

Wagasa Illumination Lights Up Tokyo Business District

Since 2018, the Otemachi area near Tokyo Station has been the site of an illumination event that uses *wagasa* (traditional Japanese umbrellas). The contrast between the business district vibe of the area and the Japanese-style illuminations looks fascinating in photos, making this event quite the talk of the town. We interviewed one of its organizers. (Text: Tanaka Nozomi)

Walumination is a coined term combining “wa” meaning “Japanese-style” and “illumination.” The event came about after an executive committee was formed among local corporate employees interested in community development. Otemachi, the site of the event, is located in the northwestern part of the area between Tokyo Station, also known as the main entrance to Tokyo, and the Imperial Palace, where the Emperor of Japan resides. Otemachi is one of Japan’s most prominent business districts, home to the headquarters of many major corporations and financial institutions, yet it also holds a certain charm as a place of historical interest. This is what inspired the executive committee to choose it as the site for the event.

Although there is almost no trace left of them today,

Multicolored *wagasa* illuminated in vibrant light in the center of the Otemachi business district.

residences of feudal lords¹ who served the shoguns of the Tokugawa Shogunate lined the Otemachi district from the 17th through the middle of the late 19th century. The executive committee decided to organize an illumination event that features the *wagasa*, the traditional Japanese craft in order to create a space in which visitors could experience a sense of Japanese ambience in an area where feudal lords used to live and many samurai used to come and go.

“In 2019, the second year of holding the Walumination event, we used about 100 *wagasa* and arranged them in a display like *andons*² (Japanese lanterns) (see photo). We chose Otemachi Nakadori Street, one of the more vibrant and bustling thoroughfares in Otemachi, as the site of the display, placed the *wagasa* on both sides of the street



Otemachi is located between Tokyo Station and the Imperial Palace.

Photo: Geospatial Information Authority of Japan





Above left: *Wagasa* illumination lights up Otemachi business district

Below left: Illuminated *wagasa* arranged in a curved line

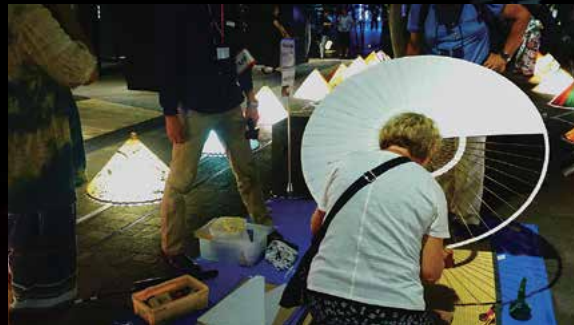
Center: Display of a tower-shaped three-dimensional work

Above right: *Wagasa* artworks are also displayed in building entrance halls.

Below right: An installation of traditional Japanese umbrellas called *Wagasa Wall*

in straight or curved lines, employing variations in the arrangement, and illuminated them. This display was very well received. In a different previous year, in addition to arranging *wagasa* displays along the street, we exhibited installations, such as tower-shaped *wagasa* arrangements, in building entrance halls and alleys. The light emanating from the *wagasa*, which are made by attaching traditional Japanese *washi* paper to a bamboo frame, is soft and mesmerizingly beautiful. I hope these lights allow many people to experience the charm of the Otemachi district,” says Kitamura Ayumi, a member of the executive committee.

In the past, the event program included *wagasa* making demonstrations by artisans and workshops where people could try attaching the paper to *wagasa*



A workshop offering the popular experience of *wagasa* making

frames. These attractions were very popular with visitors from overseas, too. The comments received, such as “Very beautiful,” “Thank you for showing us this craft,” and “Amazing! Beautiful Japan!” indicate that visitors from overseas enjoyed the workshops with the awareness that *wagasa* making is an experience of traditional Japanese craft.

Currently, the organizers are coordinating efforts toward holding Walumination in October, 2023. Executive Committee member Kitamura Ayumi expressed her enthusiasm about the event, saying: “Although Otemachi is a business district, I would be very happy to see it become a place visited by many people on weekends and outside of working hours, and the fan of Otemachi gradually increases.” 



1. The Tokugawa Shogunate granted residences in Edo (current Tokyo) to the feudal lords who served the Tokugawa family, as they were required to travel from their domains to Edo, where they had to spend every second year. The site where the Edo Castle once stood is now occupied by the Imperial Palace, and part of it is open to the public as the East Gardens of the Imperial Palace.
2. An *andon* is a type of lantern made of *washi* Japanese paper attached to a frame made of bamboo or wood. In the past, oil or candles were used as the light source, but nowadays electric lanterns are also referred to as *andons*.