



THE SKIING VILLAGE OF HIRAFU

29 June, 2012

The looming ski mountain has houses, lodges, restaurants, and rest stops scattered all over its massive face. On the Northern Island of Japan called Hokkaido, there is a small skiing village called Hirafu, and it is a major attraction for skiers all around the world.

At the base of the mountain, I can see the multicolored ski jackets of all the skiers bustling around, lining up to get on the lift. Japanese words are flying all over the place, and the loudspeaker blares out a static-filled message. When I line up to get onto a chair lift, the smell of gasoline and motor oil at the station lingers in the air. As I go higher and higher on the chair lift, the smell fades away, replaced by the earthy smell of pine trees surrounding me, and the fresh snow gently drifting down to the ground, coating the landscape in a pure white.

As I get off the cold, smooth, grey lift and set foot on the freshly fallen snow, the colors of the ski jackets shine greater than ever. At the top of the mountain run, the sapphire blue sky accompanied by the luminous floodlights and the golden sunshine reflects beautifully off the rainbow colors of the ski jackets. My brother next to me is whooping with excitement in anticipation of another run down the mountain, and we sit down to do up our firm foot bindings, grabbing hold of our thin boards, and setting off down the slope.

As I zoom down, I hear the all too familiar constant whisper of snow being sprayed and

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Chairlifts for the
Grand Hirafu,
Niseko.

shifted below my gliding board. My brother passes me, spraying light, powdery snow in my face, making me shiver in the frigid temperature. At the bottom of the slope, the gasoline and motor oil smell of the station comes again, as we meet up with our parents for lunch at a lodge.

In the lodge, the warmth radiating from the fireplace is a welcome change to the freezing air outside. The smell of well-seasoned ramen and peppery dumplings makes our mouths water. We dig in to the food, and finish off our satisfying meal with a cup of freshly made, warm, milky hot chocolate with Oreos on the side.



Colorful skiers

The grand Hirafu is one of my favorite holiday destinations; one reason is because of its traditional Japanese culture. The village is filled with old Japanese traits, such as onsens, skiing, old-fashioned clothes, and occasionally hand-crafted wooden skis. This place has special meaning to me because it is where I first remember seeing snow in my life, and where I

first started learning how to snowboard. Snowboarding has become one of my favorite sports, and my training began here.