**Niseko**

**Categories**

**Good For**

Beginners

Intermediates

Experts

Snowboarders

Non-skiers

Après ski

Snow reliability

**Data**

**Beginner Runs**

22

**Intermediate Runs**

18

**Advanced Runs**

17

**Total Runs**

57

**Lifts**

30

**Chairs**

27

**Drags**

0

**Gondola Cable Cars**

3

**Parks**

4

**Pipes**

2

**Weather**

**Annual Snowfall**

12m (39ft).

**Overview**

For those in search of heavenly ski conditions throughout the season, head to Niseko ski resort, where up to 15m (49ft) of powder snow falls here each year. What’s more, Niseko compares very favourably to similar European and North American mega-resorts for its range of facilities and runs.

Niseko United, the resort's umbrella name, combines three separate but interlinked ski areas: Grand Hirafu (linked to Hanazono on all ski passes), Niseko Village (formerly known as Higashiyama) and Niseko Annupuri.

Traditionally, Niseko ski resort has attracted skiers from Australia and New Zealand during their summer season; many are buying and developing land, particularly around the resort's main town of Hirafu, where the après-ski scene rocks. More recently, Niseko has also experienced a rapid rise in visitors from Hong Kong and Singapore.

**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

http://www.powderlife.com

**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: (0136) 232 093; [www.nac-web.com](http://www.nac-web.com)) and Niseko Outdoor Adventure Sports Club (tel: (0136) 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: (0136) 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: (0136) 233 434) at the southeastern end of Hirafu village, and Makkari (tel: (0136) 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: (0136) 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: (0136) 216 688) in Hanazono resort has a variety of ski lesson and tour programmes for families and kids. At the Hirafu Prince Hotel (tel: (0136) 232 239; [hirafutei.info/en](http://hirafutei.info/en)), there's an amusement centre stacked with arcade video games.

Hotel Niseko Alpen (tel: (0136) 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**

Some of Niseko's most luxurious accommodation is in self-catering apartments decorated to boutique hotel standards. Niseko Alpine Developments (tel; (0136) 215 811; [www.nisekoalpineaccommodation.com](http://www.nisekoalpineaccommodation.com)), NMS (tel: (0136) 212 500; [www.nisekomanagement.com](http://www.nisekomanagement.com)) and Hokkaido Tracks (tel: (0136) 233 503; [www.hokkaidotracks.com](http://www.hokkaidotracks.com)), all based in Hirafu, have impressive accommodation options, including ultra-chic penthouses.

**Apres Ski**

There’s no shortage of places to wind down with a beer or something stronger in Hirafu. 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**

One of the best places to eat in Niseko’s main town of Hirafu is J-Sekka (tel: (0136) 213 088; [www.j-sekka.com](http://www.j-sekka.com)), which serves fine Italian cooking with a modern Japanese twist. A good spot for breakfast or lunch away from the slopes is the bakery/café/bar Abucha (tel: (0136) 225 295; [www.abucha.net](http://www.abucha.net)), which is located at the main intersection in Hirafu. Also not to be missed for its baked goods and sandwiches is Graubünden (tel: (0136) 233 371; [graubunden.jp](http://graubunden.jp)), located just out of Hirafu on the way down to Kutchan.

For a more unusual night out, Gentem (tel: (0136) 233 154) is based in a Mongolian yurt (midway between Hirafu and Niseko Village) and serves South East Asian dishes in a relaxed atmosphere with chilled world music.

There are numerous options for Japanese specialities. Among these is Bang-Bang (tel: (0136) 224 292), which specialises in local fish dishes and over 30 different types of yakitori; while Senchou (tel: (0136) 222 001) also serves great Japanese food.

**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.

**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**

XXX

**Country**

Japan

**Telephone**

(0136) 441 144.

**Website**

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

**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**

XXX

**Country**

Japan

**Telephone**

(0136) 215 811.

**Website**

http://www.thevaleniseko.com

**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**

XXX

**Country**

Japan

**Telephone**

(0136) 221 105.

**Website**

http://www.grand-hirafu.jp