# Sumo makes a historic comeback to London’s Royal Albert Hall after 34 years



Sumo wrestling made a spectacular return to London’s Royal Albert Hall after a 34-year hiatus, captivating packed audiences with a rare five-day Grand Sumo Tournament featuring some of the sport’s elite athletes. This event marks only the second time in over 1,500 years of sumo history that such a prestigious tournament—also known as a basho—has been held outside Japan, the first being at the same venue in 1991. The current tournament, which concluded recently, showcased 40 top rikishi (wrestlers) competing on a specially constructed clay and rice bale platform called the dohyo, preserving the sport’s traditional setting and ceremonial gravitas.

The organisers have invested significant effort to authentically recreate the sumo experience in London. The Royal Albert Hall had to undergo extensive modifications, including the installation of reinforced toilets and new seating capable of supporting wrestlers weighing up to 200 kilograms. Complementing these preparations, the intense dietary demands of the competitors became apparent, with around 11 stones of rice consumed daily and local wholesalers reportedly running out of noodles due to the huge quantities ordered. This behind-the-scenes glimpse highlights sumo’s demanding physical culture, which extends far beyond the matches themselves.

Among the tournament’s highlights was the dominant performance by grand champion Onosato Daiki, who secured victory in the main bout by forcefully tossing Ura Kazuki out of the ring. Another striking moment came from Ukrainian wrestler Aonishiki Arata, whose remarkable debut year continued as he triumphed over Atamifuji Sakutaro despite conceding a significant weight disadvantage of over six stones. Several bouts featured notable size mismatches reminiscent of ‘David versus Goliath’ encounters, including Tobizaru Masaya, who overcame both weight and height deficits to defeat the larger Shonannoumi Momotaro with a stunning throw. Such exciting contests introduced dramatic and dynamic storytelling that engaged both seasoned sumo enthusiasts and first-time spectators alike.

The event blended athleticism with cultural reverence as the audience were reminded by the compere not to approach the dohyo, acknowledged as a “very sacred place.” This ritualistic respect resonates deeply with sumo’s long spiritual heritage, which dates back more than 1,500 years. It is this combination of sport, ceremony, and history that distinguishes sumo as much more than a competitive pastime—a living tradition reflecting Japan’s cultural identity.

The tournament also served as a diplomatic bridge between Japan and the United Kingdom. Since their arrival in London, wrestlers were seen embracing the city’s landmarks, posing for photos at the Houses of Parliament and Buckingham Palace, riding Lime bikes, and even enjoying local snacks such as hot dogs on Westminster Bridge. This warm cultural exchange illustrated the event’s broader ambition to share and spread appreciation for Japanese heritage internationally.

Organisers view this London tournament as a significant step in a decade-long effort by the Japan Sumo Association to modernise and globalise the sport after years of internal challenges. Nobuyoshi Hakkaku, a former grand champion who now chairs the association, emphasises the importance of engaging new international audiences and promoting sumo’s unique blend of athleticism and tradition. Looking ahead, next year’s event is planned for Paris, signalling a continued drive to expand sumo’s global reach and captivate new fans beyond its Japanese heartland.

This resurgence coincides with renewed worldwide interest in sumo, partly fuelled by popular media such as the Netflix series and new sumo facilities like the hall in Osaka, Japan. The cross-cultural exhibitions of sumo, combining ritual, skill, and spectacle, highlight the sport’s growing resonance in an increasingly interconnected world, where audiences value not only the competition but the stories and cultures behind it.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/sport/royal-albert-hall-sumo-wrestling-london-japan-buckingham-palace-b2846267.html), [[5]](https://www.reuters.com/sports/grand-sumo-tournament-makes-historic-return-london-after-34-years-2024-12-04/), [[3]](https://apnews.com/article/e26ac995ce739ec3e74fe44cb20793cc)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/sport/royal-albert-hall-sumo-wrestling-london-japan-buckingham-palace-b2846267.html), [[7]](https://www.independent.co.uk/sport/royal-albert-hall-sumo-wrestling-london-japan-buckingham-palace-b2846267.html)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/sport/royal-albert-hall-sumo-wrestling-london-japan-buckingham-palace-b2846267.html), [[4]](https://www.reuters.com/sports/flipping-sumo-wrestlers-get-london-tournament-rolling-2025-10-16/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/sport/royal-albert-hall-sumo-wrestling-london-japan-buckingham-palace-b2846267.html), [[3]](https://apnews.com/article/e26ac995ce739ec3e74fe44cb20793cc)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/sport/royal-albert-hall-sumo-wrestling-london-japan-buckingham-palace-b2846267.html), [[7]](https://www.independent.co.uk/sport/royal-albert-hall-sumo-wrestling-london-japan-buckingham-palace-b2846267.html)
* Paragraph 6 – [[2]](https://www.reuters.com/sports/wrestlers-primed-rock-london-five-day-tournament-2025-10-15/), [[5]](https://www.reuters.com/sports/grand-sumo-tournament-makes-historic-return-london-after-34-years-2024-12-04/), [[4]](https://www.reuters.com/sports/flipping-sumo-wrestlers-get-london-tournament-rolling-2025-10-16/)
* Paragraph 7 – [[2]](https://www.reuters.com/sports/wrestlers-primed-rock-london-five-day-tournament-2025-10-15/), [[6]](https://apnews.com/article/cc7acc92b743469019e1db4c7fcc5693), [[7]](https://www.independent.co.uk/sport/royal-albert-hall-sumo-wrestling-london-japan-buckingham-palace-b2846267.html)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/sport/royal-albert-hall-sumo-wrestling-london-japan-buckingham-palace-b2846267.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.reuters.com/sports/wrestlers-primed-rock-london-five-day-tournament-2025-10-15/> - Japan's top sumo wrestlers are bringing their ancient sport to London's Royal Albert Hall for a five-day Grand Sumo Tournament, marking the first event of its kind outside Japan since 1991. Over 40 elite rikishi (wrestlers), alongside referees and sumo elders, have arrived to compete on a specially constructed clay and rice bale 'dohyo' platform. The tournament is the result of over a decade of planning, led by Japan Sumo Association Chairman Hakkaku, a former Grand Champion, who aims to modernize the sport after years of scandals.
3. <https://apnews.com/article/e26ac995ce739ec3e74fe44cb20793cc> - Sumo wrestling, a traditional Japanese sport with a history spanning 1,500 years, was showcased at London's Royal Albert Hall in a rare international presentation. This marked only the second time that the elite five-day tournament has been held outside Japan, the first being in 1991 at the same historic venue. The event was organized not only to display the athleticism and ritual of sumo but also to highlight Japan’s rich cultural heritage. The exhibition featured traditional sumo bouts, involving large competitors engaged in tests of strength and technique while wearing traditional attire.
4. <https://www.reuters.com/sports/flipping-sumo-wrestlers-get-london-tournament-rolling-2025-10-16/> - Japan's premier sumo wrestlers kicked off a five-day exhibition tournament at London's Royal Albert Hall, marking the UK’s first such event in 34 years. The evening opened with traditional ceremonies and was guided by seasoned NHK announcer Hiro Morita, who helped newcomers understand the sport. The crowd quickly warmed up, cheering for dramatic moments such as Asakoryu’s energetic battle with Sadanoumi, and a memorable mismatch where lightest wrestler Midorifuji was hoisted out of the ring by the heavier Kinbozan. A highlight came when Ukrainian wrestler Aonishiki executed a rare and skillful move to defeat his opponent Atamifuji. The event, hosted by the Japan Sumo Association to promote UK-Japan ties, concluded with wins by grand champions Hoshoryu and Onosato and a traditional bow-twirling ceremony to purify the fighting ring. Spectators were left impressed by the power and ritual of the sumo spectacle.
5. <https://www.reuters.com/sports/grand-sumo-tournament-makes-historic-return-london-after-34-years-2024-12-04/> - The Grand Sumo Tournament will return to London’s Royal Albert Hall for the first time since 1991, making it only the second instance in the sport’s 1,500-year history that a five-day 'basho' is held outside Japan. Scheduled for October 15-19, 2025, the event will feature a traditional raised clay 'dohyo' fighting stage, with seating arrangements that foster an authentic sumo experience. James Ainscough, chief executive of the Royal Albert Hall, highlights the cultural and educational significance of this event, beyond its excitement as a sporting spectacle. Wrestlers from Japan's top sumo division will compete for the London title, under the watchful eye of Nobuyoshi Hakkaku, the 1991 winner and current head of the Japan Sumo Association. Hakkaku emphasizes the importance of sharing Japanese tradition and culture with the British public, confident that the spectators will gain a meaningful appreciation of sumo through this historic event.
6. <https://apnews.com/article/cc7acc92b743469019e1db4c7fcc5693> - Next year, London's Royal Albert Hall will host a five-day sumo wrestling tournament, marking only the second time the sport's elite athletes have competed outside Japan since 1991. Organizers aim to recreate the buzz from 30 years ago, hoping to attract sell-out crowds and national attention. This resurgence coincides with a renewed global interest in sumo, partly fueled by Netflix series and a new sumo hall in Osaka, Japan. The event will also showcase Japanese culture, featuring Kabuki theater and other traditions. Wrestlers Kitanowaka and Fukutsuumi, along with past champion Nobuyoshi Hakkaku, promoted the event with an exhibition match and posed for photographers in London's chilly November weather. The sport’s rich ritualistic heritage, coupled with modern interest, suggests a promising return to London.
7. <https://www.independent.co.uk/sport/royal-albert-hall-sumo-wrestling-london-japan-buckingham-palace-b2846267.html> - Sumo returned to London's Royal Albert Hall after a 34-year absence, with the opening night featuring the sport’s elite in action. For only the second time, the Grand Sumo Tournament is being staged outside Japan, with the five-day event concluding on Sunday. London’s Royal Albert Hall also hosted the event in 1991, and this time 40 wrestlers (rikishi) were taking part, with grand champion Onosato Daiki winning the main bout of the evening when he hurled Ura Kazuki out of the ring (dohyo). Ukrainian Aonishiki Arata was another notable winner, defeating Atamifuji Sakutaro despite conceding over six stones in weight. The Royal Albert Hall had to make significant adjustments to cater for the wrestlers, including bringing in new chairs capable of bearing 200kg in weight, as well as installing reinforced toilets. Around 11 stones in rice have been eaten each day by the competitors, with event organisers revealing that the wholesaler being used had run out of noodles because of the quantity ordered. The wrestlers have been seen across London since their arrival, posing for pictures in front of the Houses of Parliament and Buckingham Palace, riding Lime bikes, and even eating hot dogs on Westminster Bridge. Sumo, which has a ceremonial-religious aspect and dates back more than 1,500 years, will be taken to Paris next year to continue reaching new audiences.