

Halloween in Shibuya: Mayhem ensues despite increased security and ban on alcohol

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Chaos unfolded in Shibuya on Thursday night as countless costumed partygoers pushed, pulled and squeezed their way through a seemingly endless crowd running amok despite efforts by police to contain the madness of the annual Halloween celebrations in the area.

Hundreds of police officers and security guards, many shouting instructions through megaphones, used ropes in an attempt to corral the waves of revelers traversing the famous Shibuya scramble crossing.

In recent years, the bustling Shibuya area has become the place for people to gather for Halloween celebrations. Aside from updated pop culture references, everybody from Kylo Ren and the Joker to Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping lookalikes made appearances Thursday night.

Increased security and a temporary ban on sales and the consumption of alcohol seemed to do little to subdue the mayhem.

Many people were seen drinking on the streets, although Shibuya Ward earlier this year adopted an ordinance banning the act during Halloween.

"It was absolutely insane," said Masaki Takuma, 23, who was experiencing Halloween in Shibuya for the first time. "There's just so many people. I've never seen anything like it."

Rather than dress up in a costume, Takuma and Yuki Satake, 24, chose to spend the evening of Halloween handing out candy to children and picking up trash littering the streets and sidewalks.

The two men admitted they thought picking up trash would draw more attention than wearing flashy costumes, but they also wanted to do something different that would benefit others.

"Halloween is such a messy event," Satake said. "Every year, well-meaning party people come and trash the place and I feel bad for the locals."

Satake said this year he thought there was "more trash and more people."

Nine individuals — all males from their teens up to the age of 50 — were arrested from Thursday night to early Friday morning on suspicion of groping, theft and, in one case, assaulting a police officer, according to the Shibuya Police Station.

“It is regrettable that some people were arrested, but I think it was the most safe and orderly Halloween in recent years,” Shibuya Ward Mayor Ken Hasebe reportedly said Friday. “Most people followed the rules and trash and quarrels were largely reduced.”

Last year, 13 individuals were arrested for similar misdemeanors, and a small truck was overturned by revelers. The fallout led to a debate on why the occasion inspires a handful of individuals to display anarchic behavior, and how to stop it.

In June, Shibuya Ward adopted an ordinance to ban alcohol consumption in parks and on streets near Shibuya Station on Halloween and on the weekend before it.

The ordinance also targets loud music, climbing streetlight poles and other mischievous acts, although it carries no punishment for violations. It will be enforced at other big events when large numbers of revelers congregate, such as on New Year’s Eve.