

# Hokkaido Winter Landscape Adventure 2024

Feb 17, 2024

Wow! That was the longest period I've gone without a post since at least 12 years ago, possibly the longest period since I started the Podcast back in September 2005. My apologies for the hiatus, although I can assure you it was not simply me being lazy. I'll explain as briefly as possible, but as you know I have three Japan tours that I run each winter, with the first being what I call the Hokkaido Winter Landscape Adventure, which starts towards the end of the first week in January each year. I'm going to update you on that trip shortly.



Now, the cool thing is, as I mentioned in a brief post before my Top Ten post for 2023, I bought a drone. A DJI Air 3, as I wanted to create a video to share the beautiful locations that we visited during my Hokkaido Landscape Tour with you, and during the 9 days that I was at home after that trip, I spent time pretty much completing my editing of the video and got started on creating the background music, but got set back a little by spending some time looking into a new server for my various websites.

One takeaway from that was I'd like to warn you if you don't already know this, but when you look at reviews to find the best server provider you'll almost invariably see Bluehost come out on top. They were less than half the price of my dedicated server that I've used for several years now, but I was looking at VPS or virtual private server, in a bid to bring costs down. Technology has moved on since I got my "dedi" and you don't need the power I was paying for to serve websites up quickly now.

There was also a problem that I was trying to circumvent, which was that I was being forced to migrate my CentOS server to AlmaLinux because CentOS is being EOL'd, and there were some critical components that I used that did



not have a version compatible with AlmaLinux, so they were blocking my migration, which had to be completed with the next few months. Then though, when I logged in to my new Bluehost server, I was amazed to not only be presented with the same migration warning, but their implementation was blocked just like my old server, and it was brand new!

I asked if they could provide me with an AlmaLinux server out of the box, and they did not have a solution, and at this point, that's just laziness on their part. So I requested a refund, and this took them almost three weeks to process. I was appalled by the quality of their support, and product, and feel that they

must be paying a lot of money to reviewers to get their name on the top of all the best provider lists. Whatever quality Bluehost may have once boasted about is no longer an attribute they can claim to own, and that little excursion cost me another full day.

At that point, I had to prepare to leave for the first of my two Wildlife Tours, which went great. I got back from that trip a week ago today, and I tried again for a few days to complete the video and get it published, it's almost ready, but then the refund from Bluehost finally came through, and I was pulled back into my server migration project, because this has to be done soon, and I felt I could fit it in, during pockets of

downtime. Then, as is always the case, once I got started, I couldn't stop, and then my main server went down as I made some changes, so it was all or nothing, and that took the best side of two full days to complete.

My server is now running nicely in an inexpensive RackNerds VPS, and I am sitting here writing out a transcript for the episode that you are currently listening to or reading via WordPress on my new server. Phew! What a month it's been, and I didn't even get started on my accounting work this week yet.

So, with the video coming up at some point, which includes some lovely comments from my wonderful guests on

the Landscape tour, I have selected several key photos from the trip to share with you today. I'm going to try not to go too crazy talking about what the drone enabled me to do, but there were some shots that are simply not possible without a drone, and I couldn't resist including them in this roundup.

We started our trip with our first three days photographing the beautiful hills and trees around Biei. At dawn, we took a brief walk to the waterfall behind our hotel and were treated to some lovely color in the sky as the sun reached the horizon behind the distant mountains. I had my drone out videoing the group in this special environment, and I couldn't resist taking a moment to make this photograph from above the bridge on which we were standing.

The DJI Air 3 has two cameras, a wide-angle, and a mid-telephoto focal length camera. This was shot with the wide-angle camera, and the quality is pretty amazing for such a small sensor. Of course, it's bigger than most smartphone cameras, and they give great quality too, so I shouldn't be surprised, but the images are sharp, very clear, and have amazing details. Of course, they're not quite as good as my Canon EOS R5 images, but at 48 megapixels, and with the processing that DJI must do with their raw files, it certainly gives the R5 a run for its money.

After breakfast, we went to the area of Biei where they have those beautiful rolling hills, and I love shooting the lone trees that are situated perfectly near the top of the hills, so we can capture them with that subtle line between the snow and the sky. This kind of image relies on us getting an overcast sky and hopefully some falling snow, so it's always nice when the conditions change in our favor.





This next image shows the other side of the same hill, with a copse running up the ridge of the hill, again, leading to the subtle line between sky and snow. There is always something hugely satisfying in getting this kind of minimalist shot.



As usual, we also made an excursion to the ski slopes on Mount Asahi, where we photographed scenes like this from the edge of the slope while being careful not to get in the way of the skiers tearing down the mountain. This is the same shot that I shoot every year, but I do like this scene.

I could share scores of similar images, and it is tempting to do so, because I love this work so much, but we'll move on to the coast, where we spent some time on a snow-covered beach, photographing these tetrapods as the waves crashed around them and the seawater left beautiful patterns as it washed close to our feet.

I pretty much always use a tripod when shooting landscapes, as I enjoy how it helps me to fine-tune my composition, and because I generally use somewhat slow exposures, such as 1.3

seconds for this shot, I often use a 2-second timer, so that I can get my hand away from the camera during the exposure. For images like this though, where the timing has to be spot on, I use a wired shutter really or a remote timer. Trying to time pressing your shutter button to catch a wave that will reach the optimal height two seconds into the future is more difficult than it may sound, but it's simply a case of paying attention and pressing the cable release shutter button if you take a moment to hook one up.



Again, I have loads of shots from this beach that I'd like to share, but I'll resist, so that we can press on, with this next image of a Shinto Gate with a nasty sky and great waves that came up high enough to cover the concrete base of the gate.

I gave the top half of the sky a bit more contrast with a Luma Mask in Capture One Pro that enabled me to darken the dark areas without adjusting the lighter areas. I included time to visit this location several times during our stay, and as is often the case, the best shots came from the third visit. If we waited until that time to save time on the previous visits, you can bet your bottom dollar, that it would be the previous visits that would have provided what we want. If you want the results, you have to put in the work.





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Every year I'm relieved to find that my boat graveyard is still there, and this year was more of a relief than before because they were working clearing away some of the more derelict buildings there when we visited last year. This spot is one of my favorite places to photograph on the planet, especially when we get some heavy skies and falling snow, to make images like this one.



Once again, the drone helped me to get a very different perspective, with this shot from directly over the line of boats that I have photographed over the years. I love the patterns that the wind-driven snow has created here, telling a story of the relentless winter weather these boats endure.



As we rounded the northernmost tip of Japan, we spent some time in a harbor where the weather turned on us. One moment it was calm, and the next, a squall blew through, and it was so strong it was a little scary. Not so scary that it stopped me setting my tripod down again for a few more shots as I made my way back to our bus. This is one of my favorites. I love the mood and atmosphere in the photograph.

I left this in color as I like the red hulls of the boats, but I think I'll play with a black and white version later as well when I come up for air after my third tour starting this weekend.



We continued on our journey, and photographed a little inland from the coast on the East side of Hokkaido, as you can see in this image, with a dark tree in the foreground, and a stream leading us to the more distant trees. Once again, the snow and gray sky make this kind of image.



Although shot from eye level, this next image of the fishing port at our final location was also shot with the drone. I kind of like the natural vignette that you get, and the cinematic 16:9 crop is always a pleasure to walk with.



This final image is something that I would never have thought of shooting if it wasn't for actually getting up there above the port and seeing what it looks like. The drone opens up so many doors. Of course, the video footage is stunning, and I'm looking forward to sharing my video with you, but the still

photography opportunities are so much more fun and beautiful than I expected.

OK, so that was two more images than my usual ten, but I wanted to share all of the key locations and shots, and although I have many more I'd love to

share, I'll leave it there. I finished this manuscript on Friday evening, and I'm recording on Saturday morning before leaving for Hokkaido for my second wildlife tour and my third winter tour of this season. I hope we have as much fun as on the first two trips, I'll be back at the beginning of March, probably

starting with my landscape tour video, and then I'll go on to walk you through the best of my two wildlife tours.

If you think you might like to join us on the 2025 Landscape tour, please check availability on my [Tours page](#), and I'll see you on the flip side.





MARTIN BAILEY PHOTOGRAPHY K.K.

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