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



After captivating Londoners on the streets with sightseeing and social media buzz, sumo wrestlers took centre stage for a historic five-day Grand Sumo Tournament at the Royal Albert Hall, attracting sell-out crowds eager to witness one of Japan's most ancient sports in the heart of the UK capital. This event marks only the second occasion since 1991 that a Grand Sumo Tournament has been staged outside Japan, and uniquely, both instances have taken place at the Royal Albert Hall, underscoring the venue’s long-standing tradition of hosting prestigious cultural and sporting events.

The transformation of the iconic hall was remarkable: crews constructed a traditional clay dohyo—the sacred ring made from clay and rice bales—inside the arena, covered by a suspended purple canopy, all captured and shared widely on TikTok and other social media platforms. This elaborate setup underscored the organisers’ commitment to preserving sumo’s deep-rooted Shinto traditions during the London event. Spectators were treated to an intense opening night featuring 20 bouts, where the wrestlers' immense physical prowess and ceremonial rituals, such as the salt-throwing purification rites, lent the evening a unique blend of sport and heritage that resonated strongly with the crowd.

Event organisers faced practical challenges due to the athletes' considerable stature; many wrestlers weigh around 25 stone (approximately 160kg), necessitating reinforced seating able to support up to 200kg—a doubling of the Royal Albert Hall’s usual weight capacity. Director of programming Matthew Todd revealed that new chairs were specially sourced, alongside reinforced toilets and safety measures to accommodate these heavyweight athletes safely. The venue also issued warnings about the front-row seating arrangements, where the absence of barriers meant there was a risk of wrestlers falling into the spectator area, advising caution particularly for those with mobility issues and for young children.

The arrival of the wrestlers was met with fascination as clips showed them exploring London’s landmarks, including a McDonald’s visit, browsing at TK Maxx, and mimicking the Beatles’ famous Abbey Road crossing, delighting passers-by and showcasing a human, relatable side to the elite athletes. The tournament itself was spearheaded by the Japan Sumo Association and its chairman, Hakkaku, a former Grand Champion, who has championed modernising sumo after a period marked by scandals, helping to bring the sport’s rich cultural significance to a global audience.

Among the top competitors were two grand champions or yokozuna: Mongolia’s Hoshoryu Tomokatsu and Japan’s Onosato Daiki, the latter noted for becoming the fastest wrestler to achieve this rank in the modern era. The event, which also featured a Ukrainian wrestler executing a rare skillful move, was hosted to promote UK-Japan ties and cultural exchange, as recognised by Royal Albert Hall’s chief executive, James Ainscough OBE. He noted the honour in hosting the tournament again, highlighting sumo’s unique combination of sport, tradition, and ritual, which distinguishes it from other longstanding activities like boxing and wrestling frequently held at the venue.

As the tournament unfolded, the audience was treated not only to fierce competition but also to cultural performances such as the traditional bow-twirling ceremony used to purify the ring. The enthusiastic crowd embraced these rituals and the raw physicality of the bouts, illustrating the event’s success in bringing this centuries-old Japanese cultural spectacle vividly to life in London. The Grand Sumo Tournament’s return to the Royal Albert Hall after 34 years serves as a testament to sumo’s enduring global appeal and the dedication of those working to preserve and promote its legacy worldwide.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/othersports/article-15196409/Sumo-stars-London-Royal-Albert-Hall.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://apnews.com/article/e26ac995ce739ec3e74fe44cb20793cc), [[7]](https://www.scmp.com/sport/martial-arts/other-martial-arts/article/3289482/grand-sumo-tournament-makes-historic-return-londons-royal-albert-hall-after-34-years)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/othersports/article-15196409/Sumo-stars-London-Royal-Albert-Hall.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.reuters.com/sports/wrestlers-primed-rock-london-five-day-tournament-2025-10-15/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/othersports/article-15196409/Sumo-stars-London-Royal-Albert-Hall.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/othersports/article-15196409/Sumo-stars-London-Royal-Albert-Hall.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.reuters.com/sports/wrestlers-primed-rock-london-five-day-tournament-2025-10-15/), [[4]](https://news.sky.com/story/stars-of-sumo-head-to-londons-royal-albert-hall-and-noodles-sell-out-13450433)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/othersports/article-15196409/Sumo-stars-London-Royal-Albert-Hall.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[5]](https://www.reuters.com/sports/flipping-sumo-wrestlers-get-london-tournament-rolling-2025-10-16/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[4]](https://news.sky.com/story/stars-of-sumo-head-to-londons-royal-albert-hall-and-noodles-sell-out-13450433), [[6]](https://www.nationalworld.com/sport/other-sport/grand-sumo-tournament-returns-london-tickets-howe-to-watch-tv-5360628), [[5]](https://www.reuters.com/sports/flipping-sumo-wrestlers-get-london-tournament-rolling-2025-10-16/)
* Paragraph 7 – [[5]](https://www.reuters.com/sports/flipping-sumo-wrestlers-get-london-tournament-rolling-2025-10-16/), [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/othersports/article-15196409/Sumo-stars-London-Royal-Albert-Hall.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://apnews.com/article/e26ac995ce739ec3e74fe44cb20793cc)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/othersports/article-15196409/Sumo-stars-London-Royal-Albert-Hall.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - 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://news.sky.com/story/stars-of-sumo-head-to-londons-royal-albert-hall-and-noodles-sell-out-13450433> - Sumo returns to London on Wednesday. It's just the second time a Grand Tournament has been held outside of Japan - and this is a sport that has records going back over 1,500 years. It's 34 years since the Royal Albert Hall hosted the only previous such event on foreign soil - and the appetite for tickets meant all five days sold out immediately. Much of the focus is on the two grand champions or yokozuna, the 74th and 75th men to attain the rank. They're the Mongolian Hoshoryu Tomokatsu, plus Japan's Onosato Daiki - who this year became the quickest wrestler to achieve the rank in the modern era.
5. <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.
6. <https://www.nationalworld.com/sport/other-sport/grand-sumo-tournament-returns-london-tickets-howe-to-watch-tv-5360628> - Royal Albert Hall’s chief executive, James Ainscough OBE previously said: “The fact they’ve chosen to come back when they could have gone to any capital city around the world is quite an honour, particularly for us here at the Royal Albert Hall. To find something like Sumo, which isn’t just a sport but is a cultural moment, has a great tradition and ritual attached to it, it makes it even more interesting. We’ve had wrestling and boxing here at the Royal Albert Hall for well over 100 years, but Sumo is a completely different level and nature of sport and that’s why it’s such a fascinating thing to bring here.”
7. <https://www.scmp.com/sport/martial-arts/other-martial-arts/article/3289482/grand-sumo-tournament-makes-historic-return-londons-royal-albert-hall-after-34-years> - The five-day event, or ‘basho’, has been held only once before outside Japan – back in 1991 and also at the venerable concert hall.