
Sapporo Autumn Fest

Hokkaido is known for the abundance and quality of its food, much of which appears at Sapporo's Odori Park in the autumn. For three weeks beginning in mid-September, restaurants and producers from throughout the island bring their harvest bounty to the park for a gourmet celebration. Regional specialties include venison and other wild game, beef and dairy products, seafood, fruits and vegetables, beer, wine, sake, and much more. Many of these items are organically produced and owe their high quality to the pure waters and clean soil of the island.

The word *kuidaore* is a key term for understanding the atmosphere at the festival. It is a common buzzword, even appearing in the name "Kuidaore Square" in 5-chome. *Kuidaore*, which implies eating oneself into bankruptcy, literally means to eat until you fall (whether physically or financially). In that spirit, sampling as much of the bounty of Hokkaido as one possibly can is the goal of many visitors to the festival.

The festival debuted in 2008 and is the newest of the major seasonal events in the city. It now draws over two million people each year. One of the original goals of the event was to revitalize Hokkaido as a whole. It is an expansion of an earlier annual festival held at Odori Park where food and beverage specialties from towns all over the island were brought together.

The event also includes a version of Oktoberfest, the renowned beer festival in Munich, Germany. This reflects the sister-city relationship between Sapporo and Munich that began in 1972.

Guide to the Festival

Sapporo Autumn Fest occupies most of Odori Park, with offerings concentrated in 1-chome, 4-chome–8-chome, 10-chome, and 11-chome. Each area has a distinct atmosphere and a different focus. Around two hundred stalls are open on any given day, and new ones appear throughout the festival.

1-chome: Oktoberfest

The German-style beer festival under the Sapporo TV Tower is an outgrowth of the close and longstanding sister-city relationship between Sapporo and Munich. Live bands playing traditional German music provide an authentic Munich atmosphere to accompany the microbrews from Germany and Hokkaido. Sausages and other German cuisine are on the menu, along with various Hokkaido specialties.

4-chome: Sapporo Welcome Park

This is the entrance to Autumn Fest. A number of stalls offer cuisine showcasing seasonal ingredients from Hokkaido, with meat and seafood dishes dominating the menu. There is a wine bar, and cocktails, champagne, and sake are also available, all of which can be enjoyed at seating surrounding the large fountain at the center of the park.

5-chome: Ramen Fest and Kuidaore Square

Hokkaido is well known for ramen noodles made with wheat grown in Asahikawa. This is a great place to sample those noodles in different varieties of ramen dishes from all over the island. Fruit and soft-serve ice cream are another point of interest in this block. The huge trees in 5-chome and their falling leaves provide an atmospheric place to wine and dine, and there is a full lineup of stage events during the day.

6-chome: Restaurants

Many of the most popular restaurants in Sapporo set up temporary locations here during the festival. There is ample dining space at tables set up under the large trees in this section of the park.

7-chome: Bar

This block features the wines of Hokkaido, as well as vintages from overseas, along with an array of cheeses, grilled oysters, and other foods that pair well with wine. There are many shops selling wine, hard cider, whiskey, and Japanese *shochu* distilled spirits.

8-chome: Hokkaido Market

Local delicacies from more than 100 towns in Hokkaido are on offer, and it's possible to sample specialties from the whole island in one block. Maps of the island pinpoint the exact locations of the towns that are represented, enhancing the sense of taking a virtual tour.

10-chome: Oh! Dori Farm

This block is dedicated to meat and game, with a huge selection of venison, pork, lamb, chicken, and beef on offer. Famous Hokkaido wild game shops also set up their stalls here.

11-chome: World Cuisine

Chefs of iconic restaurants in every corner of Sapporo serve up their specialties. Many of these dishes come from ethnic and international cuisines, and there are wines and beers from all over the world to round out the menus in this block.

Food Safety, from Farm to Table

The high quality of foods produced in Hokkaido starts with the environment. Clean soil and water and a focus on organic farming and sustainable practices result in products of a high level of purity. The organizers of Autumn Fest ensure that food safety is maintained as these products are brought into Sapporo for the festival.

Hokkaido is a prime example of a place where people and nature coexist in harmony. This is expressed in the idea of *satoyama*, usually thought of as living on upland slopes while cultivating fields on the more level ground below. In Hokkaido, *satoyama* encompasses the mountains, woods, farms, fields, and rivers surrounding rural communities.

The products showcased at Autumn Fest come from all over Hokkaido, grown on this extended *satoyama*. Maintaining food quality and safety throughout the festival is of paramount importance. The organizers and vendors pay great attention to food safety and hygiene. Venue managers and vendors attend food safety and hygiene seminars held by outside experts. Twelve of these seminars are held each year. Outside experts also conduct 16 test inspections of the kitchens at the festival venue to ensure safety during the event.

Visitors to the festival are encouraged to do their part to contribute to food safety. Frequent handwashing is recommended, and hand soap is provided in the toilets at 5-chome, 7-chome, 9-chome, and 11-chome. Additionally, taking perishable foods home in bulk is not advised.
