

Japan's Winter Wildlife

Snow Monkeys, Whooper Swans, Sea Eagles & Japanese Cranes



Westernized and yet profoundly Asian, Japan remains an enigmatic land. The Japanese archipelago with its jagged and broken coastline and its high mountain peaks possesses some of the most striking scenery in eastern Asia. Nowhere in Japan is far from the sea; this has an immeasurable influence on both landscape and people. If your mental image of Japan is of shiny consumer exports, high technology, endless overcrowding and automatic everything, then join us on a Photo Safari to create images of Japan's untamed side.

Imagine seeing hundreds of the stunningly beautiful, but rare, Japanese cranes on Hokkaido, dancing and displaying at their riverine roosts and at their feeding grounds. Experience a boat ride among the shimmering pack ice and photograph one of the world's largest and most dramatic raptors—the Steller's sea eagle. Think of being within arm's reach of hundreds of delightful whooper swans at ice-coated and mist-fringed lakes and wintry seacoasts. Herds of sika deer and red fox, flocks of sea ducks, several species of gulls and some inspiring scenic opportunities all add to the charm of Hokkaido.

A visit to upcountry Japan is an experience in itself—one that requires a spirit of adventure and a willingness to adapt to new ways. Simple things like eating Japanese food and sleeping on a futon are very different from back home, but add to our experience as we explore our cultural differences. We intersperse these Japanese

experiences with more familiar western-style accommodations in Tokyo and Kushiro.

The finale of the trip finds us in central Honshu where we escape the sprawl of Tokyo and visit the snow-covered "Japanese Alps." There, in deep snow and taking refuge in an outdoor hot pool, are the extraordinary, highly approachable and extremely photogenic Japanese macaques—the snow monkeys.

Compelling Reasons to Travel With Us

Our 1996 pioneering Japan's Winter Wildlife photo tour is one of our most copied trip itineraries—and for good reason. It's a great trip! Though imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, over the past 20 years we have continually fine-tuned our itinerary to offer not only a wonderful wildlife photography experience but an equally enjoyable sampling of lodging and local Japanese culture.

What makes the winter wildlife photography so special in Japan is that virtually all the animals we photograph are routinely fed by the staff of the wildlife reserves and private property owners whose land we visit. Because of these regular feedings (Japanese wildlife can count on the daily feeding times to be as punctual as the train schedules) the wildlife is remarkably unwary and is often within full-frame wide-angle lens distance.

Unparalleled Experience

Joseph Van Os Photo Safaris has more than 20 years experience offering winter wildlife photography tours in Japan—spanning more years than any western photography group in the world. Our local guide has worked with us for many years. She knows exactly what it takes to facilitate an enjoyable and successful photo tour. Experience matters when carrying out the logistics of a complicated Japan photo tour. We waste no time getting you exactly where you need to be to capture exciting Japanese wildlife images—every day of your trip.



Monkeys, Swans, Cranes, Eagles and a lot more

This photo trip is designed to provide multiple opportunities to photograph the country's incredible unwary wildlife featured in the itinerary as well as beautiful mountain scenery. We sample both Japanese and western cuisine and meet numerous Japanese photographers and gracious innkeepers along the way.

Accommodations Matter (A Lot)

A wonderful feature of this trip is the charming traditional inns and westernized lodges where we stay—almost a "stone's throw" from our photography locations. After a chilly photo session in the field it is a pleasure to retreat to delightful accommodations that offer a chance to rejuvenate before returning to the field. Outside of Tokyo and Kushiro our group may occupy the entire lodge or inn with a full group of 12 participants.

Private Transportation Throughout the Trip

Though Japan is renowned for its on-time high speed train

system and rapid boarding method, for a photographer with luggage it can be a logistical nightmare. There are no porters or baggage handlers. Therefore we charter a 22-passenger bus (or larger) to provide us with convenient private transportation throughout our tour. We avoid the hassle of lugging our gear up and down the many stairways in the train stations, onto trains and public busses where space might not be readily available to store the luggage and camera gear.



All these ingredients—and more—combine to create our **Japan's Winter Wildlife** Photo Safari—this trip is recommended as one of Joe Van Os' Top 10 most enjoyable wildlife shoots in the world.

Check out Mark Thomas' [trip report](#) from our 2018 Japan's Winter Wildlife photo tour.

Tour Itinerary

Day 1

Depart from the US.

Day 2 (Jan 30)

Participants arrive at Narita or Haneda airports, are met and assisted with the transfer to our comfortable Tokyo city center hotel. We meet for a Japanese welcome dinner. (D)

Day 3

We transfer to Haneda Airport for our flight to Kushiro on the northern island of Hokkaido. Our private bus and driver will accompany us throughout our Hokkaido exploration. Our first afternoon of photography at the Tsurui Mura Crane Reserve yields extraordinary shots of courting Japanese (red-crowned) cranes, white-tailed eagles and black-eared kites that are fed in the afternoon.

Though some of the cranes here are local nesters, many of the birds we see here are migrants from Siberia and Kamchatka. (BLD)

Day 4

We expect snow to be on the ground (and hopefully also falling) during our visit to Hokkaido. Today we rise early to photograph Japanese cranes from a famous



bridge where views of the birds roosting in the river can yield extraordinary images of frost, fog and early pastel light. Following breakfast (and warm up) we shoot cranes and white-tailed eagles at Tsurui Mura as well as other crane feeding areas. Red foxes and sika deer often appear. Flight shots of cranes as they head to roost top our day. (BLD)

Day 5

Morning crane shoot followed by a drive to Lake Mashuko for snowy landscapes of its massive volcanic caldera. We arrive at Kawayu for lunch, followed by whooper swan photography. (BLD)

Days 6–7

As early morning steam from the geothermal hot spots rises from the lake, throngs of whooper swans arrive for their morning feeding. Wonderful flight shots of their arrival are possible, followed by extraordinary photo opportunities of them landing on the ice—their large black feet spread behind them, acting as brakes to control air speed. For many participants, the swan photos become their most "artistic" shots created on this trip. We also photograph several species of ducks that share in this food bounty, as well as numerous species of songbirds and woodpeckers that frequent birdfeeders in the area. (BLD)

Day 8



Explore the Shiretoko Peninsula, passing through snowy national parklands en route to Rausu. We pause on the way to photograph sika deer, red fox, swans and rugged snowy mountain scenery. (BLD)

Day 9

Photograph white-tailed and Steller's sea eagles on the pack ice on a two-hour morning photo cruise out of the fishing village of Rausu. From the harbor we are accompanied by a throng of slaty-backed, glaucous and herring gulls. Once we reach the ice, tubs of fish are emptied onto the larger floating ice chunks. Now larger figures appear in the air. More than 100 immense Steller's eagles and their smaller white-tailed cousins—waiting on the ice since first light—come from all directions and provide spectacular shots. We capture their exciting images in flight, on ice and fighting for fish—just a few feet from the boat. Weather permitting, we provide a second two-hour eagle trip later this morning, or if shooting conditions deteriorate due to snow or fog we try again on the morning of Day 10. (BLD)

Day 10

Today is a shoot and travel day. If the weather has cooperated and we have completed our two boat trips, we will return to Kushiro with photo stops at locations that we will select this morning. They

include a beach and marshland where sika deer and red fox are common or we may return to one of the Japanese crane sanctuaries. If we have not completed our boat trips, and the weather is suitable, we will photograph eagles from the boat and head back to Kushiro in the afternoon with a photo stop or two along the way. (BLD)

Day 11

We fly to Tokyo and then drive into the Japanese Alps by private chartered bus to our hotel. The private transportation allows us to avoid the hassles of transferring baggage and camera gear through Japan's inconvenient (for travelers with luggage) train stations—none of which have porters for assistance. Tonight we reside in a delightful traditional inn. (BLD)

Days 12–14

In the morning of Day 12, we walk (about one mile) to our traditional inn and acquaint ourselves with its backcountry charm.

The inn is the only one in the snow monkey park and many monkeys sleep on its roof at night. We enjoy three days of shooting monkeys and return nightly to this remote mountain inn at Jigokudani (Hell Valley).

The snow monkeys are fed three times daily and 100 or more of them may be in the feeding area at the same time. Following the meal many of them retire to the comfort of their geothermal hot pool for a

comforting soak. We photograph these hot-tubbing

monkeys, as well as babies clutching their mother's fur, dominant males as they argue over territory, old matriarchs, and juveniles playing with "snowballs." Occasionally we see stealthy Japanese serows (mountain goats) foraging high on the canyon slopes. (BLD) (Due to the short length of good light in this steep canyon, many people keep snack food in their rooms and skip lunch to maximize shooting time.)



Day 15

Following morning photography of the snow monkeys, we return to our Tokyo hotel for a farewell dinner. (BLD)

Day 16 (Feb 13)

We provide your transfer to Narita or Haneda airport. You depart for home this evening, arriving the same day. (B)



Trip Details

Jan 29 - Feb 13, 2021

Fee: **\$10,495** from Tokyo, Japan

Deposit: **\$800**

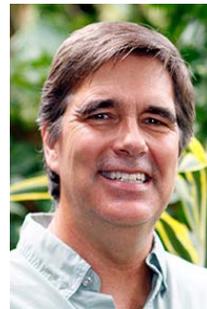
Limit: **12**

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Tour Leader



MARK THOMAS

This may well be the best trip Frank and I have ever taken. The photography opportunities were wonderful and the bonus was experience of a culture in a relaxed and vital way. I recommend the trip to everyone.

—E. J. Wu

Joseph Van Os Photo Safaris puts you in locations to take extraordinary photographs.

—J. Rowe

The itinerary was brilliant. Time of day, choice of place, order of operations, accommodations, perfect!

—S. Lake