



Japanese Winter

Photographic tour with tour leaders Ellie Rothnie & Richard Peters

8th - 21st February 2027

Trip Overview

Group size:

The trip accommodates a maximum of 12 guests.

Due to the nature of the trip we will have to take an interim payment of £1500 on the 30th July 2026 and this will be deducted off your final balance.

Cost includes:

Accommodation, all transport to/from Tokyo airports and within Japan (including flights to/from Hokkaido and our own private coach and local guide), all meals, entrance fees to reserves, feeding stations and boat trips.

Cost excludes:

International flights to/from Tokyo, alcohol, sundry items and personal travel insurance.

Accommodation:

Accommodation is based on a twin room basis dependent on which hotel/lodge we are at during our travels. It will all be typically comfortable Japanese accommodation which will vary between traditional style. Some single supplements will be available but due to the nature of accommodation in Japan it might not be possible for the entire trip.

Level of fitness:

The weather will be very cold with lots of snow around, so suitable clothing/footwear will be necessary. Most of the locations involve short walks only, however there is a 20 – 30 minute walk to the Snow Monkeys which may be icy. Days are relatively short, so not too much of the early mornings/late nights either.

LEVEL 3 – 4



Trip Overview

We have been running trips to Japan now for many years and is without doubt one of the most evocative and fascinating locations for winter wildlife photography. This beautiful country has so much to offer the wildlife photographer from the iconic Snow Monkeys which warm themselves in thermal pools to the graceful courtship display of the Red-Crowned Cranes, one of the most beautiful members of the crane family.

As well as spending several days with each of these iconic national species we will work with the equally dramatic Whooper Swans set in a beautiful winter wonderland landscape and travel by boat into the floating pack ice looking for Steller's and White-tailed Eagles at sunrise. With stunning winter vistas throughout, and other opportunities including Red Fox and Sika Deer, this trip promises to be truly memorable. We have maximised our time at each location giving us plenty of opportunity to really capture the beauty and character from each as they all offer so much, as does the overall experience of travelling in this enchanting country at this time of year. For classic winter photography Japan takes some beating and the way we have put this trip together to maximise our chances at each location, makes our Japan trip have that extra edge.



Itinerary



Day 1: It's a day of travelling as it's a long overnight flight from London to Tokyo. We will be in touch with the flight recommendations.

Day 2: Arrive in Japan and then transfer by coach to the mountain village of Yudanaka near to Nagano which will be our base for the next three nights. We will stop for a light snack lunch on the way and then have an afternoon at leisure to give us a chance to re-adjust our body clocks given the big-time differences.

Days 3 & 4: The Japanese Alps near to Nagano is famous for the opportunity to photograph the beautiful snow monkeys. The Japanese macaque is a species native to northern Japan, and is the most northern-living non-human primate, surviving winter temperatures of below -15°C . The Japanese macaques at Jigokudani hot springs in Nagano have become notable for their winter visits to the spa. The monkeys spend the day relaxing in the thermal pools to combat the intense cold of the mountains. We will spend two full days capturing this unique behaviour and try to photograph the monkeys with an array of different lenses from wide angles to long telephotos.

Day 5: We'll have a final morning with the snow monkeys again today at Jigokudani and then in the early afternoon we will head back to Tokyo for an overnight stay at a hotel near to Haneda Airport.

Day 6: We will board an early morning flight to the northern Japanese Island of Hokkaido. Hokkaido is the second largest, northernmost, and least developed of Japan's four main islands. Its weather is harsh in winter with lots of snowfall and below zero temperatures. We will be spending the next 9 days exploring this beautiful island and visiting key locations photographing some of the iconic wildlife that can be found here. Our first photography will be at the Akan crane centre, and we will be visiting the centre for an afternoon session of photography en-route to our hotel base.

Itinerary



Day 7: The red-crowned crane also called the Japanese crane is one of the rarest cranes in the world. In some parts of its range, it is known as a symbol of luck, longevity, and fidelity. Japanese cranes, also known as Tancho were thought to be extinct in Japan due to overhunting and habitat destruction. However, in 1926 a group of about 20 birds was discovered in the marshes around Kushiro. With conservation efforts they have since made a dramatic recovery and now number more than 1000 birds. The cranes are spectacular to watch as they dance, often in pairs, with seemingly choreographed dips and jumps. The cranes are best seen in the winter as they gather at winter feeding sites.

For these two days here, we will be trying to capture images of this beautiful bird at its night-time roosting sites and at a local crane centre where the birds are fed daily. Hopefully with the right weather conditions and if the cranes perform their spectacular courtship display, we will be rewarded with some evocative images. White-tailed eagle and red fox are other possibilities at this location as they too are attracted in at feeding times.

Itinerary



Day 8: We will spend our last morning with the cranes, and it will be an early start as we get ourselves into position at a famous roosting site along a small river. We will then transfer to our next location, which is Lake Kussharo for an afternoon's photography of whooper swans.

Days 9 – 10: Lake Kussharo is a popular stopping point for several kinds of migratory birds in the winter. Kussharo is a caldera lake, and it's fed by hot springs, so parts of it during the winter remain unfrozen. In the fall, large flocks of whooper swans head south from Russia to Hokkaido. Lake Kussharo is a perfect winter roosting spot for the swans. The swans have been fed for many years and so they are very tame compared to other populations. This is without doubt one of the best places in the world to photograph this beautiful species. We will have all our first day here to explore the lake and try different techniques in capturing images of these graceful birds. On the second day we will transfer to Rausu during the afternoon which will be our base for the next two nights.

Days 11 – 12: These next two days will be based in Rausu where we will be going out each morning on a chartered boat. This boat trip will be out into the Sea of Okhotsk, and we will sail into the pack ice looking for Steller's Sea eagles. Each winter, many Steller's Sea eagles migrate from their breeding grounds to the southern Kuril Islands and to Hokkaido, Japan, where food is more plentiful. This very large, powerful eagle spends the winter around the coasts or on the pack ice. The birds are attracted to fish that is thrown out for them. This really is one of the highlights of this remarkable trip and we shall be doing two consecutive boat trips each morning to maximise our potential in obtaining images of them in this stunning environment. White-tailed sea eagles are also attracted to the bait so both species will be possible. On the afternoon of the first day here we will travel to Notsuke Peninsula, which is a good place to look for Sika Deer and Red Fox. After our second mornings outings though we will head back to Lake Kusharo where we will spend our final night near Lake Kussharo.

Itinerary

Day 13: We will have one final morning with the whooper swans before we then transfer to Kushiro airport for our flight back to Tokyo for our over-night stay near Haneda airport.

Day 14: From our hotel we will catch a flight from Haneda airport which given the time differences will arrive back in the UK later the same day.



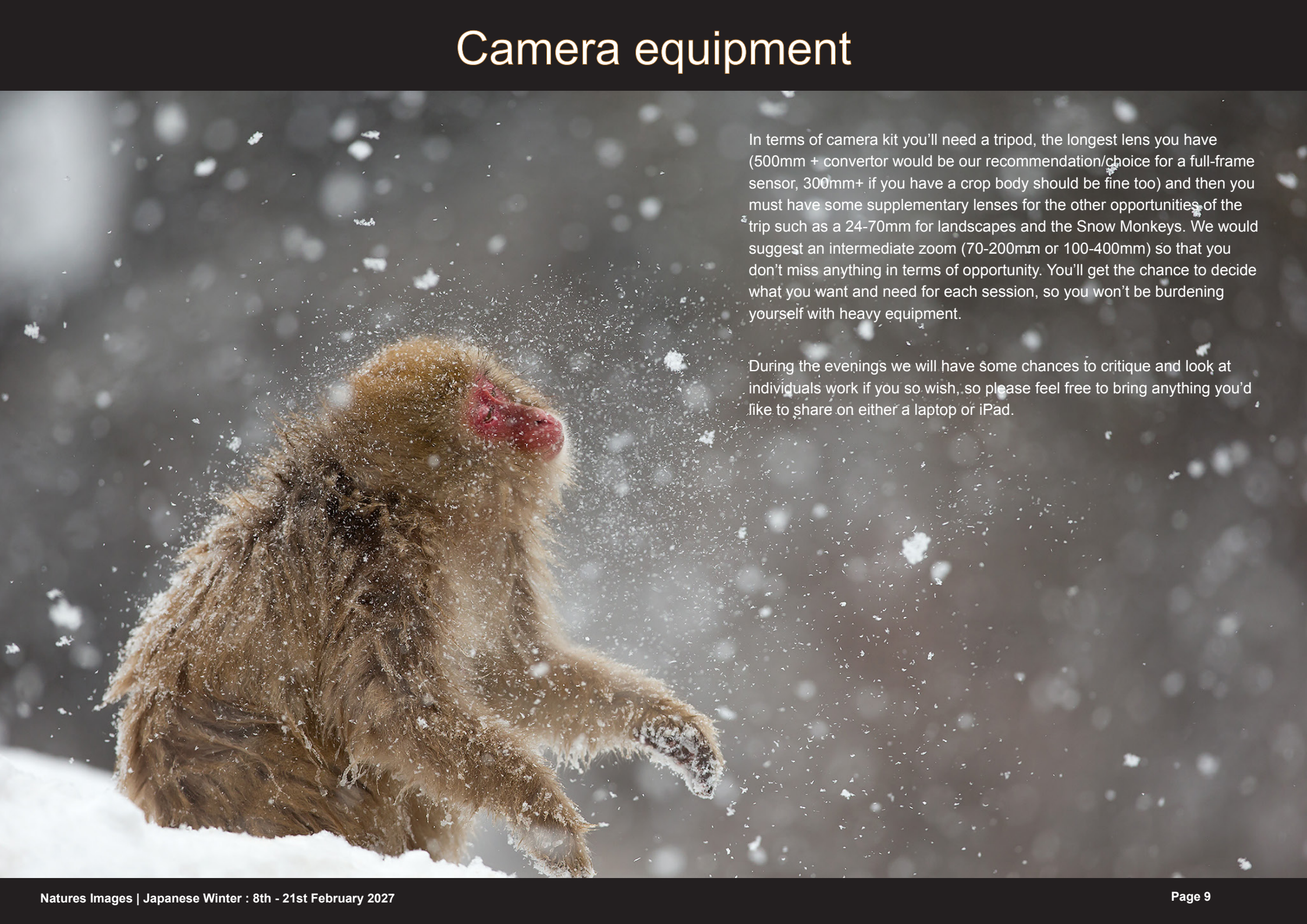
Things to bring



The accommodation is typically Japanese which is clean and comfortable with all bedding and towels provided. This often involves futons or mattresses on the floor, which will be provided/setup for you every evening. It is also worth noting that in a couple of the hotels on Hokkaido there will only be the traditional Japanese style communal baths available too, part of the uniqueness of travelling in this remote area. The social protocol associated with using these baths will be explained in full by our Japanese-speaking guide throughout the trip. Food will be predominately Japanese cuisine but in a few of our hotels there may be a western-style option. If you do have concerns on the diet, then please consider bringing some snack items of your own as the options available en-route will be very limited. You might also want to consider bringing a thermos to fill up with coffee or tea in the morning for our days out.

In terms of clothing, you'll obviously need plenty of warm and weatherproof clothing as it can and will be very cold. The following are very much recommended - a good pair of strong waterproof walking boots and ideally those offering some thermal lining. You will also need a pair of Yak tracks to attach for the climb to and from the snow monkeys as it can be very icy and is a path on bare rock. Keeping warm feet, hands and head should be your priorities. Good waterproof over trousers (lined ones are best as they'll keep you warmer especially with a normal pair of trousers and some thermal leggings underneath as well) and dependent on how these 2 items fit together some gaiters can be useful as well if the snow is deep. For the top half it's very much a question of having several layers – like a thermal type of vest, t-shirt, thin jumper, fleece and then a waterproof down coat that is built for keeping out the wind chill. You'll know your own cold thresholds, but it really is a question of build it up in layers. A good hat, some fingerless mittens and then some warm waterproof gloves to go over the top (the former so that when you come to photograph your fingers can still work the camera) should round the piece off. We would also suggest you bring lip balm as the cold can cause chapped lips. A head torch is a good idea for the early morning crane session.

Camera equipment



In terms of camera kit you'll need a tripod, the longest lens you have (500mm + convertor would be our recommendation/choice for a full-frame sensor, 300mm+ if you have a crop body should be fine too) and then you must have some supplementary lenses for the other opportunities of the trip such as a 24-70mm for landscapes and the Snow Monkeys. We would suggest an intermediate zoom (70-200mm or 100-400mm) so that you don't miss anything in terms of opportunity. You'll get the chance to decide what you want and need for each session, so you won't be burdening yourself with heavy equipment.

During the evenings we will have some chances to critique and look at individuals work if you so wish, so please feel free to bring anything you'd like to share on either a laptop or iPad.

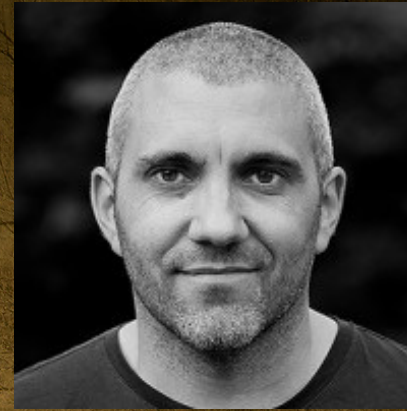
Useful Contact Information

Our contact numbers for the build up to and for the duration of the trip are:

Ellie: +44 (0)7879 480143



Richard: +44 (0) 7740 195960



Please don't hesitate to contact us even if you think it is a minor question, we're here to help.



Address

4 Deer Park Drive, Newport, Shropshire TF10 7HB

Tel: 01952 411436

Email: mark@natures-images.co.uk

Web: www.natures-images.co.uk

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