

HOKKAIDO BY CAMPER VAN

A 15-Day Loop Around Japan's Northern Island, Hokkaido

Kazue & Yaz • June 10–24, 2026

Presented to West Coast View/Navion Rally Group



THE IDEA

Why Explore Hokkaido on a Camper?

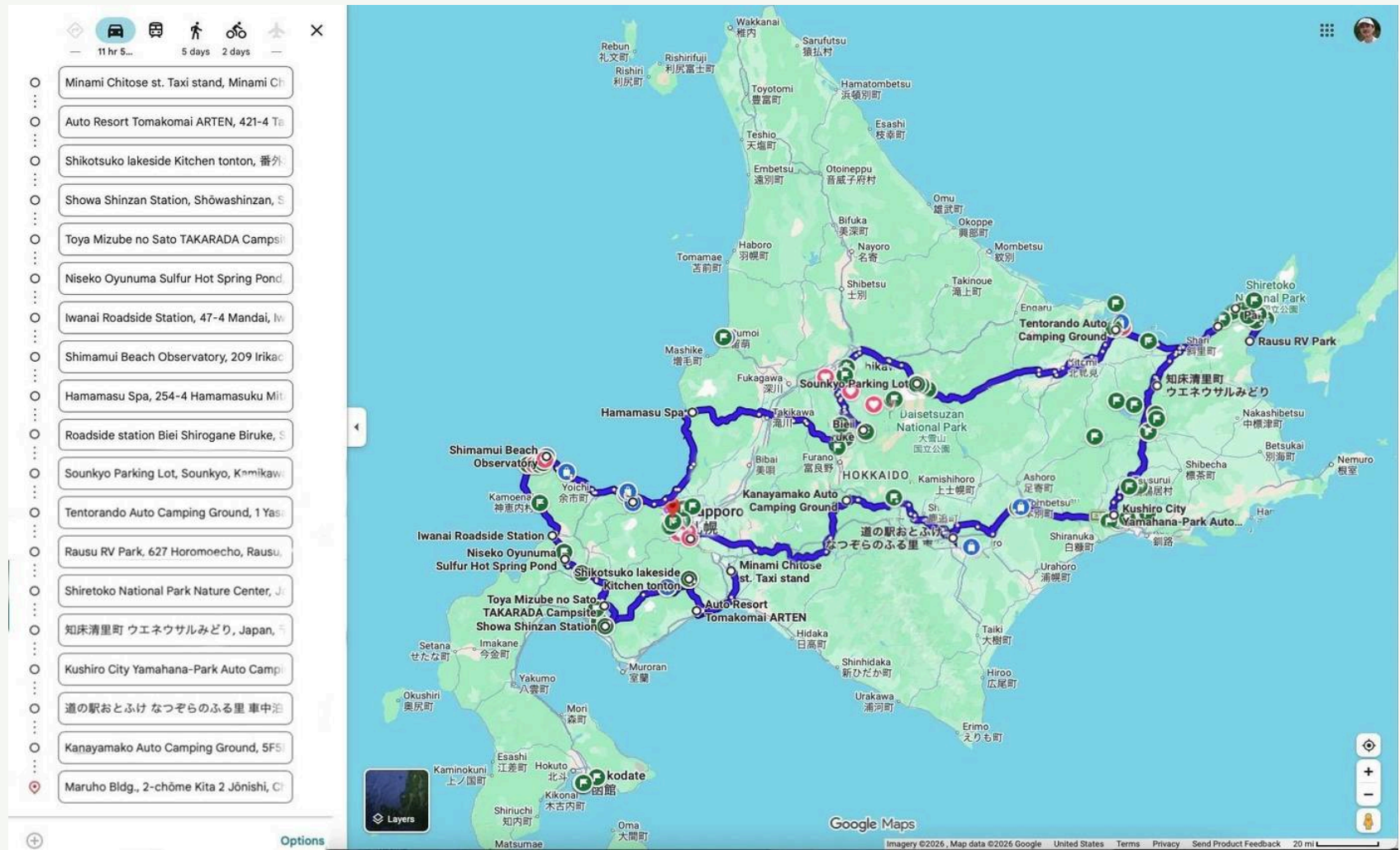
- Hokkaido is big — bigger than several US states — and best seen slowly, one small town at a time.
- Hokkaido's public transportation network is less developed than in other parts of Japan.
- A camper meant no hotel bookings, no fixed itinerary, and the freedom to linger wherever the view (or the onsen) was good.
- Fifteen days, one loop: beautiful lakes, rugged coasts, volcanoes, lavender fields, a UNESCO wilderness, and a lot of very good food.



THE ROUTE

A Clockwise Loop of the Island

- Picked up the camper near New Chitose Airport
- Circled clockwise through the west coast, central highlands, and east coast in about 1,800 km.
- Returned the camper in Sapporo at the end of the loop



THE RIG

Our Home for Two Weeks

- A compact cab-over camper built on a Mazda 1.8-liter gasoline cab chassis.
- A dinette, a small kitchenette, and just enough storage for two.
- Much smaller than our Navion back home. – No toilet or shower.
- Right-hand drive, small parking spaces, and a learning curve — but it went everywhere we asked it to.

First Night: Auto Resort Tomakomai Arten

One of Japan's Largest RV Park - It has 135 dry campsites and 74 RV campsites (electricity, water, cable TV and Wi-Fi)

LIFE ON THE ROAD

Dinner for Two, Every Night

- Convenience-store bento eaten at our own dinette table and the occasional splurge.
- For five nights we skipped campgrounds and stayed overnight at parking lots.



A Lake Born of Volcanoes

- Lake Toya sits inside a massive volcanic caldera, with three symmetrical islands rising from its center.
- Calm mornings on the water made for some of the best light of the whole trip.
- Showa-Shinzan — a volcano that pushed itself out of a wheat field in the 1940s — still steams quietly.



THE BEST PART

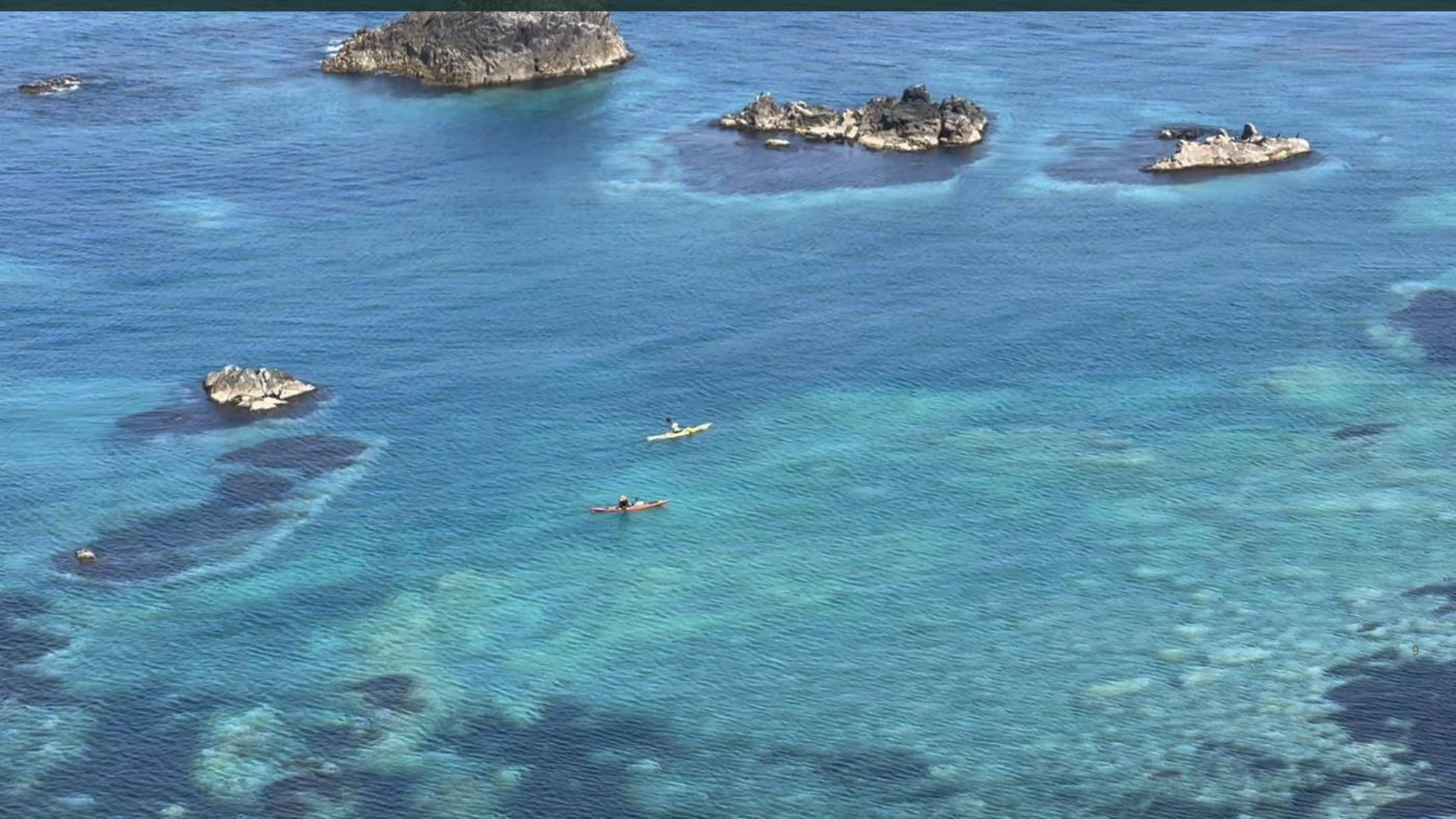
Meeting new people Along the Way



Fellow travelers we crossed paths

"Shakotan Blue" Cliffs

Cape-top trail over cliffs, looking down into water so clear and blue it has its own nickname.



Eating Our Way Around the Island

- Fresh uni (sea urchin) donburi — a Shakotan must, and worth every bit of the reputation.
- A cheese-factory stop near Obihiro in Tokachi's dairy country
- Robatayaki grilled seafood in Kushiro, and Jingsukan (grilled lamb) back in Sapporo.
- Chirashi-sushi from Costco was so good that we had it twice.



Hot Springs With an Ocean View

- We visited so many onsens (hot springs) but this open-air bath had the best view.
- This open-air bath in Shakotan looks straight out over the Sea of Japan.





LOGISTICS

Gasoline, Rough Roads, Michi-no-Eki & Konbini

- Yes, that's a Costco gas station — There is only one in entire Hokkaido.
- Roads ranged from smooth highways to one-lane mountain switchbacks. Many roads in Hokkaido have surprisingly rough pavement, and the speed limit of 60 km/h (37 mph).
- Roadside stations (michi-no-eki) were reliable for bathrooms, produce, and overnight parking.
- We had so many Convenience-store bento from Seicomart (Sekoma). I even made a frequent customer card.

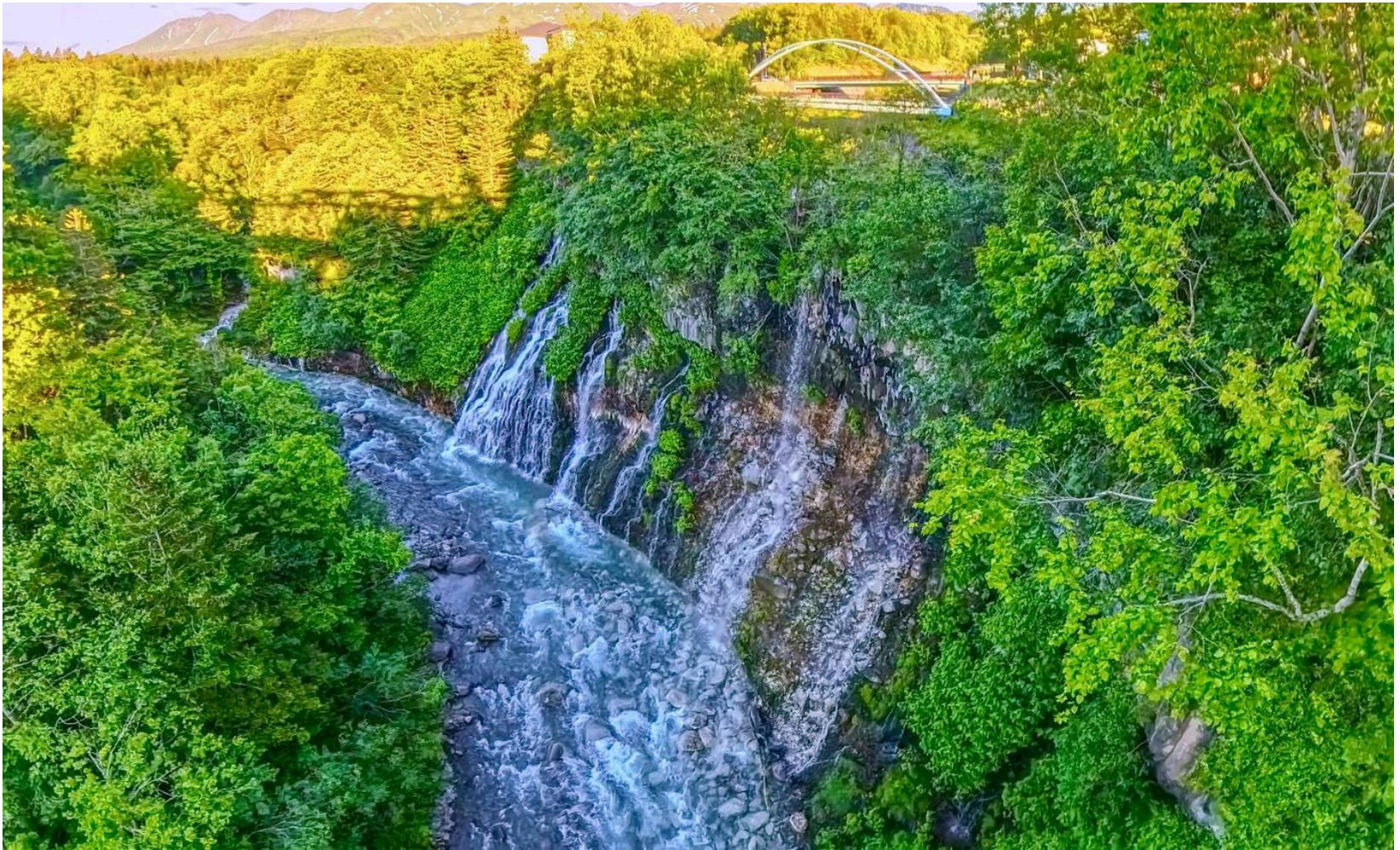


Sunset Over the Sea of Japan

We stayed overnight in the parking lot next to Hamamasu Onsen. After soaking in the hot spring, we drove to a nearby beach and watched a spectacular sunset over the Sea of Japan.

Into the Lavender Hills

- Furano's rolling farmland turns purple in early summer — rows of lavender climbing every hillside.
- Biei's patchwork fields of flowers and crops are famous but we were too early for the flowers.
- We also visited a famous “Blue Pond” and White Beard Falls



Hokkaido's Rooftop

- Daisetsuzan National Park is Hokkaido's largest and highest —steaming vents and wildflowers blooming.
- Sounkyo Gorge cuts a dramatic basalt canyon, with waterfalls dropping straight off the columns.



Public RV Park

- Abashiri is famous for its maximum-security prison.
- The former Abashiri Prison was relocated to its current site and now serves as a museum, much like Alcatraz.
- Nearby Tentorando Campground is operated by Hokkaido Prefecture.
- We got senior discount and the camp fee was only 1,400 yen (\$9).
- Tentorando Campground has 28 RV sites and 22 tent sites.



Into a UNESCO World Heritage Site Wilderness

Shiretoko means "the end of the earth" in Ainu — a remote, forested peninsula and has one of the densest brown bear populations anywhere on Earth . We joined other hikers for a guided walk through the beech forest.



The Waterfall That Splits in Two

Nicknamed the "Twin Falls," Oshinkoshin drops in two braided streams right beside the coastal road into Shiretoko — an easy, five-minute walk that was worth every second. This was Kazue's favorite waterfall of all four waterfalls we saw.



Tancho: The Red-Crowned Crane

- Kushiro's wetlands are the year-round home of the tancho, once thought extinct in Japan and now a protected species with an estimated population of 1,900.



The Neighborhood Has Bears

- We encountered wild brown bears twice while driving, but they disappeared before I could take a photo.
- We visited Bear Mountain Safari Park for a close look at brown bears.

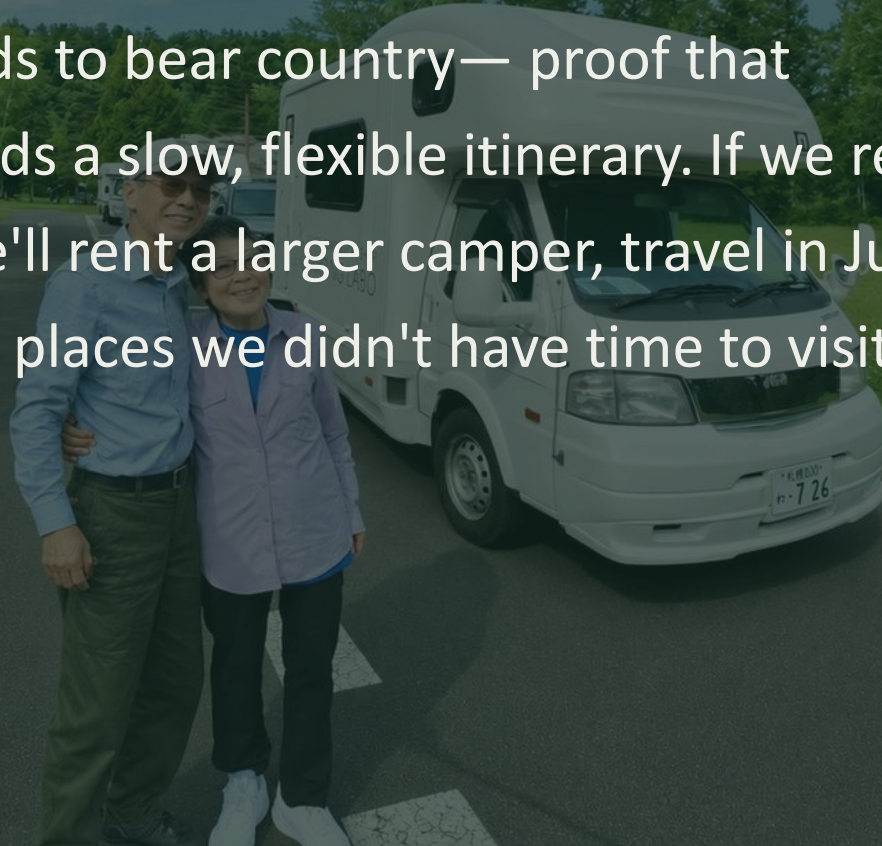


Last Quiet Lake

A final night beside Kanayamako Lake gave us one more still, mountain-ringed reflection before turning back toward Sapporo. At 7,100 yen (\$45.50) per night, this was the most expensive campground on our trip.



Fifteen days, one small camper, and a loop that took us from beautiful lakes, rugged coasts, active volcanoes to lavender fields to bear country— proof that Hokkaido rewards a slow, flexible itinerary. If we return to Hokkaido, we'll rent a larger camper, travel in July, and explore the places we didn't have time to visit.



Things That Surprised Us

- Michi-no-Eki were popular overnight stops, while many campgrounds were nearly empty.
- Finding places to dispose of trash was often difficult.
- Refilling the camper's 10-liter fresh water tank was harder than expected.
- Seicomart ("Sekoma") seemed to be everywhere—and quickly became our favorite convenience store.
- Public toilets were remarkably clean, and many featured high-tech bidet seats.
- Costco in Japan only accepts Mastercard—they don't take U.S. Costco Visa card—luckily, we had an REI Mastercard.
- Some merchants (mostly small restaurants and onsens) accepted cash only, so carrying enough yen was essential.
- Most 7-Eleven stores had ATMs that accepted U.S. debit cards, making it easy to withdraw yen almost anywhere.



Total Cost

- Camper rental ¥261,800 (\$1,637)
 - Total fee (14 days) including options, delivery, and easy checkout
 - Fuel ¥ 37,639 (\$235)
 - 226.55 liter (59.85 gallon) / Average price ¥166.1 per liter (\$3.93 per gallon)
 - Camping fee ¥ 34,955 (\$218)
 - 9 nights / Average price ¥3,883 (\$24.3) per night (\$9 min - \$45.5 max)
 - Food
 - Store food (8 % consumption tax) ¥ 35,167 (\$220)
 - Restaurant (10% consumption tax) ¥ 66,888 (\$418)
 - 29 meals / Average price ¥2,306 (\$14.42) per meal (\$5.69 min - \$93.75 max)
 - Onsen (hot springs) ¥ 8,760 (\$55)
 - 6 times / Average price ¥730 (\$4.56) per soak
 - Extra expense
 - Activities ¥ 38,200 (\$239) Cable car ride, Guided tour, Park admission, Parking
 - Miscellaneous ¥ 30,205 (\$189) Portable Wi-Fi Hotspot, Portable toilet, Futon, Phone stand, Towel hanger
-
- Grand Total ¥515,595 (\$3,222)

■ Backup slide

■ Camper rental

- Rental fee ¥239,800 (14 days)
- Options ¥4,070 (Bedding, Linens, Kitchen wares)
- Delivery ¥5,000 (Delivery to the airport parking lot)
- Easy checkout ¥13,000 (No need to fill up or dispose garbage before checkout)