

Tens of thousands gather at Tokyo Rainbow Pride events for the first time in 3 years.

There were squeals of joy from people walking around the Tokyo Rainbow Pride Festival this year as they bumped into old friends, some they hadn't seen for months if not years.

It had been three years since the Tokyo Rainbow Pride Parade was canceled at the last minute when one of Japan's first surges in COVID19 cases began in March 2020.

"It is like finally being able to confirm our friends still exist after all these years," one reveler decked out in a rainbow t-shirt and headband said as she hugged another friend..

Over the three days of the Tokyo Rainbow Pride Festival 2022 April 22 through 24, some 66,000 thousand people flocked to Tokyo's Yoyogi park to reconnect and re-energize their fight for LGBTQ+ rights and recognition.



Booths of the Tokyo Rainbow Pride Festival line the Yoyogi Event Plaza April 22-24, 2022. Credit TRP2022

The weather helped, especially on the first two days (Friday and Saturday). Bright sunshine and a cool breeze had replaced a weather forecast that had predicted clouds and rain.

The largest crowds however were on the last day (Sunday) despite the fact that the predictions of heavy cloud cover and rain had finally come true.

The total number of visitors this year was certainly not anywhere close to the numbers achieved before in 2019 when 204,000 people packed what remains essentially one of Asia's largest LGBTQ+ event. But this year security had to be tightened and admission restricted through several entry points around the Yoyogi Event Plaza - all in the name of preventing the spread of COVID19 infections. And there was also the fact that many overseas tourists, who often travel to Tokyo especially for the occasion, were still not allowed back in Japan.

Nevertheless, the excitement and buzz was palatable throughout the three days.

"We are very happy that so many people from all over came and filled the festival with so many smiling faces," both TRP co-chairs Fumino Sugiyama and Natsumi Yamada concurred.

And there was much to smile about around the Plaza. Over a hundred booths exhibiting rainbow colored wares and merch, or selling food and drinks kept the visitors occupied.

Local LGBTQ+ NGOs, Japanese and foreign corporate sponsors, foreign embassies were all present in force. And for the first time 2 Japanese media booths - the national broadcaster NHK and private broadcaster NTV also joined in with rainbow colored mascots and booths with exhibitions of the LGBTQ+ friendly programs they had broadcast.



NHK's Rainbow colored mascot at the Tokyo Rainbow Festival Photo credit Olivier Fabre

On stage, the three days were kicked off with a program of educational symposiums to guide the LGBTQ community through the various legal, medical and social hurdles the community faces daily.

The second day was followed by an entertainment program which began with four artists chosen by the public, a band made up of rickshaw drivers, the openly LGBTQ+ singer KIYOTAKA TENDO and also the openly LGBTQ+ performance group ENVii GABRIELLA. The day ended, however, with Thelma Aoyama, a Japanese pop and R&B singer who is also part Afro-Trinidadian, who sang five songs, including her signature "Soba ni Iru ne".

The final day of the festivities kicked off with inspiring speeches by supporters including U.S. Ambassador Rahm Emanuel, Dutch Ambassador to Japan Peter van der Vliet and Acting Canadian Ambassador to Japan Deborah Paul, and Japanese politicians before people rushed to line up for the parade.



*From right to left, TRP Co-Chair Fumino Sugiyama, U.S. Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel, his wife Ms Ms. Amy Rule, Dutch Ambassador to Japan Peter van der Vliet, his wife Ms Joan Joan Mitchell, Canadian Acting Ambassador to Japan Deborah Paul, TRP Co-Chair Natsumi Yamada.
Credit TRP2022*



A 15 meter (50 foot) rainbow flag leading the Tokyo Rainbow Parade 2022. Photo credit Olivier Fabre

Ultimately some 2,000 people (pre-registered due to COVID19 limitations) took part in the Tokyo Rainbow Parade 2022 which wound through the streets of Tokyo, at one time walking across the famed Shibuya scramble crossing. Led by TRP co-chairs and the Youth Pride Japan (new TRP project of young members in their teens and 20s) the parade signaled its will to “Change the Future” for future generations. Braving the gradually strengthening rain, crowds also gathered to cheer them on, waving rainbow flags and shouting “Happy Pride” from their store fronts.

Stage events continued after the parade, with an introduction to several of the major Pride organizations around Japan, before the final entertainment program kicked off with the Japanese girl rock band Chai, drag queen unit Happo-Fubijin, comedian and impressionist

Miracle Hikaru, and before ending with a colorful ensemble of drag queen shows including five songs from the drag queen trio Hoshikuzu Scat, made up of some of the most famous drag queens.



Stage finale at the Tokyo Rainbow Pride Festival Sunday April 24, 2022. Credit TRP2022

All in all, while there were a few hiccups here and there that the organizers promised to learn from for following Pride festivals, the three days ended without any major incidents.

However, TRP has promised that it is not the end of Pride Events for the year. After all TRP has also vowed in its mission statement this year to find countless ways to connect in this world we call the “new normal”.

So taking on the lessons learned from the previous years of COVID19 restrictions, Tokyo Rainbow Pride plans to host online events in June for those who were unable to make it in person this year, especially those from the LGBTQ community outside Tokyo who are less likely to have come out or for one reason or another were not able to come to the capital.

The online events, which will be held during the global Pride Month, will include a “Pride Conference” on June 3rd, and a “Pride Talk Live” event on June 25th and 26th. Details will be confirmed on the official website (<https://tokyorainbowpride.com/>)

There is even talk of future plans for Tokyo Rainbow Pride including some form of collaboration with the next two World Pride events; Sydney in 2023 and Taiwan in 2025. But that is still some time ahead.

Final Figures:

Pride Parade participants: **2,000** people in eight blocks or floats

Pride Festival total attendance: **66,949**

(Breakdown: Friday, April 22 – **5,012** / Saturday, April 23 – **28,543** / Sunday, April 24 – **33,394**)