

WILD, WILD WINTER

Hokkaido is having its snowiest season ever — and it looks like it will never end

BY ELISABETH LEE



Mount Yotei provides a majestic backdrop in Niseko's snowy landscape.
PHOTOS: TROY THERRIEN

"Is it snowing again?" groaned the girl at the breakfast table.

Even though everyone at the lodge had come to ski Niseko's world-famous powder snow, we all could feel her pain. The snow had been falling thick and fast for most of

the last few days; we'd had another 20cm of snowfall overnight. Still, this morning, the view out of the lodge window wasn't of majestic Mount Yotei across the valley, but of white fields, white clouds and big, white flakes of snow dumping down. It was

going to be a blustery, bone-chilling day.

LOTS OF FLUFFY WHITE STUFF

This season, Niseko has had an unprecedented volume of the fluffy white stuff. According to local blog 360Niseko

(360niseko.com), the resort has seen an average daily snowfall of 13.5cm — with the heaviest snowfall on Christmas Eve last year, when Santa Claus brought an early present of almost 50cm of powder. As of this month, a staggering 32 cubic km of snow has fallen over the resort grounds — putting Niseko ahead of other international resorts such as Whistler, Jackson Hole and Chamonix.

At the start of this month, the total snowfall was an impressive 10m — the height of two double-decker buses. Even long-time locals are impressed. Niseko resident Hisashi Wakatabe, a former park ranger who has been skiing Hokkaido for the past six years, said he hasn't seen this much snow ever. "The snow we got in December was easily double the historical average!" he said.

As a result, the skiing has never been so good. Across the four resorts that make up the Niseko ski grounds, ski runs are carpeted in soft, dry snow — not an icy patch in sight. There are truly excellent conditions underfoot (or underboot, as the case may be), whether you're a novice taking your first run down a bunny slope, or whether you're an expert rider carving up the chutes and trees. The groomers are perfect, the moguls soft and the bowls packed with deep, deep snow.

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