

# Trip Report - Niseko, Japan

February 24th - March 3rd

Happy to report that overseas SKIBACS trips are back! First of hopefully many to come was to Hokkaido, Japan. Our group of 36 departed Seattle on Saturday, February 24th and arrived in Niseko on Monday, the 26th after crossing the dateline and spending a night in Haneda. Upon arrival, some grabbed their gear and headed out to catch a couple of hours on the slopes while others stayed back at the lodge, recovering from a late night out in Tokyo the night before.

There were some concerns with conditions given the warm rain that swept through a few weeks earlier, but we were able to find groomed trails and soft snow, especially in the trees. Conditions were mostly OK during our stay, giving us a mix of overcast and windy, sunny and calm, and a snowstorm on the last two days to finish it off. Getting good snow in March was surprising as ski season in Japan usually ends by late March. Some of us found the tree runs from the Miharashi trail from the top of Hirafu Gondola worth the short hike up.

As the name suggests, Niseko United comprises four ski areas that join up near the summit. Each area has a unique style. Our lodges were in the Hirafu area, a lively village with easy access to the slope, restaurants, and bars. Most of the group stayed at Full Note Pension Lodge where we made most use of the communal area for welcome dinner and hanging out in the evenings. The lodge is owned by a guide company and different groups headed out on guided tours each day to explore nearby lift-accessed sidecountry at Kiroro and Rusutsu resorts. And returning from the slopes, many headed to the Half Note bar downstairs to grab happy hour drinks or for live music sessions. Close quarters and crowds at the resort did have its downside, with some participants catching the bug and having to recuperate at the lodge.

We left Niseko to spend our last night in Sapporo, where we enjoyed a course of traditional Japanese dinner. Susukino district is known as party central in Sapporo and many headed out to explore afterwards. Returning to Tokyo on the 3rd, some headed straight back to the States while others spent up to a week exploring the rest of the country. Niseko attracts a lot of visitors from across the globe, making it an easy choice for a first ski trip to Japan. But there's more to see and do in Japan and the trip leader is already thinking about another trip but to a different area in the country.

Submitted by Takeo Kuraishi

