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# Iwakuni museum stores armory’s worth of samurai weaponry

STORY AND PHOTOS BY SETH ROBSON,  
STARS AND STRIPES  
Published: November 20, 2025

A museum packed with samurai weapons and armor stands near the iconic Kintai-kyo Bridge in Iwakuni, a short drive from the Marine Corps air station in Yamaguchi prefecture, Japan. The Kashiwabara Museum, formerly known as Iwakuni Art Museum, stores everything from swords, spears and muskets to elaborately decorated armor.

The collection of artifacts could be props from an Akira Kurosawa film such as “Seven Samurai.” But they’re the genuine articles – weapons that were used by real Japanese samurai.

There’s a sword, made for a shogun, that’s been registered as a Japanese national treasure. It’s kept inside a glass case, but you can heft a replica sword and try on an old helmet. The museum also has a collection of decorated sword guards.

There are all kinds of other old weapons including pistols and a wide range of spears and similar devices designed to kill, or at least seriously injure, an enemy.

The museum promotes its weapons and armor collection as the “culture of life and death.”

“For samurai, risking their own lives to protect their country, territory, and clan was the very meaning of ‘living,’” the museum states



The Kashiwabara Museum stores everything from swords, spears and muskets to elaborately decorated armor in Iwakuni.

on its website.

Samurai armor and weapons were not only tools to protect their owners but also works of art that evoked their courage and magnified their short, potentially deadly lives, the website states.

Helmets on display have some interesting decorations including antlers, rabbit ears and crab claws.

There’s some elaborate shining ceremonial armor. There’s also armor that was used by ordinary samurai in battle. Some look as though they were damaged by swords or arrows.

The older armor has quite a lot of protection around the midsection — not because the ancient samurai were overweight but because it was

needed to protect horsemen from arrows.

Alongside the weapons and armor the museum has a collection of art including glassware, ceramics and antique furniture used by Iwakuni’s feudal lords.

The museum promotes this part of its collection as the “culture of life.”

The samurai lifestyle was glamorous yet profound, the museum states on its website.

“In particular, the everyday items used by women and children reveal the samurai class’s deep and profound love for supreme works of art,” the website states.

When you’ve seen enough ancient samurai artifacts, take a stroll through the park near the museum at the foot of Mount Yokoyama near Iwakuni Castle and the



Samurai helmet display.

## Things to know

**DIRECTIONS:** You can reach the museum by walking across the Kintai-kyo Bridge from Iwakuni, Japan. The museum’s address is 2-10-27 Yokoyama, Iwakuni City, Yamaguchi Prefecture, 741-0081.

**TIMES:** 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. (closes at 4 p.m. December to February); closed on Tuesdays. Open on public holidays.

**COSTS:** 800 yen for adults; 500 yen for high school and university students; 200 yen for elementary and middle school students. Discounts for groups of 15 or more.

**FOOD:** There are at least two ice cream shops near the Kintai-kyo Bridge.



WEBSITE

Kintai-kyo Bridge.

The pedestrian bridge, at the same site more than 350 years, across the Nishiki River, is a series of five wooden arches.

It’s been destroyed multiple times by floods and rebuilt each time. There’s a small fee to cross, 310 yen for adults and high schoolers, 150 yen for elementary school kids.

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Tokinosumika Winter Illumination

Check video

Photos courtesy of Tokinosumika

Kirakira Festival

Hiroshima Dream

Photo courtesy of Sasebo Kirakira Festival Executive Committee

Photo courtesy of Hiroshima Lightup

# My faves Japan's festive lights

BY TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI,  
STRIPES JAPAN

As Japan starts to enter the holiday season, you'll notice many of the country's parks buildings and gardens are set ablaze with brilliant and elaborate illumination displays to help ring in the holiday spirit.

I love the beauty of this winter tradition, and the warm lights feel like an appropriate way to end another year. While strolling in the bright streets at night, I can't help but reminisce about the people and places I encountered over the last 12 months.

Here are some of my favorite places to check out the winter fun. Not only are these spots home to some dazzling light displays, but the locations are also worth a stroll year-round.

Most of these sites are free, so visit one near you and enjoy the happiest season in Japan with the millions of bright lights!

takiguchi.takahiro@stripes.com

## Misawa Phantasia Winter Illumination (in Misawa)

Get into the holiday spirit at Phantasia Winter Illumination near Misawa Air Base. This vibrant project at the Misawa Nakayoshi Park runs through January 31. Visitors will be treated to the "Forest of Illumination" featuring over 130,000 LED lights, an illuminated reindeer and, at the center, a 16-meter-tall Christmas tree.

During the event, the park opens from 5:30 p.m. to midnight for the sparkling lights, so there's plenty of time to enjoy this holiday treat.

**LOCATION:** 2-1-1 Chuo-cho, Misawa City, Aomori Pref. (a 6-minute drive from Misawa AB Main Gate)

**HOURS:** Through Jan. 31, 2025, 5:30 p.m.-midnight



**ADMISSION:** Free  
**TEL:** 0176-53-2175 (Misawa Chamber of Commerce)

## Tokyo Midtown Christmas Illumination (Near Hardy Barracks)

Tokyo Midtown is one of the most popular stops for holiday lights, great food, and great shopping.

This year's "Midtown Christmas 2025," features golden-hued LED lights and special performances in the garden area.

The elaborate display in the building's green space elicits the nostalgia of Christmas morning with music and ambiance, while incorporating modern technology for brilliant displays that are a treat for the eyes.

And the fun doesn't stop there. Up the holiday fun by hitting the ice-skating rink constructed on the premises every winter season (starting from 2,000 yen). This display definitely features fun for the whole family!

**LOCATION:** 9-7-1 Akasaka, Minato-ku, Tokyo  
**PERIOD:** Through Dec. 25 (Promenade are illuminated until Feb. 23)  
**HOURS:** 5-11 p.m.  
**TEL:** 03-3475-3100



## Tokinosumika Royal Road Winter Illumination (Near Fuji)

Hotel and Resort Tokinosumika in Gotemba is just a 30-minute drive from Camp Fuji and offers a large illumination display called "Hikari-no-Sumika" (home of lights) every year.

With its proximity to Mount Fuji, you'll be getting two great views for the price of one! If you want to make a daytrip out of it, add area attractions like the Fuji Five Lakes, Fuji Safari Park, or the Sengen Shrine to your itinerary. Ending the day at the light display will be the cherry on top of a fun day!

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Yokohama Milight

Photo courtesy of Minatomirai21 Grand Mall Park Illumination Office

Misawa Phantasia Winter Illumination

Photo courtesy of Yoshihito Morita

Tokyo Midtown Christmas Illumination

Photo by Takahiro Takiguchi, Stripes Japan

Hiroshima Illumination

# s illuminate the season

During my family's last visit to Tokinosumika's illuminations, we enjoyed the tunnel of lights which spans a quarter mile long. The lights will wow you and you'll get many great pics to share with friends and family back home. My daughter remembers our visit fondly and I'm sure your kiddos will love it, too!

The display follows the theme of "Magic Forest" for Winter 2025-2026 and includes the tunnel plus other lights with elaborate sequences, figures, and ornaments, according to the resort. The grounds also feature a couple of 120-year-old fir Christmas trees dressed up in lights for the season.

For an admission fee, check out "Castle Hill," an impressive multimedia show featuring 3D mapping, music, and a 150-meter-tall water fountain.

- **LOCATION:** 719 Kamiyama, Gotemba City, Shizuoka Pref.
- **PERIOD:** Through Mar. 8

- **HOURS:** Through Jan. 12, 4:30-10 p.m., Jan. 13-Mar. 8, 5-9:30 p.m.
- **ADMISSION:** Tunnel of Light, Twin Trees are free; for Castle Hill, ages 12 or older, 1,200 yen and elementary schoolers, 500 yen
- **TEL:** 0550-87-3700



## ■ Yokohama Milight (near bases in Kanto)

Head to Yokohama for the Yokohama Milight Illumination project spanning a one-mile-long stretch from JR Yokohama Station to Minatomirai Station. The illuminations light up this popular hangout with the backdrop of majestic Landmark Tower, Bay Bridge and Marine Tower.

While strolling through the lights you may want to drop by Dockyard Garden behind the Landmark Tower. On the bottom of the dry dock, you can see a large ship-shaped blue illumination made up of 100,000 LEDs while cheerful Christmas music is played.

The walk-through of Yokohama Bay this time of year is truly gorgeous, and an easy trip for those on Yokosuka, Zama and Atsugi.

- **LOCATION:** From JR Yokohama Station (East Exit) to Dockyard Garden (Landmark Tower)
- **PERIOD:** Through Feb. 8
- **HOURS:** 4-11 p.m.



## ■ Hiroshima Dreamination (Near Iwakuni)

The Hiroshima Dreamination draws over 600,000 visitors each year and is only a one-hour drive from MCAS Iwakuni.

This year, the large-scale illumination project presents a "Fairylend" with 1.4 million lights. Colorful lights fill Peace Boulevard, a major road running from east to west through downtown, along with Namiki Street and Alice Garden. The squares made up of gold-based illuminations around the streets create the "Shining Star", the "Secret Wonderland" and the "Shining Castle".

- **LOCATION:** Center streets of Hiroshima
- **PERIOD:** Through Jan. 3
- **HOURS:** 5:30-10:30 p.m.
- **TEL:** 082-554-1813



## ■ Kirakira Festival (in Sasebo)

Every year, Sasebo City's Shimanose Park and Saruku City 403 shopping arcade get the razzle dazzle treatment with over 1 million lights! Visitors are also treated to the brilliant lights, gigantic, illuminated artworks, live music and dance performances on the weekends.

If you're stationed at Sasebo Naval Base, you'll want to make plans to see this beautiful sight for yourself!

- **PERIOD:** Through Dec. 25 (The site is illuminated until Jan. 12)
- **HOURS:** 5-11 p.m.
- **LOCATION:** Shimanose Park and Saruku City 403 Shopping Arcade in Sasebo City
- **TEL:** 0956-24-4411



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# Sanrio Puroland near Tokyo lights up holidays with Hello Kitty and friends

BY TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI, STRIPES JAPAN

In Japan, winter means that many open-air amusement parks roll out colorful dazzling illumination events sure to keep you entertained and in the holiday spirit.

Near Yokota Air Base, Sanrio Puroland, home to Hello Kitty, My Melody and all the other Sanrio characters, are taking the illumination indoors. “Puroland Illumination Christmas” offers a wonderful holiday feel while avoiding the chilly winter winds.

The event, which runs through Dec. 25, includes various kawaii activities like “Twinkle Gift Night,” a parade featuring Little Twin Stars, and other characters dressed in star costumes and dancing along to holiday music.

With “Sanrio Character Boat Ride - Illumination Party with JOCHUM,” another activity, you can spot dozens of Sanrio characters popping up here and there, enhancing the Christmas spirit, while enjoying your boat ride.

Hit all the photo spots decorated with star-shaped objects and champagne-gold illuminations for some great pics with your favorite Sanrio characters.

Don’t miss the holiday-themed foods and merchandise. Currently, the cafés in the theme park are offering Wish upon a Hello Kitty’s star omelet curry, Cinnamon Roll’s star illumination☆ hamburger curry, and My Melody’s Christmas present♪ nata-de-coco melon soda.

Sanrio Puroland is a great draw for families and Sanrio fans. You’ll definitely want to enjoy the warm illuminations indoors with your favorite Sanrio characters this holiday season!

takiguchi.takahiro@stripes.com

### Things to know

**PERIOD:** Through Dec. 25  
**HOURS:** 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. on most days.  
**LOCATION:** 1-31 Ochiai, Tama City, Tokyo  
**ADMISSION (PASSPORT):** 2,500 - 5,900 yen - varies depending on the day of the week. Check out the link for more information.  
**TEL:** 042-339-1111



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# Stripes Sports Trivia

Don't let the nickname confuse you, "Charlie Hustle" was no Charlie or Charles. Who was the player known for his relentless hustle?

**Answer**  
Pete Rose

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To give their children an edge over the competition, many parents in Japan send their children to "juku," or cram schools. The schools have been around for decades. There are more than 50,000 juku in Japan today and about 50-70 percent of students who plan to take entrance exams use them.

**Kanji of the week**

冬  
Fuyu (winter)

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### The Weekly Crossword

by Margie E. Burke

ACROSS

1 Rumble, as hair  
5 \_\_\_ del Sol  
10 Orch. section  
14 "\_\_\_ Dinka Doo"  
15 Bread spreads  
16 Opera feature  
17 Working hard  
18 Saving gas, say  
20 Shortcut  
22 Bobby of tennis fame  
23 "The Zoo Story" playwright  
24 Took to jail  
26 Like draft beer  
29 Renders invalid  
33 Taunts on the field  
36 Meetup, slangily  
37 Sculler's need  
38 Gibraltar and Magellan  
40 Nonpro sports gp.  
41 It ebbs and flows  
43 Denier's words  
45 Trap  
47 "Peer Gynt" composer  
48 Street reps  
50 Indian flatbreads  
53 Social no-no  
56 "Calvin and Hobbes" cartoonist  
59 "It's news to me"  
61 Bones, in anatomy  
62 Golfer's cry  
63 Water and elec.  
64 Fortune teller  
65 Heads-up abbrs.  
66 "One of \_\_\_ days...."  
67 Latin "to be"

DOWN

1 Sporty Mazda  
2 No further than  
3 Wave-riding platforms  
4 Shiny fabrics  
5 Cola starter  
6 One of five Norwegian kings  
7 More parched  
8 Highest rated  
9 Japanese volcano  
10 Steinbeck's birthplace  
11 H.S. math  
12 Smoke or napkin follower  
13 Yields to gravity  
19 Copier insert: Abbr.  
21 Rogen and others  
25 Trojan War figure  
27 Clothing  
28 Gave up, reluctantly  
30 Quells, as rioters  
31 Son of Isaac  
32 "On the Verge" actress Elisabeth  
33 Shopper's bag  
34 Parade spoiler  
35 \_\_\_ Cruces, N.M.  
39 "Goosebumps" writer  
42 Makes a cryptogram  
44 Fragrant bloomer  
46 Elvis' middle name, originally  
49 Sink of "Stranger Things"

51 Plastic surgery targets  
52 Catch  
53 Minor quarrel  
54 Call to a mate  
55 Italian seaport  
57 Business card nos.  
58 Shock, in a way  
60 Ump's call

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Answers to Previous Crossword:

A	C	M	E	A	D	A	M	S	O	M	A	S
C	R	U	X	M	I	L	E	C	L	I	V	E
T	A	L	C	M	A	I	N	T	A	I	N	E
O	N	C	E	M	O	R	E	E	L	O	I	S
R	E	T	R	O	I	N	G	R	E	S	S	
				P	R	E	S	S	E	R	T	A
V	A	S	T	E	S	T	L	A	R	C	E	N
I	N	T	E	N	T		P	E	A	R	C	E
I	S	A	D	O	R	E	M	I	S	U	S	E
I	I	I	O	R	I	E	N	T	S			
	R	E	A	G	E	N	T	E	A	T	U	P
S	E	W	A	G	E	D	E	A	D	L	I	N
P	R	E	S	E	N	T	E	R	S	I	N	C
O	I	L	E	R	W	E	E	K	T	E	A	K
T	E	L	L	S	O	D	D	S	Y	A	P	S

### SUDOKU

Difficulty: Easy

Edited by Margie E. Burke

HOW TO SOLVE:  
Each row must contain the numbers 1 to 9; each column must contain the numbers 1 to 9; and each set of 3 by 3 boxes must contain the numbers 1 to 9.

Answer to Previous Sudoku:

2	4	6	3	7	5	8	9	1
9	3	5	8	1	4	2	7	6
7	8	1	9	2	6	5	3	4
6	9	4	5	3	2	7	1	8
1	5	3	7	8	9	4	6	2
8	7	2	6	4	1	9	5	3
3	6	7	4	9	8	1	2	5
5	1	8	2	6	7	3	4	9
4	2	9	1	5	3	6	8	7

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# HOLIDAY HOP

## Shop, eat, drink, be merry at Christmas Markets

### NAGAOKA CHRISTMAS MARKET

*Festive shopping, food, and illuminations to enjoy*

The Nagaoka Christmas Market invites visitors to celebrate the season with shopping, food, and sparkling lights. Hosted at Aore Nagaoka's central plaza (Nakadoma), this festive event is returning after a three-year hiatus, and it blends holiday charm with a cozy winter atmosphere.

Under the glow of the venue's iconic Christmas tree, over 40 vendors will offer a variety of goods for purchase. The market features 28 merchandise booths selling everything from Christmas wreaths to knitted accessories and unique children's items, with hands-on workshops available for those who want to craft their own holiday keepsakes.

Food and drink lovers can explore more than a dozen stalls serving winter favorites like cakes, hot wine, and coffee, perfect for warming up while enjoying live performances by local musicians playing Christmas classics.

At the market, visitors can also revel in the breathtaking Aore Nagaoka Illumination, a seasonal light display that transforms the venue into a winter wonderland. The illuminations, which run from mid-November until mid-February,



really set the scene for some magical holiday season shopping.

The market will be open from 11 a.m. until 6 p.m. on Saturday and until 5 p.m. on Sunday, with some vendors rotating between the two days. Whether you plan on shopping for gifts, enjoying local treats, or simply enjoying the atmosphere, the Nagaoka Christmas Market offers something for everyone.

**DATES:** Dec. 19 – 21

**COST:** Free entry

**LOCATION:** Aore Nagaoka

**ADDRESS:** 1 Chome-4-10 Otedori, Nagaoka, Niigata 940-0062

**GETTING THERE:**

- Aore Nagaoka is located just minutes on foot from Nagaoka Station, which is served by the Jōetsu Shinkansen, the Shin'etsu Main Line, and the Jōetsu Local Line.
- For those who opt to drive, basement-level parking is available at Aore – it's charged at 100 JPY for every 30 minute increment. Please keep in mind that only cash is accepted for payment.

**NOTE:** For event updates and more details (including information on participating vendors), visit the official event Instagram.



INSTAGRAM

– Kim Bergström, Japan travel

### OSAKA CHRISTMAS MARKET

*Festive fun at Tennoji Park*

Christmas markets are a highlight of the winter season, and they come filled with delicious eats, drinks,

and trinkets to purchase. The Osaka Christmas Market is one such event, and it takes place at Tennoji Park's Tenshiba area.

The market aims to emulate the atmosphere you'd expect from traditional German Christmas markets, and there will be vendors selling everything from mulled wine and hot cocoa to toys and ornaments imported from Seiffen, a village in Germany known for their woodturning and toy making.

There will also be fun areas with giant Christmas trees set up, making the perfect backdrop for festive photo opportunities. Admission to the event itself is free, but bring yen if you plan on making purchases.

**DATES:** Until Dec. 25

**COST:** Free entry

**LOCATION:** Tennoji Park

**ADDRESS:** 5-55 Chausuyamacho, Tennoji Ward, Osaka, 543-0063

**GETTING THERE:**

Tenshiba at Tennoji Park can be accessed in just two minutes on foot from Tennoji Station, which is served by numerous lines including the JR Osaka Loop Line and the Osaka Metro's Midōsuji Line and Tanimachi Line to name a few.

– Kim Bergström, Japan travel

### TENJIN CHRISTMAS MARKET

*Enjoy a taste of Europe at Christmas in Fukuoka*

The Tenjin Christmas Market in Fukuoka brings a taste of Christmastime in Europe to the city. The event will have a range of food and drinks on offer (including the always popular mulled wine!) and vendors

selling Christmas decorations and other goods.

With an array of twinkling lights illuminating the area after the sun goes down, it's the perfect spot to embrace the joy and cheer that comes with the festive season.

Admission to the event is free, but do bring some yen if you plan to make a purchase. The hours of the market also differ on weekdays and weekends. The weekday hours of operation are from 5 p.m. until 10 p.m., and on weekends and holidays that extends out to 12 p.m. until 10 p.m.

**DATES:** Until Dec. 25

**HOURS:** 5 – 11 p.m.

**COST:** Free entry

**LOCATION:** Fukuoka

City Hall West Side Fureai Plaza

**ADDRESS:** 1 Chome-8-1 Tenjin, Chuoh Ward, Fukuoka, 810-0001

**GETTING THERE:**

The Tenjin Christmas Market takes place at the Fukuoka City Hall West Side Fureai Plaza. The venue is located just four minutes on foot from Tenjin Station, served by the Fukuoka City Subway's Kuko Line.

**PHONE:** +81927345462

– Kim Bergström, Japan travel



WEBSITE



WEBSITE

### YAMAGATA CHRISTMAS MARKET

*A market reminiscent of Germany waiting for you*

Every year, Yamagata Prefecture becomes a snow globe for winter sports, festivals, and heartwarming delicacies. Before the winter wonderland goes into full effect, kick off the holiday season with Yamagata's first Christmas market!

The Yamagata Christmas Market will take place just a one minute walk from Yamagata Station. The festive market is inspired by German traditions, featuring gourmet food, mulled wine, locally made crafts, and other treats that people of all ages can enjoy.

Admission is free, so take a stroll with a warm drink in hand and celebrate the magic of Christmas!

**DATES:** Dec. 12 – 25

**HOURS:** 4 – 9 p.m.

**ADDRESS:** 1 Chome-2-38 Futabacho, Yamagata, 990-0828

**GETTING THERE:**

Yamagin Prefectural Hall Event Square is a one minute walk from Yamagata Station on the West Exit.

– Tiffany Aguilar, Japan Travel



WEBSITE

### TOKYO CHRISTMAS MARKET

*A taste of Europe in Tokyo*

Christmas is a season for family, and especially lovers in Japan. The Tokyo Christmas Market is one of the most extravagant ones in Japan. Supported by the German Tourism and German Embassy, visitors will definitely get a taste of Europe.

The Christmas Pyramid is a known symbol of Christmas in Europe, which will also be showcased here, along with stellar illuminations. Hibiya will turn into a cozy Christmas town, with a 14-meter tall Christmas tree shipped from Germany!

Stalls and shops like those in Zeifen village will open; from handmade holiday ornaments to hot chocolate, beer and Christmas workshops, this market is perfect for the holiday season. There will also be live performances.

If you plan on attending, please note that ticket prices differ from weekdays to weekends/holidays (¥1000 and ¥1500 for adults respectively). This increases to ¥2,000 during the period from December 23rd through 25th.

The first evening of the event starts at 4 p.m. to 9:30 p.m., but all other days run from 11 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. (last orders at 9 p.m. for all days).

**DATES:** Until Dec. 25

**HOURS:** 11 a.m. – 9:30 p.m.

**COSTS:** 1,000 JPY – 2,000 JPY (Ticket prices)

**LOCATION:** Meiji Jingu Gaien, Shinjuku, Tokyo

**GETTING THERE:**

Meiji Jingu Gaien can be accessed in under 5 minutes on foot from Gaienmae Station on the Tokyo Metro Ginza line.

– Jessica Lin, Japan Travel



WEBSITE



WEBSITE (MEIJI JINGU GAIEEN)

### SHIBUYA CHRISTMAS MARKET

*A fusion of European charm and Hawaiian warmth*

This winter, Shibuya will host its first-ever official Christmas market event, bringing a mix of European charm and Hawaiian warmth to the heart of Tokyo. The event will take place from December 1st to 25th across three locations: Miyashita Park, Kitaya Park, and the Yoyogi Park BE STAGE.

Unlike traditional markets found in other cities, this one will feature two distinct themes. At Miyashita Park, the European zone intends to capture the atmosphere of a traditional German Christmas market, while Yoyogi Park will transform with a tropical atmosphere bringing a touch of warmth to winter. It's the first time Japan has seen a multi-location market with such contrasting holiday vibes.

Visitors can enjoy festive food stalls, crafts, live performances, and even a lighting ceremony on December 1st featuring a special guest performance. Admission is free, though on select days, limited-entry tickets with commemorative mugs will be available for 1,500 JPY.

For more details and specific operating hours for each venue within the event window, please visit the official site.

**DATES:** Until Dec. 25

**COST:** Free entry

**LOCATION:** Miyashita Park, Kitaya Park, and the Yoyogi Park BE STAGE

**ADDRESS:** 2-1 Yoyogikamizonochō, Shibuya, Tokyo 151-0052

**GETTING THERE:**

All of the event venues are walkable within 10 minutes or less from Shibuya Station.

– Kim Bergström, Japan travel



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