



Please read and understand this entire document!

Download the latest version BEFORE making any arrangements:
<https://moivalodge.com/assets/MoiwaLodgeInformationPack.pdf>

Last updated: 26 August 2024

Hi Guys,

Not long to go now and you'll be riding powder in Japan in what is sure to be an amazing experience!

This pack is constantly being updated throughout the year, so it is important to revisit the most recent version of this document before your trip or before making any arrangements.

After another amazing year, we are excited to be preparing for another winter here in Niseko and we want to welcome you to all that the Niseko area has to offer. As Niseko continues to grow and become more well-established as a destination, some things may be slightly different from previous years: a new building here and there, some older buildings or businesses gone, swept up in the progress and change. But the overall scene and feel of Moiwa is largely the same.

For some of you this year's trip to Niseko is one of many and you are well familiar with what is involved with a Niseko holiday and the kind of preparations that are necessary. For others this first trip to Niseko will require a little more thought regarding preparation. For all travellers to Niseko this winter, it will be an opportunity to spend time with family and friends, to meet new people, and to experience the best of Niseko. To ensure that everyone gets the most out of their Niseko holiday and gets to their destination smoothly this winter we have put together some helpful information. So please have a look through and use this as a rough guide to help you pack and prepare.

We look forward to serving you during your stay with us at Moiwa Lodge.

Pre – Trip Information

The Lodge

Moiwa Lodge is one of the last traditional large Japanese ski lodges in Niseko, with 4 stories of facilities, including: restaurant, bar (open mid-Dec to early-March), ski room, drying room, TV's and DVDs, large communal areas, wireless internet, laundry facilities and games area.

The lodge has many of the mod-cons, but still has the cool Japanese feel that you come to Japan for. You will be able to keep some of your gear in your rooms but there will be storage provided for your board bags and racks for skis/boards. There is also a boot drying area and drying room.

Niseko and surrounding resorts

Niseko is on the Island of Hokkaido and is approximately 2.5 hours by road transfer from New Chitose Airport in Sapporo. Niseko itself is a town that you may not even see when you are in the Niseko area, as it is away from the ski resorts, and is only a small country town with a train station, and a few great restaurants.

There are many resorts in the Niseko area. Moiwa Lodge is located slopeside at the Moiwa ski resort. Moiwa is Niseko's hidden gem, and the reason why we believe Moiwa Lodge is the best located lodge in the Niseko area. Few see crowds at the resort - in fact most of the time you will be one of just a handful on the mountain, yet the resort boasts some of the best snow and terrain in the area.

Whilst the rest of the crowds are in the busy Hirafu area battling to find the last little bit of powder at 11am, you can be up to your waist in fresh powder for days over in Moiwa. You will not be disappointed!

The most popular resort is the Niseko-United area, which is approx. 3 or 4 minutes away from Moiwa Lodge. You can ski home from this resort to our door. Access to Niseko-United is via our free lodge shuttle to the Annupuri lifts in the morning. It's about 3-4 minutes in the shuttle to Annupuri, and from you can access the entire Niseko-United area via the lift system, or via the Niseko-United shuttle bus. Our shuttles operate each morning and evening to/from Annupuri, and the Niseko United shuttles operate all day to/from Hirafu. Alternatively, you can ski to Annupuri by using a one-time lift pass for the Moiwa quad.

Niseko-United is regarded as one of Japan's best resorts. The skiing area is made up of four separate resorts – Grand Hirafu, Niseko Hanazono, Niseko Village and Niseko Annupuri. A Niseko-United lift pass gives you access to each of these resorts; however, you can also buy cheaper single resort tickets.

Every one of the Niseko resorts are equipped with efficient lift systems. Lifts are often gondolas and covered chairlifts so even on the most extreme blizzard days, you can ride in comfort. Bad weather does not mean bad visibility in Niseko, as the resorts tend to have an abundance of tree runs and being low in altitude, they rarely experience true whiteout conditions that are often found in North American or European resorts of higher altitude.

Queues are rare in shoulder seasons, except for the Hirafu/Hanazono areas which can have massive lines due to its huge popularity and abundance of accommodation.

There are also plenty of alpine alternatives here to be enjoyed - snowmobiling, snowshoeing, and relaxing in the natural hot springs (called *onsens*). All these activities and tickets can be arranged from our reception.

Our Location

Moiwa Lodge is in the Moiwa base area of Niseko, Hokkaido. We are slopeside at Moiwa resort, and within easy walking distance to ski hire, four onsens and various places to eat and drink.

We are NOT located in the busy Hirafu base area, which gives you many benefits:

- 1: Little or no lift queues
- 2: More powder snow than you will experience anywhere else in the Niseko area
- 3: A more genuine Japanese local experience – away from the crowds.
- 4: More flexibility in your stay with the ability to ski/ride at all of Niseko's resorts during your stay.

Guests who arrive expecting us to be in Hirafu will be disappointed to find that we are 15-20 minutes away from the masses. We stress: Unless you are after 70 different restaurants and a wide selection of bars open until 3am each night, there is little need to go to Hirafu whilst in Niseko. Everything you need is within easy distance from Moiwa Lodge, all at cheaper rates than Hirafu. Read more on transport around the local area below.

Arranging your Ski Experience

Ski Hire

Many guests rent their gear on arrival to Niseko. It can be a very convenient way to travel, freeing up luggage space, and ensuring the best equipment for the Japanese powder. A popular idea for many is to travel with your own ski boots, and just rent powder ski/poles or board. Every combination/option is available. A 'full set' will include everything you need right down to goggles and hat.

Ski hire can be arranged for your stay through WINTER FIRST ski rental. Their gear is exceptional, and their service is incredible.

Winter First have the best gear and prices in the area, and they will deliver and fit all your gear in the lodge at a scheduled time as part of the service. You don't have to go anywhere. If you are also hiring boots, they will bring numerous sizes to make sure they fit you well. Payment will be processed at the time of fit out at the lodge.

Please book directly with Winter First on their website at: <https://winter1st.com/en/>

All hire companies in the area have up to date gear. You will not be disappointed with the quality.

PLEASE don't rent from hire places in Hirafu. You'll be disappointed at spending hours trying to arrange transportation, then sorting out how to return your gear at the end of your stay.

Avalanche Gear Rental

Moiwa Lodge rents full avalanche packs, beacons, snowshoes, collapsible poles, or each piece individually from reception at far cheaper rates than other rental companies in the area.

Prices are listed here: https://moiwalodge.com/assets/Backcountry_Rental_Price_List.pdf

Please book in advance via email, as availability can be limited in peak times.

Backcountry Touring Gear Rental

If you are planning on renting your backcountry touring gear in Niseko, it is best to arrange this through Rhythm Summit in Hirafu. They have the best selection of touring skis, split-boards, skins, and poles in the area. Scan this QR code on your phone to be taken to the Rhythm site. Using this QR code for your booking will also give you a 5% discount on your rental.



Due to the distance to Rhythm and their limited pick-up options, PLEASE only book with Rhythm if you are renting their backcountry touring gear. The normal skis/boards available from Winter 1st gear is terrific, so use them where you can for regular or premium ski gear (see 'Ski Hire' section above).

Warnings on touring gear rental:

1. Many rental outlets in Niseko (including Rhythm) only rent touring gear to their guiding customers during peak season.
2. Trying to arrange touring gear on arrival in Niseko can be almost impossible, so do your best to organise it before you arrive.
3. Stores tend to alter their rental policies on the fly during the season, so don't be surprised if touring gear is suddenly unavailable without a booking.
4. We do not provide any transportation to rental outlets

When you make a booking with Rhythm, and only if your group is large enough, they MAY come and pick you up from Moiwa Lodge for your fitting. Just call them from the lodge phone when you arrive to make your pick-up arrangements. If they can't pick you up, you will need to make your way to their store via the Niseko United

shuttle bus system. In recent seasons, many stores have been short of staff and services, so expect to have to make your way yourself, but hope for the best.

Other potential options:

<https://nisekoskisnowboardrentals.com/>

<https://risingsunguides.com/equipment-rental/>

Lift Passes

Moiwa lift passes are available from reception at Moiwa Lodge at a discount to the ticket window price.

Many people ask us for Niseko-United 'All-Mountain' lift passes, but we would **not** suggest you get the large multi-day all-mountain tickets as they can be very expensive and limiting.

Our guests over a week would normally ski about 3-4 days at Moiwa (outside your front door), then probably another day at a different resort around the area (like Rusutsu on our regular trips), then the rest of the time at the larger Niseko resorts of Annupuri, Niseko Village, Hirafu and Hanazono. If you buy the big multi-day Niseko United lift pass, you are limited to just skiing Niseko United, yet there are so many other places, with far less crowds and more powder just waiting for you!

For example, if you ski Annupuri and love it, or you just want to ski the Annupuri back bowls, then you can just buy a pass that covers the Annupuri resort - it will save you a lot of money – e.g. Annupuri 5-hour pass is 5500JPY (2023-24 price) vs a Niseko United day pass of 10500JPY in peak season.

Many of our guests who ride the Niseko backcountry only use a pass for Moiwa or Annupuri as these are where most of the backcountry gates are located – an all-mountain pass will be a waste of money.

If you buy the multi-day passes, you WON'T have the flexibility to decide each morning what you want to do and where you want to go.

Passes for Moiwa are available at reception at a discount to the ticket window price, whilst Niseko United and other resort passes are available from their relevant ticket windows.

Guiding

A great way to explore Niseko is with a good guide. There are plenty of guiding companies that operate in the Niseko area - some good, some bad. It's vital to find the perfect fit. Whether you want lift accessed terrain, side-country, or are wanting to go deep into the backcountry with touring gear, we can arrange it.

Importantly, a good guide is not limited to any one resort, so you can travel all through the Niseko area based on the best snow conditions on any given day.

Climbing and riding/skiing Mt Yotei is incredible, and something to seriously consider doing whilst in Niseko - skiing a volcano is a bucket-list item for many. A Yotei trip normally incurs a surcharge on top of guiding rates.

There are two guiding options that we can recommend:

1: Native English speaking guides: Big Fun Guides

For guiding and instruction, we prefer long time locals Todd, Kenji and co. They have all worked in the Niseko area for many years and have been our most requested operators.

Bookings are essential for any guiding company, as all guides in the area generally sell out well in advance – 85,000JPY per day for up to 3 people, and 10,000JPY for each additional person up to approx. 5. Depending on group size and experience, a second guide would be required for more than 5 people at the same 'per day' rate. Half days are also available for 50,000JPY for up to 3.

Bookings must be made via email to Kenji on kenjifunahashi@gmail.com

2: Non-native English speaking guides: Niseko Powder Guides

Their lead guide and owner - Naoto Seto - lives in Moiwa Lodge year-round and has been a Niseko local for decades. Naoto and his guides are not native English speakers, so you will not be able to have extended conversations in English, however they are widely respected local guides, and know Niseko as well as anyone. Their pricing is also a lot cheaper.

You can book online on their website at <https://www.nisekopowder.info/en/> and guiding starts from 70,000JPY per day for up to 4 people.

Avalanche Safety

Due to the HUGE amounts of snowfall in Niseko, many avalanche hazards can and do exist. Lodge staff have dug many people out of avalanches in Niseko back-bowls and the surrounding areas, and there have been recent deaths in the backcountry. Niseko's backcountry is not controlled or patrolled.

Whilst avalanche packs and beacons are not yet compulsory to access Niseko's backcountry, their use is universally expected. You should carry and be prepared to use avalanche safety equipment to access back-country and back-bowls.

Skiing and snowboarding is fun, but don't under-estimate the dangers mother nature can throw at you! Recent deaths have often been caused by people acting outside of the local rules and regulations. **THE DANGERS ARE REAL!**

Avalanche packs are available to rent from the lodge – see section above on 'Avalanche Gear Rental'.

The Niseko backcountry map and rules can be found here: (Moiwa Lodge is in the lower left corner of the map): https://moiwalodge.com/assets/Documents/Niseko_Rules_2019-20.pdf

The latest daily avalanche information is available here: <http://niseko.nadare.info/>

Ski School

Regardless of which ski school you choose, we cannot stress enough how important it is to book early. Ski schools in Niseko can sell out months in advance, so the earlier you can book the better!

Private lessons:

The Moiwa Ski School have some of the best value lessons in the area. These lessons are run in front of Moiwa Lodge at Moiwa resort by Japanese instructors who speak basic English. Details on pricing are available on the resort web site: <http://niseko-moiwa.jp/lessons/> . If you want to book, please complete the booking form, and return it to us via email.

Moiwa Ski School booking form: <https://moiwalodge.com/assets/Documents/privatebooking.pdf>

If you would prefer native English-speaking instructors, you can try Todd and Kenji at Big Fun Guides – see 'guiding' section above.

Otherwise ProPeak (<https://www.propeak.org/>) also offer a good service.

With all lessons (whether private or group lessons), the lesson will always be tailored to the lowest standard of skier/rider in the group.

Group Lessons:

Group lessons can be very difficult to come by in the Niseko area. Annupuri has group lessons, however these are exclusively held in Japanese, so are not appropriate for foreigners. There are some group lessons

available out of the Hirafu base area, however they can be logistically awkward to get to, and a separate lift pass must be purchased over and above the lesson cost.

The private lessons at Moiwa listed above are often far better value for money.

If you still wish to look for group lessons, then you can try GoSnow. Note that this requires a morning transfer to Hirafu to make the lesson time.

<https://www.gosnowniseko.com/lessons/adult-group-lessons>

Kids Ski School

As mentioned above, the best option for most people is to use the Moiwa Ski School as listed above. Their lessons are conducted in front of the lodge, and they can easily come back to the lodge at the end of the lesson.

If you want to look elsewhere, GoSnow have group kids lessons available. You would need to make your way to Hirafu for these lessons, and also purchase a separate lift ticket.

Ages 7-14 - <https://www.gosnowniseko.com/lessons/yama-riders>

Ages 3-6 - <https://www.gosnowniseko.com/lessons/ninja-kids>

Cat Skiing

Cat-skiing can be one of the best ski experiences in Niseko, however each of the operations have their pros and cons.

Our order of cat skiing operations below is based on advanced skiers and riders and is listed in the order we would choose to go for the day. You can choose to ignore the order of recommendations if you like but do your research to avoid disappointment.

To book any of the below options, please email us.

1. <https://iwanairesort.com/> - Iwanai Resort. This has the best terrain. Sometimes there is not quite as much snow as some other areas, but an amazing ocean view and normally great snow regardless. 155,400JPY per person.
2. <https://risingsunguides.com/cat-skiing/> - Big Wave/Rising Sun Cat Skiing. They operate from Kambetsu. It has short runs (200m), but lots of steep and fun terrain, pillows, etc. 95000JPY per person.
3. <https://www.hokkaidobackcountryclub.com/en/cat-skiing/chisenupuri-snowcats/> - Hokkaido Backcountry Club - Chise terrain can be a bit limited for advanced skiers/riders, but the cats operate like a chairlift meaning you don't need guides = lots of vertical in a day (3360m vertical on average). approx. 97,000JY per person.
4. <https://hanazononiseko.com/en/winter/activities/weiss-cat-skiing> - Niseko Weiss Powder Cars - a mix of terrain and snow. Good for beginner/intermediates, but advanced customers often complain that the terrain is too flat. 110,000JPY per person (2023-24 pricing).

Another option is to have a regular ski guide. These tend to be far cheaper and can go everywhere in the local area ... lots of people choose a normal guide as their option.

ABS and BCA Cylinders

Whilst uncommon in the area, it is possible to rent air cylinders for your ABS or BCA pack in Niseko.

Niseko 343 (www.niseko343.com) has had both ABS and BCA air cylinders at their shop in the past. It's 1000JPY for the first day, then 500JPY per day thereafter (2020 prices – we have not had an update for a few years during COVID). The shop is in Hirafu, so if you want this for your first day of skiing, you need to make sure you arrange to pick it up.

Do the legwork and research cylinder rentals before arrival – we're local, and we find them hard to source!

Rules for the Mountain

The general rule of the mountain is to observe and abide by all signage and warnings on the mountain. They are there for a good reason and if you disobey them, you will run the risk of having your pass confiscated by the ski patrol.

Stay away from areas that are out of bounds and do not duck ropes that fence off a particular area of the mountain. This is for your safety. Going backcountry is fine, but if you go into an area that is permanently closed, you will find yourself locked up, or worse. The Japanese take this VERY seriously. Do the right thing, ride the backcountry where you should, and you will have more than enough powder to keep you happy. The key message is: Don't be an idiot!

The Niseko backcountry map and rules can be found here: (Moiwa Lodge is in the lower left corner of the map): https://moiwalodge.com/assets/Documents/Niseko_Rules_2019-20.pdf

Transportation – Arrivals/Departures

Catching a bus from New Chitose Airport to Niseko is the most popular option for travellers to arrive to Niseko. It is fast, convenient, and relatively cheap.

If you have the budget, a rental car will make your experience in Niseko more convenient and enjoyable, as it will provide you the flexibility to visit different resorts or out-of-the-way restaurants, and experience more of the 'little things' that make a Niseko visit so special.

Another good option can be a private transfer. The most up-to-date transfer options are below.

Airport to Niseko bus transfers

Booking options:

Most likely you will be arriving to Hokkaido via New Chitose Airport (Sapporo's main airport). The best way to organise a bus to/from Chitose airport and Niseko is to book it yourself. Please follow the 'Steps to Follow' lower in this page.

Option 1: The first option should be the 'Chuo Bus'. This offers direct services from New Chitose to nearby Northern Resort Annupuri – approx. 5 minutes from Moiwa Lodge. In previous seasons, they have operated 3 services each way, and if you find one of their service times appropriate, it is a very convenient and speedy option, with wifi onboard.

At the time of this update, this link was not working, however once the new schedule is released, we anticipate it will be posted here:

<https://teikan.chuo-bus.co.jp/en/course/7768>

Chuo bus is also a good service for early or late season bookings, as they generally operate whenever the Annupuri resort is open.

Option 2: We recommend waiting until the above Chuo Bus schedule to be released (normally October) before making plans, as it is a better and cheaper service to any other bus company. However, if the Chuo Bus times don't suit, then another option will be to catch the longer duration 'Resort Liner' service. This service passes via Hirafu and other resort areas before arriving to Moiwa, so takes about an hour longer. For booking, please use this link (book this bus to Kanro No Mori hotel):

https://www.access-n.jp/winter2024/en/skibus/detail/101chitose_rusutsu_niseko.html

PLEASE do NOT book with the 'White Liner' or GoodSports bus company, as it will only take you to Niseko Village. We do not pick up from Niseko Village, and you will need to take a taxi from there to the lodge (which can often be difficult to arrange).

Steps to follow

Regardless of the bus company you book with, we will only pick up guests arriving in the Moiwa or Annupuri areas, so book your bus to Northern Resort Annupuri, or Kanro No Mori hotel in Moiwa.

The steps to follow:

- 1) Our reception is closed between 10am and 3.30pm. If you arrive/depart between these times, we will not be able to either pick you up, or check you in. However, you are welcome to leave your gear near reception and explore the area until we re-open.

The Niseko Area Circuit Bus operates during these times and can pick up from Northern Resort Annupuri and take you to Moiwa Ski Resort for 500JPY. This bus does not operate in early or late season. The new timetable is not yet released, but the 2023-24 timetable is here:

<https://www.nisekibus.co.jp/uploads/Niseko-Circuit-Bus-1.pdf>

- 2) Book your transfer at least 9 days before arrival and departure, as this is when most companies 'close off' their bookings to new customers. If you need to book inside this time, we may be able to assist - a 1000JPY booking fee would apply.
- 3) Be sure to allow at least 1 hour between the scheduled flight arrival time and the bus departure time. Your destination should be booked as Northern Resort Annupuri for Chuo Bus transfers, and Kanro No Mori for Resort Liner. We do not pick up guests outside of these two stops.
- 4) Once you receive confirmation, please email this to us at info@moiwalodge.com

IMPORTANTLY:

1. We will NOT be able pick you up if you do not let us know your arrival time at least 24hrs in advance.
2. We do not pick up passengers when the office is closed (between 10am and 3.30pm), or after 10.30pm. When the office is closed, or if you have not notified us of your arrival time, you will need to make your own way to the lodge.
You will still be able to arrive to the lodge after 10.30pm and find your bed or room.
3. If you require us to make a bus booking or alteration, a 1000JPY booking fee will apply per person.

Once you have booked your transfer, PLEASE notify us of your arrival time. Please email it to info@moiwalodge.com

At the airport:

New Chitose Airport is a nice, modern airport that has plenty to offer. After you arrive, collect your bags and make your way to the relevant bus counter. Once you are checked in for the bus, you should have a bit of time to pick up some cash and snacks for the bus. There is GREAT food on the 3rd floor of the domestic terminal.

The trip to Niseko is approximately 2 hrs 45 mins from the airport depending on snow conditions (3.5 hrs for Resort Liner services).

On arrival in Niseko:

Arrival times to Niseko vary wildly depending on snow and weather conditions. On arrival to your destination, please call or WhatsApp our lodge transfer number: **+81 70 4390 4988**

Don't have international roaming on your phone? Consider an eSIM. See our section on eSIMs in the 'General Information' section later in this document.

We will normally be there in a few minutes to collect you. If there are any significant changes to your arrival time, please let us know via email or call / WhatsApp our transfer number.

**** A reminder – we do not provide a local pick-up/drop-off service between 10am–3.30pm, or after 10.30pm at night. Make sure you book your internal flights appropriately. ****

If arriving while our office is closed, or later than 10.30pm, you will need to make your own way to the lodge.

Sapporo City to Niseko bus transfers (NOT airport transfers)

If you are travelling to Niseko from Sapporo city, then the best option will be to catch either the Resort Liner or Chuo Bus services. The best way to organise this bus is to book it yourself. Here are the links to the best options to the Moiwa area:

- Chuo Bus (book this bus to Northern Resort Annupuri): <https://teikan.chuo-bus.co.jp/en/course/7768>
- Resort Liner (book this bus to Kanro No Mori hotel):
https://www.access-n.jp/winter2024/en/skibus/detail/101chitose_rusutsu_niseko.html

Due to the bus arrival times, we will NOT be able to pick-up or drop-off for this Resort Liner service.

When booking either of these services, note that we do not provide a pick-up service between 10am and 3.30pm. The Niseko Area Circuit Bus operates during these times and can pick up from Northern Resort Annupuri and take you to Moiwa Ski Resort for 500JPY. This bus ceases operation from the 3rd of March (2024 closing date

– it may vary for 2025). See the 2023-24 timetable here: <https://www.nisekobus.co.jp/uploads/Niseko-Circuit-Bus-1.pdf> . There is no bus available from Kanro No Mori during these times.

The steps to follow:

1. Book your transfer on either the Chuo Bus or Resort Liner websites. Your destination should be booked as Northern Resort Annupuri for Chuo Bus and Kanro No Mori for Resort Liner.
2. Once you receive confirmation, please email this to us at info@moiwalodge.com

IMPORTANTLY:

You **MUST** book your transfer at least 9 days prior to your arrival, otherwise they will not accept your booking. We may be able to help in such instances – a 1000JPY booking fee would apply per person.

On arrival in Niseko:

Arrival times to Niseko vary wildly depending on snow and weather conditions.

If you are arriving in to one of the designated stops during operation of our pick-up drop off service, then on arrival to your destination, please call or WhatsApp our lodge transfer number: **+81 70 4390 4988**

Don't have international roaming on your phone? Consider an eSIM. See our section on eSIMs in the 'General Information' section later in this document.

We will normally be there in a few minutes to collect you. If there are any significant changes to your arrival time, please let us know via email or call / Whatsapp our transfer number.

**** A reminder – we do not provide a local pick-up/drop-off service between 10am–3.30pm, or after 10.30pm at night. Make sure you book your buses appropriately. ****

If arriving while our office is closed, or later than 10.30pm, you will need to make your own way to the lodge.

Private Transfers

If you are early enough with your booking, a private transfer for your group may be worthwhile, especially if you are arriving with a family, or while our office is closed.

Book your private transfer as early as soon as you possibly can, as they fill up very quickly.

Prices vary depending on the transfer company you use and your group size, however, below are our recommendations for transfer companies listed in order. You will need to submit a request and await a response from each of these companies. Please only try one company at a time and await their response before trying the next company:

1: Wheels Transfers:

<https://cw4.roomboss.com/cw/gen/ins/order01.jsf?uid=f808ad963a51dbc3013a52ee4f1b05e2&vid=8a80818a7cd840a7017cde436f072942>

2: Long Prime:

<https://cw4.roomboss.com/cw/gen/ins/order01.jsf?uid=f808ad963a51dbc3013a52ee4f1b05e2&vid=2c98902a5d9a722d015da6a4c29874f9>

Remember that our reception is closed between 10am and 3.30pm. If you arrive during this time, you are welcome to leave your gear near reception and explore the area until we re-open.

Train arrivals

The train to Niseko town station is a less popular option, as generally the bus is a more direct and cheaper. In summary ... choose to arrive by train with extreme caution – it's not as easy as it appears, and when it goes wrong, it can spoil your trip!!

Train travel to Niseko is awkward as there are so many train changes involved regardless of where you travel from. Whilst the rail map may make it seem appealing, it's often a long journey, and it still requires a taxi from Niseko station to the resort on arrival (about 15 minutes).

Importantly, many guests choose the 6.38am train services on departure, but it's almost impossible to get to the station at that time of morning. Taxis or buses are NOT available at that time, and it's a 15-minute drive away from the lodge, so walking is not an option. In such instances, we may be able to drive for approx. 6000JPY one-way fee depending on staff availability.

See the train timetable as of 1 Dec 2023 here: <https://moiwalodge.com/assets/JR-Timetable.png>
Purchase your tickets at the station, or in advance on the JR website.

An easier journey from Moiwa is to take the 10.42am Niseko Area Circuit bus from the Moiwa car park, arriving at 10.55am to Niseko station, and then catch the 11.26am train to Sapporo or the airport.

From Tokyo or other areas on Honshu, the shinkansen (bullet train) terminates at Hakodate – the southern-most city of Hokkaido. From there, it's roughly a 4-hour trip to Niseko station (including a change at Oshamambe station).

From the airport (New Chitose) or Sapporo city, it's a rapid train service to Otaru station, then a change onto the Hakodate line train for Kutchan. You will wait 20-30 minutes in Kutchan whilst the train 'splits' into a single carriage or alternatively change to a local train, and then the final trip to Niseko station.

We don't provide any train station pick-ups/drop-offs, however there is a taxi rank at the station, and a 'Niseko Area Circuit Bus' that operates to Moiwa Ski Resort (about 100m from our door). If you're in a taxi and need some snacks or cash from the ATM, do it at the 7-11 on the way up to the lodge ... just ask your taxi driver to stop. If you are arriving at night, taxis can be extremely hard to find, and you may end up being stuck.

A cheaper option is the 'Niseko Area Circuit Bus', which operates to/from Niseko station and Moiwa Ski Resort. The timetable for 2023-24 is available here: <https://www.nisekobus.co.jp/uploads/Niseko-Circuit-Bus-1.pdf>
It takes a while to cover the short 500JPY trip to Moiwa, but it can be a handy option when needed.
This service operates from 9 December to 3 March.

Don't make the mistake using Kutchan station as your destination ... it is over 30 minutes away, and it will be an expensive taxi ride to make it out to Moiwa – approx. 8000JPY.

Remember that our reception is closed between 10am and 3.30pm. If you arrive during this time, you are welcome to leave your gear near reception and explore the area until we re-open.

Your Own Car

If you have the budget, then we recommend guests rent their own car whilst in Hokkaido. It will allow you the greatest flexibility and allow you to go that little bit further for the authentic Japanese experience that is still available all around the Niseko region.

If you are a group looking to stay in the cottage, then the money you save on your transfers to/from Sapporo will go a long way towards the cost of a rental, and the flexibility will allow you to get your groceries whenever you want them. The savings from your transfers and food costs will offset your car rental expense, and you will gain the best possible experience of the Niseko area.

There are many places within Hokkaido to hire a car. We recommend you rent it from the airport in Sapporo, as you will save money on transfers to/from Niseko.

If you are interested in a rental car, some rental car options from the airport are:

<https://www2.tocoo.jp/en/hokkaido>
<https://www.toyotarentacar.net/english/shop/n-c-airport/>
<http://www.nisekoauto.com/>

There are plenty of free parking spaces around or near the lodge to park your car. Given the amount of snow we receive in Niseko, the snow ploughs operate very early in the morning to keep things moving. Please be aware of parking in the dumping routes of the snow ploughs – we will quickly grind to a halt if we can't clear the 15m of snowfall each season!

If you are planning on driving in Japan, you MUST have an international driving permit. This is not optional, and you will NOT be allowed to rent a car without one. You need the grey/blue paper international licence!! Every year we find guests making this same mistake – don't be one of them!

Permits from France, Belgium, Germany, Monaco, Russia, Slovenia, Switzerland, and Taiwan are NOT valid (plus others). With these, you'll need an official translation, so make sure you ask about your requirements before you arrive!! Check before you arrive as to what you need to do.

Sending Luggage

Many guests send luggage to us before their arrival to the lodge. Japan has a wonderful domestic courier system where bags can be sent around the country seamlessly. For example, you can drop your bags at the courier desk at most airports, and the bags will arrive to Niseko roughly 2-days later.

The 'Black Cat' (or 'Yamato'/'Takkyubin') system is a great service for anyone spending a few days in Tokyo, Osaka or Sapporo. It's a way to send your gear ahead of you, allowing you to travel without un-needed bags.

It costs around 3000JPY for a ski bag to be sent from Tokyo to our door.

Here is a bit of an explainer of the service: <https://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2278.html>

This is the Yamato service website: <https://www.kuronekoyamato.co.jp/ytc/en/send/services/takkyubin/>

Send your luggage to:

Moiwa Lodge, 451-6 aza-Niseko, Abuta-gun, Hokkaido. 048-1511
Ph: 0136 583 003

It is important that you understand the following terms when sending bags to/from Moiwa Lodge:

Accepting baggage early or sending baggage after your departure is provided as a goodwill service. We do not accept any responsibility for loss or damage to your baggage or ski gear when using this service, or responsibility for loss or damage to any baggage after its arrival or before its departure from Moiwa Lodge, or any responsibility for delays to baggage at either end of the process. Bags on arrival to or departure from Moiwa Lodge are stored in unmonitored and unsecured areas, such as the open lobby or in unlocked luggage rooms. Whilst we try our best to keep track of baggage, and whilst we have never had any baggage damaged or 'go missing' from the lodge when using Yamato, it is not our responsibility to care for your bags. Any costs for sending bags is your responsibility.

We normally accept luggage 2-3 days before a check-in, but if you need longer please let us know.

Transportation – Local Transport in Niseko

There are options for getting around in the Niseko area, but its best to be organised. Regardless of where you stay, your own car will always be the best option, but if that's out of your budget, there are still ways to stay connected and mobile.

Moiwa Shuttle

We offer our guests free transfers to/from Annupuri each morning and afternoon. There are numerous services to/from Annupuri in the morning, and 1 service returning in the afternoon.

From Annupuri you can access the entire Niseko-United area quickly and easily via the lift system during the regular season when the 'top lifts' are open (normally mid-December). If you need bus access to Hirafu in the morning, you should take the Niseko United shuttle bus from Annupuri Resort to Hirafu.

At the end of the ski day, most guests choose to ski back to the lodge - It's a very easy beginner traverse from Annupuri back to our door at Moiwa Lodge, however there is one afternoon transfer available if needed or if the snow does not allow for the trip home.

Unfortunately, staff shortages across Niseko have caused many resorts and hotels to drastically cut their transportation options. Moiwa resort who share the operation of our previous Hirafu bus no longer have a bus, and so we have had to cease the morning Hirafu direct shuttle – please use the Niseko United shuttle instead.

Moiwa Lodge to Annupuri Shuttle

Shuttle times:

<u>Moiwa Lodge</u>	<u>Nook Annupuri</u>	<u>Moiwa Lodge</u>
07:45	07:50	08:00
08:30	08.35	08:45
16:30	16:45 *	17:00

1. Please be at the stop 5 minutes before the scheduled departure.
2. Shuttle will only stop at designated stops.
3. First-come first served basis.
4. The shuttles at 8.30am vary from quiet to incredibly full. Please bear with us in the busy times while we try to get everyone to the hill as quickly as possible.
5. These times may change in our quieter periods during early-season or late-season

The 7.45am shuttle is designed to align with the Niseko United shuttle departing Annupuri at 8am. This will take people to Hirafu for lessons, etc. as required.

* - Our 4.45pm shuttle from Annupuri departs at 4.45pm, regardless of whether the Niseko United shuttle from Hirafu has arrived. The Niseko United shuttle can sometimes be 20 minutes late or more, and so we cannot wait around for a late arrival. If you are on the Niseko United shuttle and you think you will miss the 4.45pm lodge shuttle, please get off the Niseko United shuttle bus at the 'Annupuri Entrance' stop and make your own way back to the lodge – the driver will know the Annupuri Entrance stop. It is approx. 1.2km from the lodge. The walk home may provide you a good opportunity to stop in and visit the Yugokorotei onsen on the way home.

Our free Lodge to Hirafu evening shuttle

On Wednesday and Saturday nights during peak season, we operate an evening shuttle service to Hirafu. It's a great way to have a change of scenery and visit some other restaurants in Hirafu or catch up with friends in the main tourist area.

Bookings are essential, and the bus can fill up during peak season. A sign-up sheet is normally at reception. Note this shuttle service does not operate during early or late season – i.e. before 20 Dec or after 1 March.

Moiwa Lodge to Hirafu

Moiwa Lodge – Depart at	6pm	8.30pm
Hirafu – Lawsons Arrive at	6.30pm	8.55pm

Hirafu to Moiwa Lodge

Hirafu – Lawsons Depart at	6.30pm	9pm
Moiwa Lodge – Arrive at	7pm	9.30pm

Niseko United shuttle

The Niseko United Shuttle operates throughout the Niseko area and is a way to get over to other Niseko base areas from Annupuri, or when you want to go at unusual times of day. The timetable is available here:

<https://www.niseko.ne.jp/en/niseko-access/#shuttle>

The best way to access Hirafu in the morning is by using our morning Annupuri shuttle, and then connect to the Niseko United shuttle. At other times of the day, the closest stop during the day is at the Annupuri Resort Entrance which is about 1km away from the lodge.

Niseko Area Circuit Bus

The 'Niseko Area Circuit Bus' operates to/from the Moiwa Ski Area (in the car park near the front door of the lodge) and covers a loop around the Niseko Village, Annupuri, Moiwa and Niseko- town areas. The timetable for 2023-24 is available here: <https://www.nisekobus.co.jp/uploads/Niseko-Circuit-Bus-1.pdf>

It can be a handy form of transport when you are moving around the area during the day, arriving while our office is closed, or for covering odd trips. This service operates from 9 December to 3 March (These are the 2023-24 dates. The 2025 dates may vary).

The route map is here: <https://moiwalodge.com/assets/NisekoCircuitBusMap.jpg>

Restaurant Pick Up Services

A fantastic service that many don't expect are the free pick-up/drop off services from local restaurants.

Many restaurants in the Moiwa/Niseko area pick up dinner customers and return you to the lodge after your meal. If you are after a feast, or just a drink, these can be a great way to get out and about without the hassle. Many of these restaurants are away from the tourist traps of Hirafu and provide an authentic local experience without the price tag.

However, MAKE SURE YOU BOOK EARLY, as these fill up quickly. Sometimes we can get you in on the same day, but the earlier you book the better. When booking in advance, some restaurants will require a credit card to secure the table.

Whilst the pick-up/drop-off services are free, many restaurants require at least one person in your group to drink at least one alcoholic drink at dinner.

Walking

We are within walking distance to many of the things you will need during your stay. There are numerous restaurants and Onsens that you can access by foot, as well as ski hire and Moiwa resort.

Niseko's best onsens are in the Moiwa region. Read our recommendations below in the section on 'Onsens'.

Local taxi services.

Historically, the local taxi service in Niseko has had a bad name. Few speak English, they seemed to operate at the whim of the driver's dinner schedule, and they finish way too early at night.

This can still be the case, however there are more taxis than ever before this season in Niseko.

For this winter, the number of taxis has been significantly increased. The taxi app known as "GO" is helping to provide this service, and reservations can be made using the GO App.

Please note that in order for this service to run, a ¥900 surcharge applies when making a booking with the GO App. You can download it using these links:

iPhone: <https://apps.apple.com/jp/app/go-%E3%82%BF%E3%82%AF%E3%82%B7%E3%83%BC%E3%81%8C%E5%91%BC%E3%81%B9%E3%82%8B%E3%82%A2%E3%83%97%E3%83%AA-%E6%97%A7mov-japantaxi/id1254341709>

Android: <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.dena.automotive.taxibell&hl=en&gl=US>

If you are going out late at night into Hirafu, a taxi will be your only option to get home. These can close anytime from around midnight. Don't be caught out, as you will have no way home!

The best bet is still to be prepared well in advance.

Eating and Drinking

Restaurants

Yukari (our resident cook) produces fabulous food from the lodge kitchen. Continental breakfast is served daily, including home-made fresh bread, eggs, bacon, ham, cheese, yoghurt, etc.

Delicious dinners are served each night in our top floor restaurant. Both Japanese and western meals are available. An evening meal is 2500JPY.

There are plenty of restaurants in the area to choose from. Here are just some of our favourites:

Matsuri – our closest neighbour in Moiwa is just 50m from our door. An shabu shabu (hot pot) restaurant with great vibes, and lots of choice.

Kobito – about 1km from the lodge, and our favourite ramen in the area. An izakaya restaurant with free pick-up/drop-off service. Try the ramen, aburi salmon sushi, and for fun in a group, try the Russian roulette gyoza.

Taj Mahal – Indian – about 1km from the lodge, with a pickup/drop off service. They are open late and deliver.

Lucky Fingers – creative Japanese dining. Located in Anupuri, this is a favourite for a nice night out. Try their steak! Normally 2 sitting times for dinner (6 and 8pm), with a pickup and drop off service.

Chez Dou Dou – French – run solely by a lady and her dog, this is a lovely small French restaurant with all home cooked food, and it is delicious! If you are after a quiet night away from the crowds, this may be the place. Note that there are no transport options other than your own car, and bookings are essential.

White Birch – French. Unexpected, but an absolute delight. We marvel at how the chef can produce such fine food out of such a small kitchen by himself. A staff favourite, and not something you would expect in Japan. There are no transport options.

Haru Korean Kitchen. A small restaurant with amazing Korean food. It has only 2 tables and is in a farm building about 3kms from the lodge. It's a unique experience, where the wonderful friendly chef will make everything from scratch. There are no transport options, and bookings are essential.

Rakuichi – Soba – One of Niseko's most famous restaurants, this soba restaurant is incredibly difficult to book into. If you want to get a taste of this amazing Japanese dining experience, bookings open 90 days before sitting via their website: <https://www.rakuichisoba.com/> . Located about 800m from the lodge.

Raphael – Italian – Located at the end of our street, this restaurant has a great range of Italian food – pasta, pizza, burgers, good coffee, etc. They are open for lunch, so are a good option when skiing/riding Moiwa.

Hanayoshi – Sushi. One of Niseko's busiest and best sushi restaurants. The chef visits the fish markets himself each day, and 3 set menus are available (10,000JPY, 15,000JPY and 20,000JPY). Bookings can be difficult, so get in early! Located in Niseko town,

Average Prices (when eating out)

If you eat modestly ¥5000 per person per day is plenty ... maybe more if you plan on taking down Japan's seafood, sushi & sashimi regularly. Expect to pay around ¥700-800 per pint or schooner once you hit Japan's pubs & bars. Spirits are also available. Tipping is not necessary in Japan in the same way as in North America. Wine is quite expensive and not the quality you may be used to at home.

Lunch on the hill will be about 1500-2000JPY for a meal. Less if you want just a small bite.

Drinking Etiquette

In cozy and friendly Japanese-style bars, customers often pour drinks for each other from bottles of beer as a gesture of companionship. If you are a fellow beer drinker, reciprocate with your own bottle. A whiskey drinker may invite you to drink from his bottle and fix a drink for you. In this case, you need not reciprocate unless you have your own bottle.

If with a group, do not begin to drink until everyone is served. Glasses are raised in the traditional salute as everyone shouts Kampai! (Pronounced Cam-pie!) Which means Cheers.

Eating Etiquette

Mastering chopsticks may be challenging at first, but once you have learned, eating with this simple instrument is a genuine pleasure.

If you make friends with the locals and they happen to invite you out for dinner, there are a few do's and don'ts when sharing a common plate amongst a group of people. If you are selecting food from a dish that others are also selecting from, use the end of your chopsticks opposite the end that you eat with. Move the food onto your plate first, and then flip your chopsticks around. Secondly, once you have picked up food from your own plate it is important that you do not put it down again. It must remain in your chopsticks until you have consumed it.

Smoking

Smoking is not allowed in Moiwa Lodge; however, smoking is still very much a part of eastern society. Be prepared to find smokers in many bar areas in and around Japan.

General Information

Internet

We have Wi-Fi throughout the lodge, however in some small pockets the signal can be weak.

It's important to remember that Niseko is a rural area. We do not have access to the bandwidth of major cities. Whilst our internet is fast when the lodge is quiet, it can slow down at peak times – for example, 7am-9am, and in the evenings.

If internet speed is important to you at these busy times, or if you are considering working remotely while in Japan, you should consider an eSIM (see below).

eSIM's

eSIM's are an extremely effective way to stay online and keep in touch when travelling, and a terrific way to avoid expensive roaming charges on your phone.

If you have an iPhone11 or later (and their Android equivalent), then an eSIM should work on your phone, while still allowing your home sim card to work for phone calls, etc. Essentially, your phone would use the eSIM to transmit data, and your phone would function exactly the same as it would at home.

All our foreign staff use an eSIM in their phone whilst in Japan.

This is the eSIM that our staff use, however there are many other eSIM providers available. We recommend Airalo, as we know it works in Moiwa and all over Niseko - <https://www.airalo.com/ja/japan-esim>

What plan you choose will obviously depend on how much data you are going to use in Japan. Many cafes will have Wi-Fi, and the lodges have Wi-Fi, but when you are in the car, buses, trains, on the hill, walking around, etc. you will need to have some data with you.

Health Care

The health care system in Japan is very much comparable to that of western standards. You can be confident of receiving a high level of care should you require attention or hospitalisation. We strongly recommend travel insurance to cover against emergency medical services, overseas medical and hospital expenses. Japanese health care is VERY expensive. A simple visit to a doctor will be about 10,000JPY, scans for a suspected broken bone this season cost one guest 60,000JPY, and a hospital visit could be much more.

There's a simple way to avoid surprises - Insure yourself and make sure it covers everything you will do!

Medicine

One big difference you will find in Japan is the accessibility of medicine.

Pain medication, anti-biotics, anti-inflammatories, cold-and-flu medication, or anything else you would expect to find in any western pharmacy is extremely difficult to get a hand on in Japan. Doctors are extremely reluctant to subscribe or issue pain medication or anti-biotics, and even their simple drugs like Paracetamol is low-dosage.

Bring any medicine you think you may need.

Money

Ensure you have enough Japanese YEN in cash BEFORE you arrive into Niseko. This is not as crucial as it once was, but there are still many places that do not accept cards, and there are limited cash dispensing machines in the area. Sapporo airport (CTS) has many ATMs to use before boarding the bus.

Moiwa Lodge accepts credit cards at reception.

Some now accept American Express or Diners Club. Visa and Master Card are more widely accepted, but you should still obtain a reasonable amount of Japanese Yen in Cash (traveller's cheques also not accepted) before you arrive. There are limited ATMs in Niseko.

The closest ATM when staying in Moiwa is at a 7-Eleven near Niseko Town, which is about 6 km from Moiwa. A taxi will cost around 2000-2500yen one way.

Weather and Snow Conditions

We are often asked about snow conditions.

We find snow-forecast.com the best and most reliable forecasting site. It's what we use on our website at moiwalodge.com. It will normally under-report the expected snowfall, so don't be surprised if a 4cm overnight prediction becomes 25cm or more.

A live video feed of Moiwa's 'Main Course' run is available here:
<https://www.youtube.com/live/WfoxVX1CX4A?si=s8ZVRamrINUJVDpC>

Clothing and Surviving the Cold

Much of Hokkaido is quite cold with persistent wind and a few sunny days that rarely get above minus 10 degrees Celsius, and with night conditions being around 5 – 10 degrees colder than day temperatures. This unique weather makes for the best most reliable dry powder snow on earth.

We strongly recommend that you dress in layers e.g.: thermals followed by fleece warm-retention layers and an outer windproof/waterproof shell. Goggles with a double lens designed for low light are a must as is a fleece neck-warmer & hat. We also suggest that you bring a spare hat & two pairs of ski gloves if you have them. We sell heat packs for 300JPY a pair at reception, and they last all day.

A quality helmet is also a great way to keep your head warm and protected from the elements.

At times, the roads can be extremely slippery, so please ensure you have suitable footwear such as rubber soled winter boots in addition to your normal winter clothing.

Most chairlifts and gondolas are covered to protect you from the snow and wind however you will need to dress appropriately to keep you warm.

If you do not have these vital items they can be rented at 'Winter First', or at the local ski hill.

Important things to bring:

- Japanese Yen in cash
- Medicine - Paracetamol such as Panadol or similar, Cold & Flu tablets, anti-inflammatories, pain medication, or anything else you think you may need on a ski trip.

The Onsen Experience

One of Japan's most cherished customs is a hot mineral bath called an Onsen. Onsens are a unique experience to a Westerner...most notably that any type of clothing (except for modesty towel) in the Onsen is considered unhygienic and therefore unacceptable. 99% of all Onsens have separate male/female baths (the exception being the Niseko Grand which is about 1km away) and usually cost around 1000yen. Towels are available to hire at the Onsens.

Ask at the Moiwa Lodge reception and we can guide you to all the best nearby onsens – some are a few minutes away by foot. Most Onsens will also have a lunch and dinner menu you can purchase from.

Our recommendations are:

Yugokorotei – Probably the best onsen in the Niseko area. Separate mens/womens onsen. This is about 1km from the lodge.

Niseko Grand – Mixed onsen where men and women can all bath in the same onsen area. There are separate change rooms for each, and separate onsen baths inside, however the large outside onsen is mixed. Modesty 'suits' are provided for women (at a nominal fee).

Basic Japanese Words and Phrases

The Japanese language can be very confusing to most people. It can be very daunting when signs and posters are written in foreign characters. However, most Japanese people in transit speak Basic English and will be able to understand you if you speak slowly and clearly. Keep your sentences brief and to the point. You will find that they are very helpful and will try their best to answer your questions in English. Below are a few helpful words and phrases to get you on your way.

Hello	Kon-nichi-wa	How are you?	O-genki-desu-ka ?
Good Morning	Oh-hayo gozai masu	Good Evening	Konban-wa
Good night	Oyasumi –nasai	How much is it?	Ikura-desu-ka
Please	Kuda – sai	Thank you	Arigato gozai -masu
Excuse Me	Sumi-masen	I am sorry	Gomen – nasai
Can I have this?	Kore-wo-kudasai	What is this?	Kore-wa-nani desuka
I don't understand	Wakari-masen	Where is the toilet?	Toire-wa-doko desuka?
Look out	Abu-nai	Good Bye	Sayonara
1 Ichi 2 Ni 3 San 4 Shi (or Yon) 5 Go 6 Roku 7 Nana (or Shichi) 8 Hachi 9 Ku 10 Jyu			
100 Hyaku	1,000 Sen	10,000 Ichi man	20,000 Ni man

Lastly

We trust that you will have a brilliant time in Niseko. It is one of the great ski areas of the world, and we are sure you will love it!

We look forward to seeing you in Moiwa very soon!