# Japan

## Spring Highlights

## Hokkaido Extension



**Okinawa Rail by Glen Valentine**

*Our Highlights of Japan tour during spring takes in the very best of what Japan has to offer during this fabulous time of year when all the country's resident species and summer migrants are present and actively singing, displaying and nesting – indeed a magical time to visit 'The Land of the Rising Sun'.*

*The wetlands and forests on Honshu support the extremely localized Japanese Marsh Warbler, Japanese Reed Bunting, Long-billed Plover, Latham's Snipe, endemic Copper and Japanese Green Pheasants, Japanese Green Woodpecker, Japanese Yellow Bunting, Japanese and Brown-headed Thrushes, Japanese Grosbeak and Japanese Accentor, all of which will be targets on this trip. On the offshore island of Miyake-jima we hope to find the richly coloured and endemic Izu Thrush and Owston's Tit, while other specialties include Japanese Wood Pigeon, Styan's Grasshopper Warbler and Ijima's Leaf Warbler. We conclude the main part of this Japan Spring Highlights tour in the Ryukyu Islands where we spend our time on the small islands of Okinawa and Amami in search of a host of exciting endemics and near-endemics. The endangered Okinawa (Pryer's) Woodpecker recently discovered and highly threatened Okinawa Rail, stunning Ryukyu & Okinawa Robins, Ryukyu Minivet,*

*Amami Woodcock, Lidth's Jay and Amami Thrush are just some of the islands' tantalizing species that we will be searching for during our explorations there!*

*Japan's northern-most island of Hokkaido probably ranks as the country's most scenic and is certainly Japan's most rugged and wilderness-rich island. Home to several of north-east Asia's most iconic birds, we will explore the eastern side of the island in search of mouth-watering species such as the magnificent Red-crowned (Japanese) Crane, Hazel Grouse, Black Woodpecker, Ural Owl, Long-tailed Rosefinch, Middendorff's and Sakhalin Grasshopper Warblers, Japanese Robin, Siberian Rubythroat, Grey Bunting and the regal Blakiston's Fish Owl amongst a wealth of other great birds and wildlife.*

## *Itinerary & Map*

### Spring Highlights

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| **Day 1** | **Arrival in Tokyo** |
| **Day 2** | **Tokyo & Tonegawa to Karuizawa** |
| **Day 3** | **Karuizawa area** |
| **Day 4** | **Karuizawa to Gotemba via Mount Fuji** |
| **Day 5** | **Gotemba to Tokyo, ferry to Miyake-jima** |
| **Day 6** | **Miyake-jima, ferry to Tokyo** |
| **Day 7** | **Tokyo, flight to Amami Oshima** |
| **Day 8** | **Amami Oshima** |
| **Day 9** | **Amami Oshima, flight to Okinawa** |
| **Day 10** | **Okinawa** |
| **Day 11** | **Okinawa, flight to Tokyo & final departure** |

### Hokkaido Extension

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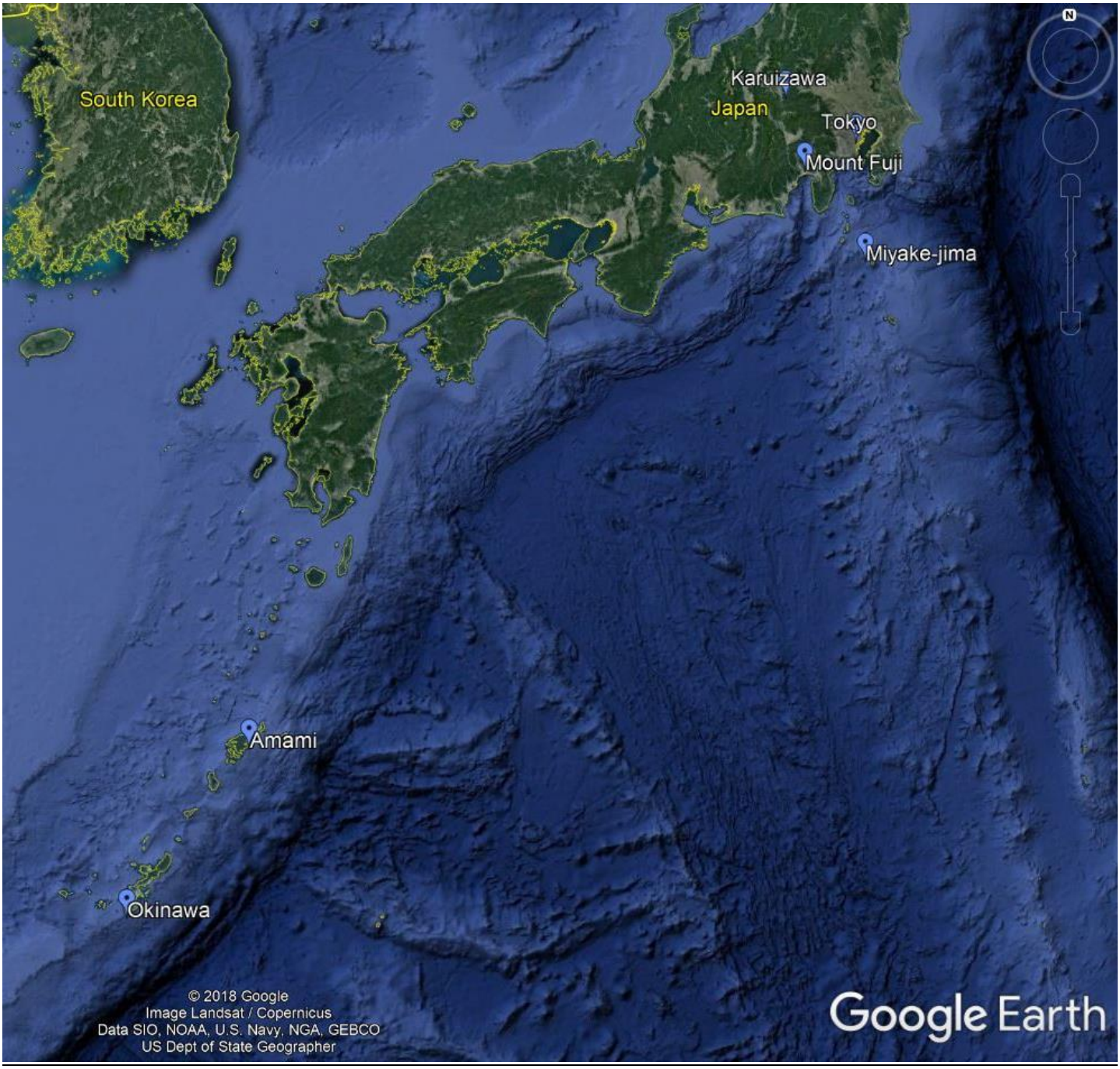
| **Day 1** | **Tokyo, flight to Kushiro, Hokkaido** |
| **Day 2** | **Kushiro to Nemuro, Lake Furen & Kiritappu area** |
| **Day 3** | **Nemuro to Yoroushi (Shiretoko Peninsula)** |
| **Day 4** | **Rausu area to Shari/Abashiri (Shiretoko Peninsula)** |
| **Day 5** | **Shari/Abashiri, flight to Tokyo & final departure** |

## Spring Highlights



# Hokkaido Extension



## *Birding sites in detail*



**Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker by Dušan Brinkhuizen**

**Greater Tokyo area.** This morning we will begin our search for two extremely localized species whose breeding ranges are centred on the remaining wetlands and reedbeds in the greater Tokyo area. These are the extremely scarce, range-restricted, and little-known Japanese Marsh Warbler and the attractive, black-headed Japanese Reed Bunting. We may have to put in a fair amount of time and effort to find the Reed Warbler, although they do often perform their aerial display flight above the reeds at this time of year and our chances of seeing this rarity are excellent. Grey-faced Buzzards are sometimes seen perched up in the adjacent tall trees or on neighbouring powerlines along with Black Kite (sometimes split as Black-eared), Oriental Turtle Dove, the near-endemic Brown-eared Bulbul, White-cheeked Starling, attractive Bull-headed Shrike, Grey-capped (Oriental) Greenfinch and Eurasian Tree Sparrow and if we are extremely fortunate we may even encounter a Eurasian Bittern, a rare species in Japan. Yellow Bittern is more regular and is often seeing skulking in dense reedbeds or in low flight between reed clumps. Common Snipes lurk at the water's edge along with Oriental Reed and Black-browed Reed Warblers, while Eurasian Skylarks (sometimes split as Japanese Skylark) is likely to be seen and heard in the surrounding fields. Great Cormorant, Great Egret, Grey Heron, Little Grebe, and Eurasian Coot occupy the open water habitats.

**Karuizawa area.** Karuizawa is situated in the forested mountains of central Honshu to the west of Tokyo and is one of the country's prime birding localities. Most of our time will be spent along the network of forest trails



**Copper Pheasant by Glen Valentine**

and tracks in and around the town searching for several rare and elusive species that include Copper Pheasant, Ural Owl and Japanese Yellow Bunting. We stand a good chance of seeing the bunting, but we'd have to be very fortunate to encounter the pheasant and the owl. Copper Pheasant is at least much more readily seen during the frigid winter months when they venture down into the warmer valleys around Karuizawa town. While searching for these specialties we will also keep a lookout for Great Spotted Woodpecker, Lesser Cuckoo, Ashy Minivet, the scarce and shy Japanese and Brown-headed Thrushes, charismatic Brown Dipper, miniscule Eurasian Wren, the brilliant Siberian Blue Robin, the shy Asian Stubtail, beautiful Narcissus and Blue-and-white Flycatchers, Asian Brown Flycatcher, and the scarce, attractive and impressive Japanese Grosbeak.



**Varied Tit by Dušan Brinkhuizen**

A trip to a nearby river may produce the beautiful but scarce and shy Mandarin Duck, Crested Kingfisher, and the rare Long-billed Plover, while we also hope to find Chestnut-eared and Meadow Buntings, Japanese Green Pheasant, Siberian Stonechat, Azure-winged Magpie, Large-billed and Carrion Crows and the colourful and localized Chestnut-cheeked Starling in the surrounding scrub, bushes, trees, and fields. Another specialty that we hope to encounter here in the late afternoon or early evening is the migratory Latham's Snipe that breeds in central and northern Japan between April and August.

**Mount Fuji.** The majestic Mount Fuji, Japan's highest volcano at 3 776m (12 388ft) and one of the world's most famous and impressive mountains will be an imposing site throughout our time here, adding a whole new dimension to our birding experience.



**Japanese Murrelet by Glen Valentine**

We'll be birding the coniferous and deciduous forest that cloak the lower northern and eastern slopes of the mountain. Target species in these tall forests include White-bellied Green Pigeon, Northern (Rufous) Hawk-Cuckoo, Red-flanked Bluetail, Eastern Crowned and Japanese Leaf Warblers, Goldcrest, Eurasian Bullfinch (the race here sometimes split as Grey-bellied Bullfinch) and Black-faced Bunting, while we may also encounter more common and widespread species such as Oriental Cuckoo,

White Wagtail and Olive-backed Pipit.

We'll also spend time searching for the localized Japanese Accentor that moves up in elevation from the surrounding forested valleys during the summer months to breed in the scrubby alpine habitat around the treeline of Mt. Fuji and surrounding mountains. While searching for the accentor we are likely to encounter many of the species mentioned above, and we might also be fortunate to find Siberian, Japanese and Brown-headed Thrushes.



**Lidth's Jay by Glen Valentine**

**Miyake-jima.** The island of Miyake-jima is one of the seven small volcanic islands that make up the Izu Islands chain. Miyake-jima supports several highly localized specialties and we'll be searching intently for these species during our time on the island. The striking Izu Thrush will be one such species and fortunately it is pleasantly common as is Ijima's Leaf Warbler, a species that only breeds on the Izu Islands and is virtually unknown on its non-breeding grounds, presumably The Philippines. Another Izu specialty is Styan's Grasshopper (Pleske's) Warbler, and this small-island specialist skulks about in the dense coastal vegetation. Other target species include the large, handsome, and localized Japanese Wood Pigeon, Japanese Bush Warbler and the eye-catching Owston's (Izu) Tit (recently split from Varied Tit). We will also be on the lookout for the gorgeous Japanese Robin and covies of Chinese Bamboo Partridge, although this attractive gamebird has been introduced here.

**Miyake-jima - Tokyo ferry.** We will take the ferry between Tokyo and Miyake-jima hoping to encounter several seabirds during the journey. We have a very good chance of finding Streaked Shearwaters, whilst intent scanning of the ocean might pick up Tristram's Storm Petrel, Sooty and Short-tailed Shearwaters, Red-necked Phalarope and both Black-footed and Laysan Albatrosses, with some luck, the range-restricted Japanese Murrelet.



**Okinawa Robin by David Hoddinott**

**Amami Oshima – Naze area.** We hope to encounter one of Amami's most prized and sought-after endemics near to the small town of Naze, the vibrantly coloured Lidth's Jay. Other noteworthy species on offer here include the scarce and unobtrusive Japanese Wood Pigeon, Ryukyu Minivet, Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker and Japanese White-eye. The interior forests of the

island host some spectacular endemics and we will work hard to try and locate every single one of these specialities during our stay here.



White-backed Woodpecker by Glen Valentine

**Amami Oshima – Kinsakubaru Forest Reserve.** The Kinsakubaru Forest Reserve protects the lush, extensive, and verdant forests that cloak the hills above Naze. Here we hope to locate the rare and endemic Amami Thrush. As dusk approaches, we will search the gravel roads for the endemic Amami Woodcock, Ryukyu Scops Owl and if we are extremely lucky maybe even the little known and seldom-recorded Japanese Scops Owl. We also have a chance of finding Amami Rabbit, an endangered and endearing species endemic to this island.

In the early mornings, we shall watch out for Amami Woodcock and Amami Thrush along the gravel, forest tracks and road-edge should we not have found them yet. We'll also have an excellent chance of finding the beautiful Lidth's Jay. This attractive corvid is reasonably common here but shy and sometimes difficult to observe. However, we are almost certain to achieve excellent views of these gems during our time on the island. Other species that we will be on the lookout for this morning include the endemic *owstoni* subspecies of White-backed Woodpecker that is likely to be split as Owston's Woodpecker, the scarce and furtive Japanese Wood Pigeon, very shy Whistling Green Pigeon, the rare, recently split Ryukyu Flycatcher (from Narcissus) and Ryukyu Robin, split from Okinawa Robin, Varied and Japanese Tits and Japanese White-eye.

**Okinawa.** The name 'Yanbaru' means 'Mountains and fields', and we have a full day and a half to explore this scenic and well-forested part of the island that is mostly encompassed within the Yanbaru National Park. The star bird in the 'Itajii', or evergreen oak forests, is probably the rare and furtive Okinawa (Pryer's) Woodpecker, the rarest extant woodpecker on earth. This mega-rarity is listed as critically endangered and is one of the rarest birds on Earth with an estimated population of fewer than 600 individuals!



Ryukyu Minivet by Glen Valentine

Our primary target species on the island will be the stunning Okinawa Rail, a bird described to science only as recently as 1981. We are likely to hear them calling in the area, and with patience and perseverance and the knowledge of the most reliable "hangouts" for this rare species, we stand an excellent chance of obtaining a view of one of these skulking, flightless rallids. They sometimes come to the road-edge and forest-edge in the early morning to feed but if we cannot find one at or just after dawn we will search again in the evening when singletons and pairs can

sometimes be seen roosting on open branches at the edge of the forest, on occasion even within arm's reach from the road-edge.



**Amami Woodcock by David Hoddinott**

After arriving in the city of Naha, on the southern end of Okinawa Island we will begin the drive up to the northern end of the island. We'll start birding after arrival, having a good chance of picking up several Ryukyu endemics such as Ryukyu Minivet, Whistling (Ryukyu) Green Pigeon, and the stunning Okinawa Robin (recently split from Ryukyu).

In the evening, we will try for Ryukyu Scops Owl along the forested roads near our accommodation and we even have a chance of encountering the little known Japanese Scops Owl (recently split from Collared Scops Owl), Northern Boobook and Okinawa Rail on its night roost. This island, along with Amami-Oshima is also known for its large population of 'Habu', a species of viper that is commonly seen, especially at night.

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**Kiritappu.** The lush forests around Kiritappu host several fantastic species that we may have already seen on Honshu such as White-bellied Green Pigeon, Japanese Robin and Narcissus Flycatcher, but we'll also be on the



**Red-crowned Cranes by David Hoddinott**

lookout for a number of other specialties that lurk in the verdant coniferous and deciduous forests that cover large parts of this area. One elusive species we can try and track down is Hazel Grouse. Other species we'll be on the search for include the impressive Black Woodpecker, the uncommon and shy Siberian Thrush, Sakhalin Leaf Warbler, and the furtive Grey Bunting.



**Blakiston's Fish Owl by Glen Valentine**

Other noteworthy species include the striking White-backed and Grey-headed Woodpeckers, Marsh Tit, Grey-headed Bullfinch, Hawfinch and Eurasian Siskin. If we are fortunate, we may even encounter a Eurasian Woodcock standing motionless alongside a boggy forest stream or scurrying quickly across the leaf-litter.

At night we can try to find the beautiful Ural Owl, a rare and elusive denizen of these cool, temperate forests. We also stand a chance of finding Oriental Scops Owl and Grey Nightjar during our nocturnal forays.

**Lake Furen.** Around the vast Lake Furen we will concentrate on finding the area's various wetland-edge specialists, top of the list being the stately and majestic Red-crowned (Japanese) Crane that breeds in the marshes in this area during the summer months. Latham's (Japanese) Snipe is another major drawcard to this area during Japan's spring and summer months as they can regularly be seen displaying over the marsh. Common Reed Buntings and Black-browed Reed Warblers are also present in fair numbers, while the magnificent White-tailed Eagle sometimes appears. In the surrounding brush and rank, weedy vegetation we hope to locate a few singing Siberian Rubythroats, the males of which are almost impossibly brilliant and wonderful to admire perched up and singing their hearts out at the tops of bushes and other vantage points, especially in comparison to how they usually behave – or indeed misbehave - on their wintering grounds further south in Subcontinental and South-East Asia!



**White-tailed Eagle by Glen Valentine**

Here we will also focus our attention on teasing out the three species of skulking *Locustella* warblers that this area is famous for during this time of the year. These are the tiny and heavily streaked Lanceolated Warbler, Middendorff's Grasshopper Warbler and Sakhalin Grasshopper Warbler (recently split from Gray's Grasshopper Warbler). Russet Sparrows also occupy this habitat along

with the very pretty but rather shy Long-tailed Rosefinch, another big target species in this magical part of Japan.

Various varieties of waterbird should also be present on the lake, and we hope to find and obtain good scope views of Red-necked Grebe, as well as Greater Scaup and Common Merganser, and with a bit of luck maybe a Falcated Duck. We'll also scan out to sea on a few occasions where we are likely to encounter at least a few oceanic species that mainly occur here in winter but that usually linger into spring and early summer in small numbers such as Stejneger's and Black Scoters, the spectacular Harlequin Duck, Rhinoceros Auklet, Spectacled Guillemot, Red-throated and Pacific Loons (Divers), Slaty-backed and Glaucous Gulls, Black-legged Kittiwake and Japanese (Temminck's) and Pelagic Cormorants.



**Ural Owl by Glen Valentine**

**Shiretoko Peninsula.** The Shiretoko Peninsula in extreme north-eastern Hokkaido is home to a few pairs of Blakiston's Fish Owl, and we hope that our patience will be rewarded with superb views of this absolute beauty! It may require us staying up late into the night, but we certainly have an excellent chance of seeing this spectacular bird. Staring into the giant eyes of this nocturnal giant, the largest owl on Earth must rank as one of the world's great birding experiences!

During our daylight hours in the area, there are countless options depending on which species we want to see. The Shiretoko Peninsula is cloaked in some magnificent temperate forests and gives access to a high alpine pass. These forests harbour all the forest species of Hokkaido so we can concentrate on anything that we have missed until this point or want better views of. The views from the high pass out to the Kuril Islands are worth it alone! There is also no shortage of coastal vantage points where we can scan the Sea of Okhotsk for coastal and pelagic birds and mammals.

## *Tour Grading & Key*

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| **Overall Ease** |  | Easy to moderate. Suitable for all birding / wildlife interest levels and most mobility capabilities. Can be a little tiring due to travel and relatively long days. |
| **Birding Ease** |  | Undemanding, most species provide good visuals. A small number of scarce/rare target species. |
| **Accommodation** |  | Mostly good, some lodges are simple with shared and/or basic washroom facilities (minshuku). |
| **Walking / Trails** |  | Reasonably easy. Most walking is on flat terrain or on wide trails. |
| **Vehicles / Roads** |  | We use a coach for most of the tour. Some drives are long, mostly on sealed roads in good repair. A few internal flights & a ferry. |
| **Photography** |  | Good+ to excellent. |
| **Annoyances** |  | Limited, ferry ride could be rough (weather dependent). |

## *Financial Arrangements and Important Notes*

Tour dates, prices, single supplement, approximate flight costs and tour spaces are displayed on our website.

Tour inclusions:

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 11 for those on the Spring Highlights tour;
- All meals from lunch on day 1 to breakfast on day 5 for those on the Hokkaido Islands extension;
- All lodgings;
- All ground transportation during the tour;
- Ferry between Miyake-jima & Tokyo;
- All reserve entrance fees;
- All guiding services
- Tips for local guides, drivers and services.

Tour exclusions:

- Visa fees;
- ANY flights;
- Any beverages (including bottled water or mini-bar charges at hotels);
- Optional excursions;
- Special gratuities;
- Telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.

**Single Supplement**: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

**Tipping**: Tipping is NOT customary in Japan. However, if you feel that your Rockjumper leaders have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them.

- **Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing. The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates.**
- **Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registrations, a small group supplement will be offered to confirm the tour.**
- **Tour prices are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.**
- **The designated tour leader/s may be changed at short due to unforeseen circumstances.**
- **The itinerary is indicative only. Changes may need to be made to the order in which the tour is conducted, or some of the venues we visit closer to departure. We will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.**

- Much of our time is spent in vehicles, as we do have to cover fair distances to get to the best birding areas. The more luggage you pack the less room there is in the vehicle, so it is important for the comfort of your fellow travellers that you do not over-pack. Kindly stick to 20kg (44lb) for check in luggage and 8kg (+-18lb) for hand luggage.
- You should expect several long days, potentially without mid-day breaks in order to maximise our chances of finding all of the countries' special species, as the sun rises early and sets late in Japan at this time of year.
- Accommodations are of a good standard throughout the tour. We will do our utmost to make your stay as comfortable as possible, but at times we may experience maintenance problems that are beyond our control. In the remote areas, like in northern Okinawa, we opt for the best available accommodation; however, this is sometimes below the standard of what you may have come to expect but is always clean and comfortable.
- Some accommodations during the tour may have shared washroom facilities.
- This tour does not require a high level of fitness, but participants should be in good general health as much of the birding will be done on foot and may require walking for several hours at a time.
- Should you have any physical limitations, please notify us in advance of departure.

## *Arrival and Departure Details*

The Spring Highlights tour departs from our hotel near Narita Airport, Tokyo (IATA: NRT) in the evening on day 1. As this is an arrival day, you are free to arrive at any time, but preferably before 16:00 to meet up for a welcome dinner at approximately 19:00. The tour will conclude in Tokyo after our flight from Okinawa around late-morning of day 11.

The Hokkaido Extension will depart from Tokyo's Haneda Airport, Tokyo (IATA: HND) on day 1 and conclude in the early afternoon on day 5 at Haneda Airport, Tokyo (IATA: HND).

**If arriving or departing from Tokyo's Narita Airport there is a shuttle bus that can be used to transfer between airports, the cost of this is approximately $50.**

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your Tour Confirmation package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

Haneda Airport, Tokyo (IATA: HND) handles most of Japan's domestic flights and premier international business flight routes. Narita International Airport, Tokyo (IATA: NRT) handles most of Japan's leisure international flights.

Visa requirements differ by country, nationality of the traveller and duration and purpose of your intended stay. It may be necessary to obtain a visa or an electronic travel authorization in advance of your travel. It is therefore vitally important that you check with your travel agent/consulate/embassy for exact visa requirements.

**DO NOT book any flights until the Rockjumper Team have officially confirmed the tour.**