expensive roaming charges on your phone.

If you have an iPhone11 or later (and their Android equivalent), then an eSIM should work on your phone, while still allowing your home sim card to work for phone calls, etc. Essentially, your phone would use the eSIM to transmit data, and your phone would function exactly the same as it would at home.

All our foreign staff use an eSIM in their phone whilst in Japan.

This is the eSIM that our staff use, however there are many other eSIM providers available. We recommend Airalo, as we know it works in Moiwa and all over Niseko - https://www.airalo.com/ja/japan-esim

What plan you choose will obviously depend on how much data you are going to use in Japan. Many cafes will have Wi-Fi, and the lodges have Wi-Fi, but when you are in the car, buses, trains, on the hill, walking around, etc. you will need to have some data with you.

Health Care

The health care system in Japan is very much comparable to that of western standards. You can be confident of receiving a high level of care should you require attention or hospitalisation. We strongly recommend travel insurance to cover against emergency medical services, overseas medical and hospital expenses. Japanese health care is VERY expensive. A simple visit to a doctor will be about 20,000JPY, scans for a suspected broken bone last season cost one guest 60,000JPY, and a hospital visit could be much more.

There's a simple way to avoid surprises - Insure yourself and make sure it covers everything you will do!

Medicine

One big difference you will find in Japan is the accessibility of medicine.

Pain medication, anti-biotics, anti-inflammatories, cold-and-flu medication, or anything else you would expect to find in any western pharmacy is extremely difficult to get a hand on in Japan. Doctors are extremely reluctant to subscribe or issue pain medication or anti-biotics, and even their simple drugs like Paracetamol is low-dosage.

Bring any medicine you think you may need.

Money

Ensure you have enough Japanese YEN in cash BEFORE you arrive into Niseko. This is not as crucial as it once was, but there are still many places that do not accept cards, and there are limited cash dispensing machines in the area. Sapporo airport (CTS) has many ATMs to use before boarding the bus.

We accept credit cards at reception.

Almost no one takes American Express or Diners Club. Visa and Master Card are slowly becoming more widely accepted, but you should still obtain Japanese Yen in Cash (traveller's cheques also not accepted) before you arrive. There are limited ATMs in Niseko.

The closest ATM when staying in Moiwa is at a 7-Eleven near Niseko Town, which is about 6 km from Moiwa. A taxi will cost around 2000-2500yen one way.

Weather and Snow Conditions

We are often asked about snow conditions.

We find snow-forecast.com the best and most reliable forecasting site. It's what we use on our website at moiwalodge.com. It will normally under-report the expected snowfall, so don't be surprised if a 4cm overnight prediction becomes 25cm or more.

A live video feed of Moiwa's 'Main Course' run is available here:
https://www.youtube.com/live/WfoxVX1CX4A?si=s8ZVRamrlNUJVDpC

Clothing and Surviving the Cold

Much of Hokkaido is quite cold with persistent wind and a few sunny days that rarely get above minus 10 degrees Celsius, and with night conditions being around 5 – 10 degrees colder than day temperatures. This unique weather makes for the best most reliable dry powder snow on earth.

We strongly recommend that you dress in layers e.g.: thermals followed by fleece warm-retention layers and an outer windproof/waterproof shell. Goggles with a double lens designed for low light are a must as is a fleece neck-warmer & hat. We also suggest that you bring a spare hat & two pairs of ski gloves if you have them. We sell heat packs for 300JPY a pair at reception, and they last all day.

A quality helmet is also a great way to keep your head warm and protected from the elements.

At times, the roads can be extremely slippery, so please ensure you have suitable footwear such as rubber soled winter boots in addition to your normal winter clothing.

Most chairlifts and gondolas are covered to protect you from the snow and wind however you will need to dress appropriately to keep you warm.

If you do not have these vital items they can be rented at 'Winter First', or at the local ski hill.

Important things to bring:

- Japanese Yen in cash
- Medicine - Paracetamol such as Panadol or similar, Cold & Flu tablets, anti-inflammatories, pain medication, or anything else you think you may need on a ski trip.

The Onsen Experience

One of Japan's most cherished customs is a hot mineral bath called an Onsen. Onsens are a unique experience to a Westerner...most notably that any type of clothing (except for modesty towel) in the Onsen is considered unhygienic and therefore unacceptable. 99% of all Onsens have separate male/female baths (the exception being the Niseko Grand which is about 1km away) and usually cost around 1000yen. Towels are available to hire at the Onsens.

Ask at our reception and we can guide you to all the best nearby onsens – some are a few minutes away by foot. Most Onsens will also have a lunch and dinner menu you can purchase from.

Our recommendations are:
Yugokorotei – Probably the best onsen in the Niseko area. Separate mens/womens onsen. This is about 1km from the lodge.
Niseko Grand – Mixed onsen where men and women can all bath in the same onsen area. There are separate change rooms for each, and separate onsen baths inside, however the large outside onsen is mixed. Modesty 'suits' are provided for women (at a nominal fee).

Basic Japanese Words and Phrases

The Japanese language can be very confusing to most people. It can be very daunting when signs and posters are written in foreign characters. However, most Japanese people in transit speak Basic English and will be able to understand you if you speak slowly and clearly. Keep your sentences brief and to the point. You will find that they are very helpful and will try their best to answer your questions in English. Below are a few helpful words and phrases to get you on your way.

Hello	Kon-nichi-wa	**How are you?**	O-genki-desu-ka ?
Good Morning	Oh-hayo gozai masu	**Good Evening**	Konban-wa
Good night	Oyasumi –nasai	**How much is it?**	Ikura-desu-ka
Please	Kuda – sai	**Thank you**	Arigato gozai -masu
Excuse Me	Sumi-masen	**I am sorry**	Gomen – nasai
Can I have this?	Kore-wo-kudasai	**What is this?**	Kore-wa-nani desuka
I don't understand	Wakari-masen	**Where is the toilet?**	Toire-wa-doko desuka?
Look out	Abu-nai	**Good Bye**	Sayonara

1 Ichi **2** Ni **3** San **4** Shi (or Yon) **5** Go **6** Roku **7** Nana (or Shichi) **8** Hachi **9** Ku **10** Jyu

100 Hyaku **1,000** Sen **10,000** Ichi man **20,000** Ni man

Lastly

We trust that you will have a brilliant time in Niseko. It is one of the great ski areas of the world, and we are sure you will love it!
We look forward to seeing you in Moiwa very soon!

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