

## New Year's cleaning, cooking and other customs

-*'Nenmatsu nenshi' in Japan-*



The end of every year in Japan is perhaps more hectic than any other country. These days we can enjoy bright and colourful fairy lights at Christmas (which is a mere 'event' here in Japan), but once this day has passed everyone immediately begins preparing for '*oshougatsu*' (New Year).

From ancient times there has been a belief in Japan that the '*toshigamisama*' (New Year god) visits at New Year. The *toshigamisama* is a god that visits each and every house at the beginning of the year and grants the inhabitants happiness for that year. So in order to welcome the *toshigamisama* with the very best hospitality, everyone is busy with all kinds of preparations, which begin with cleansing your house. This is the annual ritual of '*oosouji*', thorough housecleaning. In the lead up to New Year, special decorations are also displayed, such as '*kagami mochi*' (two differently-sized round pieces of mochi, the smaller one placed on top of the larger one, usually accompanied by a particular type citrus fruit with a leaf still attached), *kadomatsu* (usually made from pine branches and bamboo stalks) and *shimekazari* (woven ropes generally made from the straw of hemp or rice plants etc.), and are customarily put out sometime between December 26<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> or on the 30<sup>th</sup>. Now, you might be wondering: why can't you put these decorations out on December 29<sup>th</sup> or 31<sup>st</sup>? Well the reasons for this are that the 29<sup>th</sup> is read as '*nijyuuku*' in Japanese, which directly translated is something like "pain and suffering two-fold", akin to a "double whammy". This is considered to be a bad omen so decorations are not put out on this day. Furthermore, the 31<sup>st</sup> is the day before New Year's Day, so the act of putting out New Year's decorations on this day gives the impression of being rushed and lacking sincerity, and therefore you will not receive a blessing from the visiting New Year god. This god that we welcome on New Year's Day is also said to hate loud noise and fire, so Japanese people avoid using fire in the kitchen on this day (i.e. they do not cook). Recently it's said that this is also to relieve the people who always prepare

our food from housework and chores so that they can have a break. This lead to serving '*osechi ryouri*' on New Year's Day, as it can be prepared in advanced and stored to be served on New Year's Day.

*Osechi ryouri* cooking is stored and served in stackable boxes called '*jyubako*' which symbolise the piling up of happiness. Ingredients are carefully arranged and packed into the boxes, and each of these ingredients has a particular meaning so as to bring great happiness to the person eating them. Just a few of the ingredients with interesting meanings include; '*kuromame*' (black beans): to work earnestly and live healthily.

'*kazunoko*' (herring roe): the great number of herring eggs symbolises the perpetuation of one's descendants.

'*kinton*' (a Japanese food made with mashed sweet potatoes often including chestnuts or beans): the yellow colour represents fortune in order to have a successful year.

'*ebi*' (shrimp or prawns): the curved back indicates a wish for longevity

'*renkon*' (lotus root): the numerous holes in the lotus root through which you can see things far away express the desire of foresight for the coming year.

Of course there are many other ingredients with their own unique meanings, and different regions have their own unique foods.





Another aspect of preparing for the New Year in Japan is sending out New Year greeting cards called *'nengajyou'*. These are sent to co-workers, friends, school teachers etc. as a friendly greeting for the New Year, and are available in stores from November onward. However you must make sure not to send *nengajyou* to people who have lost a close relative such as a parent or sibling that year. The reason for this is that they must mourn the passing of their family member for one year and must refrain from celebrations. If you have lost a close relative during the year, it is customary to send a mourning postcard called a *'mochuu'* to all of the people who you would normally send a *nengajyou* to before the Post Office *nengajyou* acceptance period begins (in early December). The recipients of these *mochuu* then know that they must not send any postcards to these people out of respect.

Most *nengajyou* display the animals from the Chinese zodiac and include a greeting such as “明けましておめでとうございます” (*akemashite omedetou gozaimasu*) and “謹賀新年” (*kinga shinnen*) which both essentially mean “Happy New Year”. Recently many families print their own *nengajyou* and include family photos to send out to people. 2014 will be the year of the horse, so the majority of *nengajyou* sold in shops this year are horse themed. Of course if you're feeling more creative, you can also buy blank *nengajyou* that you can design yourself with drawings, stamps and Japanese calligraphy.

On New Year's Eve, or *'oomisoka'*, there are many traditional activities and customs that you can experience. The night of New Year's Eve, December 31<sup>st</sup> is also called *'joya'*, and on this night it is customary to eat very long and thin buckwheat noodles called *'toshikoshi soba'* to grant the eater a long life. After this, it is tradition for Japanese people to go to a temple

for the ringing of the temple bell. From midnight, the temple bell is struck 108 times to symbolise the 108 earthly desires of mankind according to Buddhist teachings (these include states of the heart caused by lust, anger, indecision and anguish). Striking the bell the exact number of times is said to purify these sins so that we can begin the New Year with a clean slate.

Then comes New Year's Day, and January 1<sup>st</sup> to the 3<sup>rd</sup> is referred to as *'oshougatsu'*. During *oshougatsu* people eat a special soup called *'ozouni'* which usually contains mochi and vegetables and visit shrines for the first time of the year (*this act is called 'hatsumoude'*).

This is a fun time of year for children as they traditionally receive a small envelope (*'pochibukuro'* in Japanese) containing money from adults in their family, called *'otoshidama'*. *Otoshidama* originally came from the divine act of the *kagami*

*mochi* offered to the New Year God being distributed to worshippers. When giving it to someone younger than you it is called *'otoshidama'*, but when giving it to someone more senior than you it is called *'onenga'*.

Even though nowadays many of these New Year customs and events have changed or been regionalised somewhat, the original traditions are still kept alive by Japanese people. There are those who go to shrines and draw a fortune, those who go to shopping malls to get the first *'fukubukuro'* mystery bags that go on sale, those who meet with relatives they have not seen for a while and exchange *otoshidama*, and those who stay at home and eat and sleep on New Year's. How will you spend this New Year's?

---- Article by S. Watanabe and Y. Mieno



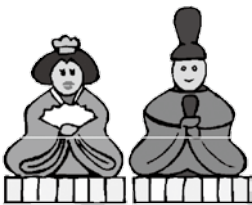
Year of the horse *nengajyou*



## Festivals and Events



| Date  | Event Description   | Location  | Contact #      |
|---|---|---|----------------|
| Jan. 1 <sup>st</sup>                            | <b>First sunrise of the new year-</b> the Beppu ropeway to Tsurumi-dake will open at 4:00AM giving visitors the chance to make their first sunrise of the year a memorable one. Come along and enjoy the beautiful view.                        | Beppu City<br>Tsurumi-dake  | ☎ 0977-22-2277 |
| Jan. 1 <sup>st</sup>                            | <b>Sunrise walk-</b> a yearly event where visitors walk along the 4km Bungo Kuroshio Line. Paper balloons are released simultaneously into the sky at sunrise.  | Saiki City<br>Yonouzu Bungo Kuroshio Line                             | ☎ 0972-35-6111 |
| Jan. 1 <sup>st</sup>                            | <b>Usa Shrine New Year visit-</b> every year around half a million people visit Usa Shrine on this day to pray for good fortune and things such as the health of their family, business prosperity, road safety and success in their studies.   | Usa City<br>Usa Shrine  | ☎ 0978-37-0001 |
| Jan. 2 <sup>nd</sup>                            | <b>New Year Shonai Kagura-</b> this will be the first Shonai Kagura performance of the New Year.  | Yufu City<br>Shonai-Machi   | ☎ 097-582-1111 |
| Jan. 11 <sup>th</sup>                           | <b>Housenji Fireworks-</b> a fireworks festival where around 2000 fireworks are released into the clear winter sky. There will also be a burning of New Year's decorations.   | Kokonoe-Machi<br>Housenji Onsen                                       | ☎ 0973-73-5510 |
| Jan. 13 <sup>th</sup>                           | <b>33<sup>rd</sup> Hiji New Year Health Marathon-</b> features 1.5km, 3km, 5km, 10km courses and participation is free. A great opportunity to start the year with exercise.  | Hiji-Machi<br>Oga Fishing Port  | ☎ 0977-73-3156 |
| Jan. 25 <sup>th</sup> -<br>Feb. 1 <sup>st</sup> | <b>Oita Fugu Festa-</b> selected famous <i>fugu</i> (blowfish) restaurants throughout Oita City will be offering discounts on fugu cuisine so that everyone can taste the deliciousness of <i>fugu</i> .  | Oita City<br>Participating Restaurants                                | ☎ 097-537-5764 |
| Feb. 2 <sup>nd</sup>                            | <b>Oita Fugu Festa-</b> in connection with the Beppu Oita Mainichi Marathon, there will be <i>Fugu-zosui</i> (porridge made with blowfish, rice and vegetables) available at the Oita Athletics Stadium from 13:00.                             | Oita City<br>Oita Athletic Stadium                                    | ☎ 097-537-5764 |
| Feb. 2 <sup>nd</sup>                            | <b>The 63<sup>rd</sup> Beppu Oita Mainichi Marathon-</b> well known as a stepping stone for marathon newcomers. Held alongside the Beppu coast, come along to cheer on the runners (if you're not already competing!).                          | Oita City<br>From Umitamago Aquarium<br>to the Oita Athletics Stadium | ☎ 097-558-1999 |
| Feb. 2 <sup>nd</sup>                            | <b>Setsubun Onie-</b> held at the <i>Hibarusan shouheiji</i> temple, this tradition is around 350 years old.  | Nakatsu City<br>Yabakei-Machi   | ☎ 0979-54-3111 |
| Mid-Feb -<br>mid-Mar.                           | <b>Yoshino Japanese Plum Blossom Festival-</b> during this festival there will be events such as kagura and <i>taiko</i> performances amongst the some 450 plum blossom trees.  | Oita City<br>Yoshinobai-en  | ☎ 097-597-1000 |
| Mid-Feb.  | <b>Sekiaji, sekisabafish festival-</b> an event where visitors can enjoy a <i>sekiaji sekisaba</i> fish set (including sashimi etc) for discounted prices. Saganoseki produce such as fruit and vegetables will also be available for purchase. | Oita City<br>Saganoseki Shimin Center                                 | ☎ 097-575-2000 |



### HINA DOLL EXHIBITIONS

The *Hina* doll festival is a yearly tradition beginning in mid-February, continuing until mid-March. Families display *Hina* dolls to celebrate Girl's Day on March 3<sup>rd</sup>. Displays feature a number of tiers, and each doll represents a different figure from the Emperor or Empress, to court ladies and samurai.

| Date   | Display Description  | Location                            | Contact #      |
|--|--|-------------------------------------|----------------|
| Feb. 8 <sup>th</sup> -<br>Mar. 16 <sup>th</sup>  | <b>Usuki Hina-meguri-</b> hina dolls will be displayed at various locations throughout the city.   | Usuki City<br>Various locations     | ☎ 0972-64-7130 |
| Feb. 8 <sup>th</sup> -<br>Mar. 23 <sup>rd</sup>  | <b>Kitsuki Hina-meguri-</b> hinadolls will be displayed at various locations throughout the city. And the hinadolls that were owned by feudal lord will be displayed at Historical Museum. | Kitsuki City<br>Various locations   | ☎ 0978-63-0100 |
| Feb. 15 <sup>th</sup> -<br>Mar. 31 <sup>st</sup> | <b>Hita Hina Doll festival-</b> families in Mameda-Machi and Kuma-Machi will display their <i>hina</i> dolls to the public.  | Hita City<br>Mameda, Kuma districts | ☎ 0973-23-3111 |
| Feb. 23 <sup>rd</sup> -<br>Mar. 23 <sup>rd</sup> | <b>Castle town Nakatsu Hina Doll festival-</b> various events will be held to coincide with the local <i>hina</i> doll displays.   | Nakatsu City<br>Various locations   | ☎ 0979-22-3060 |
| Feb. 7 <sup>th</sup> -<br>Mar. 9 <sup>th</sup>   | <b>Oka clan castle town Hina Doll festival-</b> featuring displays of both traditional and Taketa City original <i>hina</i> dolls.   | Taketa City<br>Jyouka-Machi         | ☎ 0974-63-2638 |

## EXHIBITIONS &amp; SCREENINGS

| Date  | Description   | Place                              | Admission | Contact #      |
|---|---|------------------------------------|-----------|----------------|
| Dec. 10 <sup>th</sup> - Feb. 11 <sup>th</sup> | " <i>Miyako no oshie, Bunzen Bungo no inori</i> "- an exhibition on the history of Tennen Kyoyu, a monk who opened a temple in Oita many years ago. | Oita Prefectural Museum of History | ¥300      | ☎ 0978-37-2100 |
| Jan. 8 <sup>th</sup> - Apr. 13 <sup>th</sup>  | " <i>Kachouga no sekai</i> "- a collection of works in the flowers-and-birds genre of Japanese and Chinese paintings                                | Oita Art Museum                    | ¥300      | ☎ 097-554-5800 |
| Jan. 10 <sup>th</sup> - Feb. 16 <sup>th</sup> | <b>Oita Wuhan fusion exhibition</b> - a mixture of pieces by artists from Oita City and Wuhan City in China will be displayed at this exhibition.   | Oita Art Museum                    | FREE      | ☎ 097-554-5800 |

Oita Art Museum= Oita-Shi Bijutsukan 大分市美術館 Oita Prefectural Museum of History= 大分県立歴史博物館

\*\*\*Most Museums and Centers are closed on Monday, or Tuesday if Monday is a public holiday. Student admissions vary, highest cost shown.\*\*\*



## STAGE &amp; MUSIC EVENTS

| Nov.             | Time  | Artist/Event   | Venue                 | Cost            | Contact #       |
|------------------|-------|--|-----------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 8 <sup>th</sup>  | 19:00 | <b>One Coin Relay Concert-</b> Trio Libertad   | iichiko Otonoizumi    | ¥500            | ☎ 097-533-4004  |
| 11 <sup>th</sup> | 18:30 | <b>Yang<sup>2</sup> New Year Concert</b>   | Brick Block           | ¥2,500          | ☎ 097-538-3111  |
| 13 <sup>th</sup> |       | <b>Kyushu International Festival in Hita 2014-</b> featuring ethnic music from around the world                                  | Patria Hita           | ¥2,500          | ☎ 0973-25-5000  |
| 19 <sup>th</sup> | 14:00 | <b>Lumière Flute Ensemble and Flute Orchestra</b>  | iichiko Grand Theater | ¥1,000          | ☎ 090-2854-9116 |
| 25 <sup>th</sup> | 21:00 | <b>HAZE-</b> DJ event ¥1,000 for entry with 1 drink, or ¥2,500 for males and ¥2,000 for females for all you can drink until 1AM. | PEI Pub               | ¥1,000 - ¥2,500 | ☎ 090-9409-0393 |
| Nov.             | Time  | Artist/Event   | Venue                 | Cost            | Contact #       |
| 1 <sup>st</sup>  | 19:00 | <b>PRISM-</b> Live tour in Oita  | Cantalooop II         | ¥4,500 +drink   | ☎ 097-548-5363  |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup>  | 14:00 | <b>Patria Music Festa Vol. 7</b>   | Patria Hita           | TBC             | ☎ 0973-25-5000  |
| 6 <sup>th</sup>  | 19:00 | <b>Utako Harada flute recital</b>  | iichiko Otonoizumi    | ¥2,500          | ☎ 03-3539-5131  |
| 19 <sup>th</sup> | 17:00 | <b>Gille 2013-2014 concert tour</b>  | Bitts Hall            | ¥4,500 +drink   | ☎ 097-533-0467  |
| 25 <sup>th</sup> | 18:30 | <b>One Coin Relay Concert-</b> Japanese puppetry performance   | iichiko Otonoizumi    | ¥500            | ☎ 097-533-4004  |

\*\*Ticket prices range from student to most expensive general admission. Prices shown otherwise indicate price for purchase on the day of the event, they may be cheaper if purchased in advance. "w/ drink" prices include a drink, "+drink" prices require the additional purchase of a drink. Times shown indicate start times, doors usually open 30 minutes beforehand.

## VENUES

*Brick Block= 5-7-5 Ikushi, Oita City*  
*Bitts Hall= Ikushi 5-783, Oita City*  
*Cantalooop II=3-2-30 Miyako-Machi*  
*Nakayama Dai 5 Building 6F Oita City*

*iichiko Atrium= Oasis Tower Ground Floor, Oita City*  
*iichiko Grand Theater= Oasis Tower 1F Oita City*

*iichiko Otonoizumi=Oasis Tower 1F Oita City*  
*Patria Hita= 1-8-11 Sanbonmatsu, Hita City*  
*P.E.I Pub= Miyako-Machi 2-5-3 Shirogane Bld2F, Oita City*

## Oita International Plaza events, projects and collaborations

The Oita International Plaza organises and runs a number of events and workshops throughout the year for international residents and Japanese residents of Oita Prefecture. These include international understanding seminars, 'skill-up' workshops for registered volunteer translators and interpreters, and the yearly International Festa. We have a free mail newsletter and free printed publications in English, Japanese and Chinese, and we are also involved with the Oita Prefecture Human Rights Festa each year which promotes understanding, respect and appreciation of one another.



2013 has been a busy and successful year, and we are very much looking forward to what 2014 will bring. To keep up to date with Oita International Plaza events and activities, check out our homepage <http://oitaplaza.opal.ne.jp/english/> (available in English, Japanese and Chinese) and our Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/oitaplaza> (predominantly Japanese).

## What's Going On?

### From the Plaza

#### Charity Bazaar for Typhoon Haiyan Victims

The Oita International Plaza will be holding a charity bazaar in December to raise money for the victims of Typhoon Haiyan which hit Leyte Island of the Philippines in early November. All proceeds will be sent to the Philippines to assist with relief efforts.

Date/Time: Dec. **21<sup>st</sup>** & **Dec. 22<sup>nd</sup>**, 10:00-17:00

Place: iichiko Culture Center 1F

For more details contact the OIP (TEL: 097-533-4021)

#### International Understanding Seminar #2

The Oita International Plaza is holding its second international understanding seminar of the year on the topic of "The Italian style of raising children through soccer". The speaker will talk about the uniqueness of AC Milan's education style, Italian culture and their own personal experiences since arriving in Japan.

Date/Time: **Dec. 21<sup>st</sup>**, 19:00-20:30

Place: iichiko Culture Center, B1F (underground), small movie screening hall.

For more details contact the OIP (TEL: 097-533-4021)

#### Free Legal Consultations

The Oita International Plaza is holding free legal consultations on **Jan. 15<sup>th</sup>** & **Feb. 19<sup>th</sup>** from **13:00-16:00**.

The Oita Emigration/Immigration Affairs Council also organizes free consultations where emigration/immigration specialists are available to offer advice on a variety of topics from Immigration Bureau paperwork and procedures, to daily life matters. English interpretation available, other languages may be available with reservation two days in advance.

Date/Time: **Feb. 2<sup>nd</sup>** from **13:00~16:00**

For more information contact the Oita International Plaza.

TEL: 097-533-4021

#### Free Tagalog Consultations

Date: Saturday **Jan. 11<sup>th</sup>** & Tuesday **Jan. 21<sup>st</sup>**

Saturday **Feb. 1<sup>st</sup>** & Tuesday **Feb. 18<sup>th</sup>**

Time: **13:00-16:00**

Place: Oita International Plaza

Consultant: Rhodora Yoshitake

#### Free Chinese Consultations

Date/Time: **Every Thursday 10:00-13:00**. Place: Oita International Plaza. Consultant: Cui Wenyu (\*Dates and times are subject to change. Please contact the Oita International Plaza before coming.)

TEL: 097-533-4021

#### Notarial Services for Filipino residents

Notarial services such as passport processing, registration of children's births, marriage etc. for Filipinos living in Oita Prefecture and surrounding prefectures will be offered on **January 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>**, 2014.

Date/Time: **Jan 11<sup>th</sup>** 9:00-20:00, **Jan 12<sup>th</sup>** 9:00-12:00

Place: OASIS Hiroba21, 4th Floor meeting room

For more information contact Rhodora Yoshitake 090-9797-6217

### Japanese Lessons

#### Himawari Japanese Volunteers

Support for people learning Japanese in order to help them enjoy their lives in Oita, now at three different locations.

Wasada Public Hall Wed. 10:00-12:00

Meiji Akeno Public Hall Wed. 14:00-16:00

Tsurusaki Public Hall Sat. 10:00-12:00

For more information contact Fukata Miharu TEL: 097-527-2614

Email: [nihongo\\_himawari\\_oita@yahoo.co.jp](mailto:nihongo_himawari_oita@yahoo.co.jp)

#### Nihongo Rakuraku-talk

Beppu City Hall offers free Japanese lessons every Tuesday from 14:00~15:30. For more information contact Beppu International Affairs Division TEL: 0977-21-6133

E-MAIL: [int-ma@city.beppu.oita.jp](mailto:int-ma@city.beppu.oita.jp)

#### Sakura Japanese Class

Come study Japanese with friendly volunteers and teachers in a pleasant atmosphere. Sakura Japanese Class is held every Monday from 10:15-12:00 at the Oita University International House in Nishiki-Machi, Oita City. Classes are FREE. For more information call Ms. Ohashi CELL: 090-7866-2486

#### AIUEO Japanese Lessons

Volunteers offer free Japanese lessons on Tuesday and Friday from 10:20-11:50 at I-NESS near Oasis Tower as well as Thursday nights at Compal Hall from 18:30-20:00. Lessons are also offered in Beppu at the Oita International House on Tuesday mornings from 10:30-12:00. For more information contact:

Ms. Miyase 090-8353-2485 (day lessons)

Ms. Kato 097-532-5940 (night lessons)

### Community Classes and Events

#### Happy Talk

Come practice speaking Japanese with other learners and native speakers. Reservations not required, just show up on the day. Held every 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday of the month at the Oita International Plaza, the date of the next session is **Jan. 18<sup>th</sup>**.

Time: **13:00 – 14:30**

Please bring your own drink if you like. Participation is FREE.

For more details contact Sunny: [orixbluewaves@gmail.com](mailto:orixbluewaves@gmail.com)

or visit the Facebook page:

<http://www.facebook.com/goto.hanasou>

#### べふはち Beppu Rainbow Society

The “べふはち Beppu Rainbow Society” is a place where you can make international friendships through multicultural events. They hold many events throughout the year such as beach parties, concerts, craft-making, cooking classes and much more.

For more information, check out their Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/beppu.rainbow.society>

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-Necessities of life-



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Date/time: January 11<sup>th</sup> 9:00 to 20:00, January 12<sup>th</sup> 9:00 to 12:00

Place: OASIS Hiroba21, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor meeting room

For more information please contact Rhodora Yoshitake 090-9797-6217



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 ☎ 097-533-4021 FAX:097-533-4052

**Oita International Plaza**  
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 Promotion Foundation  
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### THANK YOU !!

A special thanks to all those who co-operated with us for this issue. Your help was very much appreciated.

THE TOMBO is produced by:

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<http://www.oitaplaza.jp/english/>

HOURS: Monday-Friday 9:30am-7:00pm

(closed weekends and the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Mondays of each month. We are open on the Saturdays before these Mondays)

Closed national holidays & Dec 29<sup>th</sup> - Jan 3<sup>rd</sup>

The International Plaza is located on the basement floor of OASIS Hiroba 21 (iichiko Culture Center).

