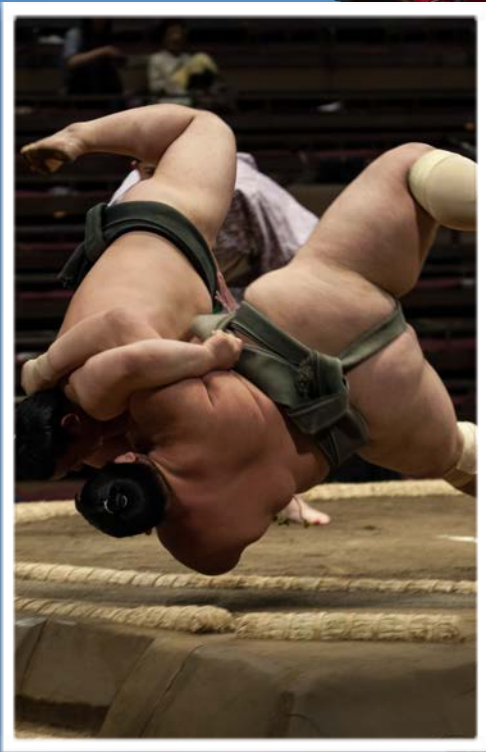


WATCHING SUMO



Welcome to Grand Sumo!

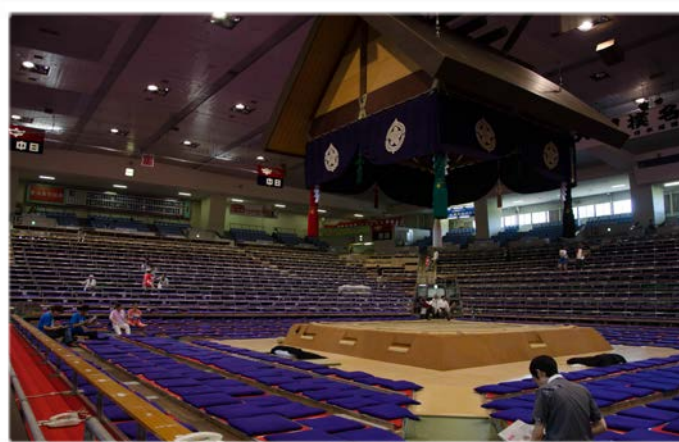
We made this guide to help you understand the basics of sumo and get the most out of your time at the event. We appreciate your business and hope you enjoy the day!

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The first thing you'll see on your way into a sumo arena are large colourful vertical flags with the names of the wrestlers. In front of the stadium will be a tall tower. The drumming you hear at the end of each day is performed at the top. The men checking your tickets are former wrestlers. If you are unsure of where your seat is show your ticket to any usher near the entrance and they will take you to it. Once inside the arena the first thing you'll notice is a large cabinet filled with trophies. In the center is the Emperor's Cup. It's silver and weighs 37 kilograms.



Once in your seat take a look around. Suspended over the ring you'll see a Shinto roof with four coloured tassels representing four spirits and directions. If you arrive early in the morning the stadium will be mostly empty except just a few hardcore fans as well as friends and family of the wrestlers in attendance.



At this time of day the fights progress quickly with new wrestlers fighting every two minutes or so. Sumo is very simple. Down or out. If you touch the ground inside the ring with any part of the body except the soles of the feet, or go outside it you lose.



The ring itself is 4.55 metres in diameter and is made of hard packed earth and straw bales. As a throwback to when sumo was performed outside, four of the bales are offset to allow rainwater to drain away. A fine layer of sand around the bales helps judges determine if a wrestler has touched the ground outside them.



With the wrestlers in the ring you will see the referees. Their costumes get more elaborate as the day goes on. Ring announcers holding fans call the wrestlers up to fight, sweep the ring and keep everything running smoothly.

Sitting around the ring you will see five judges in black. They have the final say on bouts and can overrule the referee. When a fight result is a close call they will step up onto the ring for a conference and the head judge will then announce the decision to the audience. They have three options; confirm the referee's decision, reverse it, or call a rematch. There are surprisingly few rules. Hair-pulling, eye-gouging, punching with a closed fist and kicking above the knee are illegal but otherwise anything goes.



From 8:30am to about 2:00pm nothing happens except the fights. You are allowed to exit and re-enter the arena once, so it's ok to leave and come back later to see the top wrestlers. Make sure to get your hand stamped at the exit on your way out or you won't be allowed back in, even with a ticket.



Less than 3% of all wrestlers that join sumo reach the salaried ranks, the top 2 divisions. Those that do are known as *sekitori* and their fights start in the afternoon. Before those fights they are introduced to the crowd with a ring-entering ceremony.

There are two of those ceremonies, one at around 2:00pm for the second division and one at around 3:40pm for the top division. During the ceremony wrestlers wear brightly coloured aprons decorated with the names of sponsors, their university, etc. They change out of them before their bout into a simple belt called a mawashi. One benefit of being a *sekitori* is having a silk mawashi in whatever colour you like. Regular wrestlers just fight in hard black canvas mawashi.



Sekitori have four minutes of preparation time on the ring before they fight so you will see them stomp, throw salt, go to the corner, face off and.....repeat the whole thing again. A good hint is to watch the referee's war fan. When he holds it towards the wrestlers it means time is up and they have to fight. Before a fight *sekitori* receive "power water" in the corner from the previous winner on their side. *Sekitori* fight once per day and the man with the best record at the end of the 15 days is the champion.



Before the top division bouts the grand-champions (*yokozuna*) have their own ring-entering ceremonies.

Yokozuna's entire existence is supposed to embody the spirit of sumo. Unlike all other wrestlers they can never be demoted. If they aren't contending for every tournament title they are expect to retire rather than disgrace the sport.

Before the top bouts you will see banners paraded around the ring. Each one represents 55,000 yen that sponsors placed on the fight. The winner gets a stack of envelopes containing that money.



After the final bout of the day a wrestler will mount the ring to perform a bow-twirling ceremony to give thanks. When he finishes, your day of sumo is at an end.

