

August 8月、葉月



August is the hottest month of summer in Japan, but in the old calendar, which is about a month ahead of the Gregorian calendar adopted in the Meiji era, it was already autumn. The old name for August is *Hazuki*. “Ha” means leaves. It meant the month when the leaves change colors and fall off the trees.

Obon, August 13-15



Obon is the Japanese Buddhist Festival to celebrate the spirits of one’s ancestors. Their spirits come home on August 13th and go back on the 15th. Some parts of Japan, like Tokyo, follow the new calendar and celebrate it in July, but most of Japan celebrates it in August. Cucumber horses and eggplant oxen are the traditional decorations. It is said that the spirits ride the horses to come home and go back on the eggplant oxen. To welcome spirits and see them off safely, *ogara*, stems of the hemp plant, are burnt in an earthenware plate at the front door steps. Offerings are set up on the altar for spirits.



Obon is also a time for family reunions. This is the busiest travel time in Japan. People travel to visit their hometowns to see family and visit ancestors' graves. Villages and towns often have festivals during Obon. *Bon Odori* dances and *hanabi taikai* (fireworks displays) are the most popular. It is a fun time for adults and children, and the whole family can enjoy festival games and food stands. Unfortunately, the festivals are mostly canceled because of COVID 19, so this year most people will stay home during the Obon holidays.

Yukata and Jimbei

Yukata is a cotton casual kimono for summer. People wear them at the festivals, especially at Bon Odori. Everyone can join and dance. Dancers often wear yukata with the same pattern, like uniforms, for Bon Odori. *Jimbei* are casual kimono-style tops and pants that are also worn at festivals and in the summer.

Japan enjoys a lot of seasonal food. Here are a couple of summer favorites.

Somen Nagashi: You catch flowing somen noodles coming down in the bamboo gutter with hashi (chopsticks) to eat it.



You can also enjoy it at home with these fun machines.



Kakigori (かき氷): Japanese style shaved ice

Shaved ice is a favorite summertime sweet. The ice is shaved very finely and flavored with all kinds of syrup, anko(sweet azuki bean paste), and other toppings.



You can buy a *kakigori* maker and make it at home too. It is a lot of fun.



Origami: Paper crane

This is probably the most known origami model in the world.

The crane is an auspicious bird in Japan. The legend says it lives for a thousand years. It is a symbol of longevity. This traditional origami model has been folded for hundreds of years.

There are many origami paper crane tutorials online. [This is an easy one to follow](#). It is challenging, but worth a try.

Senbazuru: Thousand paper cranes



In 1945, the USA dropped two atomic bombs on two cities in Japan which killed 129,000-226,000 people, mostly civilians. These are the only uses of nuclear weapons in armed conflicts. The bomb was dropped on Hiroshima on August 6 and Nagasaki on August 9.

[This year is the 75th year since the bombs were dropped.](#)



The story of “One Thousand Cranes” became famous to the world by the book called, “Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes” by Eleanor Coerr. The book is based on the true story of a girl called Sadako Sasaki.

Sadako Sasaki was two years old when the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. She developed leukemia when she was 11 years old. She started to fold one thousand cranes wishing for better health, but she died at age 12. After her death, Sasaki's friends and schoolmates collected donations from all over Japan to build a memorial to her and all of the children who had died from the effects of the atomic bomb. In 1958, a [statue of Sasaki holding a golden crane](#) was unveiled in the [Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park](#). Strings of a thousand cranes were sent from all over the world, surrounding the monument. The story of Sadako has come to symbolize the hope that no child will ever again be killed by an atomic bomb.

At the bottom of this statue, there is a plaque that reads "This is our cry. This is our prayer. Peace in the world."



To wish for eternal peace and the abolition of nuclear weapons, people fold one thousand cranes and send them to Hiroshima and Nagasaki. They are displayed at the peace memorials in both cities.