

Japow Eco-Culture Adventure

ENVS/ROE 397 - Winter 2025/26

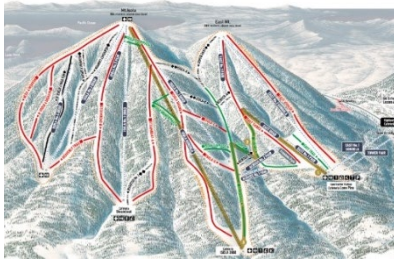
In Person Abroad Experience

3 Credit Hours

Instructor: Nate Gore, MEM / ngore@western.edu (303) 993-9468

Lead Guide: Hannah Mech / mountainnomadjp@gmail.com (970) 331-3713

Class Place and Time: Hokkaido, Japan / December 30th 2025 – January 8th 2026



Course Description

- This course is a study abroad experience taking place in Hokkaido Japan. The trip will provide opportunities for world renowned resort powder skiing, as well as an immersive cultural experience in a truly unique corner of the world. During this course, students will immerse themselves in Japanese culture while learning how to respectfully navigate the country. This trip is co-guided by Hannah Mech, Lead Guide and Founder at Mountain Nomad Adventure Company. Hannah is a half Japanese Western Alumni who focuses on authentic and impactful ski trips to Japan. She has spent half of her life in Japan and is bilingual and bi-cultural. She is very excited to show you the real sides of Japan that she knows and loves.

Three Pillars Place Based Learning

Cultural Immersion

- With a world-renowned work ethic, the Japanese have set global standards with values of honor, respect, and discipline.
- On this adventure we'll look at the outdoor industry in Japan and how these values manifest. We'll compare it with "western" business philosophies and explore the benefits and drawbacks of each.
- Being in Japan for New Years also affords us an opportunity to witness a side of Japan most don't see.
- With the few days we have in Tokyo we will celebrate Hatsumode, the first shrine visit of the new year, which also consists of different cultural activities and sightseeing.

Personal Growth

- Once we've touched down in Hokkaido, we will have the opportunity to hear first-hand how business owners, both foreign and local, have forged careers and lives for themselves in the chaotic industry that thrives under 50 feet of snow.
- We'll hear from many speakers including guides, snow forecasters, entrepreneurs, and cultural speakers.

Environmentalism

- Hokkaido doesn't let you find your feet. The unrelenting snow forces those who wish to make it their home to be adaptable, creative, and determined. During this expedition we'll speak to local forecasters about what makes this micro-climate so unique, and the threat climate change possesses. We'll explore what local people and governments are doing to combat this and reflect on what practices we can bring home with us.

Why Hokkaido?

Catching three flights, crossing the largest body of water in the world, what makes this all worth it is what sets Hokkaido apart; The snow. Despite winter being just 4 months fifty percent of Hokkaido's annual tourism is directly or indirectly a result of the snow industry. We've timed this trip to line up with when it's snowiest in this magical part of the world and will be on the mountain 5 of our 6 days in Hokkaido. While the snow is the major draw, days will also consist of exploring incredible local onsens (Traditional Japanese bathhouses), hearing stories of how entrepreneurs and business leaders in the area found their feet and visit cultural heritage sites that tell the quiet yet potent story of Hokkaido's history. Separated by just 49 kilometers, Hokkaido marks the highest point of Japan. Despite it's proximity, the culture and history of Hokkaido are rich, unique and tragic. We'll learn more about this as we explore this magical island.

- Students may use this ENVS 397. This special topic will apply for three credits of upper-level elective, that to any major or minor. Nate will be more than happy to work with each student and their advisors to identify potential substitutions and how specifically this course will fit into your individual major and field of study. **Students from all majors and programs are welcome!**
- Students are registered directly by the instructor following an application and interview with both instructor and lead guide.

Course Objectives

The objectives of ENVS 397 are for students to:

- Utilize place based learning practices to grow from tourists to well rounded global citizens.
- Gain an immersive and truly unique oppounities to execute ethical tourism practices within the context of international environmental studies and outdoor recreation
- Bring your specialized background and educational interests to this unique learning laboratory to collaboratively create a unique final deliverable.

Course Costs

- **Payment/Cancellation Information:** Payment/Cancellation Information: The cost of the program is **\$4,600 Total Cost (\$4,060 Program costs + \$540 (3 credits X \$180.00/credit)** cost of credit for undergraduate students and community members. Program costs include all breakfasts, lunches, and dinners.
 - Students will want to bring around \$200 to cover snacks and souvenirs. program cost does not include airfare, visa, gear, personal needs, individual travel, or other activities outside the established program schedule. Students are required to bring their own winter clothing, snow layers, helmet, goggles etc., Students may want to bring their own skis/snowboards and boots. Rentals are available but bringing your own gear is recommended. This trip will utilize the five consecutive days at Rusutsu (included in the Full Epic and Epic Local Pass). You are responsible for purchasing your ski pass, or individual day tickets outside of the costs of this course. Students should also budget an additional expense for flights, which may be around \$1,500 - \$2,000.
 - A **\$1,533.33** non-refundable deposit is due on or before September 25, 2025. The final balance **\$3,066.67** is due on or before October 17th, 2025. No refunds will be made after October 17th, 2025, nor will refunds be made to students do not present for the program or for those who drop out after the course begin
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- **Grading Criteria (points – grade range)**
 1. **Professionalism and Presence 90%:** Each day, your attendance, participation, and respectful interactions are assessed. With this course being field based in a foreign country, you are expected to be 100% and practicing exceptional expedition behavior. We will be relying on one another for day-to-day tasks. There will be bountiful leadership opportunities for you to step into, while also respecting the judgement and guidance of the instructor team. Each day we will be studying the natural and cultural history of the mountain communities of Japan.
 2. **Cross disciplinary final project 10%:** The premise of global citizenship is formulating strategies to learn from the places we visit, help when we its appropriate, and translate these lessons into our personal lives after we depart. Throughout our time in the country, we will be working together through our place-based curriculum for leaving a lasting, sustainable impact in places we travel, and bringing these lessons back to our respective homes. By the end of the course, you will have a great understanding of various aspects of local Japanese culture with an intention of how that relates to your major/interest. The final project will be presenting your individually chosen research topic to the class.

Course Schedule (Subject to Change with Notice)

***Prior to the course, you will be expected to attend weekly briefings with that instructor team and other students. Dates and times TBD**

DAY 1 – DECEMBER 30: Tokyo – Arrival / Travel Day

WELCOME TO JAPAN! Whether you're arriving earlier or flying in on this day, please plan to arrive at Haneda **International Airport (HND)** by the evening of December 30th at the latest. Most flights from the U.S. will depart on December 29th due to the international date line.

Students will arrive with a personal bag and possibly ski gear. Transportation will be coordinated from the airport to a traditional **Ryokan (Japanese inn)** where we'll settle in for our first night.

Dinner will be informal and a chance to explore Tokyo's local food scene. After a long travel day, we'll rest up for the start of our course.

DAY 2 – DECEMBER 31: Tokyo – New Year's Eve Cultural Immersion

We'll begin the day with a **course briefing**, exploring cultural competency, expedition behavior, and the goals of our cross-disciplinary personal projects.

New Year's Eve in Japan is rich in tradition. We'll visit a **Shinto shrine** before the crowds, where students can purchase **Omamori (protective charms)** and draw **Omikuji (paper fortunes)**. These customs are central to welcoming a new year in Japan with health and intention.

Lunch and city exploration will follow, with time to take in the vibrancy of Tokyo. We will hit a 100-yen store and get journalling materials for journalling and activities to keep throughout the trip. In the evening, we'll gather for a reflective group dinner and enjoy **Toshikoshi Soba**, a symbolic noodle dish eaten to "cross into the new year."

We'll end the evening with journaling and a brief debrief session back at the Ryokan.

DAY 3 – JANUARY 1: Tokyo → Hokkaido – Travel to Rusutsu

An early morning departure will get us to Haneda Airport, where we'll fly to **New Chitose Airport (CTS) in Hokkaido**. From there, we'll travel to the mountain town of **Rusutsu**.

Upon arrival, we'll check in to our accommodations at **Mountain Memories Lodge**, have dinner together, and be introduced to the Rusutsu area and course outline by our hosts **Henry and Noah**.

This evening will focus on grounding ourselves in place, orientation, and trip intentions.

*Set up rentals for those who need it

DAY 4 – JANUARY 2: Rusutsu – Ski & Curriculum Day

Our first full day of skiing! After breakfast at the lodge, we'll begin the day with guided morning skiing or snowboarding across Rusutsu's diverse terrain.

Lunch will be at **East Base**, followed by optional rest or reflection time back at the lodge. An **onsen soak** will give us time to relax before dinner.

Curriculum will be threaded throughout the day, focusing on environment, wellness, and adaptation to mountain life in Hokkaido.

DAY 5 – JANUARY 3: Rusutsu – Exploration & Guest Speaker

Another day of morning guided skiing, with lunch at Isola Base.

After skiing, we'll continue our **cultural immersion** with an evening onsen and guest speaker session back at the lodge. Dinner at the lodge

DAY 6 – JANUARY 4: Rusutsu – Filming & Storytelling

Morning skiing continues, followed by lunch at Steamboat Café.

The afternoon will include **filming content for Western Colorado University**, focusing on storytelling, perspective, and place-based learning.

Dinner will be back at the lodge with continued conversation about our place in outdoor tourism and cross-cultural exchange.

DAY 7 – JANUARY 5: Rusutsu → Shiraoi → Lake Toya – Ainu Culture & Relocation

Today we pack up and travel to **Shiraoi**, where we'll visit the [Upopoy National Ainu Museum](#) and Park to explore Indigenous history and cultural resilience.

After lunch in town, we'll head to a **Ryokan near Lake Toya**, where we'll wind down and reflect on the intersections of outdoor recreation and cultural learning.

DAY 8 – JANUARY 6: Lake Toya → Rusutsu – Personal Growth & Night Skiing

The morning will include intention setting and personal development exercises, followed by lunch at MOGMOG Soup Curry in Toya.

In the afternoon, we'll return to Rusutsu for a final afternoon and **night ski session**, giving students one more chance to engage with the snow and test their physical and mental resilience.

Dinner will be late and celebratory.

DAY 9 – JANUARY 7: Rusutsu → Jozankei → Sapporo – Final Reflection & Celebration

Our final full day will start with a checking out of the hotel and hitting a morning ski session and lunch at West Base.

In the afternoon, we'll visit the **onsen town of Jozankei** for a relaxing soak and walk-through of this culturally significant area.

Evening will bring us into **Sapporo** for a farewell dinner (perhaps even [Round One](#) for those feeling celebratory!).

DAY 10 – JANUARY 8: Sapporo → Tokyo – Travel & Departure Day

We'll have breakfast in Sapporo, then head to the airport for our return flight to Tokyo and final connections home.

This has been a course rich in culture, nature, and reflection. A journey to remember.

Statement of Responsibility, Release and Agreement to Participate in an International Program in Japan

****Do not sign here. Sign agreement in official course application.**

I, _____, have agreed to participate in the **Japan: Eco-Cultural Experience Program** ("the Program"), located in Hokkaido, Japan by Western Colorado University (University). I understand and hereby acknowledge that my participation in the Program is wholly voluntary. In consideration of being allowed to participate in the Program, I hereby agree as follows:

1. I hereby represent and warrant that I am and will be covered throughout the Program by a policy of comprehensive health and accident insurance that provides coverage for injuries and illnesses I sustain or experience overseas, and, more specifically, in the country in which I will be living and /or traveling while on the Program. By my signature below, I certify that my health insurance policy will adequately cover me while outside the United States; and, I absolve the University of all responsibility and liability for any injuries (including death), illnesses, claims damages, charges, bills and /or expenses I may incur while I am abroad. I agree to report to the University and physical or mental condition I have that may require special medical attention or accommodation during the Program at least thirty (30) days prior to departure.
2. I understand the University reserves the right to make changes to the Program itinerary or to cancel all or part of the Program at any time and for any reason, with or without notice, and the University shall not be liable for any loss whatsoever to me by reason of any such cancellation or change. If all or part of the Program is cancelled, prevented or rendered impossible or unfeasible by any act or regulation of any public authority, or by reason of riot, strike, act of God, epidemic, war, civil unrest, terrorism or declaration of disaster by federal, state, or foreign government and the Program is cancelled (in whole or in part), it is understood and agreed that there shall be no claim for damages by me or on my behalf and the University's obligations as to the Program shall be deemed waived by me. The University is not responsible for penalties assessed by air carriers that my result due to operational and/or itinerary changes, regardless of whether the University makes a flight arrangement. Any additional expense resulting from the above will be paid by me. The University reserves the right to substitute hotels or accommodations or housing of a similar category at any time. Specific room and housing assignments are within the sole discretion of the University.
3. I understand and acknowledge that the University assumes no responsibility or liability for any delays, delayed or changed departure or arrival times, fare changes, dishonors of hotel, airline or vehicle rental reservations, missed carrier connections, sickness, disease, injuries, losses, damages, weather, strikes, acts of God, circumstances beyond the control of the University, force majeure, war, quarantine, civil unrest, public health risks, criminal activity, terrorism, expense, accident, injuries, damage to property, bankruptcies of airlines or other service providers, inconveniences, cessation of operations, mechanical defects, failure of negligence of any nature howsoever caused in connection with any accommodations, restaurant, transportation, or other service or for any substitution of hotels or of common carriers beyond the University's control, with or without notice, or for any additional expense occasioned by any of the foregoing. If due to weather, flight schedules or other uncontrollable factors I am required to spend additional nights, the University will not be responsible for my hotel, transfers, meal costs or other expenses. My baggage and personal property are at my risk entirely throughout the Program and any travel incident thereto. The right is reserved by the University, in its sole discretion, to cancel the Program or any aspect thereof prior to

departure; and, in the University's sole discretion, to require that all participants return to the United States if the University determines or believes that any person will be in danger if the Program or any aspect thereof is continued.

4. The University reserves the right, in its sole discretion; to decline to accept or retain me in the Program at any time should my actions or general behavior impede the operation of the Program or the rights or welfare of any person. Similarly, if my conduct violates any policy or procedure of the University, which I hereby agree shall apply to my conduct while I am abroad, I understand that I may be required to leave the Program in the sole discretion of the University, and I may be referred to the appropriate University officials for further disciplinary action. I understand and hereby acknowledge that I will be subject to discipline by the University, as well as by any institution I attend or in whose facilities I reside or learn in connection with the Program, if I violate either or both institution's rules, policies or student conduct codes. I hereby consent to the jurisdiction of all such institutions to discipline me, separately and cumulatively, for any instance of misconduct which occurs during the Program or during my time abroad. I agree not to challenge in any forum or proceeding the authority or jurisdiction of the University to discipline me at any time for my misconduct abroad, during or in connection with the Program or any travel related thereto.
5. I understand and hereby acknowledge that I have reviewed the U.S. State Department Consular Information concerning travel to, in and around Japan at http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/tips_1232.html and travel alerts at http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/tw/tw_1764.html. I am aware of and understand the risks and dangers of travel to, in and around Japan including but not limited to the dangers to my own health and personal safety posed by crime, dangerous or vicious animals, adverse weather conditions, remoteness and, in some cases, great distance to adequate medical care. I hereby assume, knowingly and voluntarily, each of these risks and all of the other risks which could arise out of or occur during my travel to, from, in or around Japan. The University also recommends signing up for the STEP-Smart Traveler Enrollment Program at www.travel.state.gov (FREE).
6. Please note that while this course involves travel outside of the United States, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) cannot be enforced in other countries. As a result, accessibility standards and accommodations may differ from those you may be familiar with in the U.S.

During this course, you will be required to participate in various field trips and activities, including travel to locations in and around Japan. These activities may involve walking long distances in areas with uneven terrain, historical sites with limited accessibility, and older infrastructure that may not accommodate mobility devices.

We encourage students and participants to communicate any accessibility needs as far in advance so that we may work with our international partners to explore possible accommodations. While we will make every effort to assist, accommodations in some locations may be limited or unavailable due to local regulations and infrastructure.

7. If I choose to travel to locations other than the course's required field trips, I hereby acknowledge that these trips are not sponsored or controlled by the University, that my participation in them is not required by the University and that my participation in them is wholly voluntary. I understand and hereby acknowledge that I will face an increased and inherent risk of injury, disease or death due to these independent trips. I further acknowledge that during the trip I may be a great distance and many hours from the nearest medical care or treatment, that available medical treatment is not likely to equate with the level of care available in many U.S. hospitals. I hereby assume, knowingly

and voluntarily, all risk of injury, death, and property damage in connection with the about trips, as well as my travel to, from, in or around Japan. I agree not to travel to any other country or location prohibited by the University during the Program (including without limitation periods of independent travel) without the prior written consent of the University.

8. I agree not to use or possess any illegal drugs or substances, understand that doing so will place me and others at risk. I agree that if I (or my minor child or ward) fail to abide by agreements herein, I (or he/she) will be prohibited from further participation in this program. I agree to conduct myself in a manner that will comply with the regulations of the program and if inappropriate behavior occurs, I understand I will be dismissed from the program.
9. If I should become sick with any travel inhibiting illness, (Ex. COVID-19, influenza, streptococcus pneumonia, ect.) within/before the initial travel timeline, I understand that I may forfeit my ability to partake in this field experience. If this would happen, Western would try extensively to refund the student, depending on expenses already incurred. If the student should become sick or severely injured during the abroad course, the instructor team would put forth all resources to ensure a safe and successful recovery. In extreme cases, students may be subject to evacuation or quarantine.
10. This is a release of liability. If under eighteen years of age, signature of parent or guardian is also required. If custody is shared by both parents, each parent must sign this form. If one parent/guardian has sole custody, the custodial parent/guardian must sign.
11. As lawful consideration for being permitted by Center for Learning & Innovation and Western Colorado University to participate in this program, I (we) do hereby release from any legal liability, agree not to sue, claim against, attach the property of or prosecute and further agree to defend indemnify, and hold harmless Center for Learning & Innovation, Western Colorado University and the Trustees of the State Universities of Colorado, and all of their officers, directors, member, organizations, agents and employees of any injury or death caused by or resulting from participation in this program, whether or not such injury or death was caused by negligence from any other cause.

This agreement, made in the State of Colorado, County of Gunnison, shall in all respects be governed in accordance with the laws of the State of Colorado. Any action brought by either party to enforce any of the terms or conditions of the agreement shall be brought only in such counties. Each party consents to the jurisdiction and venue of the appropriate court in such counties.

I acknowledge that I have read and understood this Waiver of Liability and have signed it voluntarily in consideration of the Trustees agreement to allow me (or my minor child or ward) to participate in this program and acknowledge that by signing below, I am giving consent for medical treatment to the coordinator and medical personnel in an emergency. It is understood that such treatment shall be solely at my expense, and I agree to reimburse Western Colorado University for any expense it might suffer as a result of said injury or treatment.