

Diamond Dust

Hokkaido Winter Glitter

There is a beautiful natural phenomenon known as “diamond dust” that occurs only when a number of weather conditions are met during periods of severe cold. We interviewed Takahashi Masumi, a photographer based in Hokkaido, about diamond dust.

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WATER vapor in the atmosphere freezes at temperatures below minus 10 degrees Celsius. This natural phenomenon is known as diamond dust because the fine ice crystals glitter and reflect the sunlight like diamonds as they float in the air. Even in cold regions it is a special sight that can only be seen in certain conditions such as fine, windless, midwinter weather. In Japan, diamond dust can be observed in the interior of the northern island of Hokkaido, and is particularly likely to occur in the Tokachi region, Nayoro City, and Furano City in January and February.

“Hokkaido’s inland areas have moderate humidity, which makes the groups of very fine ice crystals known as diamond dust exceptionally beautiful.” So says Takahashi Masumi, a photographer based in Furano City with more than seventy published collections to his name showcasing the beauty of Hokkaido’s year-round magnificent nature. Diamond dust changes color according to the angle of the light, so it looks completely different depending on the angle and position from which it is viewed. Because of this ever-changing glittering effect, diamond dust is also known as “angel’s whisper.” Says Takahashi, “It really does make a ‘whispering’ sound when it falls, which is very soothing.”

Diamond dust scene captured by Takahashi Masumi



All photos: Courtesy of Takahashi Masumi



Diamond dust rainbow

Another phenomenon is the “sun pillars” that occur when sunlight reflects off diamond dust, forming glittering vertical shafts of light. Gradually changing form depending on the atmospheric conditions and the sun, sun pillars are a mysterious, dreamy phenomenon.

“When winter comes in Hokkaido, diamond dust forecasts are posted on the Internet, and diamond dust fans rush to those areas. I hope that people who happen upon diamond dust or sun pillars appreciate their good fortune. And when the COVID-19 pandemic is over, I hope many people in Japan and overseas will visit Hokkaido and enjoy its unique winter scenery for themselves,” says Takahashi.

Winter in Hokkaido also offers many other beautiful phenomena. Clouds and ice shimmer like rainbows, while snow and ice create magical shapes and patterns. In many cases, the beauty of these phenomena was first captured through the use of photography techniques. Leisurely viewing photographs of scenes that are very difficult to observe even at the spot where they were taken and planning a trip in your imagination is another way of enjoying winter in Hokkaido. 📷

Magical shapes and patterns created by snow and ice



Sun pillar