

"Earth and the Future of Our Children," a giant snow sculpture created for the 2008 Sapporo Snow Festival.



A snow sculpture titled (Japanese) "Castle" created for the 2009 Sapporo Snow Festival

All photos: Courtesy of City of Sapporo

The snow festival held in the city of Sapporo in Hokkaido since 1950 is an event full of international character and looked forward to by many people as a special winter occasion.

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**Interview** (December 21, 2021) by  
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**I**N early February each year, Sapporo City, Hokkaido hosts the Sapporo Snow Festival, considered one of the big three snow festivals in the world along with the Quebec Winter Carnival in Canada and the Harbin Ice Festival in China. The Festival is held across three sites. The principal Odori Site in Odori Park, which is also a main city street is lined with more than 100 snow sculptures of all sizes, including some ten giant snow sculptures ranging in height from several meters to over 10 meters, presenting a magnificent spectacle. In contrast to the main site, where visitors can enjoy viewing snow sculptures,



A giant snow sculpture depicting the Hakodate Magistrate's Office, created for the 2009 Sapporo Snow Festival



A giant snow sculpture depicting Chakri Maha Prasat Grand Palace in Bangkok, Thailand, created for the 2007 Sapporo Snow Festival

the Tsudome Site is a popular children's attraction, offering a variety of fun experiences such as snow slides and mazes. The third site is the Susukino Site, which is the venue for the Ice Sculpture Contest showcasing some of the elaborate ice sculptures that decorate the city.

The Snow Festival began in 1950 when local junior high school and high school students made six sculptures from the snow that had come to be dumped by the city's residents each year in Odori Park. The snow sculptures gradually got bigger and bigger, and four years later a gigantic sculpture standing 15 meters tall appeared.

Various techniques are used to make snow sculptures, including carving hardened snow and stacking snow bricks. Around 30,000 tons of snow (equivalent to some 6,000 truckloads) are collected from neighboring areas and transformed into a diversity of snow sculptures, reflecting the times and society. In 1955, Self-Defense Forces stationed in Hokkaido began participating in the creation of the snow sculptures alongside citizens' groups as part of their training. As a result, the snow sculptures very quickly increased in size and production techniques improved.

"The largest ever sculpture was the 25-meter-high 'Gulliver, Welcome to Sapporo' in 1972, which was created with the equivalent of 1,300 5-ton truckloads of snow. That year, the Snow Festival was immediately followed by the Olympic Winter Games held in Sapporo. Some of the Olympic officials visiting Japan were able to enjoy the Snow Festival, and that was how the event caught the world's attention," says Yamagami Isshin of the Sapporo Snow Festival Executive Committee secretariat.

The International Snow Sculpture Contest has been held since 1974, with many different artists invited from countries around the world to create snow sculptures. Since that year, snow sculptures related to places with close ties to Sapporo City, such as Shenyang (China), Alberta (Canada), Munich

(Germany), Sydney (Australia), and Portland (USA) have been created, making the contest full of international character.

"The Sapporo Snow Festival attracts more than two million visitors every time, so it's an essential winter occasion for the citizens of Sapporo too," says Yamagami. In 2021, it was held online for the first time to prevent the spread of COVID-19. This year's event is planned as a smaller scale affair, held at the Odori site only as well as online<sup>i</sup>.

While the rows of snow sculptures under clear blue skies after a snowfall are impressive, the glittering snow sculptures illuminated after dusk offer a gorgeousness different to the daytime, and are quite unmissable. 



A competitor from overseas makes a giant Buddha head at the 2007 Sapporo Snow Festival

<sup>i</sup> The 2022 Sapporo Snow Festival will be held as an online event only to help prevent the spread of the new coronavirus. It was announced on January 19 that the event at the Odori site has been canceled. (<https://www.snowfes.com/english/>)