



The traditional customs for Welcoming New Year in Japan

Ringing the Old Year Out

December 31st

As midnight nears, the air is filled with the deep sound of temple bells being rung. The bells are rung 108 times as the old year out and the New Year comes in.

In Buddhist beliefs, humans are born with 108 earthy desires which are removed when the bell is struck.

New Year's decoration

A few days after Christmas, the entrances of houses are decorated with a pine and bamboo 'Kadomatsu'. This is the most familiar decoration of New Year. We decorate it for welcoming the Shinto Gods. It is derived from the Shinto belief that the god spirits reside in trees.

The display of pine which is the evergreen, and bamboo, which grows quickly and is ramrod-straight, expresses the desire to obtain virtue and strength to overcome evil things.



『Key News』

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New Year Celebration in Japan

The Japanese New Year is maybe the most important holidays in Japan. If you know the historical background and customs in each area, you will see how we celebrate this special occasion in a big way.

Let us introduce you some traditions and impressive New Year events in each area.

TOKYO

The New Year's Day (Shogatsu) is the most important holiday of the year for families to get together. Japanese people enjoy Osechi, the special meal of New Year, visit a shrine or temple of their choice to make the wish and play for health and happiness in the New Year. The famous shrines and temples get extremely crowded. Also many people get up early to watch the first sunrise to make a wish. Meiji-jingu, one of the famous shrines in Tokyo records over three million people every year. (by Hiromi MARUYAMA)



Meiji Jingu

HOKKAIDO

The New Year's customs in Hokkaido are a collection of customs from all over Japan.

140 years ago, Hokkaido was cultivated by pioneers. They brought with them their own customs from their original places and built a new life style. People accepted the cultural differences without standardization. Therefore, how we celebrate the New Year is different with each family. When you ask someone about their New Year's customs in Hokkaido, you will know where their ancestors are from.

When you see everything covered with fresh, white snow in the morning on New Year's Day, your spirit is restored.

There are not many traditional cultural activities in Hokkaido, but we have a common feeling shared amongst people living with heavy snowfall. (by Akiko OKANISHI)

KANAZAWA (ISHIKAWA)

On the first Sunday of January, the coldest season of the year called 'Kan no iri', all volunteer firemen in Kanazawa gather at the Kanazawa castle park and they have the New Year parade of fire brigades.

Volunteer firemen in Kanazawa are called Kagatobi. The origin is 'Tobi', personal firemen of the Maeda feudal lord of Kaga=Kanazawa, in the Edo residence. They are famous for their unique costume and for high spirits fire fighting. They use hand pumps and ladders and carried on the traditions to these days.

You can enjoy seeing their skillful performances on ladders with shouts of encouragement.

(by Hisae KOJIMA)



Regeneration from the East Japan Earthquake

We are now slowly starting down the road to regenerate. Within Sendai city centre, all the hotels are re-opened also all transportations and lifelines are back as before. Nevertheless, it will take many years to reconstruct the coast area.

We never forget that we received many material supports and prayers from around the world which has made great strides forward.

Thank you all and we feel the power of our motto "In Service through Friendship". (by Naohiko WAKO)