

SUIBOKU CONCIERGE

CONFIDENTIAL GUIDE: RESTAURANTS

FOR SUIBOKU OWNERS AND GUESTS ONLY

Hokkaido is the agricultural heart of Japan and most of its restaurants serve very fresh local produce. So, the good news is that there are very few bad restaurants in Niseko. The bad news is that some of the restaurants are so popular that you will need to book well in advance if you want to get a table, particularly if you have a large group. Bookings for this 2009/2010 season are up considerably from a year ago, so it is doubly important to consider your food options early.

Equally, it is important that if you have booked a restaurant that you re-confirm a few days before your arrival, or after you arrive in town. The *Suiboku Concierge* can do this for you.

This confi-guide is not exhaustive but rather provides a short guide to some of the better food options in and around Hirafu and our recommendations.

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TOP FOUR RESTAURANTS

(ADVANCE BOOKING ESSENTIAL)

There are four top restaurants in Hirafu: **Sekka Dining**, **Abucha**, **Kamimura** and **Bang Bang**. Dress in *all locations* is very casual and relaxed and you can walk to all of them from *Suiboku*. These four restaurants are described below, in no particular order:

SEKKA DINING was voted Niseko's top restaurant by **Powderlife Magazine** for the 2008 season. This restaurant is located in the downstairs wine cellar of the multi-functional *J-Sekka* building (the large black building just to the right at the main town traffic light). The building also includes the **J-Sekka Deli and Café** (fine food store and casual café dining), the **Maki Bar** (chic fireside bar, and a great place for drinks before/after dinner) and the **J-Sekka Suites** (high-end accommodation). The restaurant, which has an authentic "rough luxe" look is the brainchild of architect/designer Nakayama Makoto and Shouya Grigg, a graphic designer from Sapporo, and is presided over by chefs, *Katherine Bont* and *Kim Wejendorp* who have cooked in some of the world's top restaurants and served as personal chefs to Keith Richards and Bruce Willis. Recommended dishes are: (i) Esachi diver scallops, (ii) slow braised Tokkachi beef cheek (iii) homemade Niseko potato gnocchi and (iv) hazelnut semifreddo with orange caramel.

Bookings for **Sekka Dining** can be made by calling +81-136-21-5022 (local: 0136 21-5022). You can also email reservations@j-sekka.com or email *Katherine Bont* directly at kat@j-sekka.com. Or, ask the **Suiboku Concierge** to organize it for you by emailing concierge@suibokuhirafu.com.

ABUCHA 2 is Hirafu's busiest restaurant and is located on the ground floor of *Suiboku*. This Japanese *izakaya* bar and grill-style restaurant is run by *Shimizu-san*, a mid-thirties-something grill chef whose omnipresence ensures very high-quality food and service. Recommended dishes are: (i) sukiyaki hot-pot of local salmon, butter, sweet corn, Chinese *bok choy* and *fen-si* noodles (feeds four), (ii) grilled organic chicken with green tea salt, (iii) tempura sun-dried squid (iv) grilled Australian rib-eye and (v) tuna and tofu salad with sesame dressing. *Abucha* has the longest and best stocked bar in town and is a good place to meet before dinner. The un-filtered sake, a cloudy brew with the rice kernels still suspended and served cold, is a treat. Whilst the staff are friendly and very efficient they are often harried given how busy this place gets. In the high season this restaurant can turn away more than 100 people each night.

To book Abucha, call +81-136-22-5620 (local: 0136-22-5620). Or, ask the **Suiboku Concierge** to organize it for you by emailing concierge@suibokuhirafu.com.

KAMIMURA is located on the 1st Floor of the Yamashizen-West building in the heart of the upper village. When it opened in the winter of 2007 it fast became known as one of the top *fine dining* experiences in Japan. *Chef Kamimura* trained and worked in the famed “Tetsuya” in Sydney, Australia working side-by-side with Tetsuya Wakuda. Kamimura offers a variety of *degustation* set menus at ¥ 6,500 (for early bird 5 course), ¥ 9,000 for the 7 course and ¥ 13,000 for the 9 course menu. Kamimura requires credit card authorization to secure a booking and for cancellations less than 24 hours before the booking or a failure to show up a charge of ¥ 5,000 per person will be made. Cancellation fees also apply if your group numbers are reduced *less than* 12 hours before the booking. We would recommend that you get a baby-sitter for younger children as this restaurant, while not stuffy, is subdued and a place for adults to relax and enjoy wonderful food. Dressing just a bit more *ski-elegante* for this restaurant would not go amiss.

Bookings for Kamimura can be made by telephone on +81-136-21-2288, local number 0136-21-2288 (ask for *Michael Phipps*, or email him at mphipps@kamimura-niseko.com) or contact them via the Kamimura website at www.kamimura-niseko.com. Or, ask the **Suiboku Concierge** to organize it for you by emailing concierge@suibokuhirafu.com.

BANG BANG is Hirafu’s top *yakitori* (grilled food on wooden skewers) restaurant and is presided over by the bandanna-decked owner, Massa-san, who oversees every aspect of food preparation in this extremely cosy restaurant located just three buildings up the main *Hirafu-Zaka* road from *Suiboku*. Given the cosiness, we would recommend this as an adults-only restaurant unless you go very early with well-behaved children. It is often nice to go early, say 5-5:30 to better hear some of Massa-san’s vintage jazz recordings. Recommended dishes are (i) king crab legs, (ii) asparagus and bacon and (iii) local Hokkaido sausages.

For bookings call Bang Bang directly at +81 136 22 4292 (local number 0136 22 4292). Or, you can ask the **Suiboku Concierge** to organize the booking for you by emailing concierge@suibokuhirafu.com.

OTHER IN-TOWN DINING OPTIONS

SENCHOU I and **SENCHOU II**. These sister restaurants serve top quality grilled izakaya food, but also specialize in seafood, so expect fresh octopus, sashimi and uni. And, surprisingly, they have a chicken yakitori that some say beats Bang Bang's (at a lower price point). Senchou II is located directly across the street from Suiboku. Senchou I is housed in a yellow building just below the main town intersection (about four buildings down). It is easy to spot as it is brightly lit and has an old fisherman's green glass ball hanging in the entranceway. In this "downtown" version of Senchou you sit on tatami mats on the floor at huge wooden tables as the pitchers or beer and the decibel levels increase. This place is great for a large group (kids love it), although **if you have a group of six or more you will need to book ahead** in the high season. *Warning:* at Senchou I, try to avoid the tables that are directly across from the yakitori grill as the area becomes smoke-filled, which can ruin your evening. The direct number for bookings is Senchou I: +81 136-22-2001 Int'l/0136-22-2001 in Japan, Senchou II: +81 136-22-5454/ 0136-22-5454. If you have difficulty (*and you may as this is primarily a Japanese-language-only restaurant, although they have English menus*) the **Suiboku Concierge** will be happy to assist you with making a booking at either of these two excellent local restaurants.

J-SEKKA DELI AND CAFÉ. From a hearty breakfast to get you ready for the slopes or a lazy afternoon spent discovering the delicious Hokkaido produce used in their house-made delicacies - including wild Hokkaido venison burger and Hokkaido crab linguine - the J-Sekka Deli lies at the heart of the village. J-Sekka's philosophy of **great local produce** is showcased in stylish surroundings at reasonable prices. A convenient stop for when you first arrive and want someplace casual and accommodating where **you don't need to book** – the place is **buzzing from 7am** serving coffee, drinks and light meals right through until late. You can also stock up on all your gourmet and daily pre-provisioning needs. **The Suiboku Concierge will be separately distributing to Suiboku Owners and Guests the J-Sekka Deli Pre-Provisioning List for you to choose those items you want to have pre-positioned when you arrive at Suiboku.**

DRAGON is a charming antique-filled Buddha-themed restaurant housed in an old wooden building almost directly across the street from Senchou I (*just below the main town traffic light, four buildings down on the left hand side*). This delightful restaurant has great pastas, some nice wines, and the occasional stroke of brilliance like grilled-to-perfection venison steaks and a huge plate of nicely grilled vegetables sprinkled with olive oil and pesto sauce. Prices are reasonable and there are a number of rooms that can accommodate a group of ten or so persons. One of the sister-owners speaks Mandarin, so watch what you say – although it will mostly be all good at this place. **Bookings are**

recommended. You can call them for a booking at +81 136 21 7700 Int'l/ 0136 21 7700 local, or ask the [Suiboku Concierge](#) for assistance.

ROSSO ROSSO specializes in Australian steaks in a cosy slightly low-ceilinged restaurant in the centre of the middle-village. Definitely the best steak restaurant in town, so if that's what you need after a long day on the slopes, Rosso Rosso is your place. **Bookings are recommended.** You can call them for a booking at +81 136-21-7100 Int'l/ 0136-21-7100 local, or ask the [Suiboku Concierge](#) to help you with your booking.

RIN is an intimate *izakaya* restaurant in the lower portion of the middle Hirafu Village featuring all variety of grilled bar/grill food and some interesting specialities like horse sashimi and Camembert Yaki – a whole wheel of cheese served sizzling, topped with a little soy sauce and eaten with salted crackers. The place is small and gets packed, but if you are at the Yukoro Onsen (right next to the restaurant) this would be a good early-meal pick. **Bookings are recommended for large groups (6 or more).** You can call them for a booking at +81 136-22-1444 Int'l/ 0136-22-1444 local, or ask the [Suiboku Concierge](#) to help you with your booking.

EZO SEAFOODS is newly opened for the beginning of the 09/10 season and is located just down the hill from the Australia House building (the big yellow building on Route 343 directly across from the Seicomart convenience store). They plan to serve a range of Hokkaido seafood, including oysters, fish & prawns that are available at the bar or for take-away. Promises to be a great addition to the town's dining scene, but before we can provide a full review/critique we will need to sample throughout the season. *If you try Ezo this season, please drop us a line at conciierge@suibokuhirafu.com to let us know what you thought.*

THE BRICK sits directly opposite Java Bar in the middle village and the building looks like, well, a big brick. If you arrive early and grab one of the few seats available upstairs, you can feast on a range of burgers, with all the trimmings and buns made on site, as well as fine chicken and lamb kebabs – the soft kebab bread / wrap also baked on site. There are a few pizza options as well. Make sure you arrive early, as this does turn into a pumping bar serving 500yen drinks all night.

WILD BILL'S is located in a large log-cabin building directly across the street from the even larger rustic-chic log cabinny Silver Birch apartments. This place is by turns the town's most raucous bar and the best and only spot in town for authentic Texan-Mexican (Tex-Mex) food. There is a large upstairs dining area that can accommodate a large group. Kids will love the food and the atmosphere. Portions tend to be very large, so order a bit first to gauge the sizes. There is a nice pool table if you get there early to take advantage and the bar-side fireplace keeps the cabin mighty toasty. Call for reservations at +81 36-22-5652 (international) or 0136-22-5652 (local), or just stop by.

GET OUT-OF-TOWN FAVOURITES

(BUT ONLY A FEW MINUTES OUTSIDE TOWN)

KAME, NISEKO WAVE SECRET HIDING KITCHEN. Formerly hiding behind the Niseko Adventure Center, this restaurant has moved to an even better hiding spot down Route 343 half-way between Hirafu Village and the Higashiyama turn-off. The chef creates a nightly *omakase* (chef's choice) menu often featuring local produce, pasta (arrabiata is his favourite) and if you are lucky enough on the day, oysters and scallops. You will either need to get a taxi to "discover" the restaurant or ask the **Suiboku Concierge** to drive you over in the **Suiboku Minivan**. The restaurant is happy to call a cab to bring you back after you meal, although the cabs do not like to wait, so wait until you start your dessert to order the taxi. You can call +81-136-22-0339 to make a booking or ask the **Suiboku Concierge** to arrange it. **Booking is essential.**

OKONOMAYAKI JYUU JAPANESE PANCAKE RESTAURANT. Thick and thin savoury Japanese (Osaka-style) pancakes with cabbage, spring onion, *kim chee*, beef, pork, you name it. A divine combination - the Pokka NegiYaki, which is kim chee and braised beef tendon served in a thinner style spring onion pancake with tempura bits, pickled ginger and lemon. A decadent option, to be sure, and not to be outdone by the *jaga* cheese "pancake" - crispy melted cheese with potato. Cosy, local authentic place 15 minutes outside town at the "T" junction in the road on Route 343 past the Hilton turn-off. Directions: drive toward the Hilton in Higashiyama and keep going straight until you can't go straight anymore. Look straight ahead and there it is. **Booking is advised** +81 136-44-2336 Int'l/ 0136-44-2336 within Japan.

TORIMATSU YAKITORI RESTAURANT. This small yakitori restaurant is the Kutchan version of Bang Bang, and in the view of some just as good but better value. It is small, so a large group could not be accommodated. It is on the main Kutchan Road leading to the Kutchan Train Station. Important to make a booking (locals flock here) and either take a taxi (easy) or ask the **Suiboku Minivan** to give you a lift into town. **Booking is essential.** +81 136-23-2893 Int'l/ 0136-23-2893 within Japan.

SHUNSAI VENISON RESTAURANT. A small family run venison restaurant featuring a nightly special set to die for. Not known by many outside the area this restaurant is owned by a hunter and his family and is located just three shops down the street facing the Kutchan Train Station (on the left). Charming place with great ambience, and you can try the amazing venison in an un-beatable value lunch set including soup, salad, rice & drink for about 1,000yen. Not for large groups or loud children. **Booking is essential.** +81 136-23-1882 Int'l/ 0136-23-1882 local.

MOUNT RAMEN. This shop on the main street of Kutchan town has better ramen noodles than any you will find in Hirafu Village and is very much worth the trip (about fifteen minutes from Hirafu) for a bowl of the salty, soy or spicy ramen noodles and gyoza dumplings. Inexpensive and delicious. **No bookings taken, first come-first served,** but no problem getting a table if you do not come at absolute peak time (12 noon).

KAKU PIZZA AND CAFÉ RESTAURANT. A charming café on the side-street leading to the Kutchan Train Station run by a western gentleman and his Japanese staff. With a wide range of terrific pizzas, desserts, and coffees it is definitely a must-stop shop if you are doing any shopping in Kutchan. They are right across the street from Takiguchi Sports (the main sporting goods store in Kutchan), so combining a trip to see the latest gear with a pizza and/or coffee might suit. The parfaits are a must, maccha ice-cream layered with cream, cookies, and a chocolate wafer, delicious! **No booking required.**

TSUBARATSUBARA SOUP CURRY RESTAURANT. Just outside Hirafu (in Izumikyo Village on the way to Kutchan – a few minutes walk outside of town on a nice day) this restaurant (which has just moved to the site of the old Maru Maru restaurant) has about ten different styles of curry soup (all delicious) with a system that allows you to choose your heat, from zero to 22. Most people (who love spicy food) settle in at around a 9 – a few we have seen have tried a 12 and failed. Small place, but great food, and we understand that their menu will expand this winter to include tempura and grilled items. **No booking required.**

ICHIMURA HOME-MADE SOBA NOODLE RESTAURANT. All homemade noodles at this iconic soba and tempura restaurant right at the T-junction before you turn off to Kutchan Town, directly across the street from the Niseko Paint Ball Field. This place is the real thing and it gets full every single day with local Japanese business and tradesmen and visiting Japanese tourists. Not many out-of-towners go there, but it is well worth the visit. **Booking advisable** (+81 136-23-0603 Int'l/ 0136-23-0603 local), but most customers are walk-ins.

GRAUBUNDEN has quite astoundingly delicious sandwiches, some would say the best sandwiches in the world, and is located a manageable walk out of the village (20 minutes from the main intersection of Hirafu) if it is a fine day, Graubunden is located in *Izumikyo 1*, the little town that you see just before you enter Hirafu coming from the airport. Graubunden has been open for 19 years and had a face-lift this summer, 2009. The shop has expanded and there is more seating inside by the fireplace. Sandwiches range from the simple ham & cheese to delicacies like cream cheese and onions stir-fried with walnuts – and

everything in between. You even get to choose the bread, from soft baguette, baguette, bagel and rye. A great place for hot chocolate and a slice of home-baked cake – if you order in advance you can even take a whole cake home. Call +81 136-23-3371 Int'l/ 0136-23-3371 in Japan.

DEL SOLE Sicilian Pizza is located in the Annupuri village, just down from the Annupuri gondola and serves traditional Naples style pizza with a thick, chewy base. It is all baked in a wood-fired stone oven, and the menu is written in Italian and Japanese. Enjoy a glass of Italian red with your pizza, and then be sure to finish with a coffee, made on an impressive La Pevoni shining silver coffee machine, with an eagle perched on top. You will need to organize the Suiboku mini-van or a cab to take you here, but well worth the trip – and a great place to stop for lunch if you are skiing the Annupuri slopes around lunchtime.

GOOD AND QUICK FOOD OPTIONS

If you are in a hurry, or if you want to feed the children before setting off for an adults dinner, the following options are good ones:

NISEKO PIZZA. Pizza restaurant across the street and three buildings up the hill from *Suiboku* owned by the owner of the erstwhile “La Andy” pizza truck (now parked next to the restaurant), named after the father and son of the owner, Cezar Constantin who, notwithstanding his latino/Graeco name would appear to be a real Italian. This place has a spacious downstairs and a new huge upstairs guarantees that your flock of young people can all get a seat. Pizzas are excellent (albeit not the cheapest in the world). The new *Pizza Bianco*, with prosciutto & olives is a winner, as well as the daily baked fresh foccacia you will find on the antipasto plate to dip into the superb eggplant dip. The kids will enjoy the extreme skiing being shown on video and the occasional local troubadour performing in the corner. **During the very high season it wouldn't hurt to make a booking if you want to sit downstairs.** Open for lunch and dinner. Call them at 0136 55 8688. They also deliver.

SENCHOU II. Not a fast-food place, but this place is on the list because it is directly across the street from *Suiboku*, so it is quick and easy to access for *Suiboku* residents. Their menu will be expanding this year, with more sushi options that are suitable to take-away. **See full details above.**

JO-JO'S. There is a raging argument in Hirafu over who serves the best burger. The real bun-fight is between the Jo-Jo Burger (a beef burger with special top-secret sauce and an egg on top) at Jo-Jo's in the Niseko Adventure Centre (NAC) building) and the juicy-licious venison burgers at the Sekka Deli and Café upstairs in the J-Sekka building. You may need to try them both (several times) to make a thorough and empirical comparison. At Jo-Jo's the kids can spend their waiting time on the climbing wall in their cavernous upstairs restaurant. They might also like the fried rice and the vanilla, blueberry and black sesame milkshakes. One of the best options in town if you have a large group and can't get a table along the high-street or if you just want to get out of the limelight for a night. Open for breakfast, lunch and dinner. **No bookings necessary unless you have large group.** Phone them at +81 136-23-2220 Int'l or 0136-23-2220 within Japan.

J-SEKKA CAFÉ AND DELI. The most versatile and user-friendly place in town about which we've written above. Perfect for kids and adults alike this grocery

store cum deli cum café serves breakfast, lunch and dinners of high quality and can knock out a burger or pasta as easily as a slow braised lamb and barley stew. Ideal for the adults to have a glass of wine whilst the kids eat an early dinner. This place is most popular for folks who've just organized their ski rentals at Rhythm & Beats (in the same building) or at Demo (across the street from Suiboku) as it is open on a first-come-first-served basis, allows diners to do a little food shopping and is totally chilled out. ***If you walk in and sign up to become an "international friend" of J-Sekka, you will get a little orange coloured key-tag you can carry around that entitles you to 300 yen coffees in the Deli*** and membership on the J-Sekka special offers newsletter which keep you plugged into the various hip goings-on at the Deli and Café. The Deli also has a few MAC computers to stay in touch with the office. See further description above. Phone them at +81 136 213 088 or local number 213 088, but **no bookings required** for this part of the emporium. You can also e-mail kat@j-sekka.com to discuss any special requirements.

RAMEN SHOP AT NISEKO PLAZA. Across the street from Suiboku in the Niseko Plaza, just below Paddy McGinty's pub, this shop is tucked into the lower left-hand corner. If you need your ramen fix this is the place to go, although the jury is out on whether this is the best ramen in town (well, okay, it definitely isn't), but it is (a) close to Suiboku and (b) very inexpensive. **No need to phone, just walk in.**

PADDY MCGINTY'S. Almost directly across the street from Abucha you will find Hirafu's only Irish pub, Paddy McGinty's serving brilliant Guinness and Kilkenny's on tap. But, what is top-secret (*only to be divulged here*) is that bars in Japan do not have restrictions on the age of diners, so while mum and dad have a pre-dinner pint, the kids can tuck into fish and chips, shepherd's pie and a variety of other very serviceable pub grub. Not cheap as chips, as this is Japan after all, but hearty. You can watch sports on the TVs spread throughout the place and listen to semi-Irishy-inspired pop music. **No bookings required.**

BEST OPTIONS FOR LUNCH IF SKIING

(FIRST COME FIRST SERVE)

The restaurants on the slopes are quick and easy, but are not really very relaxing, so we recommend three places that can be readily accessed from lift-stations and that have excellent food as well. All first come, first served at lunchtime. **Boots on is okay!**

Hirafufleur: From the family quad lift station next to the Alpen Hotel you look into the large main town parking lot. There you will see (in the upper portion) a concrete building called **Popolo** (connected to the pink coloured Scott Hotel). In the ground floor there is a great little restaurant (that used to be in a snow-covered igloo type hut years ago) that has great informal Japanese fare, including curry rice, sukiyaki, ramen noodles, dumplings and Korean barbecue. There is a great view of Mt Yotei from the window seats. You can put your skis right outside the restaurant. **No bookings taken for lunch.**

Syokusai: Lunch from 12 – 2 (only) and dinner from 6 to 10:30, Telephone: 0136 22 1117. This restaurant, located on the ground floor of the Alpen Hotel (next to the Family Quad ski lift), serves excellent classic Japanese sushi/sashimi dishes, miso soup and great bowl-of-rice dishes such as uni and salmon roe, crab and shrimp tempura and assorted sashimi over rice. Super yummy and, best of all, you can keep your ski boots on. Afterward, for dessert, go to the lobby lounge for the soft ice cream with coffee over the top and their amazing desserts. A lunchtime ritual for some. Good to arrive a bit early as this place gets filled up quickly. They stop taking orders at 2 pm and are quite strict about this. **No bookings taken for lunch.**

J-Sekka Deli and Café: This place has a big advantage in being open all day. Great food, good too to stock up on power bars, Sekka's trail mix and a few pick-me-ups. Also, the best coffees in town. See write-up above. Located in the J-Sekka building (black building) next to the main town traffic light. **No bookings required.**

BREAKFAST BEST BETS

Surprisingly there are relatively few places to go in town for a really good breakfast. Three of the best are:

J-Sekka Café & Deli – for a perfect start to the day before hitting the slopes, pop into J-Sekka for a coffee and pastry on the run, or sit down in comfort and enjoy some of the delightful breakfast options. Breakfast fare includes i) porridge with Hokkaido walnut and banana caramel ii) Niseko Green Farm corn fritters with Otaru cherry wood smoked bacon iii) Buttermilk pancakes with berries and ricotta or iv) baked organic free range eggs with goat's cheese, sausage & tomato.

Abucha – ideally located in the base of Suiboku, and a great place to stop on your way out for the day. A range of fresh baked breads and pastries – the fruit danishes are a must! – you can also feast on a range of sandwiches and bagels, that are made to order with a full range of tea / coffee and fruit juices available.

Downtown Café – is located on the corner of the main intersection in Hirafu. A cosy little café with dreamy sofas serving the “big breakfast” and even a vegetarian version of the big breakfast, eh wot? Give it a try. They also have great coffees and cakes.

SUIBOKU IN-HOUSE CATERED DINING

The Suiboku lofts are comfortable and the dining table substantial, so staying at home (especially after a long day of skiing) can make good sense. There are two companies that are familiar with the Suiboku kitchens and dining rooms who do a good job of catering. They are:

EN, specializing in French and Japanese cuisine, is open year-round. Their menu and services can be viewed at their website at <http://www.thenisekocompany.com/ja/content/en-dining>. Alternatively, they can be reached at +81 0136 55 8100, fax 0136 55 8101, or email en.reservations@thenisekocompany.com.

NISEKO GOURMET is open just for the Winter season. Their menu and service details can be viewed at <http://www.niseko-gourmet.com/>. Phone +81 0136 556 885 or email concierge@niseko-gourmet.com.

NOTE: The views expressed in this **Confi-Guide: Restaurants** reflect the personal views and choices of the Suiboku Concierge staff and are intended as suggestions only. We welcome the comments and views of Suiboku owners and guests on the restaurants described in this Guide and information/suggestions on other restaurants in Niseko that you may find exceptional or noteworthy.