**Niseko**

**Categories**

**Good For**

Beginners

Intermediates

Experts

Snowboarders

Non-skiers

Après ski

Snow reliability

**Data**

**Beginner Runs**

18

**Intermediate Runs**

25

**Advanced Runs**

18

**Total Runs**

61

**Lifts**

30

**Chairs**

27

**Drags**

0

**Gondola Cable Cars**

3

**Parks**

4

**Pipes**

2

**Weather**

**Annual Snowfall**

12m (39ft).

**Overview**

Amazingly at the dawn of the 21st-century almost no one had heard of Niseko, the Japanese ski resort located on the country’s most northerly island of Hokkaido. However, over the last ten years it has really made a name for itself.

The reason? The snow. Niseko gets more of it than almost anywhere else in the world, and, more importantly than volume, it is the light, fluffy stuff – perfect powder.

Once dominated by - predominantly Australian - powder hounds, Niseko has not rested on its laurels and has continued to evolve. Now, aside from its remarkable 15m (49ft) average snowfall, visitors can enjoy cultural delights from Onsen baths and superb sushi, to the stunning Mt Yotei, said to be a half scale replica of Mt Fuji, which dominates the view from the slopes.

Accompanying these attractions is a burgeoning scene of gourmet restaurants and quirky eateries that offer both traditional and international cuisine in some interesting settings.

It may have taken its time to accumulate the crowds, but with its winning combination of superb powder and strong cultural appeal, Niseko is only heading in one direction – up.

**Location**

Niseko is on Japan's main northern island of Hokkaido, about 100km (62 miles) west of the island’s capital Sapporo. It is based on Mount Niseko Annupuri and is part of the Niseko-Shakotan-Otaru Quasi National Park.

The three main resorts are spread around the mountain from east to west, with the main focus being the ski village of Hirafu at the base of Niseko Grand Hirafu. Kutchan, the area's main access town with a railway station, is a few kilometres northeast of Hirafu.

**Website**

http://www.nisekotourism.com

http://www.niseko.ne.jp

**Piste Map**

http://niseko.ne.jp/en/map/images/FPmap\_en.pdf

**Hit The Slopes**

The snow conditions here couldn't be better, with practically guaranteed fresh powder (and lots of it) dumped each night affording a long season – from late November until early May.

With nearly 50km (31 miles) of groomed slopes and many more off-piste opportunities, there's a ski run for everyone at Niseko. There are plenty of wide, open areas of gentle slopes for beginners as well as halfpipes, mogul fields, tree runs and tabletops for more experienced skiers and snowboarders. A single ski pass covers all of the local resorts, or it’s possible to buy individual tickets to each area.

The longest run is 5.6km (3.5 miles), which can be extended even further with a hike to the summit of Niseko Annupuri from the top chairlift. For those who prefer to get up the mountain quickly whilst protected from the elements, three gondolas glide to the upper slopes from each of the main bases. Skiers can really make the most of their on-slope time here, as night-time skiing sees lifts running until 2100 daily.

There is a variety of ski schools for beginners, while the more experienced can follow ski guides for backcountry adventures, including Telemarking and ice climbing – the large overseas population here ensures there are always English-speaking guides.

Hire of good equipment is readily available in the resort. Niseko Adventure Centre (tel: +81 136 232 093; [www.nac-web.com](http://www.nac-web.com)) and Niseko Outdoor Adventure Sports Club (tel: +81 136 231 688; [www.noasc.com](http://www.noasc.com)), both in Hirafu, are a couple of reputable outfitters.

**Niseko**

**Resort**

300

**Base**

300

**Top**

1309

**General**

**Beyond The Slopes**

The volcanic activity that created Mount Yotei also provides plentiful onsen (hot-spring spas) in and around Niseko. Try Hirafu-tei at the Prince Hotel (tel: +81 136 232 239; [hirafutei.info/en](http://hirafutei.info/en)), next to the Grand Hirafu ski lifts, with its views of the slopes for men and of Mount Yotei for women. Yukoro (tel: +81 136 233 434) at the southeastern end of Hirafu village, and Makkari (tel: +81 136 452 717), which has an open-air bath with a view of Mount Yotei, are other options.

Among the other activities are snowmobile trips around a 6km-long (4 miles) course at the Makkari onsen, climbing at Niseko Adventure Centre, and Japanese culture workshops (covering such things as the tea ceremony) at Lodge Grandpapa (tel: +81 136 232 244; [niseko-grandpapa.com](http://niseko-grandpapa.com)) in Hirafu.

Sapporo is an easy day trip away and is certainly worth visiting in early February, when the famous snow festival (the Yuki Matsuri) sees giant snow and ice sculptures constructed around the city. Another good outing is the charming seaside town of Otaru.

**Family Fun**

Niseko ski resort has greatly improved its provisions for families in recent years. The Niseko International Snowsport School (tel: +81 136 216 688) in Hanazono resort has a variety of ski lesson and tour programmes for families and kids. At the Hirafu Prince Hotel (tel: +81 136 232 239; [hirafutei.info/en](http://hirafutei.info/en)), there's an amusement centre stacked with arcade video games.

Hotel Niseko Alpen (tel: +81 136 221 105; [www.grand-hirafu.jp](http://www.grand-hirafu.jp)), in the Niseko Grand Hirafu resort, has a crèche looking after children aged two to six - family lift tickets are also available from here.

**Retail Therapy**

The main shopping areas are Hirafu and nearby Kutchan, the region’s largest town. Sakura in Hirafu (near the village's main crossroads) is the best place to buy traditional Japanese souvenirs and crafts. For snow gear and other outdoor equipment, try Niseko Adventure Centre.

**Splashing Out**

Niseko Gourmet (tel: +81 136 556 885; [www.niseko-gourmet.com](http://www.niseko-gourmet.com)) is the resort’s first in-house gourmet catering company. The service provides a talented chef, along with a waiter, who travel to your holiday accommodation to prepare a wonderful meal to your tastes, using fine locally-sourced ingredients. Just think, now you can enjoy the delights of dining at a fancy gourmet restaurant in the comfort of your pyjamas.

**Apres Ski**

There’s no shortage of places to grab an evening beer or two in the ski village of Hirafu – the area where most of the resort’s après-ski venues (and accommodation) are based.

The Vale Bar & Grill offers an upmarket option with a fusion of eastern and western tastes and décor; Restaurant Lupicia has a fine choice of wines in an old-world atmosphere; while Blo Blo, Wild Bill’s and Splash keep the spirits flowing well into the night.

For something a little more unusual, the funky Gyu bar (also know as The Fridge Door) is easily spotted by its door that's made from the front of an old Coca-Cola vending machine.

**Eating Out**

Niseko’s choice of dining options is rapidly expanding and now offers a mix of both traditional Japanese eateries and a diverse range of international restaurants. Additional options are also available in the nearby town of Kutchan.

Somewhat of a resort institution, Graubünden (tel: +81 136 233 371; www.graubunden.jp) has been a popular choice with resort regulars for years thanks to its freshly baked products and gourmet sandwiches.

Of the newer resort choices, Prativo (tel: +81 136 558 852; [www.milk-kobo.com/prativo](http://www.milk-kobo.com/prativo)) serves superb Japanese cuisine in an intriguing setting, with visitors sat in a theatre-like-space overlooking Mt Yotei.

The small Ambai Bio Organic Kitchen (tel: +81 136 223 623; [www.ambaibio.niseko-web.net](http://www.ambaibio.niseko-web.net)) is a popular choice for its vegan and vegetarian cuisine, so popular in fact that reservations are usually required at least a day in advance.

Surprisingly, given its location, the resort is also home to The Flying Fish (tel: +81 90 1303 5172), a British-style eatery serving delicious old fashioned style beer battered Hokkaido Cod and chips in newspaper.

As expected, there are numerous establishments serving traditional Japanese cuisine, and specifically fish dishes. Among the best options is Bang-Bang (tel: +81 136 224 292), which offers over 30 different types of yakitori; while Senchou (tel: +81 136 222 001) specialises in scallops.

**Transport**

**Getting There**

Nearest airport: New Chitose Airport (CTS).

Distance to resort: 102km (63 miles).

Driving time: 2 hours.

Nearest railway station: Kutchan.

Distance to resort: 5km (3 miles).

Driving time: 15 minutes.

**Getting Around**

An ‘All Mountain Pass’ allows visitors to ski between the three main resorts using all the lifts on the mountain. There are also shuttle buses from the base stations of the resorts linking each ski area. Regular buses operate to Kutchan for train connections.

**Hotels**

Niseko combines three separate but interlinked ski areas: Grand Hirafu, Higashiyama and Annupuri Kokusai, where the standard of accommodation is excellent. Accommodation ranges from backpacker dorms and youth hostels to luxury lodges and hotels in Niseko.

**Hotel Niseko Alpen**

Set in a great location next to the Grand Hirafu lifts, the Hotel Niseko Alpen has mainly Western-style rooms and good facilities, including a 25m-long (82ft) heated swimming pool.

**Category**

Moderate

**Thoroughfare**

204 Yamada

**Neighborhood**

XXX

**Locality**

Kutchan

**Sub Admin Area**

XXX

**Admin Area**

XXX

**Postcode**

044-0081

**Country**

Japan

**Telephone**

+81 136 221 105.

**Website**

http://www.grand-hirafu.jp

**The Vale Niseko**

This hotel provides the ultimate in alpine luxury, including a private onsen and ski-in/ski-out facilities.

**Category**

Luxury

**Thoroughfare**

194-5 Aza-Yamada Kutchan-Cho

**Neighborhood**

XXX

**Locality**

Hirafu

**Sub Admin Area**

XXX

**Admin Area**

XXX

**Postcode**

044-0081

**Country**

Japan

**Telephone**

+81 136 215 811.

**Website**

http://www.thevaleniseko.com

**Black Diamond Lodge**

This convivial backpacker-style lodge offers budget-end comfort plus a restaurant and bar.

**Category**

Cheap

**Thoroughfare**

24-3 Higashiyama

**Neighborhood**

XXX

**Locality**

Niseko

**Sub Admin Area**

XXX

**Admin Area**

XXX

**Postcode**

044-0081

**Country**

Japan

**Telephone**

+81 136 441 144.

**Website**

http://www.bdlodge.com/english/index.html

**Seshu**

One of the best properties in Niseko, the luxurious 5-bedroom, 374-square metre Seshu is a short shuttle ride from the slopes and can be rented with or without catering. Facilities include a large hot tub and a media room.

**Category**

Luxury

**Thoroughfare**

Konichiwa Avenue

**Neighborhood**

XXX

**Locality**

Niseko

**Sub Admin Area**

XXX

**Admin Area**

XXX

**Postcode**

044-0081

**Country**

Japan

**Telephone**

+81 136 556 885.

**Website**

http://www.nisekoboutiques.com

**M Hotel**

One of Niseko’s newest offerings, the M Hotel is located in the heart of the resort just minutes from the ski lifts.

**Category**

Moderate

**Thoroughfare**

170-142 Yamada

**Neighborhood**

XXX

**Locality**

Hirafu

**Sub Admin Area**

XXX

**Admin Area**

XXX

**Postcode**

044-0081

**Country**

Japan

**Telephone**

+81 136 221 111.

**Website**

http://mgroupniseko.com

**Niseko Park**

One of the resort’s original hotels, with a choice of Japanese or western style rooms, the Niseko Park is virtually ski in/ski out and has rooms with views of Mt Yotei.

**Category**

Moderate

**Thoroughfare**

188 Niseko Kogen Hirafu

**Neighborhood**

XXX

**Locality**

Kutchan

**Sub Admin Area**

XXX

**Admin Area**

XXX

**Postcode**

044-0081

**Country**

Japan

**Telephone**

+81 136 220 105.

**Website**

http:// www.niseko-park.co.jp