

Matsubara Togyu-jo Bullring

This bullring was built by the local community, of which it is an integral part. As many as 3,000 people, more than 10 percent of the island's population, come to watch the year's three biggest matches, which decide Tokunoshima's top bull.

The tradition of bull wrestling (*togyu*) began on the Amami and Okinawa islands during the harsh rule of Kagoshima's Satsuma clan in the seventeenth century. Farmers would hold fights between their bulls as a way of letting off steam during quiet times of the year. The contests became hugely popular over the years, and trainers of champions gained considerable status. Today, it is common to see farmers exercising their prized animals on the roads and beaches.

The rules of *togyu* are simple: the bulls, accompanied by a trainer, lock horns and push each other around the 20-meter-diameter ring until one is knocked over or gives up and runs away. The bulls are given ranks borrowed from sumo, such as *yokozuna* (grand champion) and *ozeki* (champion). The lightest bulls weigh in at around 700 kilograms, while the heaviest can top 1,100 kilograms.

Entrance fees to *togyu* events range from ¥2,000 to ¥3,000, and ¥1,000 for schoolchildren.