



AIARE Level 1 in Hokkaido, Japan

with Mark Synnott · AMGA / IFMGA Mountain Guide

ALL-INCLUSIVE

January 17–19, 2027 · Hokkaido, Japan
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AIARE 1 — Course Overview

What is AIARE 1?

AIARE 1 is an internationally recognized three-day course that teaches decision-making tools for managing risk while traveling in avalanche terrain. Led by IFMGA Guide Mark Synnott, this course draws on decades of expedition experience and six seasons guiding in Hokkaido — bringing avalanche education to life in a way that is both rigorous and genuinely memorable.

Course Format

Day 1 — Classroom

Avalanche science, snowpack fundamentals, weather, terrain recognition, and the AIARE Risk Management Framework.

Days 2 & 3 — In the Field

Applied terrain evaluation on Hokkaido's mountains, snowpack observation, companion rescue practice, and real-world group decision-making in some of the best backcountry terrain on earth.



Student Learning Outcomes

- Prepare for backcountry travel using seasonal and daily planning routines
- Use planning tools and checklists to communicate and make decisions as a group
- Demonstrate effective companion rescue technique
- Build a framework for continuing to improve avalanche skills after the course

Prerequisites

Advanced intermediate skiing or splitboarding with good fitness. No prior avalanche education required.

Who This Course is For

Serious backcountry skiers and splitboarders who want a rigorous, internationally recognized avalanche credential — set in one of the great powder destinations on earth.

Ratio: 6:1 (max)

Student-to-guide ratio never exceeds six to one. Upon completion, participants receive an **AIARE 1 Certificate** — prerequisite for AIARE 2 and all professional-level courses.

The Hokkaido Experience

The Shiribeshi

Hokkaido, the northernmost of Japan's main islands, is known worldwide for its bottomless champagne powder, soaring volcanoes, fantastic cuisine and one-of-a-kind culture. The AIARE 1 course is based at Asarigawa Onsen Ski Resort in Otaru, with skiing in the surrounding Shiribeshi Mountains, where it's not unheard of for 50 feet of snow to fall over the course of the winter.

Terrain

Japan has everything from resort sidecountry to deep backcountry glade skiing to high-altitude alpine touring on volcanoes. Venues include Kokusai, Kiroro, and Akaigawa.

Avalanche Conditions in Hokkaido

The primary avalanche problems are wind slab and storm slab. One of the things we love about skiing here is how easy it is to find excellent terrain that avoids serious avalanche exposure — meaning consistent, untracked powder, day after day. The AIARE 1 uses this environment as a real-world laboratory for hazard evaluation and risk management.



Accommodations

The course is based at Asarigawa Onsen Ski Resort in Otaru, within easy reach of the terrain each morning. We are offering three lodging options, thanks to our local partners the Winkel Company.

Winkel Village Mountain Cottage

Private cottage accommodation in a quiet mountain setting, exclusively reserved for course participants. Sleeps 2–6, private to your group — no outside guests. Breakfast stocked in room each morning. Virtual tour [HERE](#) · Photos [HERE](#)

Winkel Village Wakakusa Private Onsen Cottage

Premium private cottage sleeping up to 4, with a private open-air hot spring bath on the deck. Breakfast stocked in room each morning. Virtual tour [HERE](#) · Photos [HERE](#)

Asarigawa Onsen Hotel

Traditional Japanese onsen hotel with single and double rooms — ideal for solo travelers or couples preferring hotel-style accommodation. Onsite hot spring bath. Breakfast included daily. More info [HERE](#).



Dining & Daily Life

Lodging and most meals are included in the course fee. Hokkaido's food scene is one of its great pleasures — outstanding Japanese cuisine that is a highlight of any trip here.



Breakfast

Included daily at your accommodation. The Japanese buffet-style breakfast at the Asarigawa Onsen Hotel is exceptional. For Winkel Village guests, breakfast is stocked in your cottage each morning.

Night 1 — On Your Own

Guests arrive at different times on the first evening, so dinner is on your own. The area around Otaru has no shortage of excellent options — sushi, ramen, izakaya. Your guide is happy to recommend.

Field Lunches — On Your Own

On field days, participants pick up lunch at Lawson or 7-Eleven on the way to the trailhead. Quick, cheap, and a quintessential Hokkaido experience. Note: lunch is provided on the classroom day.

Dinner 1 — Mark's Home

Mark's home at the base of Tenguyama Ski Resort — a relaxed yakiniku meal and a chance to debrief the day around the table. Drinks (beer and sake) included.

Dinner 2 — Hanaya Taiwanese Hot Pot

Hanaya, a celebrated Taiwanese hot pot restaurant. Fixed menu. Drinks not included. Click [HERE](#) for more info.

Dinner 3 — Ruga

Ruga, an omakase-style restaurant helmed by a Michelin-starred chef. The menu showcases local ingredients and Japanese techniques — a fitting way to close out the course. Drinks not included.

Getting There & Logistics

Flights

Fly to **Sapporo — New Chitose Airport (CTS)**. Flights from the US/Canada typically run \$1,200–\$1,800 roundtrip, usually with one or two stops. Note: Tokyo has two international airports — Narita (NRT) and Haneda (HND). If connecting in Tokyo, allow a minimum of three hours between flights.

Getting to Otaru & the Course

From the airport, take the train to **Otaru Station** — 90 minutes, ~\$18 first class, trains every 30 minutes (last train 10:53 PM). Easy, economical, and highly reliable.

Visas	No visa required for US and Canadian citizens.
Radios	Japan strictly regulates radio use. Most US/Canada brands (BCA, Yaesu, Baofeng) are illegal in Hokkaido. SMG provides Japan-legal licensed radios.
Mobile	Excellent cell coverage and internet throughout Hokkaido.
Currency	The US dollar has been strong against the yen in recent years.



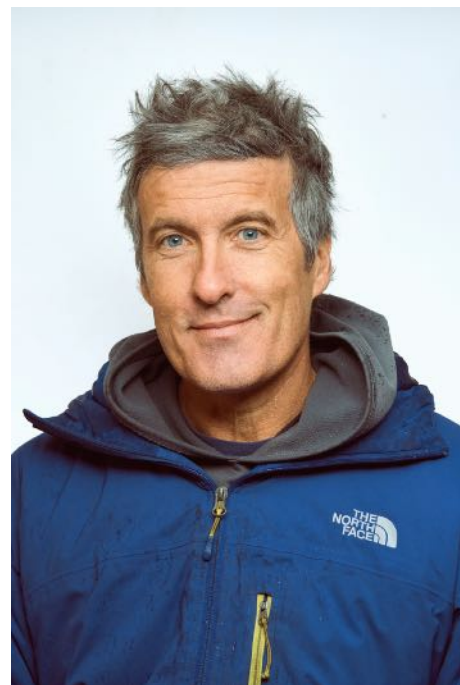
Your Guide — Mark Synnott

Mark Synnott is an AIARE course leader, an IFMGA mountain guide, and a 30-year member of The North Face Global Athlete Team. Renowned as one of the most prolific exploratory climbers of his generation, he has led and participated in more than three dozen international climbing expeditions. Highlights include six trips to Baffin Island, four to the tepui region of the Amazon, the first ascent of the Northwest Face of Great Trango Tower in the Karakoram in 1999, and an Everest summit via the Northeast Ridge in 2019. Mark also has extensive experience in the film and television industry and is the author of four books, including the New York Times bestseller, *The Impossible Climb*.

2027 will be Mark's seventh season guiding in Hokkaido. He currently holds a Japanese work visa and owns a home in Otaru, where this course is based.

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Mark and his frequent tail guide and son Will Synnott enjoying a bluebird day on Yotei's Delta slope.

Course Cost & Booking

All guiding, ground transport during the course, accommodation, and most meals are included. See the included/not included list below for details.

Asarigawa Onsen Hotel Double	Asarigawa Onsen Hotel Single	Winkel Village Mountain Cottage	Winkel Village Wakakusa Private Onsen Cottage
\$1,399	\$1,449	\$1,499	\$1,699
per person	per person	per person	per person

INCLUDED ✓	NOT INCLUDED
• 3-day AIARE 1 course with IFMGA Guide Mark Synnott • Student-to-guide ratio never exceeds 6:1 • All ground transportation during the course • Accommodation — Winkel Village or Asarigawa Onsen Hotel • Breakfast daily • Group dinners (Mark's home, Hanaya hotpot, Ruga) • AIARE 1 Certificate of Completion	• Field lunches (7-Eleven / Lawson — quick and cheap) • International airfare • Airport transfer to Otaru, including train fare and taxis to and from train station to Asari (see Japan Travel Guide for train how-to and other info) • Accommodations outside course dates • Personal expenses and drinks • Lift tickets if resort sidecountry is used (~\$45) • Travel insurance

Travel Insurance — Required

Travel insurance covering backcountry skiing is required. A good starting point is www.squaremouth.com.

For More Information

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