

# Holidays & Festivals in Japan

## Japanese National Holidays

Jan 1 – New Year's Day  
Jan 15 – Coming of Age Day  
Feb 11 – National Founding Day  
Mar 21 (or 20) – Vernal Equinox  
Apr 29 – Green Day  
May 3 – Constitutional Memorial Day  
May 5 – Children's Day  
Jul 20 – Maritime Day  
Sep 15 – Respect for the Aged Day  
Sep 23 (or 24) – Autumnal Equinox  
Oct 10 – Health-Sports Day  
Nov 3 – Culture Day  
Nov 23 – Labor Thanksgiving Day  
Dec 23 – Emperor's Birthday

Like other countries, Japan has its seasonal vacations when children are out of school and companies close down. Travel during these periods must be planned and reservations made in advance. Prices increase and hotel rooms are difficult to obtain. However, please note that these periods are great for sightseeing around Tokyo since everyone else is out of town!

The first long holiday period is the winter vacation centering around New Year's. Many merchants and companies close from about December 28 and reopen around January 5. Governments and banks take a shorter vacation, from about the 31st to the 3rd. The other long vacation period in Japan, during the summer, usually the week around the 15<sup>th</sup> of August is O Bon (the equivalent of All Souls Day; some locations hold O Bon around the 15th of July instead). During both the summer and winter holidays, Japanese travel to their hometowns to be with family and friends like Americans do for Thanksgiving and Christmas.

There are also other times when Japanese children are out of school. During these times their parents often travel with them. In April there is a two to three week period between school years, which often coincides with the American spring break. School summer vacation runs from about July 19 to around September 1.

Then, from the end of April to the beginning of May, there is a period known as "Golden Week", which incorporates three national holidays: April 29 (Green Day), May 3 (Constitution Memorial Day), and May 5 (Children's Day). Companies often give employees the days between the holidays off. Since the weather tends to be good (it's the unofficial start of summer), many Japanese visit resorts (or travel abroad).

A little common sense helps decrease frustration levels when planning trips. Remember in the summer, people like the beaches, and in the winter, skiing is popular. Therefore, during the summer and winter holidays, especially during the beginning and end of the mass exoduses, stay home! Listen to

the news to find out when the outgoing and return traffic rushes are expected, and avoid travel during those times.

Teresa K. Negley

## Festivals in Japan

(Dates may vary slightly from year to year. Please check with the Yujo Center for more current information.)

### January

- 1-3 New Year's ceremonies at shrines and temples
- 2 The public pays respects to the Imperial Family; palace grounds are open
- 3 Daruma Fair in Kawagoe
- 6 Dezome-Shiki Edo Fire Brigade near Harumi Pier

### February

- 2 Setsubun Bean-Throwing at Kawasaki-Daishi, and Kamakura Hachimangu Plum Blossom Festival, Odawara Castle Park

### March

- 3-4 Daruma Fair, Jindaiji
  - 3 Rice Planting, Chichibu
- Second Sunday in March, Fire walking Ceremony, Mt Takao  
27 Lion Dance in Hakone

### April

- Cherry blossom festivals, almost everywhere  
17 Yayoi Festival, Nikko

### May

- 3 Yokohama Port Festival
- 3-5 Odawara Castle Festival
- 11-12 Azalea Festival at Hakone
- 16-18 Asakusa Sanja Matsuri
- 17-18 Toshogu Spring Festival, Nikko

**June is Rainy Season!!**

### July

- 1 Opening of Fuji-san
- 7-12 Tanabata in Hiratsuka (near Atsugi)
- 13-15 Kawagoe Lantern Festival
- 14 Black Ship Festival (Kujirihama in Yokosuka)
- 20-22 Fan Festival in Kumagaya, Saitama
- 23-24 Chichibu River Festival

### August

- 1 Summer Festival, Omiya Ayu Sweetfish Festival, Atsugi
- 6-7 Tanabata in Fussa

### September

- 16-17 Yabusame and Feudal Procession in Kamakura
- 17 Yokohama Carnival

### October

- 1 Grape Festival in Katsunuma, Yamanashi
- 14-15 Kawagoe River Festival
- 17 Autumn Festival, Nikko



## November

3 Daimyo Procession, Hakone

First two weeks, Chrysanthemum Exhibits in areas such as Meiji Shrine in Harajuku, Shinjuku National Gyoen, and Kitain Temple in Kawagoe.

## December

3 Chichibu Night Festival

14 Gishi-sai for 47 Ronin, Sengakuji Temple

17-19 Hagoita Ichi, Asakusa Kannon

# January - New Year's Festivities

The New Year celebrations consist of a series of traditional family and religious observances, which last for days. It is a time of starting fresh, of purification. Preparations for New Year's Day, a major holiday in Japan, begin in late December. After thoroughly cleaning the house and garden, possible even replacing old tatami mats or shoji paper panels with new ones, New Year's decorations are put up. These decorations often include a shimenawa, kadomatsu, shimekazari and a special altar, known as toshidana.

You will often find *shimenawa*, a twisted straw rope with white paper strips representing cloth offerings, hung over doorways or at the entrances of shrines. It announces the presence of the gods and keeps evil spirits out. The *kadomatsu*, made of pine branches, straw, bamboo stalks, and sometimes plum branches, is placed at the front gate or doorway. It symbolizes prosperity, good health, vigor and longevity. Its size indicates how prosperous the year was for that household. *Shimekazari* represent the crops of the harvest, offered in appreciation for past good harvests and for bountiful ones in the coming year. The *toshidana*, a special altar, is placed in the *tokonoma* or alcove of the main room of the house. It consists of two kagami-mochi (large round rice cakes), set one on top of the other, and decorated with dried persimmons, a tangerine, dried seaweed, or other fruits or vegetables.

New Year's is a time to clear all debts and obligations, although this is a moral obligation and not a legal requirement. Gifts are sent to superiors, friends and relatives to express gratitude. Personally designed New Year's cards are addressed and taken to the post office before the end of December. These cards are then delivered during the first three days of January. Businessmen may send as many as 400 New Year's postcards. Cards are not sent to anyone who has had a death in the family during the previous year.

A much-anticipated moment for children is when *otoshidama* envelopes are handed to them by parents, relatives, and close family friends. These envelopes contain cash present of crisp bills.

There are many traditional dishes that are prepared for the New Year's holiday, and the first meal is a great event. Many dishes are served, including carp, the fish honored because of its stamina; black beans because the Japanese name is pronounced the same as the word meaning "robust"; white radishes and dried seaweed for happiness; and lotus root, considered a sacred plant. These special dishes along with other foods like salmon, fish cakes, herring roe, and mashed chest-

nuts are prepared ahead of time and placed within a triple-tiered container to be served to family and guests, cold. Warm o-zoni, a broth containing vegetables and rice cakes, may also be served.

Mochi, a thick, chewy rice cake, is made on the 30<sup>th</sup> day of December by pounding cooked rice into a gooey paste, then forming it into balls. It is pounded in a large wooden mortar, outdoors, by two or three men using long-handled mallets. Mochi can be served in many different ways: with meat, in soups, or with a sweet, red bean paste in the middle. It seems to be unique to Japan, and foreigners may have difficulty acquiring a taste for it. Nowadays, mochi can be purchased in stores, or made at home by machine, so the traditional way is less often practiced.

New Year's Eve is traditionally spent at home watching end-of-the-year television shows and spending time with family. Families eat toshikoshi soba, "passing year:" noodle soup. At midnight, every temple bell in Japan is rung 108 times (possibly symbolizing man's 108 kinds of selfish worldly desires, or to count the 108 beads on an official Buddhist rosary). The last reverberation of the bells signifies that everyone can start the New Year with a clean slate. At midnight, dawn or some other time during the first three days of January, many families dress in beautiful kimonos and make the first visit to a shrine or temple. Prayers are offered for good health and good fortune in the coming year. Some good places to observe the New Year's activities are the Meiji Shrine in Tokyo, Yamaguchi Kannon, near Seibu-en and Takahata Fudo Temple in Hino.

On January 2, a special daruma ceremony is held at Haijima Daishi Temple (just off Rt. 16). Many people bring their old darumas and burn them at a fire at the shrine. New darumas and hamaya arrows (to ward off evil) can be purchased. When you buy a daruma, make a wish and color in one of the eyes. If the wish comes true, color in the other eye. At the end of the year, the old doll is usually burned and a new one purchased, whether or not both eyes are colored in.

Traditional games are often played during New Year's, including tako-age (kite flying), hanetsuki (Japanese badminton using a wooden paddle, a shuttlecock made of soapberry seeds and feathers, and no net), karuta (card games), and koma (tops). A game known as Fukuwari is played when a blindfolded player attempts to draw the eyes, nose, and mouth on a piece of paper which has the outline of a face drawn on it.

The greeting, "Akemashite omedeto gozaimasu" continues to be exchanged through the 6<sup>th</sup> of January. On the 7<sup>th</sup>, the holidays officially conclude. Decorations are taken down, and nanakusa-gaya, "seventh-day porridge" containing 7 herbal greens, is served.

During the second or third week of January, giant teepees made of pine branches and New Year's decorations are burned on the banks of the Tama River after a ceremony. Since there is no set date, have a Japanese-speaking friend call the Fussa or Hamura City Hall. You can see the teepees about a week before the burning ceremony. To get there, turn right out the Fussa Gate onto Rt. 16 then turn left at Tanaka's Olde Crock Shoppe. Go 1.6 km and turn left onto Okutama Kaido, which runs along the Tama River. Go for 1.7 km (5 lights)



and turn left across the canal. Turn right at the Tama River, drive past the walking bridge on your left, and park at the dam at the bottom of the hill. The best place to stand is on the walking bridge, unless the wind is blowing in that direction.

Barbara Kirkwood, Christine Thomas, Karen Ozment, Melody Hostetler, Rita Mayer

## January - Adult Day (Seijin-no-Hi)

January 15, also known as Coming of Age Day or Adult Day, is the day when 20 year-old Japanese men and women celebrate their official coming of age by participating in a ceremony at their local ward office or city hall. (Seijin-Shiki) They also visit shrines to pray for good lives, careers and marriages.

You will notice many young women in traditional Japanese (or western) dress walking around the town. The long flowing sleeves of their kimonos (nearly calf-length vs. thigh-length for married women) signify that they are young and single as do the different and more elaborate knots of the obi. Colored collars, in contrast to the white most often seen, add a touch of gaiety. The kimonos are extremely expensive as are the matching accessories.

Getting ready takes a long time, often involving a visit to the hairdresser for assistance in doing up hair and putting on the kimono and obi. Many young people also visit the photographer this day for an official portrait (they are often teased that the photos will later be used by a matchmaker).

Barbara Kirkwood and Teresa K. Negley

## February - Bean Throwing Ceremony

The Japanese celebrate Setsubun, also known as Onioishiki, on Feb. 3. Americans better know it as the bean-throwing ceremony. This ceremony is practiced in Japanese homes to drive away evil demons. Each family places a small holly branch and the head of a dried sardine at the entrance of the house. In the evening, the windows of the house are opened to allow devils to escape, and each member of the family throws a few roasted soy-beans into each room and out the open windows of the house while chanting "Oni wa soto, fuku wa uchi" or "out with the demons, in with good luck!" It is customary to eat one bean for each year of your life, plus one for the coming year. The ceremony is called mamemaki. The next day the beans are swept up and thrown away. If you wish to perform your own mamemaki, you can purchase the cooked soybeans from many locations at the time of the year, including Seiyu. Say, "daizu o kudasai", or "please give me setsubun beans".

Today this ceremony is also performed at some Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples, where large crowds gather to watch Japanese celebrities throw the beans. If you are lucky enough to catch one of the beans, you gain good fortune for the year. One of the best nearby places to observe setsubun is Takahata Fudo in Hino City.

Barbara Kirkwood

## February/March - Walk in Clouds of Color at Yoshino Baigo

Even with the Kanto Plain's mild winters, spring is a welcome sight. Plum blossoms, unlike cherry blossoms, which only last several days, are in bloom for several weeks and are a must to see while in Japan. Their delicate pink, white, and lavender hues give a dainty loveliness to the surroundings from the end of February through March.

Once famous spot for seeing Japan's plum blossoms is right near Yokota Air Base, in Ome City. Trees in almost everyone's year are part of the beauty of the area. About 25,000 trees, spanning a collection of 100 different varieties, blossom in the town of Yoshino Baigo in Ome City, located on the Tama River. Yoshino Baigo has a small park names Umeno-Koen, or Plum Park, which is especially lovely during plum-viewing time.

"Baigo" means "plum garden." Also, Yoshino Baigo has a festival to celebrate this season with a number of booths selling the usual festival foods and souvenirs. This festival runs throughout the month of March. There's a special day of celebration on a mid-March Sunday, with performances of traditional dancing.

**TRAIN DIRECTIONS:** The easiest way to get to Yoshino is to take the Ome Line JR train to Hinatawada; then walk north to the bridge that crosses the Tama River (on your left). You are in Yoshino as soon as you cross the bridge. This main street is where the festival is held. To get to Plum Park, continue on the street until you reach a T-intersection. Turn left and look across the street for a VERY small paved street on the right-hand side of the road.

**DRIVING DIRECTIONS:** Keep in mind that parking places are scarce on the main festival day and are also limited at other times. The easiest way to drive to Yoshino is to turn right out of the Fussa or Terminal Gates and go north on Route 16. Seven lights after the Terminal Gate, turn left on Ome Kaido and continue on Ome Kaido until you reach Hinatawada in about 20 to 30 minutes. Watch for the Hinatawada train station on your right. It is above the road level, and was recently painted yellow. Turn left across the first bridge over the Tama River after the train station. You are now in Yoshino.

Sondra Halweg

## March - Hamura Festival

When cherry trees bloom, all of Japan celebrates. Time itself seems to honor the brief, but beautiful life of the fragile sakura. Under canopies of soft pink, blankets are spread, families and friends gather to eat, drink, sing, and often just contemplate the beauty and peace. There are many places well known for cherry blossom viewing - Kyoto, Kamakura, Ueno. But some of the prettiest and most accessible are just outside the Yokota gates. Fussa and Hamura annually greet the cherry blossoms with festivals.

Located along the Tama River are walkways that wind through woodland, past playgrounds, residences, and small



shrines. Offering views of mountains and rivers, the walks are lined on both sides with mature cherry trees. Normally quiet and fairly deserted, during the Cherry Blossom Festivals, these become the "place to be."

For several days, small booths sell traditional Japanese food, toys, and flowers under the protection of the blooming trees. There is occasionally a tea ceremony demonstration, or you might discover a Noh theatre in the grassy areas along the path. The way becomes crowded with many who wish to share in the spirit, but the view is never blocked. The celebrations begin in the morning and continue until about 10pm.

The walkway originates near the dam on the Tama River and follows a canal along Okutama Kaido. The most popular area is near the dam where the merchant stalls draw crowds for food and drink. But the entire walkway is worthwhile for its beauty. The dates of the festival vary according to the blooming of the trees. Normally, it last for four days over the weekend nearest the height of the cherry blossoms.

Parking is not easily found. There are some side streets near New Caesar's that offer limited street parking. It is an easy 15-minute bike ride from the base. Driving should take about 20 minutes, depending on traffic.

**DIRECTIONS:** Turn left out the Terminal Gate. Go to the first stop light and turn right. Follow this street across two sets of train tracks until you come to a "T" intersection. Turn right. You are now on Okutama Kaido and the canal is on your left. Continue to the second stoplight. There will be a bridge with yellow pavement here across the canal. Turn left over the bridge and follow the road around and down the hill past the athletic field. You may find parking along this street. You will be able to see the cherry trees and the path now. Take your blanket, picnic and camera and follow the people up the canal to the main area of the festival. Now all that's left is to relax and enjoy Japan at its most beautiful.

Donna Alexander

## March - Cherry Blossoms

### Sayama Ko

This ordinary dam becomes a promenade during sakura (cherry blossom) season. While many Japanese crowd the area on weekends, fewer people visit during the week. It's a nice place to take children for a picnic. On weekends, a number of food booths will be set up around the lake. They feature corn-on-the-cob, grilled squid and a variety of quick foods, as well as soft drinks.

**DIRECTIONS:** Turn left out the East Gate. At the first signal light, turn right. At the next light, turn left. Continue on this road to the T-intersection. At the "T", turn right onto Ome Kaido. After you pass the third light, you will see a 7-11 store on the right and the fourth light just ahead. Turn left onto a very small street just before the fourth light. Continue on this road. It will widen soon and you will enter a large park area. After about 6 or 7 km, you will pass the Tamako Jinja Shrine on your right. You will come to a fork in the road, a major intersection. Turn left. Going straight will take you around to Seibu-En and Seibu Stadium. Yamaguchi Kannon will be on your right. Just after this you will see a restaurant on your right and parking down a hill to your left.

Park and walk to the dam. Cross over to the other side and another large park.

### Mutumibashi-Dori

For special viewing at night (and day), go straight out the Supply Gate (across two sets of railroad tracks). After 1.3km, turn left onto Denen-dori (school on your right and four-way crosswalk overhead), and pass a Marufuji Store on the left. At the T, turn right and just before the bridge, enter the park on the left. Park your car and walk along the river to your right to find the cherry blossoms.

### Yanagi Yama Park

Fifteen minutes from Yokota, this park on the Tama River offers paths for strolling or biking, and swings and slides for children. Go straight out Fussa Gate and cross one set of railroad tracks. Bear left and cross a second set of tracks. At the first signal light, turn right. At the next light, turn left. Go three signal lights and turn left. The blue Fussa gym will be on your right at .6km. Yanagi Yama is behind the gym. Parking is limited.

### Chidori Ga Fuchi

A little further away, but easy to get to, is Chidori Ga Fuchi. The park has a science and art museum, and it is across the street from a huge torii gate and shrine dedicated to those who died during World War II. On a small lake, you can row a boat under the blossoms. Rental boats are available Tuesday-Sunday, 9:30am-4pm. Cost is Y200 for 30 minutes, or Y400 for one hour.

**DIRECTIONS:** Take the Ome Line to Tachikawa and change to the Chuo Line towards Tokyo. At Nakano, change to Tozai Subway (track 4). Get off at the sixth stop, Kudanshita. Go out Exit 2. The park will be in front of you at the top of the stairs. Turn right and walk a short distance. You will see a sign in English saying "Chidori Ga Fuchi" pointing left. This is the prettiest walk with the trees forming an arch over the walkway. On the right you will see a large black torii.

### Takao Rinyakyoku

This Forest Test Center offers the view of thousands of trees, which until recent years were enjoyed only by the Emperor. For a little exercise, hike to the picnic area at the top of a hill for a bird's eye view. Since there are no food stands, bring a lunch from home. A map of the area is Y50 or free of charge with the purchase of cherry blossom photographs (six for Y500). Takao Rinyakyoku is open 9:30am-3:30pm Monday-Saturday during April.

**DIRECTIONS:** Take the Ome Line to Tachikawa and change to the Chuo Line towards Takao. Ride the train five stops. After you exit the train, look for the north exit near Tracks 1 and 2. Go out the north exit and walk to the street straight out the station, Takao Kaido. Walk up a hill. Bear left. Takao Rinyakyoku is about 15 minutes from the train station.

Compiled by Pat Nolan, Lori St. Laurent, Sondra Halweg, Barbara Kirkwood, Christine Thomas



## March - Girls' Festival

Hinamatsuri, known as the Doll Festival, also known as Girls' Day, is celebrated on March 3. It is celebrated as a seasonal festival called momo-no-sekku or peach festival, for the abundant peach blossoms at this time. Families (especially those with young girls) will display a group of beautiful dolls, usually inherited, on tiers. The dolls vary in size and materials. Each doll represents a member of the ancient imperial court. On the top shelf are the Emperor and Empress (dairi-bina), below them are two eminent lords (udaijin and sadaijin), three ladies-in-waiting (sannin-kanjo), five musicians (gonin-bayashi), and lastly their three servants. At the bottom of the display on the lower shelves are miniature replicas of furniture, foods, and palanquins.

Although Hinamatsuri is a festival from medieval times, the custom of displaying dolls only dates to the 18th century. In the beginning, the dolls were handmade and thrown into the river along with other offerings on March 3. Nowadays, commercially made dolls are very expensive so they are taken down and stored carefully away for the next year. The dolls can be put up any time prior to the holiday, but about a week prior is the most popular.

Taking the dolls down is another story, as timing is of the essence. It is said that the dolls should be taken down as soon after the festival as possible, preferably on the night of March 3. The story goes: if you leave the dolls out too long, your daughters will have bad luck in getting married. Meaning the longer you delay in taking the dolls down, the longer it will take for your daughters to get married. One friend, whose mother used to leave her dolls up for over a month after the holiday, strongly believes in this superstition, as she is 30 years old and still single.

The dolls are often passed down from generation to generation, except maybe for those who like the dolls too much to part with them. In many cases nowadays, it is the grandparents who buy these very expensive dolls for the granddaughters when they are very young, usually between the ages of one and three.

Another tradition on Girls' Day is the preparation of sweet rice wine (shirozake) as well as other special dishes.

Viki Lyn Paulson-Cody

## March - Fertility Festival

Fertility festivals are held throughout Japan in March. The most popular is the Honen Matsuri, known as the Nagoya Fertility Festival. The purpose of the festival is, well, to promote fertility, complete with pomp, ceremony. And ah...unusual paraphernalia. On March 15, the festival peaks with a grand procession from one shrine to another along the banks of rice paddies to ensure a good harvest. Priests offer prayers for abundant crops while presenting sake to the crowd; farmers do their part by contributing donations to the Shinto gods.

Crop fertility, however, isn't the only fertility being honored. The priest also sprinkles rice on the spectators to ensure their fertility. (Incidentally, that's why rice is thrown at newlyweds!) Meanwhile, parade participants carry sym-

bols of a different nature. Any lingering doubts about the festival's purpose disappear after one look at the parade's centerpiece: a mail fertility symbol twelve feet long. Candy replicas of this, and its female counter part, can be purchased for those back home who "just won't believe it."

Two shrines, the Tagata (male) and the Gakuden (female), sponsor this celebration. Not surprisingly, the Tagata Shrine is the more important. Its large and varied collection of unusually shaped rocks, stones, and branches is on display on the grounds of the shrine. Held March 14-15, this festival is a splendid way to spend some time off.

Norma Jean Myrick

## March - Firewalking Festival

Only one of a few local firewalking festivals (Hiwatari Matsuri), the Mount Takao fire walking is truly an interesting festival you will not want to miss. Yamabushi Hiwatari is held at the Yakuoin Temple near the summit of Mount Takao. This festival is held on the second Sunday of March each year. Buddhist priests walking over red-hot-embers lead the ceremony. To reach the summit you can take a ten-minute cable car ride to the top. The cable car is Y810 round trip for adults or Y420 one-way. Children's fare is Y410 round trip, Y210 one-way. When you get off the cable car there are some shops and restaurants. Follow the path up the hill to the Yakuoin Temple, about a fifteen-minute walk. Of course, there are also souvenir shops and benches all along this trail. It is a great way to enjoy the countryside. On this trail you will not need any special "climbing gear", only energy and comfortable shoes. You can follow the path back and then take the cable car back to the bottom.

Festivities begin at 1pm with a drum beating chorus. Next, a procession of Buddhist priests in ornate robes slowly make their way to the altar, and go through a purification ceremony. The priests proceed to gather around a very large wooden frame, which is covered with wood and pine boughs. There will be about 45 minutes of prayers, chants and rituals. Then the priests begin to light the fire. As the fire grows larger they gather old prayer "sticks" to put into the fire, thus bringing good wishes to the wishers.

As the fire grows, the flames leap higher and higher, throwing ash into the air. Beware to those of you in the front of the crowd; it will become an "ash shower", especially if you find yourself downwind! Also be prepared for the smoke. If your eyes are sensitive, it might be wise for you to stay upwind. After about 20 minutes, the fire dies down and the priests begin to poke through the embers, creating two pathways. Although they clear the embers pretty much to the sides, the ground is still hot. The priests will begin their procession across the embers and after their ceremony is over and their shoes are back on, they will invite the spectators to try.

The lines of spectators is very long so if you want to participate in the fire walking itself you should try to gather at the gate during the ceremony, not after. There will be four salt piles: one at the beginning and end of each of the two procession lines. Before walking across the coals, step into the salt and then again when you finish. Be sure to carry a



washcloth or small towel to clean your feet when you are finished! Don't be afraid to try walking across the fire because it is too hot. On my visit, I watched a little girl of three or four try it with her mom, and she looked as though it was a breeze.

**DIRECTIONS:** By train, it takes about an hour. Leave from the Higashi Fussa station and take the train to Hachioji. At Hachioji change trains to the Chuo Line on track four to Takao. The trains are very frequent, about one every ten minutes; but be careful not to get on an express train to Kofu as it is a long ride to the next stop and it will cost you money (this is not a free mistake). Except for the express trains, all the others stop at Takao and the train will be marked for Takao (in English). At Takao you will have to change trains again to the Keio Line to each Takao-San. When you get off the train at Takao follow the signs (in English) to the Keio Line, going past the ticket booths. At Takao you will take the train to Takao San Guchi, the end of the line. The approximate cost is Y400, one way, for adults.

Viki Lyn Paulson-Cody

## May - Children's Day (Kodomo-no-Hi)

Kodomo-no-Hi, or Children's Day, is a national holiday which falls on May 5 each year, marking the semi-official end of Golden Week (a week of intermittent holidays and workdays during which many companies take vacations). Actually this day was originally celebrated as the Boys' Festival even though it is called Children's Day.

May 5 is also celebrated as a seasonal festival in Japan called tango-no-sekku or the Iris Festival. According to the old lunar calendar this is the beginning of summer. In celebrating this holiday many traditions are followed. First, to drive away the evil spirits and to celebrate the future of their sons, each family will hang one or more koi-no-bari (carp streamers made of cloth, similar to out windsocks) from flagpoles and balconies. These koi-no-bori can range in size from two feet to 60 feet, and can be simple or very ornamental. Indoors, gogatsuningyo (samurai dolls) are displayed, in a similar fashion to Girls' Day where Imperial Court dolls are displayed in the homes of girls. Boys take a bath with floating iris leaves called shobuiyu. They eat kashiwa-mochi (rice cakes in oak leaves) and chimaki (dumplings in bamboo leaves). These decorations and foods are prepared by parents with the hope that their children will grow up healthy and strong. They choose these items because in Japan samurai, carp, irises, oak trees and bamboo are known as symbols of strength. Most families still celebrate using all the traditions.

Viki Lyn Paulson-Cody

## Yokota's Friendship Festival

The Yokota Friendship Festival features fly-bys, static display aircraft and cultural events. There are many booths selling foods, t-shirts, and other items. There are also carnival rides for children, special performances and musical entertainment. On average, about 200,000 people attend the annual 2-day summer event. A firework show wraps up the

festival on Sunday evening. Watch the base bulletin and Fuji Flyer for specific dates. Invite your Japanese friends for a great time of entertainment!

Christine Thomas

## August - Fussa's Tanabata Festival

Yokotans join their Fussa neighbors in the city's streets during August in celebration of the yearly rendezvous of the lovers, Vega and Altair – also known as the Tanabata Festival. This festival involves Chinese folklore brought to Emperor Koken's Imperial Court in 775 AD. The love story is about a talented weaver, Vega, who met Altair, a herdsman, through Vega's father. The young couple fell in love and Vega subsequently neglected her weaving. Vega's father was angered so he demanded the lovers separate, allowing them to meet only once a year, on the seventh day of the seventh month of the lunar calendar.

Originally, girls wrote their wishes on paper strips hung on bamboo branches. Later, colorful streamers were used. There are three shrines carried, which are different from other festivals: one by adult Japanese males, one by adult Japanese females, and one by Americans. The festival includes dashi (a wagon with drums and music), dancers (about 130 groups), festival foods and fun.

This is truly a Japanese-American festival and a Yokota-Fussa friendship event. You can be a "shrine carrier" and part of it all; just contact the Wing Public Affairs Office.

Thora Davidson-White

## August - Ome Fireworks

On the first Saturday night in August, Ome City has a magnificent display of fireworks. It lasts over an hour! To get to the viewing area, follow the crowds walking up the hill behind the Ome train station. Take a mat to sit on as hundreds of people sit on the ground of the athletic field. Go early so you'll have room to spread out your mat or blanket. Bring a picnic and enjoy the night!

Christine Thomas

## August - The Festival of Lanterns

August is the month of Bon, when the spirits of the dead revisit their families and are entertained for a few days and then return to the other shore (like across the River Styx). Bon Matsuri, or Festival of Lanterns, is a time of solemn meditation and reflection; a time to show respect for and to acknowledge gratitude to ancestors. It is also a joyous time when those who have passed away return to visit with the living.

Bon Matsuri is not a national holiday and is therefore not celebrated at the same time throughout Japan. Traditionally, it was celebrated in July; it is still celebrated from July 13-15 in Tokyo. In most other parts of Japan, the three-day



event is celebrated in August during the summer break so that people may return to their hometowns.

In preparation for O-bon, homes and graveyards are cleaned. Decorations, offerings and food are purchased at bon-ichi (Bon market) or kusa-ichi (grass market). Buddhist graveyards are elaborately decorated. Branches from Japanese umbrella pine, koyamaki, and sakaki trees (unique to Japan, and considered sacred) can be found along with mochi, fruit and incense. Many rites and customs are associated with Bon Matsuri, and visitors to both city parks and rural areas will find very different celebrations, depending on where they go. On the first night, families flock to cemeteries with white lanterns to light the way for returning ancestors.

In the main room of the house, the butsudan, family altar, is displayed along with the ihai, record of ancestry. The house is carefully decorated, and appropriate foods are prepared. All is done to make the returning spirits feel welcome. Often a priest is invited to chant sutras for the spirits.

During this season, presents are exchanged between friends, and merchants give semi-annual gifts to valued customers. Workers are often given a day off and a gift. Public celebrations take place in every community. Vendors offer all types of souvenirs: flowers, fruits, and crickets in small wooden cages, red fish, bonsai trees and ferns. Fortunetellers promise a look into the future, and zodiac charms are available to insure good luck. There is a carnival spirit in the air.

At the end of the three-day visit, preparations are made for the spirit's return trip to Meido, the other world. Dango, farewell rice balls, are offered to the spirits for their journey. People flock to rivers to flat small boats with lighted lanterns aboard. Each boat contains a candle with writing that means "service for the myriads of souls in the other world". Often these candles are personalized with the names of the departing spirits. It is believed these small boats eventually reach the sea.

A gay and important part of the Bon season is the Bon odori, a dance intended for rejoicing. Bon-odori is a rhythmic dance in which participants dance, sing, clap hands and stamp feet in unison to folk songs; accompanied by beating drums which go faster and faster. In country districts, Bon-odori is considered one of the happiest events of the year.

The religious folk dances performed in Kosi in Nagano Prefecture, and Tokushima in Tokushima Prefecture is among the most distinctive and very popular with visitors. These Bon-odori celebrations take place August 14-16. Another noteworthy celebration takes place on Shiraishi-jima, and island in the Inland Sea, on August 13-16. Since Bon-odori festivities take place in every city and village in Japan, they are a wonderful opportunity to see dancers in traditional costume and to join in the celebrations.

Tina Isaacson, Rita Mayer 97

## September - Chouyo

Chouyo, the Chrysanthemum Festival, on the ninth day of the ninth month, was adopted by the Japanese from a Chinese festival during the Tokugawa period. The chrysanthemum signifies fall and winter and the wheel-like form of its shape is a symbol of the radiating sun (it is also the emblem of

the present imperial family). Like Ground Hog Day, the weather on this day is said to forecast the weather of the coming winter. Good weather promises an easy winter, rainy weather means cold and snow while a northeasterly wind predicts an abundance of fruit.

## September - Juugoya

With the arrival of September, minds turn to thoughts of a clear moon. A pale moonlit night in autumn has a special appeal to the poetic temperament of the Japanese people. Juugoya, the 15th night or night of the full moon late in September is an occasion for moon-viewing parties. Although the practice of greeting the moon is no longer observed as widely as in the past, it still delights many people. Just before twilight, a small table is set out where the rays of the harvest moon will fall. Fifteen dango (rice dumplings) are placed on the table with fruit and vegetables as an offering to the Moon Goddess. A vase with the Seven Grasses of Autumn (susuki: including cattails & pampas grass) will also be set on the table. When the moon rises, family and friends will admire the beauty of the moon while enjoying refreshments.

## September - Keiro-no-Hi

September 15, Keiro-no-Hi or Respect for the Aged Day, is a national holiday for showing reverence to the elderly. (Be *especially* careful not to sit in the Silver Seat at the end of a railway car this day if an older person is present. These seats are reserved for handicapped and elderly persons at all times; they are usually marked by a different color and dark blue sign on the window above the seat.) Shuubun-no-Hi, or the Autumn Equinox, is another national holiday. Some Japanese make pilgrimages to the graves of their ancestors at this time. Housewives also make and distribute delicacies to friends and neighbors as tokens of kindness and regard for life.

Carol Ingmanson, Teresa K. Negley

## September - The Ginger Festival

The Ginger Festival is to be found at the Ninomiya Shrine on September 9. About 100 years ago, the people of the area began celebrating an annual festival at the Ninomiya Shrine believing the eating of ginger would bring good health and well-being for the coming year.

Ginger plants, as well as a wide variety of craft items, can be purchased from a several vendors. Some of the more interesting vendors are the food vendors. One may find popcorn, cotton candy and honey-roasted chestnuts for sale. Try the squid cooked on skewers; surprisingly tasty.

Throughout the day, there are many different types of traditional entertainment. The puppet show is a favorite of young and old alike. The stage is set up high to give everyone a good view. The puppets are about two-thirds the size of a human and are magnificently crafted. The puppeteers can be seen, but they are shrouded in black to blend in with the back-



ground. Drums and other traditional instruments accompany the performance.

Events at the festival continue all day. Between 4-8pm a smaller portable shrine is carried through the streets and up the 46 steps to the permanent shrine.

**DIRECTIONS:** From Fussa go to Haijima Station, then change to the Itsukaichi Line. Take this train to Kumagawa, then to Higashiakiru Station. The Ninomiya Shrine is only a 4-minute walk from the station.

Debbie Reed

## November - Shichi-Go-San

Shichi-Go-San, the 7-5-3 festival, is an annual festival that was traditionally held on November 15, but is now celebrated throughout the month of November. It is a festival for 3 and 7 year old girls, and 5 year-old boys. Girls are dressed in their finest kimonos and boys are dressed in their finest haregi for a festival that honors them. Parents and grandparents, also dressed in their finest, take their children to Shinto shrines to give thanks for their good health and pray for happiness and future blessings.

On this big day, the younger girls are usually “made-up” at home by mom or grandma. Their ensemble is somewhat easier, and their makeup is simpler, since they only require lipstick. The older girls, however, may get to make a special trip to the beauty parlor where they get their hair styled, their faces made up and their kimonos perfect before their parents pick them up. The next stop is a professional photographer, who will capture the moment of the special day. Here the girls are given a stick of candy called chitose-ame (literally *1,000 years of age candy*). The girls display these long candy sticks in festive bags for their pictures. Photographs are taken, as this is one of the most important times in a young boy or girl’s life.

When the formalities of picture taking are over, the family heads to a shrine for a ceremony to pray for health and everlasting happiness. Upon arrival, we were overwhelmed by the number of beautiful young girls and handsome young boys! We made our way to the registration area where our friends’ daughters waited their turn to go into the Shrine. After more pictures (these informal) and some squirming by many young people, the girls were finally called.

There were approximately eight families in the room, both with boys and girls. I tried not to look like a ‘tourist’ as I looked over each of these young boys and girls to see their kimonos and haregi. We knelt before a Shinto priest and he began the ceremony, which I never understood but will truly remember for the rest of my life. He blessed the children as a whole and prayed for their health and happiness in a ceremony that lasted only fifteen minutes.

Within the first five minutes, my feet had gone to sleep and as I looked around thinking I might shift to a more comfortable position, I realized quickly this was a place where this should not be done. I wondered how I might walk when it was over! After the group blessing, the priest called each of the children by name to the front and gave them a blessing. Then, when all the children were done, we left the room.

Next, we took a walk around the grounds and looked at some of the old original buildings within the Shrine grounds. After some more photos, we headed for home, where everyone changed out of their kimonos into some ‘Sunday’ clothes could go out to celebrate with a traditional Japanese feast!

This festival is quite an experience, and even if you cannot participate yourself, going to local and more famous Shrines on Sundays in November (or a Japanese holiday in November) to see the boys and girls is a real treat! Some of the most popular areas in Tokyo are Meiji Jingu (Meiji Shrine) near Harajuku Station, Kanda Myojin near Ochanomizu Station, and Asakusa Jinja near Asakusa Station.

Wiki Lyn Paulson-Cody

## December - Emperor’s Birthday

In Japan, although Christmas is not a national holiday, some western traditions are being adopted. Confectioners have started a “tradition” that a Christmas cake is to be eaten by the family on Christmas Eve. Santa Claus brings one gift per child. Many offices close for a week to ten days for New Year’s from about the 28th of December until January 5. There are many end-of-the-year (and New Year) parties similar to our holiday season socials.

The only national holiday this month is the **Emperor’s Birthday** on December 23. On this day, the castle gates are opened and the Emperor gives a speech to the public. This is quite an experience, you should go! He repeats the speech several times throughout the day to accommodate the masses of people lined up to view him and his family.

## December - Chichibu Yo-Matsuri

An all-night festival is held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> of December, highlighted by a parade of six huge, lantern-lit floats. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> all the floats assemble at the Chichibu Shrine around 7pm, and proceed along the city’s main streets. There is a fireworks display from 8:20-10pm in Hitsujiyama Park. From 2-3pm, kabuki is performed on a temporary stage in front of the Musashino Bank.

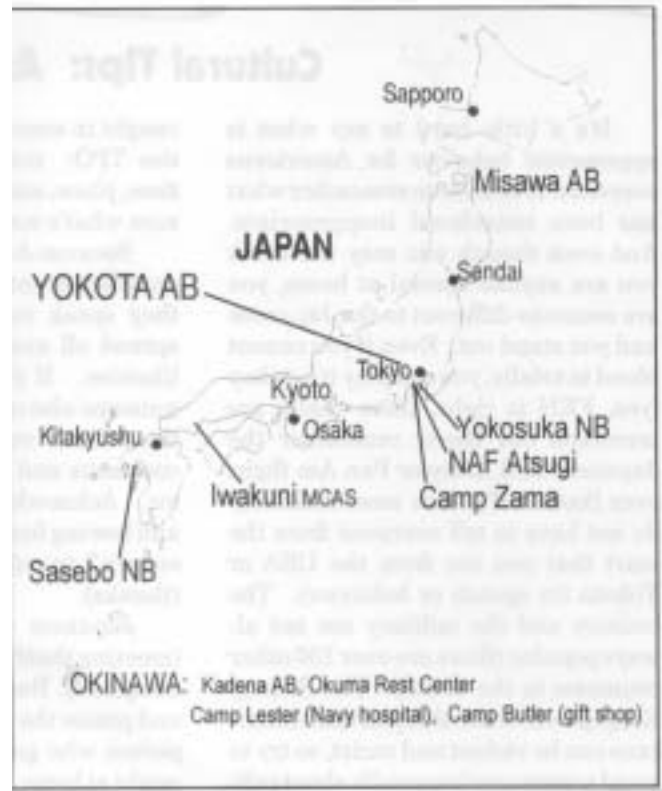
## December - Gishi-Sai

A festival is held at Sengakuji Temple in Tokyo on December 14 celebrating the famous vendetta carried out by the 47 Ronin “masterless samurai” of Ako in 1702. The parade, reenacting the event, starts from Nihombashi Memmo Co., near Higashi-Nihombashi Station on the Toei Asakusa Line at 6pm. They cross the Ryogoku Bridge and arrive at Matsuzakacho Park around 6:20. After a reception they ride the subway to Sengakuji Station and arrive at Sengakuji Temple, the burial place of these master less samurai, at around 7:30pm. A memorial service is then held.





# Area Maps



# Shrines and Temples - Etiquette

**Shrines** (Shinto) usually have torii gates (two pillars with two cross bars) at the entrances to their grounds, and jagged paper emblems or symbolic ropes in front of the altars.

**Temples** (Buddhist) are often marked on maps with a backward "swastika" symbol. Sometimes, both are present on the same grounds.

The following etiquette is appropriate for anybody visiting a shrine or temple:

You should be dressed appropriately. Pass under the torii gate and walk through the "sando" or approach to the shrine. Go to the hand-washing stone basin and cleanse your hands thoroughly. With a dipper, pour water into your cupped hand and then bring the water to your mouth, gargle and swallow. Do not bring the dipper directly to your mouth. Advance before the god enshrined. Throw some money (either paper currency or coins) into the offering box; five-yen coins are fine (the phrase go-en also means "for luck"). Then bow deeply two times. After that, clap your hands twice. Then make a deep bow once more.

# English Language Churches and Times of Worship

## 1. Kanto Plains Baptist Church

Tel. 51-1915

Sun: 11am and 6pm

Wed: 7pm

## 2. New Light Fellowship

Tel. 53-8040

## 3. Tokyo Baptist Church

Tel. 03-3461-8425

Sun: 11am and 6pm

## 4. Yokota Baptist Church

Tel. 53-2577

Sun: 11am and 6pm

Wed: 7pm

## 5. Apostolic United Pentecostal Church

Tel. 53-1159

Sun: 10:30am and 6pm

Thurs: 7pm

## 6. St. Alban's Anglican/Episcopal Church

Tel. 3431-8534

Sun: 8am Holy Eucharist

10am (Family Eucharist, 1st Sun of month)

10am Sung Eucharist

5:30pm (Choral Evensong, 1<sup>st</sup> Sun of month)

## 7. Yokota Christian Center

Tel. 51-4772

Sun: 10:30am and 6pm

Wed: 7pm

## 8. Yokota Church of Christ

Tel. 227-6028

Sun: 10am and 6pm

Wed: 6:30pm

## 9. Calvary Conservative Baptist Church

Tel. 57-0654

Sun: 11am and 6pm

Wed: 7pm

## 10. Saint Anselm's Benedictine Priory (Roman Catholic)

Tel. 03-3491-6966

Sun: 11:45am

Wed: Bible Class 7pm

## 11. St. Paul International Lutheran Church, Tokyo Lutheran Center

Tel. 03-3261-3740

Sun: 9:30am Worship Service

10:45am Sunday School

## 12. Independent Church of Deliverance

Tel. 52-9679

Please call for times of services.

## 13. Franciscan Chapel Center (Roman Catholic)

Tel. 03-3401-2141/2142

Sat: 6pm Mass in English

Sun: 8, 10am, Noon, 6pm

M-F: 8am

## 14. Tokyo Union Church

Tel. 03-3400-0047

Sun: 8:40 and 11am

9:50-10:45am Sun School

## 15. Tokyo International Church of Seventh-day Adventist

(Harajuku)

Tel. 03-3402-1517

## 16. Yokohama International Church of Seventh-day Adventists

2483 Kamikawai-cho

Ahahi-ku, Yokohama, Japan 241-0802

Tel. 045-921-2061

