

## **Sapporo Snow Festival**

The Sapporo Snow Festival is a celebration of snow and ice held for one week each February. Events are held at three locations in and around Sapporo, the capital and largest city of Hokkaido (the northernmost of Japan's main islands), and one of the world's snowiest cities. An average of 485 centimeters of snow falls there every year, and accumulations often reach 80 to 90 centimeters.

Each of the three venues has a distinct focus and character. At Odori Park in central Sapporo, snow sculptures stretch out over 12 city blocks. At nearby Susukino, a restaurant and entertainment district, ice sculptures and nighttime illumination are the main attractions. About 10 kilometers away is Tsudome, a snow park with both indoor and outdoor activities.

Each year the festival features several large snow sculptures on a different theme, including reproductions of famous buildings on an almost life-sized scale. Some require scaffolding and truckloads of snow to create. There are also several medium-sized sculptures and numerous smaller ones that are hand-formed by Sapporo residents and international teams. The celebration of cultural expression and connection developed by creating snow sculptures as a community, as well as the use of technology to enhance the experience, are hallmarks of the festival.

A Sapporo schoolteacher who helped launch the festival taught his students to think of the abundant snow as a welcome friend rather than a foe and a nuisance, and that doing so can bring enjoyment and a sense of possibility. The community embraced this view and turned a festival that began with a few snow sculptures and a snowball fight into a world-famous event that draws millions of visitors to the city every year.