

Tokamachi Snow Festival

In 1950, Emperor Hirohito (1901–1989) suggested the creation of a new winter festival to help snow country residents enjoy the season and appreciate the beauty of snow. Since then, the people of Tokamachi have devised myriad entertainments to reflect their friendly relationship with snow.

The Snow Festival features art installations, live performances, and a fireworks display. The main attractions, however, are the large snow sculptures. Teams are formed by local schools, residents' associations, volunteer groups, businesses, clubs, and other organizations. Guided by the year's chosen theme, each team collaborates on the design and construction of a snow sculpture. Prizes are awarded for technique, artistry, concept, and effort.

Tokamachi has a long history of winter festivals and events. Many are held in February, as the first full moon of the new year occurs around that time under the old lunar calendar. This full-moon period is called *koshogatsu*, or the “little new year,” and is the time when agricultural communities traditionally pray for an abundant harvest in the coming year. In Tokamachi, where heavy snowfalls support agriculture along with so much else, *koshogatsu* events celebrate the life-giving aspect of snow. They also create opportunities for people to come together, reinforcing the bonds of friendship and cooperation that make survival in snow country possible.