



Japanese New Year Traditions

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Japan has a long history of New Years Eve, or 大晦日 (omisoka), traditions. New Years is considered to be a very important part of the year, because it brings families together to reflect on the past year, and think about their dreams for the next year. There are seven Japanese traditions for the New Year, some modern, some traditional.

One of the food-related traditions, Toshikoshi Soba, meaning the end of year soba, is the dish eaten on New Years Eve. It is a very simple soba dish, consisting of buckwheat noodles and scallions in a hot dashi broth. Some families even add their own twist with tempura or fish cakes.



New Years officially starts with joya no kane, the tradition of going to a Buddhist temple at the stroke of midnight. Buddhist temples ring their bonsho, or temple bells, 108 times, representing the 108 human desires which lead to pain and suffering, which joya no kane then drives away.

Hatsuhinode is the tradition of waking up to observe the first sunrise of the year, whether it is on the beach, a balcony, or even a mountaintop. While people watch the hatsuhinode, they wish for good fortune and happiness in the New Year.



O-sechi ryori, or the New Year's Day feast, originating in the Heian period, is a jubako, or



bento box, filled with small, cold dishes. Each dish has its own job; some dishes bring good luck, others bring prosperity. Some of these dishes include candied chestnut and sweet potatoes, sweet rolled omelet, and sweet black soybeans, a personal favorite. Traditionally, families would take the time to make their own o-sechi ryori, but overtime department stores started pre-ordering processes to make the New Year's

traditions a little easier.

The next New Years food tradition is mochi, a chewy rice cake. Although mochi is found all year round at convenience stores throughout Japan, many opt to buy it from a store, since preparing mochi is a lot of work. Mochi is also used as decorations, for instance, kagami mochi, two mochis on top of the other, a daidai (Japanese bitter orange), and a leaf on top.



Nengajo, the tradition of sending family and friends New Years greetings cards, has



always been a very popular tradition. Around New Year's time, many schools take time to let the younger students write nengajo for their parents and grandparents. Nengajo is meant to be delivered on New Years Day; consequently, post offices work extremely hard to make this happen.

A tradition many children especially enjoy is Hatsumode. Happening in the first few days of the

New Year, it is the first visit to the shrine (Buddhist or Shinto). During this visit, people say their



prayers, make wishes, express gratitude, and purchase the New Year charms, each representing a different thing, whether that be good luck or good grades. While some people are saying their prayers, others are visiting the busy food stalls, giving the trip a festive feel.

Japan has always had strong love and value for New Years. Whether it's trying the o-seki ryori, or sending the first nengajo to family and friends, each New Years is a lifelong memory.





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