

Asarigawa Onsen Hot Springs Monitoring Tour Report

(2024 Monday, January 22 and Tuesday, January 23)

This is the second monitor tour we've organized. Participants included one person from Spain, one from Chile, one from Sweden, one from the Netherlands, two from Australia, and one from China.

Despite the mild winter, which differs slightly from the typical Hokkaido winter, we have prepared a tour for you to fully enjoy Hokkaido's winter experience.

To begin, we will gather at Otaru Station and then travel by car for about 15 minutes to the Asari River hot springs, "Otaru Korakuen." There, you will be welcomed with a traditional tea ceremony. (<https://www.otaru-kourakuen.com/>)

At the Korakuen Hotel, right next to the lobby, there is a tea room where you can experience authentic Japanese tea ceremonies. It's an experience that even some Japanese people may not have tried. In the solemn atmosphere, participants concentrate on each movement as they observe the tea ceremony.

While confirming each step of the tea ceremony etiquette, everyone enjoyed savoring the lingering taste of matcha spreading in their mouths.

Next, each person tries to prepare and drink their own tea. A comparison is made between the tea prepared by the teacher and the one prepared by oneself. To everyone's surprise, there is unanimous agreement that "the tea prepared by the teacher is tastier," leading to expressions of amazement. It was indeed a surprising discovery for everyone.



After everyone enjoyed the tea, we proceeded to guide them through the facilities of Otaru Korakuen. The guests were thrilled by the hospitality that permeated every corner of the inn, from the tatami-matted hallways to displays of kimonos, folding screens, and playful photographs. Amidst the snowy landscape, everyone was particularly intrigued by the outdoor hot springs, eagerly taking photographs. And then, a delightful discovery awaited them... In the changing room, they found "complimentary ice candies."

"Are these really free? Can we eat as many as we want?"

"I want to eat them right away!"

It seemed like they had already found another enjoyable aspect of their hot spring experience.

After touring the inn, it was time for activities. We moved a short distance to Winkel Village (<http://www.winkel.co.jp/family>). Here, participants had the opportunity to make snow candles and enjoy a tent sauna experience.

While some of the participants were not entirely new to snow, many had never made ice candles before. Some struggled as the candles didn't set as expected or collapsed. However, with the assistance of the Asarigawa Onsen Association members, everyone managed to create the snow candles they wanted.

Now, onto the main event of the first day: the tent sauna! Participants changed into swimsuits and headed eagerly to the sauna tents!



After 5, 10, and 15 minutes passed, participants emerged from the sauna tents, releasing steam from their bodies, only to dive straight into the snow! "Wooo! This feels amazing!" they exclaimed as they washed their faces with snow, rubbed it on their limbs, and then returned to the sauna tents.



Participants from Sweden, where sauna culture is deeply rooted, expressed their delight, saying, "Even in Sweden, I've never experienced anything like this. It's fantastic!"

Following the sauna session, everyone enjoyed light snacks such as bread, soup, and cookies (provided by Hi Bread! - <https://pain502.base.ec/>) while waiting for the sunset. Then, they admired the enchanting snow lights created by the ice candles they had made earlier in the day.

Thus concluded the first day of the tour.



On the morning of the second day, the weather was splendidly clear – perfect for skiing! We headed to the Asarigawa Onsen Ski Resort (<https://asari-ski.com/>) to enjoy skiing and snowboarding. All the participants in this tour were skilled individuals, almost at the instructor level.

Among them, there was one person who typically skied but expressed a desire to try snowboarding this time.



Since the participant was from China, we requested an instructor from Taiwan. The lesson began with a mix of Chinese and English instruction. Snowboarding, unlike skiing, poses challenges in maintaining balance. However, this was where the instructor's skill truly shone! Initially, they practiced "climbing a bit and sliding down" repeatedly. However, after about an hour, they were confidently coming down on the lift. When asked if they were enjoying themselves, they replied, "I'm having a blast! Having a Taiwanese instructor makes it very easy to understand the nuances of the language. I'll definitely come back!" and they promptly headed back up on the lift.

Meanwhile, the skilled participants were conquering the advanced slopes. "While our countries do have ski resorts, we never experience this much snow. Sometimes, we even rely on artificial snow. Despite reports of less snowfall this year, it's perfectly fine! We're having a blast!" They continued to enjoy skiing and snowboarding to the fullest extent possible.



On the afternoon of the second day, our monitor tour came to a close. Before parting ways, we asked participants to reflect on their experience.

"Despite using the same matcha, the difference in taste between the tea prepared by the instructor and the one I made myself was astonishing! This invaluable experience gets a perfect score of 5 out of 5!"

"I was delighted to participate in local events like making snow candles. The warm and homely hospitality was heartwarming."

"We were thrilled with the tour, which included many aspects of what we had imagined as 'Japanese-ness.' Among them, the tea ceremony experience will be a lasting memory."

It seemed that everyone was deeply impressed by their "cultural experience in Japan." Despite the language barrier, the thoughtfulness and hospitality were effectively conveyed throughout the monitor tour.