

January 2013

## Studying abroad in Hokkaido

Xu Jiliang  
Graduate School of Tourism  
Sapporo International University

Beautiful Hokkaido, located in the northernmost part of Japan, accounts for approximately one fifth of the nation's area. Although the area of land is vast, the population density is low, and Hokkaido has established itself in a leading position as far as Japan's agriculture, forestry and fisheries industries are concerned. Agriculture has introduced advanced, large-scale production, particularly in the areas of feed crops, cereal crops and dairy products, which are produced in especially large quantities. In addition, Hokkaido's forestry production accounts for 20% of the whole of Japan, making it the breadbasket of Japan in both name and practice. Over 100 years have passed since Hokkaido was first colonized in the Meiji era, and the history of those pioneers is certainly not a gentle one, but the characteristic natural environment of the land is majestic and mighty. Life in Hokkaido keeps a close eye on the history and traditions of Ainu, an ethnic minority in Japan, while rejecting the people bound by old customs and traditions; thanks to lifestyles that have coexisted with that distinctive nature, Hokkaido has a somewhat exotic feel that draws in the people of the regions.

Before I visited Hokkaido, I spent a year in Yokohama. Compared to that time, I feel that Hokkaido is a much more suitable place to live. The pace of the city has the same sense of rhythm as Tokyo or Yokohama. The roads are wide, the air is fresh and everyone seems to be relaxed and comfortable. For Chinese people, Hokkaido is not such an unfamiliar place. Thanks to the 2010 movie *If You Are The One*, Hokkaido is a place that remains deep in people's memories. Hokkaido, with its beautiful, expansive nature, is ideal for stirring up moods of romance, a beloved place that is etched into the heart. On the way out of the cinema after the movie had ended, many people felt they would someday like to visit Hokkaido. A friend on the Internet said the same thing; the best part of the *If You Are The One* story was set in Hokkaido. That is because it is the place that the heroine Xiao Xiao pined for and where, at the climax of the movie, she threw herself in the sea but came back to life. Hokkaido gave her the chance to rediscover life and love. For countless loving couples, beautiful, expansive Hokkaido is, in itself, romantic and somewhere that leaves a deep impression on the heart.

What's more, Hokkaido was the first place in Japan to employ a system to promote tourism on a prefecture-wide level. Countless tourists flock from home and abroad, attracted by the Sapporo

Snow Festival that is held each February. It was a dream of mine, as a student of tourism, to come to Hokkaido, with its scenic sightseeing spots, to study tourism. It's almost a year since I first arrived here but, as I grew up in the south, walking on the snow is not easy. I always feel envious when I see the people of Hokkaido walking so quickly.

Finally, from the perspective of my own tourism studies, I would like to convey to everyone the beauty of Hokkaido in winter. Winter is the most beautiful season in Hokkaido; the vast fields of snow invite you to a white fairytale world. I have been to festivals held on the theme of snow and ice, such as the Lake Shikotsu Ice Festival I visited in 2013. This is one of Hokkaido's representative winter events, and attracts approx. 200,000 people every year. Sprinklers are used to spray frames with water from Lake Shikotsu, which is one of the clearest lakes in Japan, and the water freezes to form mysterious shapes. These ice formations have a blue sparkle by day, thanks to the clear water from the lake. At night they are lit up with colorful illuminations and the venue turns into an even more mysterious world of color. As well as the ice formations, the venue also has ice slides for children, horse-riding activities and a warm rest area in which you can eat. What's more, colorful firework displays light up the night sky, and ice weddings, *ikebana* displays and *taiko* drum performances help create a festive atmosphere on special occasions. A superb-quality natural hot spring can be found near the venue, where visitors can warm themselves in the bath while they soak – definitely an experience not to be missed.

There is a saying, "Seeing is believing," and to all those students thinking about going to Japan to study, Hokkaido is the place for you. Come and experience the place that people yearn for.