

Luke Hurford

General Manager, Niseko Village

YOKOSO! JAPAN AMBASSADOR

M My dream is to turn Niseko and Furano into world-famous winter resorts. I have two strategies for achieving this. The first is to attract guests from more countries. At present 20,000 Australian skiers and snowboarders come here every year in search of powder snow, but I want a wider range of people to know about the attractions of Hokkaido. A few years



Australian-born **LUKE HURFORD** moved to Furano in Hokkaido eight years ago after graduating from the University of Sydney. Working for the city's tourism association he acted as a bridge between Australia and Japan, achieving a 30-fold jump in winter visitors from Down Under. He is now working hard to turn Niseko Village into a true winter resort.

ago we started doing promotions in Russia, and recently the number of Russian visitors has been gradually increasing. My next target is the U.K. There are 1.2 million British skiers, but since they can't ski at home most of them head to the slopes of France and Austria. I'd like to attract even one percent of them to Japan. A wider variety of guests will make the resorts more interesting for Australian visitors, and, above all, will delight Japanese skiers.

The second strategy is to help overseas visitors go beyond Niseko and Furano and fully enjoy the charms of Japan throughout the whole Hokkaido



area. It's a real shame if they simply ski and then fly back home, since there's so much more to experience: hot springs, gourmet food, a stunning natural environment, friendly people, a unique culture and much more. I'm also looking at putting together travel packages enabling people to visit Kyoto after they have enjoyed the Hokkaido area.

What I aim to create is a "Japanese international resort." I don't want a nondescript international feel, so "Japanese" is the key word. When we changed the signs on the slopes to English, we had complaints from Australian visitors. Having come to

Japan, they didn't want to see English signs. I understood exactly what they meant, and tried switching the names of the ski runs to things like *miso shiru* (miso soup) and *jagaimo* (potato). Everybody loved it. Overseas visitors want a Japanese experience.

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<http://www.japantravelinfo.com/top/index.php>

<http://www.niseko-village.com/english>



The Japan Tourism Agency's "Yokoso! Japan" campaign aims to attract 10 million foreign visitors to Japan annually by 2010. As part of the campaign, people striving to increase visitor numbers are appointed as Yokoso! Japan ambassadors.