

issue 08 Mar 29 - Apr 11 2008

powderlife

NISEKO ニセコ

rivers ready

Rafting co's gearing up

hakuba next?

The mainland's premier resort

shakotan peninsula

Niseko's stunning coastline

IT'S A WRAP
THE BEST OF '07 / '08



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Property**

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MARCH 29/APRIL 11
at 11a. 07, 2008
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Niseko has been Japan's fastest growing property market for the last three years. Niseko is now also appealing on the horizon of European and Hong Kong investors. Join the many tourists and international investors who are a part of the exciting market.

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Higashiyama Prince Hotel

¥11,000,000



**Modern 1st floor dining lounge
- Full kitchen equipped
- 2nd floor lounge area
- 3rd floor lounge area
- 4th floor lounge area**

Honazono 1st floor lounge

¥11,000,000



**Modern 1st floor lounge
- The 1st floor lounge area
- 2nd floor lounge area
- 3rd floor lounge area
- 4th floor lounge area**

3.5g House

¥11,000,000



**Modern 1st floor lounge
- Full kitchen with garage
- 2nd floor lounge area
- 3rd floor lounge area
- 4th floor lounge area**

4.5g House

¥11,000,000



**Modern 1st floor lounge
- Full kitchen with garage
- 2nd floor lounge area
- 3rd floor lounge area
- 4th floor lounge area**

4.5g House

¥11,000,000



**Modern 1st floor lounge
- Full kitchen with garage
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Honazono House

¥11,000,000



**Modern 1st floor lounge
- Full kitchen with garage
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- 3rd floor lounge area
- 4th floor lounge area**

publisher's note...

What a season it has been. Niseko continues to go from strength to strength. I came to Niseko for the first time in 1994 and I can say without a doubt that the Niseko of today is a much better resort than it was back then. This issue we take a look back at the 07/08 season and look forward to what awaits us in the 08/09 winter. We also give out the inaugural Powderlife 'Best of Niseko' awards. See you next time in our summer issue!

今シーズンは何とすばらしいシーズンだったでしょう。私がニセコに初めて来たのは1994年でしたが、言うまでもなく今のニセコとは格段の差がありました。ニセコはこれからもますます成長し続けいいリゾートに変化していくことでしょう。この号では今シーズンがどんなに素晴らしかったかを振り返ったり、また来シーズンのニセコにはどんな楽しい事が私たちを待っているかを見ていきます。今シーズンのベストオブ賞も発表いたします。それでは、また夏のパウダーライフでお会いしましょう!

**Bevan Colless
Publisher**

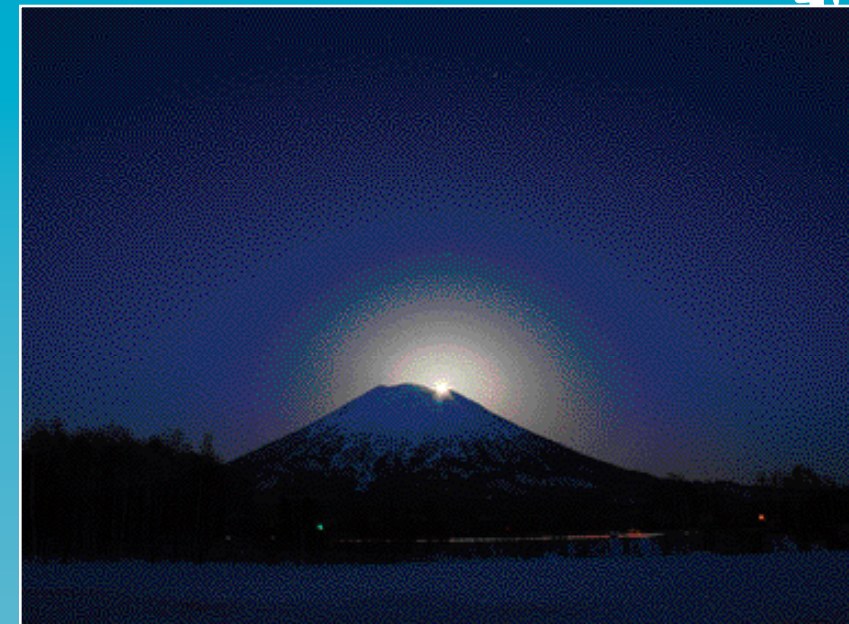


photo of the week

**Full moon Yotei...
March 21, 2008.**
by Eriko Mentzou

Many winter visitors to Niseko leave without even having seen Mt Yotei's peak. The full moon over a snow-covered Yotei is a rare sight indeed. On Good Friday it went from orange to pink in the late afternoon before the moon emerged from the caldera about 6.30pm. Wow!

in the loop

what's on in niseko this week

march 29 - april 11

イベント情報をお寄せください! Tell us about your event!
ed@powderlife.co.jp 0136 222 000

**Saturday March 29 - April 6
Wonderland Terrain Park, Higashiyama Open**
Go BIG in the new terrain park by the Wonderland chair (peak chair) at Higashiyama. Not for the faint hearted.

**Tuesdays April 1, 8
A Day in the Life of a Ski Patrolter**
Higashiyama Prince Hotel, Tuesday night 9pm to 10pm. 1F Tea Lounge Hamanasu. Japanese and English.

**Sunday April 6
18th Super Bumps Niseko Cup at Hirafu**
Freestyle skiing competition at Furiko Course. Starts from 10.15am. Keep an eye out for the flips!

**3月29日-4月5日(土)
ワンダーランド パーク オープン**
ニセコ東山スキー場内、山頂直下のワンダーランドコースにトレーニングパークがオープンします。無料にて皆様に解放! 4月6日までオープン予定です。

**4月1,8日(火)
スキーパトロールの一日**
ゲレンデや早朝のアバランチコントロールの様子など、ニセコ東山パトロールの活動を、映像や写真とともにご紹介。参加無料、21:00~ 新館1Fティーラウンジはまなす

**4月6日(日)
18th スーパーバンプスニセコCUP グランヒラフ**
フリースタイルスキー モーグルの大会がヒラフのフリココースにて開催されます。美しいターンとエアーが間近で見られるいい機会です。是非皆さん応援に来て下さい!大会は10:15~。

**Mondays and Thursdays March 31, April 3, 7, 10
Higashiyama Prince Sushi Making Class**
Learn how to make sushi the authentic way! 12pm-2pm 1F Otaru Restaurant. Japanese and English. ¥2500. Call 0136-44-1111 for reservations until 5pm the day before the class.

**Saturday April 5
Radical Air Contest in Grand Hirafu**
Preliminary jam session before the Top 8 in each category battle it out on the table tops and spine. At the Furiko Course. Preliminary matches for snowboarders start at 9.30am and for skiers at 11am. Finals from 1.30pm.

**Sunday April 6
Grand HIRAFU Bike Challenge**
Crazy MTBikers descend the ski slopes. Like last season the snow should be very soft so expect a few tumbles. Kogen Course (along #1 King chair) from 5pm.

**3月31日 4月7日(月) 4月3, 10日(木)
東山プリンスホテルにて お寿司作り教室**
海にも近いニセコ、新鮮なネタでお寿司作りを体験してみませんか。寿司の作り方がその日のうちに習得できます。日本語と英語でのレッスン 参加費 ¥ 2,500 12:00~14:00 すし処小樽にて 予約はアクティビティカウンター tel:0136-44-1111 前日の17:00まで。

**4月5日(土)
2008ラディカルエアコンテスト グランヒラフ**
今年もラディカルエアコンテストがグランヒラフのフリココースにて開催されます。予選はテーブルトップを使ったジャムセッションでスキーヤー・スノーボーダーが技を競い合います。決勝はテーブルトップとスパインを使用。見ているだけで楽しめます。是非皆さん応援に来て下さい!スノーボード予選9:30~、スキー予選11:00~、決勝は13:30~です。

**4月6日(日)
グランヒラフ バイク チャレンジ**
クレイジーなMTBライダー達が、雪上を駆け回ります。こんな楽しいレースが見られるのもなかなかありませんよ!今年時間は遅くなって17:00レーススタートです。滑った後にも是非応援しに来て下さい。キング第1リフト沿いの高原コースにて。

These are only a selection of our current listings. Please visit our website for other properties and more information.

www.nisekoproperty.com

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PICK UP POINTS

Hirafu Australia House, Bang Bang, B's Café, A Bu Cha, Senchou 1, Senchou 2, Hotel Niseko Alpen, Komekichi Onigiri Cafe, King Bell Restaurant, Hotel Niseko Scott, Hotel Snow Universe, Niseko Kogen Hotel, Hirafutei Prince Hotel, Captain Hirafu, Sekka Deli, Sekka Landmark Deli, Gentem Café, Welcome Center, Wild Bill's, The Brick, Java Bar, The Red Bar, Dragon Wine Bar, Gentemstick Retail Store, NGS, Deep Powder Tours, Ski Japan, Larry Adler, Downtown Cafe, NAC, Nathan's, Jo Jo's, Yuki Bar, Fusion, 343, Apres Bar, The Northern Fox... and more **Higashiyama** Higashiyama Prince Hotel, Black Diamond Lodge **Annupuri** Annupuri Village, Nikko Hotel, Ikoinomura Hotel, The Nook Annupuri, Mokumokutei BBQ House **Moiwa** Hotel Kanronomori **Kutchan** Kutchan Tourist Information Centre, Loaf Lounge, Be, Blue Cielo, Nami Chan Chi, Fuji Confectionary, Shunsai **Sapporo** Sapporo Tourist Information Centre, Sapporo Clock Tower Information Centre **Tokyo** Paddy Foley's, Legend's, National Azabu International Supermarket, Nissin International Supermarket, Khaosan Asakusa Backpackers Hostel **Hakuba** Hakuba Real Estate, The Powderhouse



Niseko's first periodical magazine - published every two weeks from December 22, 2007 to March 29, 2008
circulation 3000 copies per issue / 24,000 copies this season
publisher Bevan Colless **managing editor** Kristian Lund
contributors Eriko Mentzos, Vanessa Gibson, Greg Lund, Dave Garrick, Magnus Alexander, Stirling Goldman
photographers Eriko Mentzos (ideapark), Niseko Photography (Mathew Hollingsworth, Aaron Jamieson, Alex Lee), Hotshots (Randy Wieman, Dave Paull and Mark Tsukasov), Glen Claydon (Niseko Panoramas)
editorial assistant Simone Nance
distribution manager Josh Kidd
layout Metropolis Magazine Tokyo, Mojoworks, Aaron Jamieson
advertising inquiries email ads@powderlife.co.jp
subscriptions email subscribe@powderlife.co.jp
order past issues ¥1000 email info@powderlife.co.jp

powderlife magazine

170-5 Aza Yamada Kutchan-cho,
 Abuta-gun, Hokkaido 044-0081
 tel 0136 22 2000 fax 0136 22 2011
www.powderlife.co.jp

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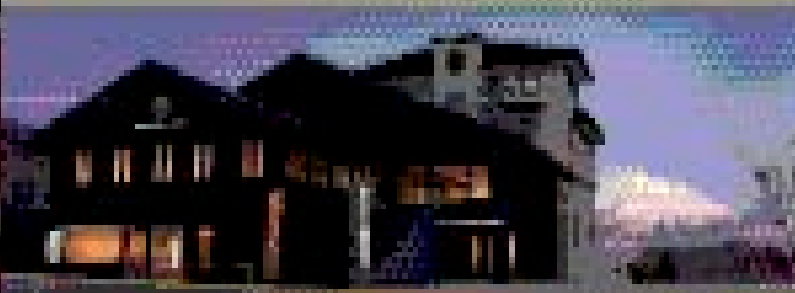
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by kristian lund and bevan colless



Sakura... the surest sign spring has arrived in Japan

Spring

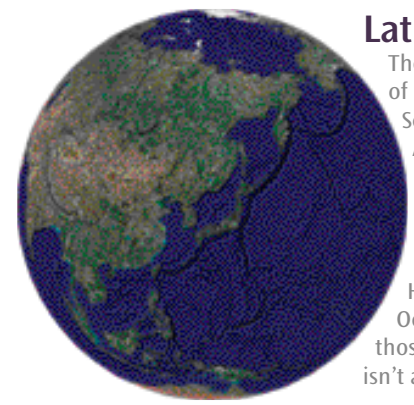
After a particularly cold winter with some huge storms across the country, it has come to an abrupt end the length of the archipelago. Tokyo has recorded unseasonably warm temperatures as high as 17 degrees. The famous sakura (cherry blossom) trees came into early bloom. Meanwhile up in Hokkaido we're experiencing rain when usually it would be still dumping snow! Last season one of the biggest dumps of the season came in mid-March. At time of going to print we were on track for one of the worst March snowfall records of all time. With no snow predicted for the week ahead we were at 38cm for the month. The last really poor recent March was 2003 with 77cm. Last year we got 1.6m and in 2005 we had two and a half metres! Even in April there is generally still a foot or so of snow around, but hopes are starting to wane we'll get that last powder fix for season 07/08. One thing's for certain... there'll be plenty more next season!

Rivers set to rage as rafting co's gear up

With an early start to the melt, Niseko outdoor adventure companies are gearing up for an early rafting season. While the official start to the season is generally April 12th, or a week later in late seasons, NOASC's Ross Carty said the grade three and four rapids could come a bit earlier. "The big water usually comes towards the end of April and the Golden Week holidays (Japan's official spring holidays April 29 - May 5)," he said. "The water doesn't really come up that quickly until we get a lot of rain and it warms up a little more, and based on what's happening this year it looks like it might happen at the start of April." For those after a bit of an adrenalin rush, keep an eye on the water and if we do get a bit of rain and you want to don the dry suit and go for some winter white water rafting, the local companies will take you down. Try NOASC, SAS and NAC.



Spring-time rapids coming early



Latitude 42

The latitude 42 north passes smack bang through the middle of Niseko. It also passes through Spain, the Mediterranean Sea, France (Corsica), Italy, the Adriatic Sea, Montenegro, Albania, Serbia (Kosovo), Macedonia, Bulgaria, Turkey (European part), the Black Sea, Turkey (Asian part), Georgia, Russia, the Caspian Sea, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, People's Republic of China, Mongolia, North Korea, the Sea of Japan, across Hokkaido, the Pacific Ocean, the United States, the Atlantic Ocean, Portugal and Andorra. We haven't been to many of those places, but we reckon there's a good chance the snow isn't as good at any of them as it is in Niseko

Winter mountain biking

People usually ask two questions when they see local Canadian expat Andrew Caldwell with his snowscooter: 1. Is that thing fun? And 2. Why don't you ride a snowboard? Obviously it's fun or he wouldn't do it! And the reason he's a snowscooter rather than a snowboarder is that he's a mad-keen mountain biker in the summer and the snowscooter gives him a similar sensation. "It gives you the same kind of feeling of speed and agility. You've got the same positioning with the handle bars and it doesn't have any brakes so there's the feeling of being somewhat out of control – it's an adrenalin thing!" Snowscooting has a huge underground following in other parts of the world, especially France and parts of Canada where they're starting to pull some very impressive motocross-style tricks.



Andrew Caldwell nearly handle-bars deep in Niseko powder.



Eye pod... wink!

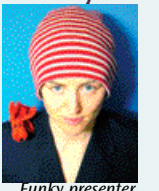
You can always rely on Japan to invent something really cool that's probably not really necessary. Now a university researcher has invented a system that allows people to operate electronic devices like iPods by winking. While iPods are the ultimate skiing and snowboarding accessory these days, the new technology is unlikely to catch on in Niseko thanks to the amount of powder that ends up in your face.

Name a ski run

Return visitors to Niseko this season may have realised Higashiyama's ski runs have been completely renamed. When new owners Citigroup came in they decided they'd give the runs fun names rather than the usually uninspiring names most Japanese resorts give to their runs. But they left one course unnamed to give visitors and locals a chance to get involved. The person who suggests the winning name gets two free season passes to Higashiyama next season. Entre at the resort.

5000 hits a day

Want to expose your product to a whopping 5000 potential customers a day? The Daily English Show is looking for sponsors. Produced in Kutchan by a talented young Kiwi, Sarah Lilburn, TDES gets 5000 views every show from people all around the world. Not just those learning English, but many who want to check out the entertaining little mini-docos Sarah does about the area, through which she provides scripts and other things to help non-native speakers learn English. See p24 for more on Sarah and the show.



Funky presenter



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Kutchan property

LOOKING at the rise of major ski resorts across the world and property prices in the service town always rise a few years after the prices in the main village.

Kutchan's prices have been falling along with the rest of Japan for many years now.

In 2006 Hirafu experienced the largest price rise of any area in Japan, but Kutchan was the third biggest drop. It seems this trend is about to end as staff accommodation is pushed to breaking point and residents head into Kutchan.

The Shinkansen (bullet train) from Honshu is slated to stop in Kutchan on its way to Sapporo in 2015.

A Kutchan-based business consultant told Powderlife that Hokkaido's most respected construction company have moved into the area and have begun selling an apartment block in central Kutchan.



Developers move on little country town Kutchan, on the back of Niseko's ski boom. Photo: Yon, tdes

Cash reliance continues

Many visitors to Niseko can't understand why, in one of the most technologically advanced countries in the world, there is no ATM in the main tourist precinct Hirafu. Well, the underlying reason is the Japanese don't like the banking system and would prefer to stash their savings (often under their futons!) and carry wads of notes around with them rather than hand it over to the bank. It's the consummate cash society.

An amazing story came out this month illustrating the scenario. Police found 50 cardboard boxes of cash stored in the Osaka home of two sisters who were under investigation for tax fraud. They had apparently siphoned off the cash in small amounts from a larger sum they inherited from their father, a real estate tycoon, on his death in 2005. Apparently, the women were spooked when one of the banks that held their money went bankrupt a few years back.

So while the nation's love affair with cash continues, the question on everyone's lips is when will Hirafu finally get an ATM? There is talk in Council that

it may be in time for next winter but with no firm confirmation. The main hope at this stage is that the competitive 7 Eleven chain will move in to stake its claim on Hirafu – every 7 Eleven franchise now has an international ATM standard. Private ATMs are known for being very profitable in other countries and the company that implemented them at 7 Eleven Japan floated on the stock market last year. It's interesting a private company hasn't been successful in setting up an ATM in a place where its success would be guaranteed.

through. Developments that were slated to go ahead without-of-the-plan sales have been the worst hit. Some prime blocks of land, such as the NOASC car park, which were to be developed, have been placed back on the market. Some developers have reported a slowdown in sales as funding for individuals becomes more difficult.

Sub-prime crisis hits Niseko

With the recent fallout from the US sub-prime mortgage debacle; financial institutions across the globe are putting a premium on having cash in their coffers rather than loans on their books. Financial institutions with large debt are being punished in the share market as the jitters spread. This tightening of the purse strings may have begun to affect the Niseko market as developments have had to be shelved when the potential funding has fallen

Skyscraper halted

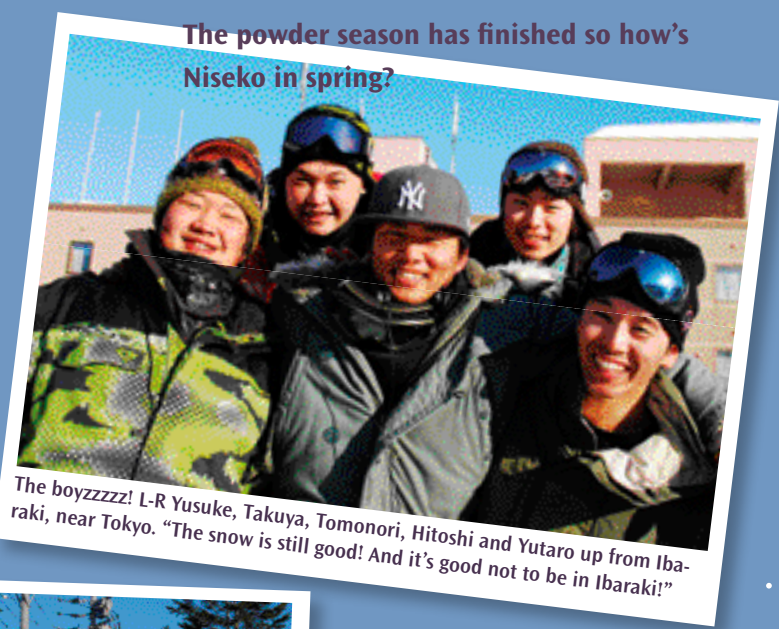
The 42 metre, 14 storey building planned for construction in middle Hirafu by Nishin, a Tokyo based company has had its approval revoked. Nishin were believed to have received approval from the Hokkaido government for the 42 metre dwelling, but with the Kutchan Yakuba's (council) new height restrictions of 22 metre becoming law, the Hokkaido government is believed to have modified the approval, to bring it in line with the local regulations. Nishin is believed to be considering its options.

<p>NISEKO HIGASHIYAMA BLACK ♦ DIAMOND</p>		
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SNAP

by eriko mentzos

faces on the street



The powder season has finished so how's Niseko in spring?
The boyzzzz! L-R Yusuke, Takuya, Tomonori, Hitoshi and Yutaro up from Ibaraki, near Tokyo. "The snow is still good! And it's good not to be in Ibaraki!"



You're from one of the few places in the world that gets more snow than Niseko, yet you've come here to go skiing? Cool!! Alaskans Dustin and Jamie, and Yankie buddies Cody, Sarah and Jenna. "It's awesome! Good snowball snow too!"



Local Ume, and Osaka's Tomoyo and Ryosuke were loving the weather and views! "Kireeeeeee!"



David and Nathan from the sunny Gold Coast were stoked: "It doesn't matter there's no powder, there's still plenty of snow. We're having a great time!"



All the way from the UK, Kate and Daniella (formerly of Australia) were blown away by how beautiful the area is: "If this isn't even the best snow that's great! It's still so much better than Australia."



Mitusuru and Ikuhiro up from Chiba (Japan's Surfers Paradise) can't believe how much snow there still is. "We can still ride everywhere!"



Rie and Yoko from Sapporo were having a great time in springtime Niseko. "It's so fun and the views from the top of the mountain are amazing. Great view of Mt Yotei too!"

mountain style

Style Wars! Yui (left) and Mai were up for the Mountain Style challenge and as expected emerge victorious from the battle! They both go for underground Japanese brands with matching jacket and pants to keep it local and keep it real. Yui's Command 9 Project baggy pink jacket with green pants won us over first, but the more we looked at Mai-chan's Blue Blood white jacket and blue pants – the more we liked desho! With a couple of Niseko fleece's from Fusion, they've made out like bandits.



"This is much more fun than sitting in the sauna." Splash Bar's Reggae guru - Shu and his crew lap up the heat



"Oh My Gosh I can't believe he just pulled off that mix!" Documentary maker Cam and massage therapist Billeigh Wahaa are aghast at the DJ's skills.



The view from the DJ booth. The punters were stoked with the beats.



"Woo Hoo! Gawd, I love this town!"...Black Diamond Babes Masato and Yui party on in 'The Red'.

Samara's 30th B'day Pimps & Ho's Party at the Brick

After a long winter of rugging up the girls were ready to show some flesh. With some heavy hitting pimp-daddies around to keep them safe, Samara Tanton's birthday bash turned into one of the best parties of the season.



'Bad Girl' Belinda and 'Between-the-sheets' Sheridan are well looked after by 'One-bullet' Wayne. Bookings essential.



Panorama's developer Jon Atherton and 'Ton-sils' Derek Begley won't be letting their top-girl Kyra go for anything less than top dollar.



Madame S (and M)... dominatrix birthday girl Samara showing The Brick who's boss



Hard-man Jeremy makes sure 'Annie the Angel' books the client before being interrupted by the pesky camera.



'Amourous Ayu' and 'Cutie-Queen' Kisato prepare to show new girl 'Waza the Wench' the way things work for a lady of the night.

FLASH

niseko social scene

by jimmy edwards

DJ Luke Walker's Diskonekted Final Red Bar Party.

Kiwi DJ Luke Walker chose Niseko as the first leg of a round-the-world trip, and luckily for us he brought his discs with him. Having being featured on UK's mega-club Ministry of Sound records his gig saw people flock from everywhere to pack out the Red Bar. Fans lined up to get in and a sweaty heaving mass danced to his tunes until the wee hours. Please come back again Mr Walker!

Powder tools

by bevan colless



Salomon Burner

Salomon is the only ski brand to successfully enter into the snowboard market and achieve credibility. They did it by spending their dosh on R & D and making great quality products. The Salomon Burner is their most advanced deck and it has a legion of fans who swear by it as the best free-riding board on the market. Using Salomon's Space frame construction, the Burner provides increased edge through a combination of cap and sidewall construction. The Zeolit sintered base makes the Burner fast in any snow conditions, but it likes powder the best. Perfect for Niseko. CNC profiling creates a slightly softened tip and tail to allow easier turn initiation and exit while the middle of the board remains very stiff, giving it solid stability when you're really hauling. Available in sizes from 157-172cm. ¥55,000 from Victoria Sports, Kanda Tokyo.



Salomon Malamute Boot

My mate from Tokyo Stuart Flanders (aka Spoggo) thinks and talks more about snowboard gear than anyone I know. He reckons he's bought close to 50 snowboards because he keeps finding some fault in them. But for the last five years he's only ridden one style of boot – The Salomon Malamute. So if Spoggo can't find fault in them they must be good. When you're deep in powder and in tight trees you want immediate response from your boots and floppiness in the boot can mean a close encounter with a tree. The Malamute is an extra stiff boot that will be a bit sore for the first few wears, but once they form to your foot... perfection! ¥35,000 from Sapporo retailers.



MSR Lightning Ascent Snowshoes

There are many products in life you can skip on. Snowshoes are not one of them. So if you must bypass the designer label jeans to save your pennies for a pair of MSR Lightning Ascent snowshoes. Mountain Systems Research are the leaders of the pack in snow shoeing and the Lightning Ascent is their best shoe. Thanks to serrated edges along the bottom of the frames, the MSR Lightning Ascent Snowshoes provide 360-degree traction on hardcore, steep terrain. They are nice and narrow so you can walk with a normal gait. Not to mention they float pretty well in the deep stuff that Niseko will no doubt offer up. The aerospace-grade aluminum frame is super light for all-day hikes, and the ergonomic heel lifter minimizes calf fatigue so you can climb longer and farther. True-Hinge steel crampons provide stability, rocker design prevents heel drag and the reinforced decks add durability. ¥43,475 from NAC.

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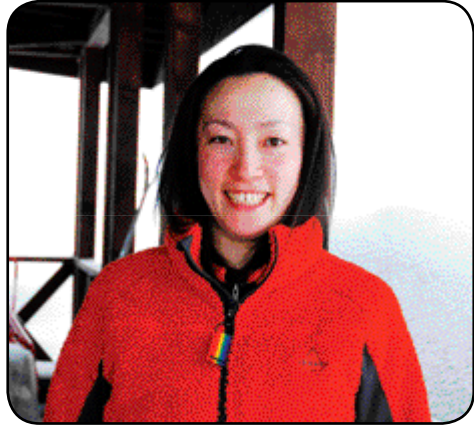
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TICKET SALES AND CAFE Makkii

name Maki Ooe
age 30 **hometown** Hokkaido
time in niseko One year
what do you do in summer?
 No plans yet
do you like powder? Yeah, I love it!
ski/board Snowboard
when did you start? 12 years ago
why did you move to niseko?
 I wanted to work at Moiwa ski area and snowboard at Moiwa!
what languages do you speak?
 Japanese
trips overseas? Not yet!
where do you want to go?
 Canada, Australia, Europe, etc. I want to visit many places!
favourite... colour Green
brand None
food Meat
restaurant PowCom cafe
onsen Makkari, Koikawa Onsen
course Everywhere in the mountains!
where else in the world do you want to go skiing?
 Tomamu and Rishiri
how long will you be in niseko? Forever!
what does niseko need? A gas stand
niseko's secret? secret...!
what's a must have item for niseko? Winter clothes!
what's your life philosophy?
 Be myself

名前 オオエ マキ
年齢 30
出身地 北海道
ニセコ来てどのくらいですか?
 1年
夏は何してですか? まだ未定
パウダースノーは好きですか?
 大好き。LOVE!
スキーヤー?スノーボーダー?
 スノーボーダー
ボード歴 12年
なんでニセコに来たんですか?
 ニセコモイワスキー場で働いて、ニセコモイワで滑るため。
話す言語は? 日本語
海外に行った事はありますか?
 一度もない。
次はどこに行きたいですか?
 カナダ、オーストラリア、ヨーロッパ、色々行ってみたい。
好きな...
 色は? 緑色
ブランドは? 特になし
食べ物? お肉
レストラン? PowCom Cafe
バー? ない、...わからない。
温泉は? 真狩温泉、鯉川温泉
コースは? 山すべて!
ニセコ以外でどのスキー場に行きたいですか? トナム、利尻
ニセコにはどのくらいいる予定ですか? ずっと...。
ニセコに必要なものは? ガソリンスタンド
ニセコで絶対必要だと思ふアイテムは? 防寒具
あなたの人生観は? 私らしく

LIFTIE Akane-chan

name Akane Uegaki
age 27
hometown Sapporo
time in niseko One season
what do you do in summer?
 No plans yet. I do a different thing every year.
do you like powder? Yes!
ski/board Snowboard
when did you start? Seven years ago
why did you move to niseko?
 I heard about Niseko from my friend
what languages do you speak?
 Japanese
trips overseas? Brazil, America
where do you want to go next? Canada, Australia
favourite... colour Pink
brand Natural Bicycle
food Soup curry
restaurant Yawaraya
bar Lair
onsen Yugokorotei
course Onsenzawa
where else in the world do you want to go skiing? Chise
how long will you be in niseko? About four months
what does Niseko need? A super market and a UNIQLO
niseko secret? I want you to tell me!
what's a must have item for Niseko? UNIQLO clothes
what's your life philosophy?
 Everything is going well

名前 ウエガキ アカネ
年齢 27 **出身地** 札幌
ニセコ来てどのくらいですか? 1シーズン
夏は何してですか? 毎年変わるからわからない
パウダースノーは好きですか? はい
スキーヤー?スノーボーダー?
 スノーボーダー
ボード歴 7年
なんでニセコに来たんですか?
 ニセコにいる友達の話聞いて。
話す言語は? 日本語
海外に行った事はありますか?
 ブラジル、アメリカ
次はどこに行きたいですか?
 カナダ、オーストラリア
好きな...色は? ピンク
ブランド? Natural Bicycle
食べ物? スープカレー
レストラン? やわらや
バー? Lair
温泉は? 湯心亭
コースは? 温泉沢
ニセコ以外でどのスキー場に行きたいですか? チセ
ニセコにはどのくらいいる予定ですか? 約4ヶ月
ニセコに必要なものは? スーパーマーケット、ユニクロ
ニセコの秘密? 逆に教えて欲しい
ニセコで絶対必要だと思ふアイテムは? ユニクロ商品
あなたの人生観は? 全てうまくいってる

SKI PATROL Kojian

name Harumi Kojima
age 43
hometown Hyogo
time in niseko about 20 years
what do you do in summer?
 Construction work
do you like powder? Yeah, I love it!
ski/board Ski
when did you start? 20 years ago
why did you move to niseko?
 I stopped here on the way to somewhere else in the middle of my travels
what languages do you speak?
 Japanese
trips overseas? No
where do you want to go next? Australia
favourite... colour White
brand SCOTT
food Beef
restaurant Fukui Shokudou
bar Bang-Bang
onsen Niimi Onsen
course Parallel
where else in the world do you want to go skiing? Whistler
how long will you be in niseko? Forever!
what does niseko need?
 Harmony
niseko secret? Hanazono Patrol
what's a must have item for niseko? Broken English
what's your life philosophy?
 Don't know yet!

名前 コジマ ハルミ
年齢 43
出身地 兵庫
ニセコ来てどのくらいですか?
 20年くらい
夏は何してですか? どちらか(土木)
パウダースノーは好きですか?
 大好き。
スキーヤー?スノーボーダー?
 スキーヤー
スキー歴 20年
なんでニセコに来たんですか?
 旅の途中での寄り道から。
話す言語は? 日本語
海外に行った事はありますか?
 No
次はどこに行きたいですか? オーストラリア
好きな...
 色は? 白
ブランド? スコット
食べ物? 牛肉
レストラン? ふくい食堂
バー? バンバン
温泉は? 新見温泉
コースは? パラレル
ニセコ以外でどのスキー場に行きたいですか? ウィスラー
ニセコにはどのくらいいる予定ですか? ずっと
ニセコに必要なものは? 調和
ニセコの秘密? 花園パトロール
ニセコで絶対必要だと思ふアイテムは? カタコト英語
あなたの人生観は? まだわからない

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Alex Lee enjoying the early start to the season

SNOW WRAP-UP SEASON 2007/08

While 2007/08 was a great season for a whole range of reasons, once again Hokkaido's default abundance of fresh, fluffy powder snow was the star. If you look at the stats it won't go down in the record books but there were periods, especially the whole of 'White January', which will be etched in the minds of locals for years to come, not to mention the visitors during that period that perhaps scored the experience of their lifetimes.



Left: Pro skiers Chris Benchetler and JP Auclair

The first flakes of winter 07/08 fell on Mt Asahidake, Hokkaido's highest mountain located in the centre of the island, on September 29. The first snow of the season in Niseko was seen on top of Mt Yotei on October 10. Over the coming weeks the snowline gradually crept its way down the mountain and a bit over a month later the first snow of the season fell on Hirafu and gave Mt Annupuri its first light covering. A week later a storm came through and finally it looked like the resort was seriously looking like it was going to open. Within a matter of 24 hours Niseko went from green, brown and yellow, to white. A foot of powder dropped overnight on November 19 and on November 21 Grand Hirafu gave the nod to open the resort two days later for the equal second earliest start to a season since 2002.

Particularly after the poor previous season, hopes were high we were in for a bumper season - traditionally early starts in Niseko end up breaking a few snowfall records. By the end of November more than a metre had fallen, one of the best Novembers of the past 10 years. We were on track.

In December however, things cooled off somewhat. In fact, it was quite warm and we even had a few days rain. The solid foundation that had been built up in November was going to waste. By the end of the month, Kutchan's official stats said 177cm for the month when it usually gets over 3m. It was the worst December in six years. Judging by the mood in the village though, you wouldn't have known it. Smiles were beaming and the boisterous atmosphere of visitors brought the village back to life. Large numbers of tourists started arriving as soon as the calendar turned over to December, and by Christmas the village was once again at full capacity. Lift lines started building, as did queues in Seicomart.

The first day of the New Year brought with it a foot of powder. And it didn't stop there. Back to back storms raged throughout the month and there was barely a day when we didn't get at least a few centimetres. If there wasn't 10cm or 20cm deposited on cars in the morning, it came down throughout the day. A couple of visiting pro skiers - Armada founder, French-Canadian JP Auclair and Californian Chris Benchetler - arrived on January 5 and stayed for

three weeks. They rated it hands down the best powder trip of their lives: "I've been skiing for 25 years and this is the best ever - every single day has been epic!" Auclair told Powderlife. "It never really stopped snowing and everyday it kept getting deeper. It was so fresh it was ridiculous!" To top it all off there was a couple of bluebird days thrown in - perhaps the only days it didn't snow the whole month. The local photographers had a field day and we documented it in a photo spread which had the town buzzing. It certainly was a good month and definitely the best January in recent memory.

February was a mixed bag. It started well, taking up where January left off with some big falls. During the middle of the month we got 'the storm of the season' which raged for about four days, keeping the top of the mountain closed and preserving any snow that had fallen. By the time the lifts started operating up high the mountain was primed for one of the deepest and best deep powder days of the season. A week later and another massive system came through. This time it was the same thing - while a lot of snow was falling, (in fact the first day of the storm delivered the biggest single day's dump for years) however the winds were so strong that virtually all the lifts were closed. Everyone assumed it was another repeat performance of the previous week and hung out until the conditions calmed down. When the time finally came to take the chairs to the top everyone had their wildest powder-specific gear out in anticipation. But when they got there they didn't know what to do with it - there was no powder to be seen. The storm had blown it all away! It didn't take more than a couple of runs for most powder junkies to realise they would be lucky to find any decent pockets of powder over the whole mountain where they could find just a little fix. Fortunately there were another few big dumps over the next few days and withdrawals were soon satisfied.

And while we had an early start to the season, it also looks at this stage like we're going to have an early finish. The whole of Japan was in the grip of a 'heat wave' in the first half of March which turned any potential snow storms into rain. At the time of going to print, the most recent snowflake to fall on

Niseko was two weeks previous. Look at the history books though and March is often a good month. Just last season the biggest, and last, dump of the season came midway through the month. To date just 37cm has fallen, while it averages about a metre and a half. March 2004 enjoyed an amazing two and a half metres! Although the forecasts are showing nothing but sun or rain for the foreseeable future, the region does regularly see a dump, and sometimes two, in April.

To date, according to Kutchan's records - which don't necessarily reflect how much snow fell on the peak which is almost always a bit higher - Niseko has had almost 9m this season, up slightly from last season which officially only got 839cm. While on the surface it might seem like a pretty light season in hindsight, that's certainly not the way it was perceived throughout the season from day to day, week to week by locals and visitors alike. Even when conditions were ordinary by locals' standards, tourists were beaming. It still seems even an average day in Niseko is better than most anywhere in the world.



photo: Randy Wieman, Hotshots

Skier Mick Davis



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best of niseko

One of the most popular sections of Powderlife this season was 'Irasshaimase', the catch cry meaning 'welcome' that staff in Japanese businesses greet their customers with. In each issue of Powderlife, Irasshaimase took a look behind the scenes of great little local businesses – the origins of its owners, the motivations behind what they do, and most importantly, what makes their product so good. So often their incentive is not huge profit but a genuine desire to serve their customers as best as possible, even if it means turning business away.

With that spirit in mind Powderlife has launched 'The Best of Niseko', a poll for visitors and residents of Niseko to try and promote the businesses that play a huge part in making Niseko such a wonderful place to visit and live.

To kick things off, we've decided to name a few of our favourites for this season. Before the start of next season you will be able to vote online at Powderlife's all new online destination portal www.powderlife.com.

Best restaurant – Kamimura

Niseko has welcomed master chef Yoichi Kamimura with open arms... and mouths! Trained under the world famous Tetsuya Wakuda in Sydney, Kamimura has set the benchmark for fine dining in Niseko.



Yoichi Watanabe

Best izakaya – Kakashi

The atmosphere is great, the food is fantastic and owners Kenichi and Gyoko Ogi treat every guest as if they're a VIP. The ultimate izakaya experience.

Best bar – Wild Bill's

In the early evening it's a great little alpine-style bar, perfect for après drinks. After about 9pm it goes off, and that's why everyone keeps going back and it's no-smoking! Brett, Takayo and the crew, we love your work!

Best onsen – Yugokurotei (Annapuri Onsen)

It's a little off the beaten track but the rotenburo (outdoor bath) surrounded by pillows of powder snow really accentuates the fact you're outside naked in the middle of winter. Free massage chairs and a great little souvenir shop top it off.

Best café – Graubunden

Not Japanese style but the most authentic European style little café restaurant around. Great sandwiches, friendly staff and great little souvenir shop.



Fine dining at home. Niseko Cuisine

Best convenience store – Seicomart

We love having the new Lawsons in town, but with their ever diligent staff running around doing their utmost to serve their hordes of customers, you can't forget the Seicomart.

Best souvenir shop – Omoshiro Box

A mixture of traditional Japanese and hippy influenced paraphernalia, Omshiro (interesting) Box is truly as its name suggests. You'll find the perfect unique souvenir here.

Best resort – Annapuri

The whole of the Niseko United is amazing, but if we had to single out one resort we'll go with Annapuri. Great groomers to suit the whole family and lots of off-pistewith the easiest access in-and-out to keep the powder junkies happy.

Best snowmobiling – Niseko Snowmobile Adventures

NSA takes you back, way back into the wilds of Niseko's backcountry. See parts of the world few others have seen and enjoy the thrill of commandeering a giant, roaring snowmobile.



Photo: Jennie Milton

"into Yotei's caldera"

NISEKO'S TOP TEN...

top ten additions

Niseko just keeps getting better and better. It's easy to look back to the time before it became a major international resort with rose-coloured glasses; but most long term residents would agree the Niseko of 07/08 is much better than the Niseko of a decade ago. In no particular order, below is Powderlife's list of the top ten additions to Niseko in the last year alone.

Niseko Cuisine

Tess Stomski and Anna Coussens have brought fine dining to your own accommodation. With the fantastic accommodation that is now available in Niseko, what a great idea to have caterers come in and prepare a fantastic dinner/breakfast/brunch in the comfort of your stylish Niseko abode.

Kamimura's

Yoichi Kamimura's fine-dining restaurant opened in December 07 and it's a great asset to Niseko. A night at Kamimura's is such a pleasure that it would be a fabulous dining experience in any major city of the world. What a joy to experience it on a skiing holiday in Japan.

Hirafu Kids

Up until this season, Niseko has been known as more of an adult resort, but now there is a top quality day care facility to complement the English speaking kids ski school classes. Parents can drop the young ones at Hirafu Kids in the morning, assured that they will be looked after by highly trained child carers in a clean and fun environment, leaving the grown-ups free to enjoy a worry free day on the mountain.

Footpath clearing

In previous years, a walk down to Izumikiyo (the small village 100m from the centre of the village with accommodation and shops) saw you either take your chances on the side of the narrow road, or wade through knee deep snow on the footpath. Now the Kutchan council bring in the heavy machinery after every snowfall and clear it out, making for a pleasant 5 minute stroll.

Powderlife

Toot toot! We couldn't resist blowing our own trumpet. What is a ski resort without a local rag? We'd like to think our humble efforts have added to the resort.

J-Sekka

Niseko is lucky to have Shouya Grigg. Within J-Sekka, Shouya has created a space including bars, restaurants, and accommodation filled with style and class of the highest order.

Dragon Bar

People who come to Niseko want to feel as though they are in Japan, and although many of the new bars and restaurants to open have been international, talented sommelier and chef Noriko Masubachi and her sister Fumie have created a fabulous dining and dining experience room in an enchanting remodelled pension that makes you feel as if you are in an old Japanese shrine.

Sunday Taiko Drumming

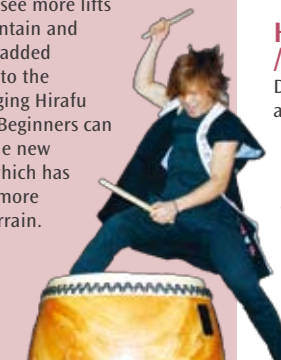
Street theatre and taste of Japanese culture presented free for everyone every Sunday! Taiko drumming is captivating to everyone, and not a performance went by that did not have 20+ locals and guests enjoying the performance from the talented and energetic Kutchan Taiko drumming group. More of the same please!

Lawsons

The Seicomart is the hub of the village, but the addition of Lawsons just 100 metres down the road has been a great addition to the area. With few queues, a great range of fresh produce, fast food, domestic products, techy goods and a range of Australian products – including VB – Lawsons is a winner.

New Hirafu chair lift

It's great to see more lifts on the mountain and Tokyu have added another lift to the already bulging Hirafu lift system. Beginners can step onto the new family lift which has opened up more beginner terrain.



top ten needed improvements

Let's face it. There are a lot of improvements that need to be made to this resort and everyone who has been here (and many who haven't) have an opinion on what's needed. So here is Powderlife's stab at the Top 10 improvements needed for this area to reach its full potential.

International ATM

It's not just here; it's all over Japan! Japan's antiquated banking systems produce ATMs that close at 11pm and do not accept international cards. But remember to feel for the Japanese consumer – they can't use their cards when they travel abroad either! **Timeframe: Maybe the 08/09 season but there is no guarantee. Our bet: 09/10.**

Medical Centre & Chemist

The Kutchan hospital does an admirable job in coping with the influx of foreigners but they are really not equipped to deal with it. The hospital and local council are behind a plan to establish a medical centre with a chemist in Hirafu, but there have been problems getting overseas doctors registered, and finding Japanese doctors with the language and clinical skills to work in a ski-side setting. **Timeframe: Maybe 08/09, more likely 09/10**

Better gondolas & lifts

Higashiyama's gondola looks pretty, but it is an ergonomic disaster. Hirafu's is slightly better, and at least has a board rack, but feels cramped with 4 people. Annapuri's is the biggest but needs board and fat-ski racks. Upper lifts need to be replaced with hooded 2-4 people lifts. The off-mountain infrastructure is likely to look after itself, but on-mountain features need investment from resort owners. **Timeframe: Probably not until each of the resorts change hands.**

More terrain opened up

Moiwa needs to be put onto the Niseko United ticket. The three closed areas in Higashiyama and Hanazono will leave it for dust when it comes to attracting summer business. Mountain bike trails need to be built and maintained, fly-fishing tours promoted, restaurants and bars need to be open, buses need to be running from Chitose, more hiking courses need to be built and more events put on. For the future of Niseko – summer is where it's at. **Timeframe: 11/12 should see Niseko being a true year-round resort.**

Higher level accommodation / Five star hotels

Developers in Hirafu have built fantastic apartments and houses, but many well-to-do skiers prefer a top class hotel with the associated services. **Timeframe: Hilton Hotel June 08, Four Seasons Hanazono 2010, Capella, Banyan Tree, Aman...nothing confirmed.**

More Restaurants, bars & nightclubs

There always seems to be a demand for more places to eat and drink. **Timeframe: More coming each year! Nightclub: 10/11**

Town Planning

The new legislations are great, but maybe they have not gone far enough. A master plan similar to the models used in Europe and North America to ensure development is controlled and to maintain the character of the village. Zoning for commercial space and a stop on apartments in the middle and lower village could have been enforced. Footpaths in the upper and lower village to separate the people from the cars, why wait until more pedestrians are hit before acting? **Timeframe: Laws revisited in 09/10**

Businesses opening later in the winter season

Too many foreign-run businesses pack up and close soon after the calendar turns over to March. Staff returning to university is part of the reason, but if March and early April are to be booked then the ancillary businesses must be open. Current culprits include Java Bar and Après Bar. **Timeframe: NPB and everyone who has a friend who owns a business here need to lean on them to open until at least the end of March.**

Becoming a year round resort

Niseko WILL become an all-year round resort. If Hirafu does not act quickly Higashiyama and Hanazono will leave it for dust when it comes to attracting summer business. Mountain bike trails need to be built and maintained, fly-fishing tours promoted, restaurants and bars need to be open, buses need to be running from Chitose, more hiking courses need to be built and more events put on. For the future of Niseko – summer is where it's at. **Timeframe: 11/12 should see Niseko being a true year-round resort.**

Co-operation

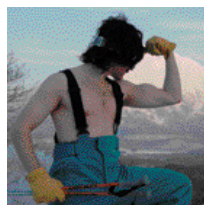
The NPB has helped to get companies working together, but more communication is needed, jealousy needs to be forgotten and new initiatives need to be supported. The end result will be an improved resort to everyone's benefit. **Timeframe: Improving all the time.**

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by Stirling Goldman

Hailing from the extreme terrain of Mt Baw Baw in Australia, Stirling Goldman was bred on waist-deep, man-made powder and extra steep chutes. Stirling has conquered the most beastly mountains across the world, and recently moved to Niseko. Stirling soon sensed that both local and international punters needed to be taught a thing or two and luckily for us, has decided to settle here for good. Stirling Goldman: a man who rides mountains.



always been a political battle. I remember back in the season of '84 - Mount Baw Baw was the place, Stirling was the face. The resort wanted to label a few double black diamonds after me. It was expensive for them but they were up for it. \$35K for the rights to my name, another \$35K for my face and a \$10K sign-on fee. That was a lot of money back then, but in reality it was a bargain for Baw Baw. Of course they went for it. But again it was political - more jealous cronies led to a six-month battle in the High Court of Australia, which ended in Baw Baw giving me a green cat track named 'Goldman's Groove'. The rights to Stirlingism are never simple. Always approached, never the approacher, it has happened many a time. Ski resorts, ski brands, clothing, nightclubs, beer companies, food - you name it, Stirling has done it. Hell, I even had a fragrance named after me. In 1989 Calvin Klein came to me. 'CK Goldman - for men who ride mountains'. It was a big hit, and a double score for CK as they didn't have to use Marky Mark for the body shots - they had SG. With my ripped abs, ridiculously toned buns and flawless face, the fragrance sold itself. But once I upped my appearance fees, they had to pull it, so it was discontinued - I basically became too big for CK and they couldn't handle me. In the early 80s I remember I was the Baw Baw man. I was competing against the Marlboro man - a gig he got only after I rejected it as I refused to promote cigarettes. As you'd expect, Stirling was a few years ahead of Formula One.

Q: Stirling, I am having some trouble skiing bumps. Can you help me out? Kate, Perth.

A: Kate, as my Austrian buddies say, 'bend ze knees'. I'll tell you what, send me a photo. If I like it, I can take you out on a personal tuition session. And

then later we can do some horizontal bumps - if you play your cards right. If the photo is less easy on the eye, I'll send you my DVD, 'Trump the Bump' explaining it all. \$99.95 including postage and handling. By the way, there is a section where my shirt is off. Feel free to rewind, pause and slo-mo as needed.

Q: Stirls, I'm a big fan. How is it you manage to drink 38 beers to my seven and still be standing, and manage to take home models on a regular basis? Any tips? Triple 20 Tom Rourke, Niseko.

A: Interesting question, Thomas. I ask you this: how does a samurai become so skilled? How does a sumo become so fat? The answer is training Tommy, training. And even then you'll struggle. I was bred as a man who rides mountains. I was born with the 6th sense and a face that makes Brad Pitt look minging. It is a lethal combination that makes 38 beers and model dating child's play.

Q: Stirling, I am somewhat bemused with your column. Your writing lacks form and your continual transition between the first and third person confuses and frustrates me. What are you trying to achieve? Peter, Hidaka, Hokkaido.

A: Ahh Peter-sama, I was waiting for this. The truth is Peter, while I should have been studying English, I was too busy pursuing my pro ski career and trying to protect myself from overly zealous ladies. Peter, my sincere apologies to you. I will aim to construct my sentences in a more grammatical fashion. But let's be honest, the crowd loves me and the chicks dig me. And geez Peter, I'm a commodity. I mean the ASX wanted to list me. So if Stirls wants to use a bit of third person from time to time, get used to it big fella.

Got a question for a man who knows? Fire it to stirling@powderlife.co.jp.

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Nine-year-old Neesha Clarke going big on her way to a 3rd placing

photo: mark sakawa, hokkaido

photo: randy wieman, hokkaido

photo: glen claydon, niseko panoramas

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zhivagos
by vanessa gibson

Zhivagos is a quaint and unique Spanish restaurant with some Russian influences located just behind the Mountainside Palace in the heart of Hirafu. You may recognise the restaurant as the two-storey house with a fire burning outside from which you can pause and enjoy the warmth while looking into the restaurant or down into the large ground floor kitchen with chefs busily occupying themselves with their preparations.

The interior of Zhivagos is quite understated; with two main seating areas, it is able to accommodate groups of up to 16 on the one table overlooking the street. On arrival we soon warmed to the place as we were served with complimentary bread and a consommé. The appetiser menu included fish or forest mushroom soup, a traditional Russian Borscht (vegetable and beef broth), king crab salad to Galician style octopus. Crab being the specialty of Hokkaido, I decided to enjoy the local delicacy as the menu suggested it was fresh from the cold Baring Sea. The king crab salad was exactly what it said on the menu, a basic leaf salad with fresh large crab claws on top, a very simple dish, the crab was of the highest order, but it would have been nice to have a wider range of vegetables in the salad, particularly for ¥2560. My dining partner who is notoriously easy to please, was extremely happy with the flavour of his mushroom soup, but noted it could have been served slightly warmer. My light simple starter actually worked well as the main I received was a rich dish and full of flavour.

There was a range of classic Spanish mains to choose from, with the house specialties being the suquet (hot-pot) and the popular paella. I opted for the fish suquet and my partner had the beef with pepper sauce. The beef was cooked to perfection; it was thick, juicy and very tender, and was well complemented by a green pepper sauce. The suquet was cooked slowly and served in a thick rich tomato-based broth - very tasty. The fish melted away in my mouth and the full flavours left no doubt that the chef was Spanish. The wine list was adequate, with selections from NZ, Australia, and one each from France and Spain. I would have liked a Sangria, but felt it was a little expensive at ¥900 a glass.

The service was great, friendly & helpful. Overall Zhivagos is a great asset to Niseko's restaurant scene.

Go Spanish in Niseko @ Zhivagos! Open daily 6.00pm – last order at 10.00pm. T. 0136 22 5610

Recently we got a fantastic email from 12-year-old Kealan and nine-year-old Neesha Clarke from Sydney. They've been travelling Japan with their parents and stopped in at Niseko. The youngsters are very handy on a snowboard and Kealan showed us he's got a bright future as a writer too. Below is an article he sent us describing in beautiful detail their travels around Japan... forget Lonely Planet, this is all you need! Thanks, guys and keep up the good work!

Starting off in Sapporo, you should see the ice festival which takes place in February. At the festival, there are ice sculptures which are made of different Japanese cartoon characters. At night they are lit up and look wonderful.

I started my journey using the JR pass. This allows you to travel freely on the Japan railways. You catch the train to Niseko and enjoy the scenery of the mountains and the ocean. If you are lucky, you may see a surfer catching waves while it is snowing. Niseko is a great ski resort; the mountain has the best powder snow. The resort is open from 8:00am to 9:00pm. I really recommend going snowboarding or skiing at night as the lights make the mountain look like a scene from a fairy tale. The closest town is Kutchan-which has a lovely Japanese style. I found this great place called the Loaf Lounge where you can pay one thousand yen (\$10) to use the indoor skate park, or have a game of pool or just watch a sports movie.

Our next stop is Kakunodate, this is known as the little Kyoto. Arriving here you are able to rent a bike to ride around the town visting the Samurai district. I was amazed by the armour the men wore when fighting. The Samurai swords were a work of art. This district dates back to the 17th century. If you have time to stay during late April for sakura (cherry blossom festival), wander down by the river where there is a cherry blossom tunnel of flowers.

Back on the train in the afternoon, we were on our way to Kyoto. This town was settled in 794 A.D. and was once the capital of Japan. My favourite site was the Nijo castle, which has the nightingale hall. The floors were designed to squeak, so that if an intruder walked through the halls it would alert the guards. The floors squeaked no matter how softly I stepped. The next day, Natsumi a friend of ours took us to Kamigamo-jinja, which is a world heritage listed temple. I felt like a movie star there. There were Japanese students on excursion there who took photos of me. The temple dates back to 679 A.D. This is the first place where I saw a monk wandering the tranquil gardens. There are many more amazing temples in Kyoto.

This should be a day of peace. We're on our way to Hiroshima where I learnt about the 6th of August,

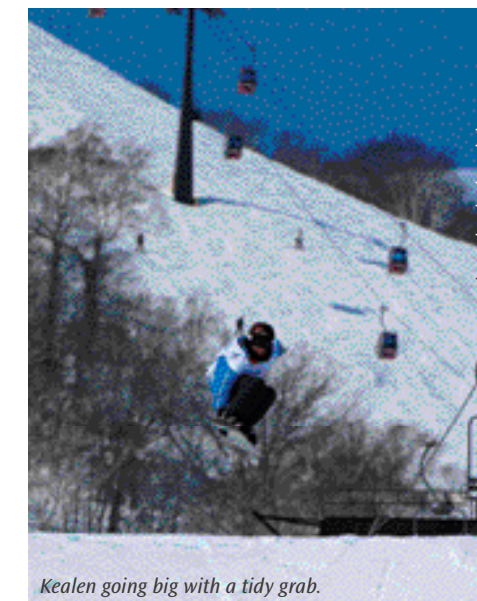
1945 8:15am, when the A-bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. The peace museum is a place everyone should visit at least once in their life time. The music is haunting; the images unforgettable, the flame outside the Hiroshima museum will burn until peace is within the world. While in Hiroshima you must also go to the Mazda factory (Zoom Zoom Zoom). The Mazda factory shows how a production line assembles cars. The employees are hard working and they are kept interested by management who put different cars in the line. The factory also shows the history from the first car to their latest cars and how the rotary engine works.

Shinahama. The locals say this beautiful beach has lovely white sand brought all the way from Australia. At the end of the beach there is a rocky out crop. There is a wonderful onsen on the rocks that looks out to sea. An onsen is a hot bath where you are required to wash yourself thoroughly before entering. The water can be hotter than 40c but it's the most relaxing and healthiest bath.

Now it's on to Adventure World, the first place where a Giant panda has been bred outside of China. The dolphin and whale show is magnificent. Torii in Miyashima is the most popular Japanese photo site. When you alight from the ferry, the deer are hungry and any paper you are holding is quickly devoured. You should see the giant wooden rice spoon while it is on display. Returning to the train is fantastic as Japanese trains arrive and leave on time; the staff are helpful, happy and bow as they leave the carriage. The train travels at speeds up to 260km an hour.

Nara which was once the political capital of Japan. The number one attraction there is the great Buddha which is under the largest wooden structure in the world. On my arrival a group of at least a hundred monks were making their way to the temple to pray - they threw coloured paper leaves to the gathering crowd. Inside the building, one of the timber supports is hollowed out and by climbing through the hollow timber you are said to be enlightened. Back to Tokyo where staying with friends is the best idea if you are lucky enough. The railway and the subway make travelling in Tokyo a dream.

Chiba is where we were introduced to the



Kealan going big with a tidy grab.

Japanese surfing culture. The water was freezing at first, but you are encouraged by the friendly Japanese locals to venture into the water so that they can practice their English.

We visited a type of fair which we called speakers corner and we met the Bohemian Japanese. There was a good vibe because there was theatre being performed. A few Japanese were holding signs offering free hugs. I accepted lots of hugs.

Then we visited the John Lennon museum. He was from the famous band the Beatles. John Lennon's wife Yoko Ono, a famous artist and peace activist, organized the museum as a tribute to their views on peace. The Museum has some interesting artifacts like a one coloured chess board which said 'Play With Trust'. Yoko Ono will some times ring on an exhibited phone, you are allowed to answer and talk to her.

Disney land is something you have to do because it is good fun for all ages. There are thrills, spills and a lot more. The Natural History Museum at Ueno, has a wonderful 3D movie. The Japanese are the most welcoming people. They laugh, they encourage and are always polite. The food is interesting and delicious. Stay as long as possible.

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HOTSHOTS
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photo: glen clodan, niseko panoramas

by Eriko Mentzos



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Sarah Lilburn ready to address the world.

Kutchan's worldwide english class

by magnus alexander

The world's first online English teaching show – attracting a massive 5000 hits a day – is broadcast out of a small, nondescript, Japanese-style apartment in Kutchan. At first, The Daily English show might seem to be a pretty straightforward production, but delve a little deeper and it becomes apparent this is an ingenious concept with clever educational techniques to enhance learning – as its popularity may suggest.

It's the brainchild of Sarah Lilburn, a Kiwi linguist from a small coastal town on New Zealand's North Island. Everyday Sarah, with the help of boyfriend and producer Yon, aka knf, produces a short video designed to teach anyone, anywhere in the world, English in an interesting, informative way. Many of the shows are mini-docos on Niseko and actually attract English-speaking people looking for information on the area. "The idea is it's a mix of entertainment and education," Sarah says. "People use it to study in a variety of ways – it's designed not as a language course, but as something extra for people who are studying English. Many teachers use parts of the show in their classes, designing activities around it, or having people watch it for homework. It's an interesting adjunct to learning English and encourages and motivates people to keep up their language study."

While education is Sarah's main focus now, she was destined to become a journalist from a young age. "I've been interested in media since I was a child – I published my first magazine with friends when I was about 10. We photocopied it and sold it for 50 cents at the dairy." She decided she wanted to be a journalist when she was 15, got work experience at the local newspaper and then a part time job presenting at a commercial radio station. Meanwhile she was heavily into art and studying languages, focusing on French which took her to Tahiti for six weeks when she was 15, and two months in France the following year on a study scholarship she won. At university she studied English literature and went on to do a post-graduate degree in journalism, all the while continuing her French study and starting Maori.

After university she decided to hit the road and travel, and thought teaching English in Japan was the perfect way for her to start to pay off the massive university debt she had accumulated, while mastering yet another language and learning about Japan. She made the move in 2001 and worked at a language school in Nagoya for a year before deciding to have a look at Tokyo where she did several part time jobs teaching English.

It was around this time she met boyfriend Yon, a born and bred Tokyoite who got her into snowboarding and introduced her to Niseko. "He'd been surfing and snowboarding for a long time and had been coming to Niseko for about six years for a week every winter. It was his dream to live here. After I finally finished paying off my student loan, we decided to move up here together. Since we could do TDES from anywhere, we figured we could make TDES and go snowboarding. A perfect mix!"

As an aside, Sarah also teaches English online via Skype, meaning she can teach anyone in the world from anywhere in the world, so long as both parties have an internet connection.

To support Sarah and Yon and benefit from the massive audience TDES attracts, contact Sarah about sponsoring the program on thedailyenglishshow@gmail.com.



TDES Kutchan HQ... where it all happens!



Tatsuru and Midori Rai

Rakuichi Soba, Anupuri

Rakuichi regulars might be a little disappointed we're exposing this hidden Anupuri gem. But it's just too good not to, and we wanted more foreign visitors to Niseko to experience this fantastic little piece of genuine Japan. Rakuichi is one of the best soba (buckwheat noodle) restaurants in the region. It's in a small unmarked wooden house set back on the block of land on the corner of the road up to Anupuri. Upon entry you'll be welcomed warmly by owners Tatsuru and Midori Rai, Midori in a beautiful Kimono and Tatsuru in traditional Japanese chef's attire. You'll need to learn some basic Japanese – there's no English menu. If you're going without a Japanese speaker, stick to hot (ataakai) or cold (tsumetai). There are other slight variations but save it for when you're with someone who can read the menu. Tatsuru grinds the buckwheat in a big black stone bowl in front of you before mixing it into a dough, flattening it out and using a large blade to cut each individual noodle while you watch. A fantastic cultural experience. Open for lunch 11am-3pm. Dinner bookings 0136 58 3170.

Nakaya / Pedenki, Hirafu Lower Village

You've heard of the world-famous Kobe Beef. Well now try Kobe 'horumon' (offal). Nakaya Izakaya (an izakaya is a casual dining Japanese pub/restaurant), which turns into Pedenki Pub late in the evening, is probably the only restaurant in Hokkaido serving offal from Kobe cows. And most horumon restaurants use pig offal anyway. Co-owner Masahiko Nakata was a butcher in Kobe before he moved to Niseko so he has the right supply connections. He cooks it in miso and urges people just to try it at least once. Most foreigners who do give it a go end up going back again and again. If the thought is just too rich, at least head down for a drink. It's a quiet little pub and interior is a very unique traditional Japanese style. The name Pedenki comes from the professions of the staff – penkiya-san (painter) from one of the staff members who helped build and paint it, and denkiya-san (electrician) from the other co-owner Junya Ishikawa. Map ref: A3.



Masahiko Nakata and Junya Ishikawa



Shoko Arakawa

Bar Eddy, Kutchan

When most people see Bar Eddy in Kutchan they imagine it's owned by a guy. But it's actually a 'snack bar'. A snack bar is generally a small bar staffed by a lady who stands behind the bar and chats with customers. On arrival she gives them a small 'snack' – a plate of rice crackers or chips or something similar. For that there is an automatic small 'charm charge' of about ¥300. In this case Eddy isn't in fact referring to a person's name – owner Shoko Arakawa was a rafting guide when she first came to Niseko and thought eddy, the term used to describe a small whirlpool off to the side of the main current, would be a good name for a bar – somewhere people can gather and mingle away from the mainstream activity going on around town. She had already decided that when she turned 30 she would start her own business, whatever it may be, and stayed true to her word. She says her English is not very good so if you go, please speak slowly and clearly, and maybe teach her a phrase or two! Heading away from the station turn left at the tourist information office and it's on the next corner.

Cliffside Pension

Niseko wasn't always the ski Mecca it is today. When Satoshi and Toshiko Makabe moved to Niseko from Sapporo and built Cliffside Pension they had to pick bamboo shoots in summer and sell them to the local factory so they could afford to eat. This was in the middle of the infamous Japanese economic bubble and despite the fact there still weren't so many people coming to Niseko, its potential was obvious. There was a pension building boom going on in Hirafu. Cliffside, now in what is regarded as the premium location in lower Hirafu Village, on the cliff overlooking the rice paddies below towards Mt Yotei, was barely accessible as the roads weren't bitumen so the roads were too slushy or muddy to get there by car. On top of that, marketing of Niseko accommodation was still nearly non-existent. Fortunes changed for the Makabes when a tour company listed their pension. These days you'll have to book in advance if you want to stay there!



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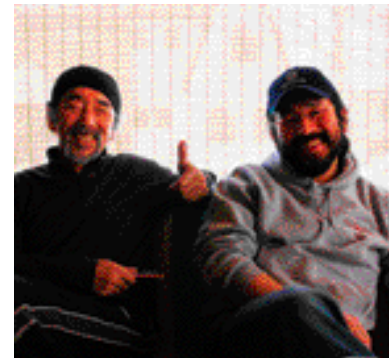
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in focus full note brothers

A well known 'secret' among people who have been coming here for a few years is the Half Note Jazz bar. Complete with pool table, table tennis table and stage, you could well find an impromptu jam session break out. Brothers Toh-san (Dad) and Toshio-san also run the Full Note and Woody Note pensions. Famous for their big hearts they're the type of characters that make Niseko great.



Toh-san and Toshio-san

When did you come to Niseko?

Toh-san: 1982, Toshio-san: 1993.

Why did you decide to come here?

Toh-san: I was a salary-man and used to move a lot because of my work. One time my company sent us to Sapporo and I loved Sapporo so much. I started to think that I didn't want to cross the ocean back to a busy, busy place like Tokyo anymore and I wanted to stay in Hokkaido. We chose Niseko because we like skiing and we knew Niseko was a great mountain because I came here for my honeymoon.

Toshio-san: I was also a salary-man. I used to work for a ski-wear maker in Tokyo. I had to work very long hours. 160 hours of overtime every month... it was insane! I loved the mountain life, so when I saw my brother's lifestyle, I thought this is what I want too! So my wife and I made a pact to move here after we had our first child. Six months after our baby was born, we moved here.

What was Niseko like when you came here?

Toh-san: There were a few pensions in Annupuri but not Hirafu back then. There were a few lodges but no restaurants, no souvenir shops. It wasn't a resort at all.

How did you name your pension?

Toh-san: Well, I like playing music. So I used the word 'Note' for everything around this pension. We have five Notes! The main pension is Full Note, the music studio and bar is 'Half Note', the tennis court is 'Love Note', the cottage is 'Mini Note', and Toshio's pension is called 'Woody Note'.

Woody Note is handmade, isn't it?

Toshio-san: Yes, except the foundation work. I built it by myself. Of course it wasn't easy, it took about 18 months of long days to build. I needed to save money on the labour, but I chose expensive red cedars for Woody Note. Now I'm getting really busy with log work not only for us, but also for our friends. I have to keep working!!

It sounds like you love music. What kind of instruments do you play? When did you start?

Toh-san: I play drums. I loved the Beatles and the Ventures when I was a junior high student, but they were so expensive at that time. Maybe a full set was three-months of my father's salary. So I could not ask my parents to buy a drum set, so I used to play with cardboard boxes. When I entered the University, I finally got to play a real drum set for the first time.

Toshio-san: I have no musical background but I started percussion recently.

Why did you make a tennis court and music studio?

Toh-san: Well, this place was a ghost town in summer. We had to think how to get customers in summer. I love playing tennis, and thought a tennis court would bring us customers in summer! I love playing music too and in Japan the houses are so small that it's tough to find a place to practice playing big instruments.

Are there many repeat customers?

Toh-san: Yes, we have maybe 70% repeat customers. For the next winter, rooms are pretty much booked already with those foreign customers! In summer we have lots of students coming for a music training camps or tennis training camps.

What do you think about the changes in Niseko?

We think it's good. Not so many Japanese people ski these days. We are happy that lots of people from foreign countries are coming here. It's good for our business!! The pension system has changed in last few years, we used to offer two meals a day to everyone, but now only breakfast. When we were doing two meals a day, we didn't have any time for ourselves, but we do now. It's good for old people like us!

There is a shuttle bus going around the village, but you are still giving rides to all the customers. Why is it important to you to offer the shuttle service?

When we drive the shuttle we can talk with our customers. It's very important for us to communicate with them. We are offering this service with all our heart. We want to give good service to the customers who chose our pensions. When we see people waiting for the resort shuttle bus on the street, we pick them up too. Our shuttle service is very flexible. When we drive up to the gondola station and we see the long line up, we can take them to the Centre Quad, or when they want to shop before they ski, we can drop them off at the shop.

What are your top three tips for all visitors to Niseko to do?

- 1 Backcountry skiing. Niseko has easy access to back-country, so please enjoy!
- 2 Have an onsen. There are so many good onsens in this area.
- 3 Please visit the places around Niseko - Otaru, Yoichi, Tomari, Shakotan... There are so many interesting places to visit around here.

* For Japanese people, we recommend spending time with Australian people. It's good to know each other. Enjoy dinner and drinking together!

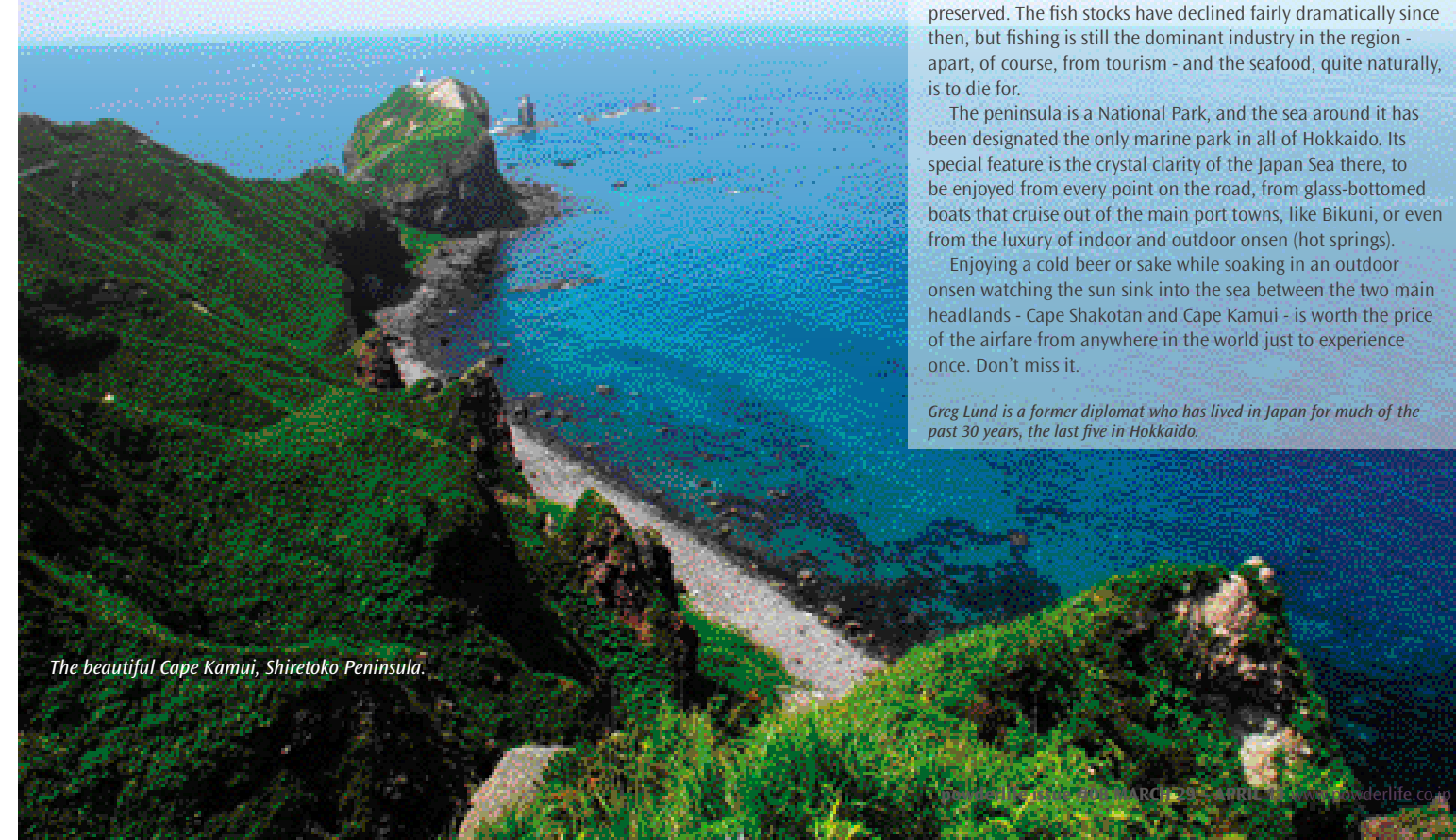
Shakotan peninsula

beautiful coastline
by greg lund
photos eriko mentzos

Hokkaido is one of the world's great undiscovered tourist treasures. As global warming increasingly impacts on popular tourist destinations around the globe, Hokkaido is just starting to come into its own. The powder snow that blankets the ski resorts in winter is one legacy of its location off the coast of Siberia, but it's also just far enough north of the equator to escape the humidity which makes mainland Japan almost unbearable in summer. In short, it's the ideal all-year round holiday destination. As more foreign ski visitors come to feel comfortable with Niseko, they might think about spreading their wings and taking in the best of the rest of this magic island - 'The Garden of The Gods'.



A fisherman hunting for Hokkaido's famous 'uni' (sea urchin), and below, sea kayaking is a popular pastime at Shakotan.



The beautiful Cape Kamui, Shiretoko Peninsula.

Hokkaido's modern Japanese history is very short. The Japanese Government formally annexed the island and introduced a policy to boost population from the mainland only in 1868, mainly because of fears of possible Russian colonisation.

Before that time, the only inhabitants of Hokkaido were the Ainu people. Exactly where they came from is still not known, but because they also lived throughout Sakhalin and the Kurile Island chain to the north, and only extended down into the north of Honshu - the main island of Japan - it is generally assumed that they spread out from the central steppes of Asia, crossing into Hokkaido when it was still connected by a land bridge.

Somewhat like the Australian aboriginal people, the Ainu have not left a heavy footprint on the cultural landscape of Hokkaido, but also like the Australian aborigines, their occupancy of the land is reflected strongly in the names of towns, rivers and mountains in the physical landscape.

The dominance of Ainu names varies from region to region in Hokkaido, but they are particularly prevalent in the south-west corner of the island, which includes Niseko. Indeed, Niseko is itself an Ainu word. So too are Kutchan, Annupuri, Moiwa, Rusutsu, Yotei, and most of the other names visitors to the area come to know during a winter ski holiday.

There are a lot more wonderful Ainu place names associated with sites of great natural beauty that are worth bearing in mind for non-winter holidays in Hokkaido too. One of these 'not to be missed' places is the beautifully-named Shakotan Peninsula, which happens to be as beautiful as it sounds, and is right on Niseko's doorstep.

Shakotan is a compact, rugged peninsula that juts out into the Sea of Japan right behind Niseko and offers some of the most spectacular coastal scenery in Japan. It is all easily accessible by car from Niseko, so while staying at traditional inns in the many small fishing villages dotted around the coastline is fun, it can also be done in day trips, returning at night to the comfort and familiarity of Niseko's abundant accommodation.

The starting point can be a short drive out of Kutchan on Route 5 to Yoichi - on the way to Otaru - and then out to Iwanai and off around the coastline. Alternatively, once the snow has melted, the trip to Iwanai can be made via the Panorama Line road that runs out past Annupuri and Moiwa.

During the late 19th century and early 20th century Shakotan was the centre of a huge herring fishing industry, and the character of the old, once-thriving port towns has been well preserved. The fish stocks have declined fairly dramatically since then, but fishing is still the dominant industry in the region - apart, of course, from tourism - and the seafood, quite naturally, is to die for.

The peninsula is a National Park, and the sea around it has been designated the only marine park in all of Hokkaido. Its special feature is the crystal clarity of the Japan Sea there, to be enjoyed from every point on the road, from glass-bottomed boats that cruise out of the main port towns, like Bikuni, or even from the luxury of indoor and outdoor onsen (hot springs).

Enjoying a cold beer or sake while soaking in an outdoor onsen watching the sun sink into the sea between the two main headlands - Cape Shakotan and Cape Kamui - is worth the price of the airfare from anywhere in the world just to experience once. Don't miss it.

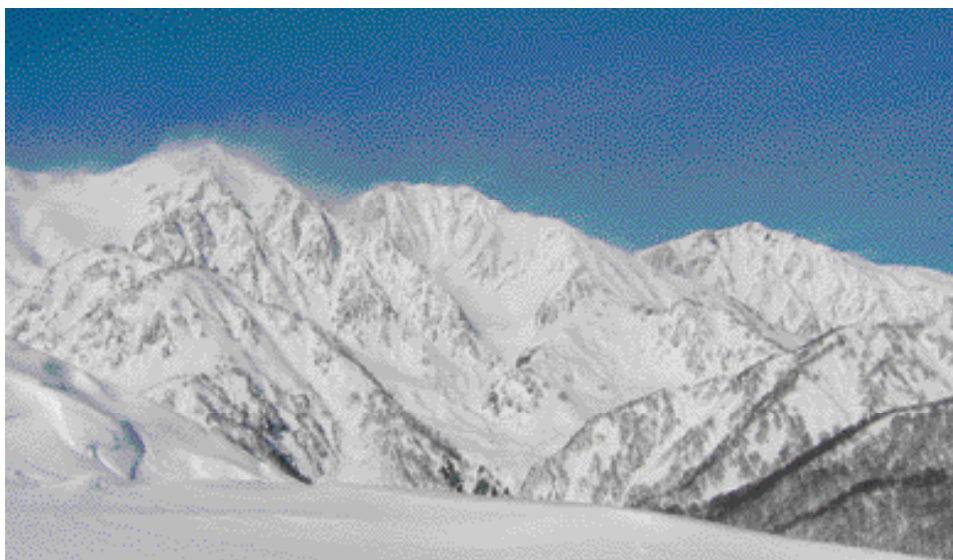
Greg Lund is a former diplomat who has lived in Japan for much of the past 30 years, the last five in Hokkaido.

photos: eriko mentzos, idapark

hakuba: next to go?

will the mainland's premier resort go the way of Niseko?

by Mick Baker



Hakuba... big mountain, steep runs, real estate potential.

Your Real Estate Investing for Dummies guidebook will tell you that once a location has experienced a rapid increase in price, you should look for other areas nearby with similar attributes that have yet to boom, and invest. Whether or not you have missed the boat in Niseko is a matter of opinion, but many investors are beginning to look further a field in Japan to other resorts that are yet to boom. During the Japanese economic bubble of the 1980s, the ski business also went through a massive boom. As Japan is 80% mountains it has an amazing array of skiable terrain and new ski resorts were erected all over the country. Even celebrities were building ski resorts. After the economic bubble burst, and in the ensuing 15 years, most ski resorts have experienced economic decline. Currently the ski resort business in Japan is undergoing a period of consolidation, with the better resorts becoming stronger and the smaller resorts closing. There are now numerous ski 'ghost towns' that have lifts and hotels in place, but where the operating companies, tired of losing money, have simply walked away. It's estimated that only 5% of ski re-

sorts in Japan are profitable. So which resort will be the next to experience a rapid increase in land prices? There really are only a few candidates: in Hokkaido Furano and Rusutsu; and on the mainland Yuzawa, Nozawa Onsen and the resort that is commonly known as the best on Honshu (the main island), Hakuba.

Hakuba was host of the 1998 Winter Olympics but that didn't have the expected positive long-term effect, and property prices continued to fall once the Olympic bandwagon moved on. Hakuba is a collection of 12 resorts located in the Japan Alps. With more steep mountains than Niseko and multiple resorts with an abundance of quality snow and variable terrain, it's suitable for kids to extreme skiers. With a noticeable steady increase in foreign tourists over the past three years, many investors are moving into Hakuba real estate. Tokyo, Nagoya and Osaka 'ski-changers' and expatriate land-speculators have led the early charge. Even though land prices have followed the national trend and been declining for 15 years since the unrealistic bubble prices, the buy-in price in most areas of Hakuba

is still considerably higher than Niseko was when foreigners started to purchase frantically a few years ago. The other factor that has held back Hakuba prices somewhat is the abundance of available land within the vast valley. There are about five or six village communities within Hakuba that are individually the size of Hirafu, and your Real Estate Investing for Dummies will probably also tell you that it's generally scarcity of land that really pushes up prices exponentially. The key to investing in Hakuba is choosing the micro-area that will become the most desirable place to stay, not only close to the lifts, but with an infrastructure that has potential.

Hakuba experienced much more growth and rapid increase in prices during the 1980s from the domestic market than Niseko, hence the ensuing fall hit the area harder. So the key question is, will the international investment in the area be substantial enough to reach those values again?

Mick Baker is the founder of Hakuba Real Estate.

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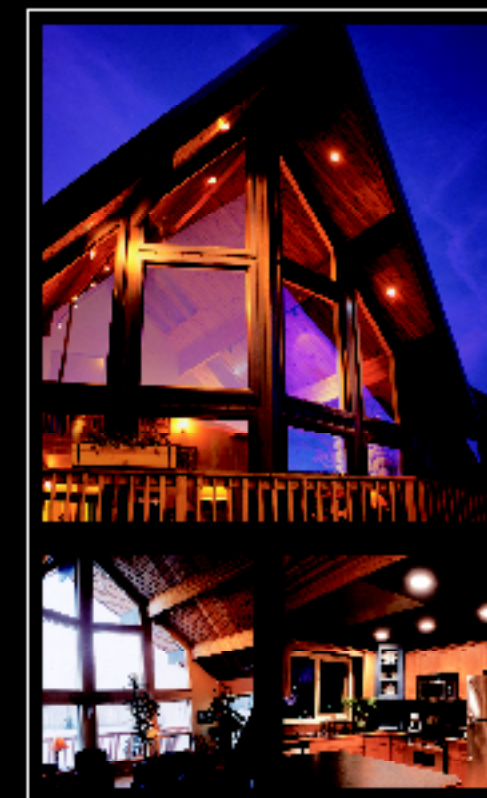
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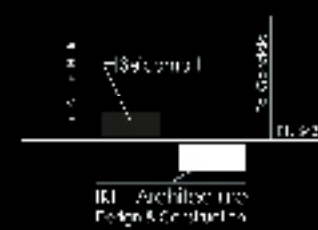
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Yotei Tracks Penthouse 503

¥130 million (\$1.3 million)

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- Inquiries to Hokkaido Tracks Resort Properties + 81 (0) 136 216960



Villa site sale in lots

The excellent location that is located on the hill overlooking Mt. Yotei!

SUNLIGHT YOTEI II

The town of sunshine filtering through foliage

Information MAP
Local guide chart

Grand Hirafu ski area, Seisei mart, SPA HIRAFU, YAMADA, Mt. Monte Bridge, Niseko Higashiyama Prince golf course, Niseko, HIRAFU, KABAYAMA, ROKKA, Lake Hangutsu.



Block Map
All blocks with amazing view of Mt. Yotei

Property Overview

- Location: 11-6-12 Aza, Katsuyama, Hirafu-cho, Abuta-gun, Hokkaido
- Access: 12 min. from JR Hirafu station by car • Parking covered/4 lots
- Total floor area: 11,800 sqm • Block area: 100,000 ~ 170,000 sqm/lot (incl. road)
- Electricity and telephone facilities (incl. sewage) 200,000 yen ~ 400,000 yen/lot (incl. 10% of laying construction) • Water service (incl. sewer) 200,000 ~ 400,000 yen
- Planning: 100% public management/management/management
- Electricity: Hokkaido Electric Power Co., Ltd., Telephone: NTT, gas: Hokkaido Gas, water: Hokkaido Water Supply Co., Ltd.

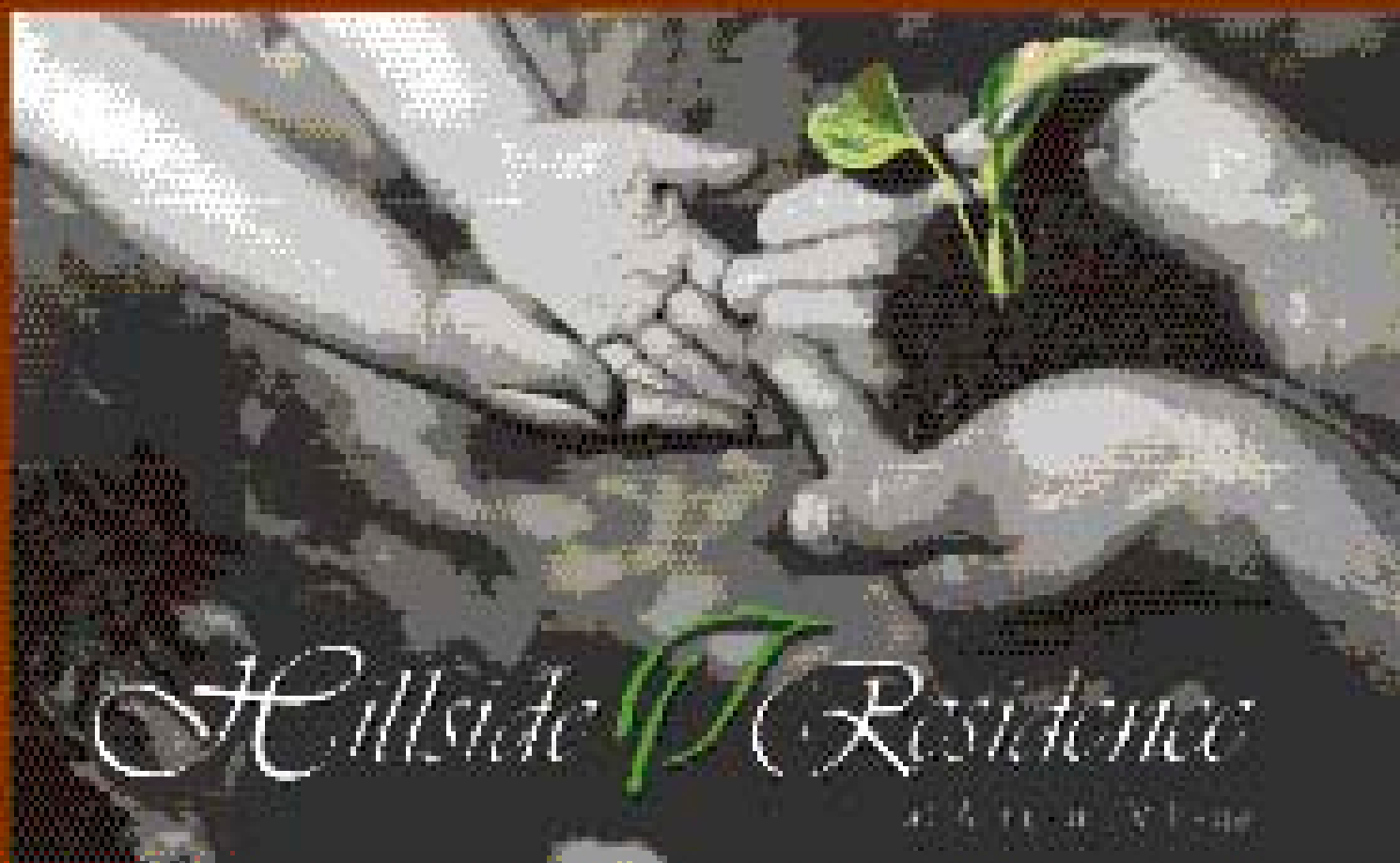
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http://www.mz-cosmo.jp
email: cosmo@hscb-jtd.com phone: (011) 733-6611

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Getting From New Chitose To Niseko

On arrival at Chitose international airport, visitors not on a full travel package have a few options to complete this last leg of their journey to Niseko and back. Although the trip is only 110kms, due to icy roads and no direct train route, it takes two to three hours.

BUS

The bus is the most convenient and commonly used form of transport from the airport. Buses depart about every 30 minutes from the airport to Niseko. They take about three hours, including a rest stop halfway and a dropoff at Rusutsu. ¥2,300 - one way and ¥3,850 for a round trip.

The buses disembark at six designated bus stops within the greater Niseko United Resort. You will find two different points to get off at each of the main ski areas.

Whiteliner Buses

www.whitelinerbuses.com.....011-242-2040

Chuo Buses

www.chuo-bus.co.jp/kikan/ski.....011-231-0500

Donan buses

www.donanbus.co.jp/ski.....0123-46-5701

Hokkaido Resort Liner

www.access-n.jp/ski_info.html.011-219-4411

CAR RENTAL

If you are comfortable driving in the snow, renting can be convenient as it allows you to take a trip to Kutchan to stock up the fridge before returning the car. One way hire from Chitose to Hirafu is about ¥7,000 for six - 24 hours. Nippon Rentacar, Mazda and Orix have offices in the Niseko area. If you want a car only in Niseko, you can contact Black Diamond Lodge in Higashiyama.

Mazda Rent a Car : Chitose airport 0123-45-8756, Niseko 011-231-0118 (drop off and pick up in Niseko only available on weekdays)

Nippon Rent a Car : Chitose airport 0123-26-0919, Niseko 0136-43-2929

Orix Rent a Car : Chitose airport 0123-22-0543, Izumikyō (Hirafu) 0134-25-0543, Black Diamond Lodge : 0136-44-1144

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a private company bus which costs ¥500 and a free shuttle bus which is included in your all mountain pass. See the timetable on the course map for more information. If you have a 12-point ticket, one point per trip is needed. Others need ¥500 for adult and ¥300 for child per ride.

Kutchan Night Bus

A free bus runs from Grand Hirafu ski area to Kutchan station every night. Step out from Hirafu village and enjoy shopping, eating, and drinking in Kutchan.

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United Airlines.....0120 114 466

BANKING

Yes, we all know Hirafu needs an international ATM! Until then, use the post office in Kutchan open 8.45am to 7pm on weekdays, 9am to 5pm on weekends and holidays. You can also withdraw from the 24-hour Citibank ATM at 3F Chitose airport and the 7-Eleven near Kutchan station. Most of the cards with Cirrus and PLUS marks are accepted at these places, but round cornered cards are not.

CREDIT CARDS

Japan is still a predominantly cash society. Most small bars and restaurants in Niseko do not accept credit cards, but larger hotels, restaurants and hotels often do.
American Express.....0120 020 120
MasterCard.....03 5728 5200
Visa Card.....00531 44 0022

CURRENCY

You can exchange your money into Yen at the bank, post office, and most inbound travel operators. Please bring your passport - it may be more convenient to change with your hotel. You can also exchange USD travellers cheques at banks or at Kutchan post office.

DRIVING

When driving on icy roads the number one thing to remember is to drive slowly. Make sure the windscreen and back and side windows are thoroughly de-iced on the outside and de-steamed on the inside before setting off - don't simply clear a 'porthole' to look through. Maintain at least a five-second gap between you and the vehicle in front. Use a high gear to avoid wheel spin, but take care not to let your speed creep up. Brake gently to avoid locking the wheels. Never brake if the vehicle skids, instead, ease off the accelerator and steer slightly into the direction of the skid until you gain control.

ELECTRICITY

Standard voltage is 100v AC. You can use many higher watt items without a problem but higher wattage devices such as hair dryers may not run on full power. Plugs are the flat two blades type. Many recent buildings have 240v with Australian shaped plugs.

EARTHQUAKES

In the event of an earthquake, stay out of elevators, stand in a door frame and watch for falling objects. The safest places are in large open areas such as parking lots of ski areas, schools, parks etc. Your accommodation is likely to have an emergency earthquake pack.

EMERGENCIES

Police.....110

Ambulance and Fire.....119
Emergency Interpretation.....03-5285-8185
Japan English Helpline (nationwide emergency assistance).....0570-000-911

ETIQUETTE

Japan is perhaps the most courteous country in the world. Say excuse me (sumimasen) and thank you (arigato) regularly. Do not eat while walking, or wear your shoes on tatami mats or in most indoor residences. A bow can be used to say thank you, sorry, hello, goodbye and excuse me. It is impolite not to return a bow. The deeper the bow, the more polite it becomes.

EATING

At most casual dining Japanese restaurants (Izakaya) meals are ordered for the table and shared. You will often receive a small snack with your first drink which may or may not be billed. Rest your chopsticks across the top of the bowl or plate - never leave them sticking out of the rice!

DRINKING

It is tradition in Japan to pour from a bottle into your guest's small glass regularly. Kam-pai is the Japanese word for cheers - use it readily! Also please remember to stay well behaved when under the influence. Poor behaviour by drunken Australians in Niseko has received national media attention in Japan. Remember you are an ambassador for your country at all times while you are abroad.

TIPPING

Although tipping is not generally done in Japan, some restaurants and bars will include a service fee for groups.

GARBAGE

Hokkaido has some of the strictest garbage separation rules in the world. Please try to follow them, follow the signs on the bins to the letter.

ONSEN (HOT SPRING BATH)

Buy a ticket, strip down - no swim suits allowed, keep your clothes in a basket, your valuables in a locker. Take a little towel only into the onsen with you, wash and scrub your body well before you go in to the bath. You can fill your towel with cold water before you enter the onsen. Do not put your towel into the onsen water - leave it on your head and squeeze the cold water out when you get too hot (it's best not to bring drinks into the onsen). After bathing rinse off under the shower. Finally dry your body well before you walk back into the changing room.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Although there are rumours of an English speaking clinic opening in Hirafu in 2008/9 season presently you will need to go to Kutchan for most medical services. If you can't speak Japanese you will need to bring a translator, or one may be provided at the hospital.

Kutchan Kousei Hospital

The major hospital servicing the area is located 4 blocks from the main intersection of Kutchan. They have an X-ray, a slightly ageing MRI and medical dispensary. No appointment necessary, orthopaedics cases taken in the morning only. It will take you most of the day. Address: North 4 East 1-2, Kutchan-cho Tel: 0136-22-1141

Niseko Physio

Located on the second floor of Australia House, staffed with Australian physiotherapy graduates from North Sydney Orthopaedic and Sports Medicine Centre (Australia's leading knee clinic). Primary care also available. Sports injuries, back and neck pain, braces and taping. Appointments preferred but not essential. www.NisekoPhysio.com Telephone 0136 22 0399.

Ueda Orthopedic Clinic

A privately run orthopaedic clinic providing more time efficient service than the hospi-

tal. X-ray, medical dispensary. 1-4, South 3-jo West3, Kutchan 0136-22-1386

INTERNET

Most accommodation in Niseko will have internet access. If you have a laptop, you can try finding the free wireless hotspots in cafes and bars around the village. Try Pow Pow, the Java Bar or B's café.

MOBILE PHONES

3G phones only will work in Japan. You can hire a phone from IXSM travel 0136 21 5855 or Go Mobile 03 4496 4344. For longer term stays the three big carriers have stores in Kutchan:

au.....0136-21-5616
Soft Bank.....0136-21-2588
NTT DoCoMo.....0136-21-6868

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Domestic Calls

Green and grey public phones take coins or pre paid telephone cards, available from convenience stores or at some phone card dispensers in some booths. Local calls don't require the "0136", unless made from a mobile phone.

Directory Assistance

Dial 104 (toll call) and then ask for an English speaker. You must know the location and name to get a number.

International Calls

International direct dial can be made using any of the following prefixes, 001 (KDDI), 0041 (IT) and 0061 (IDC). They will cost you.

Calling Cards

Brastel The most popular international calling card service is available in Niseko. Known for its flat 24 hour rates as low ¥6 per minute to Australia from any type of phone using a non-toll free access number. Brastel has excellent customer service available in over 20 languages and the card is available at several locations in Hirafu and can be recharged at IXSM travel or by your credit card. New subscribers get five free minutes. Toll-free: 0120 659 534. www.brastel.com

Kazak Rates from ¥20 for one minute to Australia. The kazak card is the highest selling card in the Niseko area. Kazak card is available from your hotel front desk, Piz Gloria convenience store and from most inbound tour operators. 0123 36 4000

POST OFFICES

Look for the red "T" symbol. Stamps and the post office box are at Piz Gloria convenience store. For other services you will need to go to the post office in Kutchan.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Kutchan Tourism Information centre

Located on Eki-mae Dori opposite Best Denki, the newly opened tourist information centre provides an excellent English speaking service for visitors. They dispense brochures and can help you book accommodation. 0136 22 1121

The Niseko Grand Hirafu Welcome Centre

At the main bus stop in Hirafu parking lot the Welcome Centre has a wide range of brochures and transport information. They can also help with booking accommodation if you've arrived without a booking - you risk taker you. 0136 22 0109.

WALKING ON ICY ROADS

About 1/3 of all injuries in Hirafu are caused by people falling on the street. Wear shoes with good grip, buy and attach rubber sole covers with metal studs. Take small steps, walk slowly and never run, keep both hands out of your pockets and free for balance. Walking with two ski stocks is a great idea and protect yourself instead of the objects being carried.

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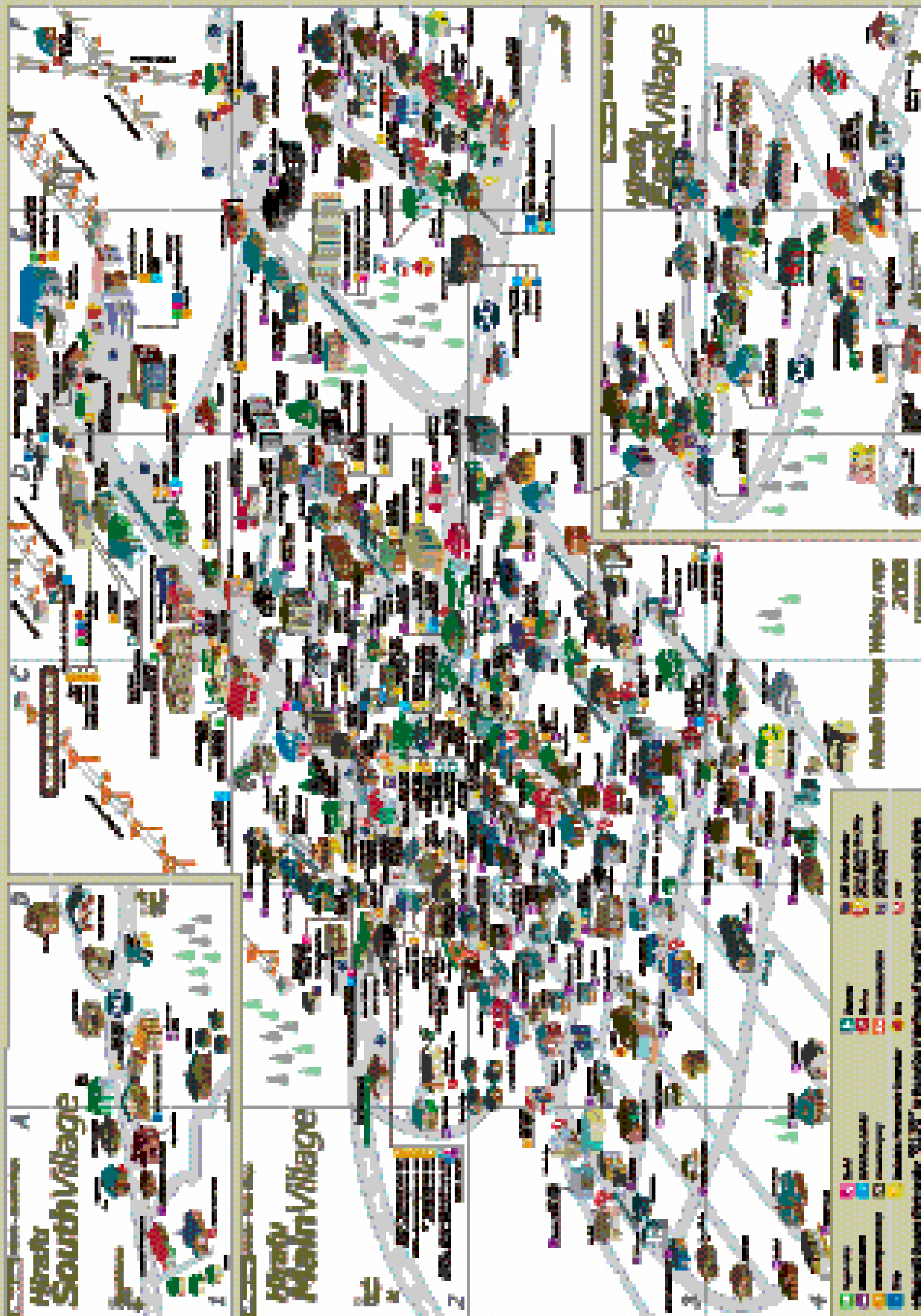
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Map ref: C 2
www.CaptainHirafu.com T. 0 136 22 60 28



Australian Alpine Club Niseko



The Australian snowsports club with its own Niseko lodge. The lodge has eight western style guest rooms (with ensuites), dining, bar and kitchen facilities. Membership is available (to all nationalities) for A\$6,500 and members also enjoy reciprocal rights at five other Australian Alpine Club lodges. Commercial bookings are available.

Map ref: D3 www.aacniseko.com T. 0136 22 3006



Niseko's Black Diamond Lodge and Restaurant



Located just a short 300m from the Higashiyama resort lift the Black Diamond Lodge is a local favourite. Ski to the lodge or take the free shuttle bus and come and check out our great Western and Japanese menu or our private snow park. Meals from 900yen, rooms from 5500yen.

www.bdlodge.com T. 0136-44-1144



Java Bar & Java Massage



The Java Bar has some of the best coffee & cocktails in Hirafu. A relaxing lounge bar that is perfect for a quiet drink after a long day's skiing. Mix of local & overseas visitors. Live music, reggae and local DJ Maco. Open till late. Wireless Internet Hotspot during the day. Java Massage has qualified Australian massage therapists for your essential massage. Open 10am to 9pm daily. Simultaneous massage available.

Map ref: C 3 www.Niseko-Info.com T. 0136 23 0788



Restaurant Maru



We are a traditional Japanese "Don Buri" restaurant with a great atmosphere. Expect huge servings of pork, tempura, sashimi, seafood and more on rice. We have set menu or 'Izakaya' style to share dishes with your friends.

11.30-15.00, 17.00-21.00

ボリューム満点の丼物、定食、居酒屋メニューヒラフ近郊は送迎有り(要予約)

Map ref: E3
www.NisekoMaru.web.fc2.com T. 0136-22-5020



Paul's Café Niseko



The only Belgium beer café in Japan owned by a Belgian, comes to Niseko. Specializing in Belgium beers and rotisserie chicken. More than 30 beers on tap and on bottles. Real Belgium waffles and more... A full meal or just a beer, don't hesitate and come in.

Map ref: D 3
www.paulscafe.jp T. 090-9524-4968



Bang Bang



Owner Masa Saito chooses some of the best ingredients in Japan for his extensive menu. Wagyu beef, Hokkaido crab, 5 types of salmon and yakitori are the highlights.

アフタースキーの楽しいひと時を厳選食材で創る料理と飲み物でお過ごしください。5.00-11.30pm. Closed Wednesdays.

Map ref: C 1
http://www.niseko.or.jp/bangbang T. 0136-22-4292



Ichimura Soba



Ichimura soba serves top quality soba (buck wheat noodles) that are made fresh on the premises. A beautiful wooden premises looking out towards Mt Yotei is the perfect location to enjoy some of the best soba you will find anywhere in Japan. Tempura Soba ¥1,300

11.00-15.00, 18.00-20.00 Closed Tuesdays

Map ref: E 4
www.Niseko-Ichimura.com T. 0136-23-0603



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Map ref: C 1
www.grand-hirafu.jp/en/mountain/rental.html T. 0136-22-0109



Niseko Hirafu Ski & Snowboard School



Ski & Snowboard school in Niseko mountain resort Grand HIRAFU. From beginner to expert. Our specially trained ski pros who speak English help you to improve your skiing or riding!

Map ref: D 1
www.grand-hirafu.jp/en/mountain/school.html T. 0136-22-0921



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Niseko Auto is a licensed auto and auction dealer offering weekly and monthly 4wd rentals, sales and repair as well as exporting overseas. Add a vehicle to your rental property or take the ultimate souvenir home and save thousands of dollars by letting us locate and send you your dream car.

www.nisekoauto.com T. 090-2055-6074

Bonbori Souvenirs & Foot Massage



The perfect souvenir shop also does foot massage during the day! We specialise in original Japanese character calligraphy based souvenirs including 3,500 T-Shirts and much more. We also offer foot massages from 1pm - 3pm.

Souvenir shop opens from 3pm - 8pm.

Map ref: B 2
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the last word...

on health: lower back pain

by Dave Garrick



Dave Garrick
Is a physiotherapist working at Niseko Physio. Outside of winter, he is based at North Sydney Orthopaedic and Sports Medicine Centre. He is currently studying his Masters in Sports Physiotherapy.

QF 21 – 8 hours or so from Sydney to Tokyo. You nod off during the flight with dreams of 7 days straight of thigh deep powder, hot spring baths and delicious Japanese food. You make your way to Niseko via a couple of bus rides and another short flight. Next morning, you hit the hill; it's hard to contain your excitement. First run - two turns in - bang, you feel your back go. The pain is unbearable. Some say knifelike, others

liken it to being shot. Either way, it is not what you had planned. After a few expletives, you wonder how you are going to ski again this trip and realise that you didn't spend \$3,000+ on your holiday to watch re-runs of 'The English Patient' in your chalet. 85% of us will have low back pain at some point in our lives. Furthermore, 50% will have at least one recurrence of this. The good news is that 90% of all back pain will get better within a 3 month period.

The majority of back pain falls into what is labelled somatic low back pain. This is generally pain coming from damaged soft tissue such as the disc or tissues of the apophyseal (facet) joints. This is usually local to the back, yet can spread into the buttock or down into the leg. This leg pain however, is different from a more serious nerve root compression often, yet not always correctly referred to as sciatica. A smaller percentage (about 10%) of low back pain (LBP) is due to more serious pathology such as bony fracture, stress fracture, spondylolisthesis (slipping of the one vertebra on another) and narrowing (stenosis) of the spinal canal. Hip and sacroiliac joint (pelvis) injuries can also present as LBP. Generally, these more serious conditions can be screened during a consultation and appropriate management can be taken.

So how is somatic LBP treated? The best advice is to

see a physiotherapist for suitable management should your back 'go' on you. There is no 'set' treatment for all low back pain and therefore a programme tailored to the individual's presentation will produce the best results. Physiotherapy treatment may include several techniques such as joint mobilisation, soft tissue techniques, stretching and strengthening exercises, electrotherapy and taping. In the majority of cases, you should be able to get back on the hill within 2-3 days. If you are unable to get treatment the following should help:

- Unless your pain is so severe you cannot move, avoid bed rest as it can cause stiffness and slow recovery. Should you need to rest, adopt pain free postures. Movements in pain free directions are encouraged and you should avoid movements that aggravate pain.
- Avoid prolonged postures, (especially sitting in couches or low chairs), heavy lifting and excessive bending or twisting. A lumbar roll or rolled towel in the small of the back can help promote good spinal posture.
- Analgesic and anti inflammatory medications from your pharmacy or GP can help with pain relief and inflammation. Heat is often good for muscle spasm. Ice is also effective yet may not be as desirable in the colder Niseko climate. For most acute injuries, we advocate ice as the best initial management, yet as the joints in the back are not as big as say your knee and ankle, heat is ok.
- We live in a society in which we constantly bend forwards or sit for long periods at computers. Rarely do we extend or go backwards with our spines. Spinal flexibility is important in both directions. However, repeated extensions (McKenzie Extensions) can often relieve pain for the majority, but not all conditions.

As with any condition, prevention is better than cure. There are several ways to prevent your ski holiday being ruined by low back pain. This is particularly relevant for those who have suffered previous back pain. Try to concentrate on the following.

- Good posture – Prolonged poor posture places undesirable loads on the lumbar spine. Work set-up

forms part of this. A supportive chair with lumbar support is helpful. When lifting; use the legs, keep the load close to you, keep the back straight and brace the stomach muscles before lifting.

- Core stability – this is a ubiquitous new millennium term. It refers to the muscular control required around the lower back, pelvis and hip area to keep your centre stable. It is imperative to have a stable 'core' or middle for a good base of support to allow your arms and legs to take load. This is a topic in itself, and the best advice is to see your physiotherapist or a well qualified Pilates instructor.
- Flexibility – many muscles cross over the pelvis and lower back area. If they are tight they can affect the mechanics of the lower back. Stretching and soft tissue work can help this.
- General fitness – regular activity is the best way to prevent LBP. Staying fit and moving your body around regularly generally means less back pain as exercise promotes movement. It also means you carry less weight.

Should your back pain not be responding to treatment or if you fall in the 10% of more serious pathologies, further investigations such as X-Ray, CT scan or MRI may be needed. For the majority of LBP, investigations are not necessary as it usually does not change treatment or management. On top of this, emphasis should be placed more so on a patient's presentation as opposed to investigation findings, as these findings may not be responsible for the patient having pain. Many people have bulging discs on MRI in the absence of low back pain.

Surgery is usually not helpful for the majority of LBP sufferers. Should there be bladder or bowel function loss, non-improving nerve compression signs, or notable instability of the bones, it is generally indicated.

LBP is too large a topic to cover completely here but hopefully this snapshot can provide you with an insight into how it can be managed and how you can keep yourself on the slopes, away from the re-runs and the treatment room.

Happy skiing!



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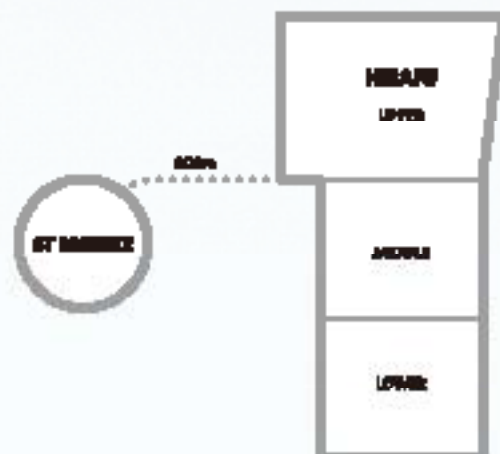
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