

Want to travel to Japan?



Want to be an ambassador for your community?

Learn a new culture?



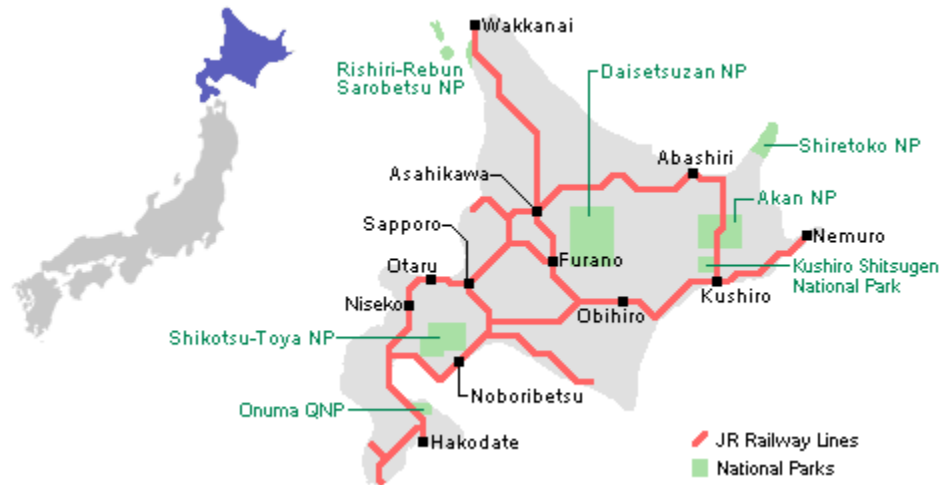
Japanese Cranes by Kushiro



The Japanese Tea Ceremony usually takes place in a traditional Japanese tatami room.

Be in the Sister-City Student Exchange Program!!

Welcome! Obihiro are gracious hosts.



Obihiro, Japan is located on the northernmost island of Japan, called **Hokkaido**. Students are flown to Chitose Airport in **Sapporo**, where they will usually spend the night in a hotel before traveling by bus to Obihiro to meet with homestays. Sometimes air travel takes them to **Tokyo** for an overnight stay before flying to Hokkaido. The bus ride itself takes about two and a half hours. They also may take a train from Sapporo to Obihiro. The city of **Kushiro**, east of Obihiro, also has a relationship with Seward, being our “Port Sister City.”

Hokkaido Climate

Hokkaido is known for its cool summers (which attract many tourists from other parts of Japan) and icy winters. The average August temperature is around 22°C (72°F), while the average January temperature ranges from -12°C to -4°C (10°F to 25°F) depending on elevation and latitude. The island tends to see isolated snowstorms that develop long-lasting snowbanks, in contrast to the constant flurries seen in the Hokuriku region.

During the winter, passage through the Sea of Okhotsk is often complicated by large ice floes broken loose from the Kamchatka Peninsula. Combined with high winds that occur during winter, this brings air travel and maritime activity almost to a halt on the northern coast of Hokkaido.

It is Hokkaido's climate that has made it such a popular place for tourists from countries such as Australia. The other advantage is the ski season in Hokkaido is at the opposite time of year to that in Australia.

Go to Festivals and receive red-carpet treatment!

participate in fun cultural activities!

Bon Odori Dance



A famous dance in Japan is the **Obon dance**, called "Bon Odori" (盆踊り) in Japanese. People dance the Obon during the Obon Festival, held every summer in districts and neighborhoods in every city in Japan. Obon is an annual Buddhist event for commemorating one's ancestors. It is believed that each year during obon, the ancestors' spirits return to this world in order to visit their relatives.

Bon Odori is a dance that came around to be a welcoming for the spirits of the dead. These dances are different for every region of Japan and have a different music for each dance. It may change from region to region but the usual bon dance involves people gathering around a yagura. A yagura is a high wooden building made of wood that is made especially for this festival. During the dance the people that gathered around the yagura move either counter clockwise or clockwise moving away and towards the yagura. Some times they can switch direction in which they rotate around. In some regions when people do Bon Odori they describe that regions history. They do this by doing certain movements together that represent their past, such as the coal mining song. During the coal mining song people, in unison, do the movements of miners such as digging, cart pushing and lantern hanging. Another way that the Bon Odori dance is different from one region to another is the use of tools for the dance. Some tools and instruments that they use during this dance are fans, small towels, and small wooden clappers. The "Hanagasa Odori" uses flower decorated hats for the dance. These are different from one region to another and make Bon Odori a wonderful dance.

The Tea Ceremony



The tea ceremony is a very special event in Japanese culture. The host spends days going over every detail to make sure that the ceremony will be perfect. There are various styles of tea ceremonies and it is recognized that every human encounter is a singular occasion that will never recur again in exactly the same way, and so every aspect of the tea ceremony is savored. The ceremony takes place in a room called the chashitsu. This room is designed and designated only for this ceremony. The room is usually within a teahouse, and is located away from the residence in the garden.

In the tea ceremony, water represents yin. The fire in the hearth represents yang. A stoneware jar called the mizusashi holds fresh water and symbolizes purity and only the host touches it. The green tea called matcha is kept in a small ceramic container called a chaire that is covered in a fine silk pouch (shifuku) and is set in front of the mizusashi.

If tea is served during the day a gong sounds, or if it is evening a bell tolls five to seven times to summon the guests back to the teahouse. Everyone purifies their hands and mouths once again, and then re-enters the teahouse to admire the flowers, kettle and hearth before seating themselves.

When all the guests have tasted the tea, the bowl is returned to the host who rinses it, and cleans the tea scoop and tea container. The host offers the cleaned tea scoop and tea container to the guests for examination. Afterwards the group engages in conversation about the objects used in the tea ceremony and the presentation that took place.

savor the Ceremonial Experience!!

Kimonos

Japanese kimono, much like U.S. clothing, are worn to compliment the seasons. In the spring, bright colors and spring floral kimono patterns are worn. In autumn, fall colors and fall kimono patterns are worn. In the winter, especially near the holidays, kimono patterns with designs such as the bamboo, pine trees or plum blossoms or worn for they signify good luck and prosperity.

There are many types of kimono, each worn according to the persons age, season or the event. However, the formal kimono can be basically broken down into two main categories based on the persons age and marital status. Young unmarried women wear kimono with long sleeves called *furisode*. The sleeve length can vary from slightly long to very long reaching the ankle. Young women's kimono are very vibrant, colorful and rich with patterns.

Older women or those who have married, wear a kimono with short sleeves called *tomesode*. The kimono designs are smaller or solid and the colors are more subdued. There are also special kimonos made for ceremonies.



It's fun to dress up!

Men's Kimono




Kimono were traditionally worn by men as daily wear clothing, but today they are usually only worn for festivals, ceremonies, special occasions and as kimono robes. Men's kimono, like women's can range from simple to elaborate patterns. Popular kimono patterns include dragons, koi and masculine designs and generally are conservative in color. The kimono background color is usually blue, black, gray or brown with contrasting designs. Kimono with scenes and motifs include; dragons, kanji symbols, bamboo canes or geometric patterns.

The sleeves for men's kimono are completely sewn closed under the arm in comparison with the open underarm sleeve on women's kimono. The underarm portion is called tamoto in Japanese.



International sister cities

Obihiro has three international sister-cities:

-  [Seward, Alaska, United States](#) - (1968) While on a business trip in Alaska, a (former) teacher at Obihiro's Agricultural High School, Yasuhiko Ohsono, was asked by the mayor of Seward to create some sort of cultural exchange between the two cities. On March 21, 1967, the mayor of Obihiro sent a picture album and other materials to introduce the city to the mayor of Seward. The mayor of Seward sent a message, a coat of arms, and a medal; all of which were personally delivered by a member of the entourage of the U.S.-Japan Fishing Industry Negotiation Team in Japan at the time. Obihiro sends the Mayor of Seward a wooden carving of a bear. On January 31, 1968 the resolution made by the Seward City Council arrives. The City of Obihiro also created a resolution on March 27, 1968, the sister city agreement was signed by both sides, and exchange between the two cities began. Since the Obihiro Economic Observation Group visited Seward in September, 1971, there have been various exchanges between Seward and Obihiro. Both mayors and many citizens of both cities have participated in exchanges, and the high school student exchange program has been put on every year since the summer of 1973.
-  [Chaoyang, Liaoning, People's Republic of China](#) - (2000) Interaction between the two cities began with Chaoyang's Economic Observation Group Visit to Obihiro on May 30, 1985. In September that same year, Obihiro sent the 15 member Northeast China Friendship and Observation Group to Chaoyang. Since then various groups have made exchange visits, agricultural trainees have been received, and there has even been exchanges of craft projects between elementary students. Since 1987, administrative and agricultural trainees have made 13 visits. In addition, JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency) has been sending agricultural specialists to Chaoyang. At the end of October in 1999, the mayor of Obihiro at the time, Toshifumi Sunagawa, lead the Official Friendship Visit Group to Chaoyang, and he exchanged memos regarding the signing of a Friendship City Agreement. On November 17, 2000, the mayor of Chaoyang at the time, Daicao Wang, lead a delegation to Obihiro where a Friendship City Agreement was signed with the purpose of deepening interaction between the two cities across a wide range of fields, and to promote further friendship and peace between the two cities; not to mention China and Japan. The two cities have run a high school student exchange program since 2002.
-  [Madison, Wisconsin, United States](#) - (2006) Obihiro became sister cities with Madison in October 2006. The two cities have almost the same latitude, and have similar climates. The content of the sister-city relationship has been mainly various visits to Madison regarding the field of mental health, but since the official start of the relationship there have been various fact-finding missions to and from Madison. There was even a short visit to Obihiro by two Madison area students, in August 2007. Obihiro hopes to learn more about Madison agriculture, mental health systems and facilities, and about how the [University of Wisconsin-Madison](#) runs various programs and organizations that have helped make it the university it is today. For example, the [Obihiro University of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine](#) has shown interest in marketing ice cream and other dairy products as the Babcock Dairy does at [UW-Madison](#).