

YUKIHOMES PRESENTS

Ryokan- Ready

旅館準備完了

The Hokkaido short-term rental renovation & licensing checklist — every item inspectors expect before your Japanese vacation home can legally host its first guest.



BEFORE YOU START

Read This First

Most short-term rental projects in Japan don't fail on design or budget — they fail at the public health center. This checklist collects everything we've learned taking real properties in Sapporo, Otaru, Furano, and Asahikawa through renovation, inspection, and licensing.

2026 changed the game. Sapporo tightened its lodging rules this spring, Otaru's new regulations take effect in August, and a national crackdown on sauna safety — triggered by a fatal Tokyo sauna fire in December 2025 — means health centers are inspecting items they never used to look at. Requirements that didn't exist when a project kicked off can appear mid-renovation. Budget a buffer for it.

The Golden Rule

Build fire-safety and licensing equipment into your renovation quote **from day one**. Bundling emergency lighting, detectors, and exit signage into the main construction is significantly cheaper than retrofitting after the walls are closed — and hidden wiring for emergency lights alone can run ¥100,000+ when done as an afterthought.

KNOW YOUR LICENSE

License type	Japanese	Operating limit	Best for
Minpaku	住宅宿泊事業 (民泊)	180 nights / year	Testing a market, part-time hosting
Simple Lodging	簡易宿所営業	365 days	Most whole-home STRs — the usual sweet spot
Ryokan / Hotel	旅館・ホテル営業	365 days	Larger or multi-room properties, premium positioning

Two agencies control your fate: the public health center (保健所) and the fire department (消防署). Rules also vary by city — Sapporo and Otaru do not read from the same script. Always pre-consult with drawings before construction starts.

Old building? Check the paperwork first.

Many older Hokkaido homes are missing building certificates, design documents, or the completion inspection certificate (検査済証). Missing documents must be resolved **before** renovation and licensing can proceed — discover this early, not after settlement.

01 Fire & Life Safety

These are the items that determine whether your license application moves — and where inspectors spend most of their attention.

- ☐ **Emergency lighting & exit guide lights (誘導灯)** installed and working. Decide early if you want wiring concealed — it's an upcharge, and much cheaper during renovation.
- ☐ **Smoke detectors** in all required rooms, functioning
- ☐ **Heat detectors** where required (kitchens, heater rooms)
- ☐ **Fire extinguishers** installed and easily accessible
- ☐ **Exit signage** mounted per fire department guidance
- ☐ **Evacuation route map** created and posted
- ☐ **Emergency contacts posted** — fire, police, ambulance, property manager
- ☐ **Fire & earthquake instructions** posted for guests
- ☐ **Stairways, handrails & exits** safe and unobstructed
- ☐ **No exposed or stray wiring** anywhere guests access
- ☐ **Gas appliances** verified as functioning safely
- ☐ **Fire blanket + first aid kit** in the kitchen

Heater rule most owners miss

FF-type kerosene heater flue pipes **cannot be concealed inside walls** — the fire department will not allow it, and exhaust can't route where snow blocks it. A decorative, removable, non-combustible cover is the accepted solution. Don't promise clients (or yourself) invisible piping.

02 The 2026 Rule Changes

- ☐ **Guest check-in terminal** (iPad / monitor) at the entrance — now expected under Sapporo's updated ryokan rules
- ☐ **Physical barrier** blocking any floor not registered for guest use (removable after approval in some cases)
- ☐ **Privacy screening** where guests are visible from the street or neighboring properties

Have a sauna? Read this twice.

After a fatal private-sauna fire in Tokyo (Dec 2025), the health ministry found 23% of Japan's saunas had no panic button and ordered local governments to tighten supervision. Expect your health center to require: an **emergency call button** reachable from inside the sauna, a **monitored alert** (often via a security company if there's no on-site staff), a **cleanable interior with drainage**, and scrutiny of the **door opening reliably from inside**. Whether the public bath law (公衆浴場法) applies to your whole-home rental varies by municipality — ask explicitly, it changes everything.

03 Inspection-Day Essentials

Health center inspections won't finalize on promises — the property must look ready to host that day.

- ☐ **Property signage** visible out front so guests find the right house — inspectors expect it (a simple temporary sign passes; upgrade later)
- ☐ **Designated spot** to post the license / registration certificate
- ☐ **Beds made — linens and bedding physically in the property** (inspections have stalled on missing sheets alone)
- ☐ **All bedrooms furnished** and guest-ready
- ☐ **Windows** open, close, and lock; **interior lighting** all functioning
- ☐ **Bathrooms:** hot/cold water, working toilets, drainage, ventilation fans, zero mold
- ☐ **Kitchen:** sink, plumbing, and appliances operational
- ☐ **Photos taken** of every room, all safety equipment, and exterior access — before the inspector arrives

04 Guest-Ready Systems

- ☐ **Bilingual house manual** (EN/JP): appliances, heating, Wi-Fi, check-in/out
- ☐ **Garbage sorting instructions** for guests + a designated storage area (burnables / non-burnables / plastics — city calendar rules apply)
- ☐ **Guest registration process** established
- ☐ **Neighbor complaint response procedure** written down
- ☐ **Security camera** at entrance + **smart lock / keybox** with managed codes
- ☐ **Local emergency contact** reachable 24/7 (required for most license types)

05 Winter-Proofing

- ☐ **Heating systems verified** + guest operation instructions written
- ☐ **Water pipes protected** against freezing (and a drain-down procedure for vacancies)
- ☐ **Snow removal plan** — who clears it, how often, paid by whom
- ☐ **Exterior lighting** functioning for dark 4pm arrivals
- ☐ **Ice hazards** addressed at entrances and walkways
- ☐ **Entryway gear storage:** ski/board racks and boot-drying space

THE PATH FROM KEYS TO LICENSE

06 The Licensing Sequence

- 1 **Verify zoning + building documents** before (or at) purchase — confirm STR use is possible and the 検査済証 exists
- 2 **Pre-consult** with the public health center and fire department, drawings in hand, before construction begins
- 3 **Renovate with safety equipment bundled in** — detectors, emergency lighting, exit signs installed during the build
- 4 **Obtain the fire compliance certificate** (消防法令適合通知書) — the health center usually won't process without it
- 5 **Submit the license application** with floor plans and facility details
- 6 **Pass the on-site inspections** — fire department, then public health center, with the property fully guest-ready
- 7 **Post your certificate**, add the license number to your Airbnb listing, and open the calendar

Timeline reality check

From settlement to license in hand, plan on **months, not weeks** — and longer if documents are missing or rules change mid-project. Working backward from ski season? Start the licensing conversation the day you go under contract.

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Want the full playbook, episode by episode?

▶ The Podcast

Zoning, licensing, renovation war stories, and the numbers behind real Hokkaido STRs.

open.spotify.com/show/033KTz5F0S7mUI5q1sXV1X

▶ YouTube

Property walkthroughs, before/afters, and inspection-day footage.

youtube.com/@yukihomes

▶ Instagram

Follow @yukihomesjapan for daily renovation progress and new-listing drops.

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▶ Want us to handle all of this for you?

YukiHomes finds, renovates, licenses, and manages STR properties across Hokkaido — end to end. Book a call.

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This guide is general information based on YukiHomes' project experience in Hokkaido as of 2026, not legal advice. Lodging requirements vary by municipality and change frequently — always confirm current requirements with your local public health center (保健所), fire department (消防署), and a licensed administrative scrivener (行政書士) before purchasing or renovating. © 2026 YukiHomes.