



In the Heart of Rausu: An Immersive 5-Sensory Experience

Imagine this: you round a bend on a secluded road along the Shiretoko Peninsula, and a deer suddenly bursts from the undergrowth, calmly crossing in front of your bike before disappearing toward the sea. The sound of its hooves fades. You're here, in Japan's northernmost reaches, in Rausu, about to begin an adventure that awakens every sense. Guided by sea winds and captivated by sweeping views of remote, mysterious islands, you feel the raw power of Hokkaido's untamed wilderness.



“kombu queen” (c) Hokkaido Tourism Organization

Cycling Along the Coast

Led by English-speaking guide Terayama-san and crafted by local enthusiast Sasaki-san, this tour offers a rare invitation to immerse yourself in local life, uncovering secrets that even many Japanese have yet to experience. Cycling is the perfect way to engage with the landscape, and Sasaki-san chose it for good reason! Unlike a car or bus, a bike allows you to slow down and truly connect. Experiment the brisk wind on your face, the calls of birds, the distant crash of waves, and the silhouette of an animal moving through the grass or gliding just above you.

Whether you're an athlete or a novice, the 25 kilometers of gentle coastal roads are enjoyable, and cautious riders can even opt for electric assistance!

This tour also dives into the cultural richness of the region. Terayama-san will happily share insights into the history of local temples, shrines, and seaside hot springs—essential to the daily lives of residents. After cycling, a soothing soak in a traditional onsen provides the ideal reward, relaxing your road-weary muscles in the comforting warmth of natural thermal waters.

At Rausu Port

A highlight of your trip awaits at the bustling fish market in Rausu's harbor. Step inside, and the sounds come to life: fishermen unloading crates overflowing with the morning's catch, auction calls ringing through the air. Hear the rapid, rhythmic chant of a man in a red cap, the laughter echoing around you, and take in the briny scent that fills the shed.

Amid this lively scene, an array of fish, octopus, and shellfish are laid out for eager customers. Open only to fishermen and professional buyers, this market is a world unto itself. With the help of your guides, you'll be able to make sense of the bustling activity. Don't hesitate to ask questions or you'll regret it! Experiencing a show like this is a rare and unforgettable opportunity.

The Kombu Queen

Fishing is at the heart of life here, and few know it better than Risa Kase — a fisherman's daughter, granddaughter, wife, and... the region's very own "kombu queen."

Risa-san warmly shares the intricate process of harvesting and preparing Rausu kombu, the prized seaweed essential to fine Japanese cuisine. Hand-harvested in demanding conditions, kombu is a treasured local delicacy. Renowned for its exceptional quality, this type of kombu is rare and highly valued for its high glutamic acid content, the component

responsible for the umami taste — Japan’s famous fifth flavor so essential in Japanese cuisine.

Each step is meticulously carried out: harvesting, drying, cutting, selecting, and packaging for export. With the fishermen's blessing, she unveils every secret they hold. Now she's showing you a peculiar conical object with a glass window. “This is a mask with a fastener at mouth level that you have to clench with your teeth, allowing the fisherman to peer underwater from his boat. It leaves both hands free to cut and gather the kombu.”

With each detail, Risa-san brings to life the rich history of kombu and umami.

Finally, it's time to try the original sweet kombu specialties she's prepared — delicious!

Behind the Scenes

For Sasaki-san, the tour’s founder, connecting with locals and hearing their stories is essential. Indeed, traveling merely to admire the scenery is akin to standing at the entrance of a cozy home without ever stepping inside, missing out on the true richness within. Through casual conversations, he was inspired to invite local figures to share their stories, creating a deeply immersive experience in this unique region.

Each part of the tour adds a brushstroke to the landscape, transforming it from a mere backdrop into a vibrant, living canvas.

This journey is not just about sightseeing—it’s about immersing yourself in the stories, traditions, and everyday life of Rausu. Encounters with locals reveal the quiet yet profound connections they hold with the land and sea, bonds forged over generations. In each interaction, from a conversation with a fisherman at the harbor to a moment shared with your guide, you come to appreciate the unseen layers of this landscape. Through these exchanges, nature takes on a more intimate, meaningful dimension.

Beyond showcasing Rausu’s beauty and unique culture, Sasaki-san envisions this project as a way to boost the local economy. He is considering establishing additional complementary activities and varied tours to ensure these initiatives are both sustainable and profitable. His ultimate goal? To enhance the quality of life for Rausu’s residents and attract visitors committed to responsible, eco-friendly tourism.

For several days, travelers, guided by local experts, uncover Rausu’s hidden treasures: small, secluded temples, harbor viewpoints, and stories of fishing traditions. Here, even a simple bento break becomes a ritual, accompanied by the wind and the call of seagulls. Between winding roads and spontaneous stops, this adventure offers glimpses of a life known only to insiders.

As you depart, you cast one last glance around, and suddenly everything becomes clear: this tour is more than an adventure; it’s a privilege. By opening yourself to the locals’ stories,

you capture the very essence of Rausu — an authentic Japan, shaped by the forces of nature and human skills. This journey leaves an indelible mark, providing more than memories — a deep understanding and newfound respect for this remarkable corner of the world.

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By Isabelle VanSteenkiste, Journalist.

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Press kit

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The bounty of the sea. Salmon roe. Scallops. Seafood bowl (c) Hokkaido Tourism Organization

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