

GAZETTE

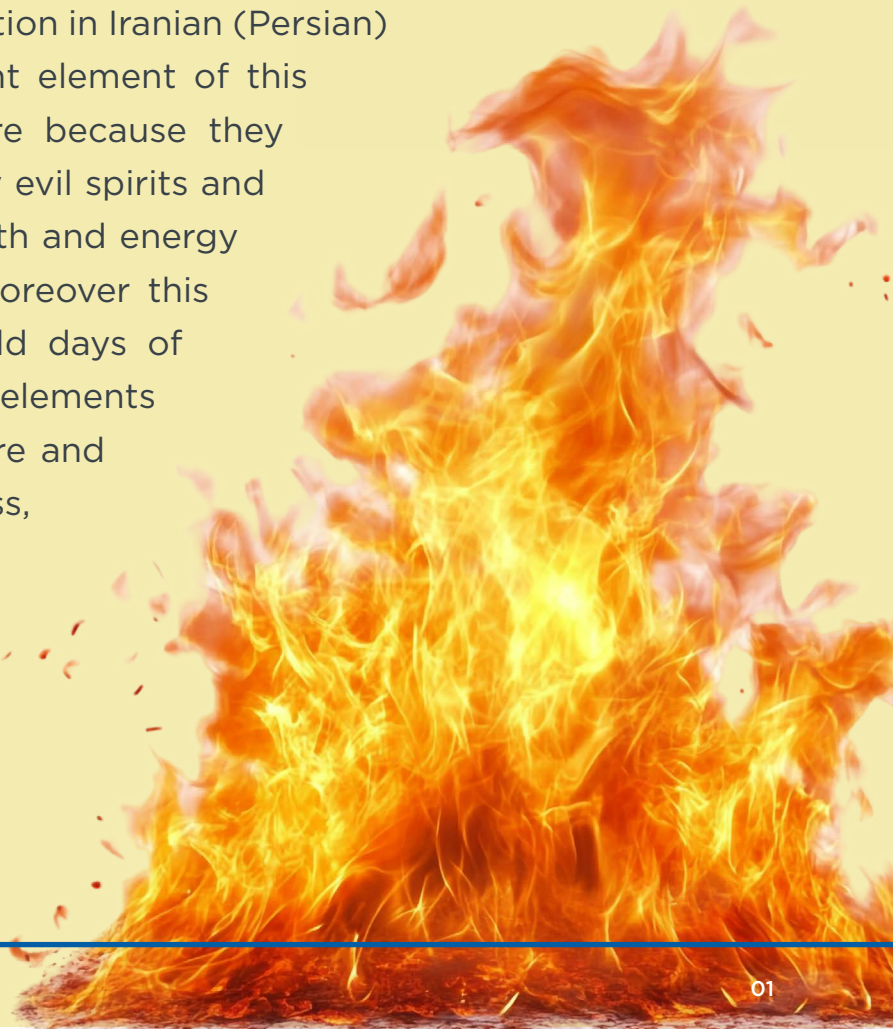
H o l l y w o o d & W e s t w o o d

FESTIVAL OF FIRE



Charshanbe soori, which is held on the last Wednesday of the year, is an important celebration in Iranian (Persian) culture. Fire is the most important element of this celebration. People jump over fire because they believe that they are burning away evil spirits and bad vibes, and they use the warmth and energy of the fire to start a new year. Moreover this celebration marks the end of cold days of winter. Fire is one of the classical elements and the only element which is pure and a symbol of light, purity, freshness, health, and life on the land. Today, this magnificent celebration in Iran is both dangerous and exciting!

By Artmis



JAPAN'S "COMING OF AGE DAY" – THE SECOND MONDAY OF JANUARY

In January in Japan, there is a major event called "Coming of Age Day," when we celebrate everyone who has turned 18 that year (i.e., those who have become adults). Ceremonies are held simultaneously all over Japan. For young people, this is a great day to party with friends and family and earn a lot of money.

On this day, many women wear flashy kimonos called "furusode". Men wear kimonos, "hakama", and suits to participate in the event. Although it varies slightly depending on the region, everyone visits shrines or temples and then participates in events organized by the local government. Furisode and



men's kimonos can be rented but they are generally purchased by parents or grandparents. They cost around \$5000 to \$20 000. In addition, adults give large amounts of cash to their children and relatives who have reached adulthood.

In some regions, people compete to see who can spend the most money on kimonos and clothes. Some people spend over \$50 000 and drive around the city in a flashy, modified convertible car with their friends. This is a bit excessive and you may get arrested by the police.

Until two years ago, this Coming of Age Day was celebrated by 20-year-olds. The Japanese government revised the law, and 18 years old is now considered an adult. As a result, Coming of Age Day is now celebrated by 18-20 year olds. Even though the age of adulthood has been lowered to 18, the legal age for smoking and drinking alcohol remains 20 years old, which is confusing to Japanese people. The Japanese government says that the reason for lowering the age of adulthood is to respect the right of self-determination of 18 and 19 year olds and to encourage their active participation in society - but most Japanese people are not convinced.

Even so, those who have actually reached adulthood enjoy their Coming of Age Ceremony with friends and family, spending the day in a lively atmosphere. Since ceremonies are traditionally held in the area where you were born and raised, it's fun to be able to gather in your hometown with childhood friends you became separated from when you went on to high school or college. Also, as mentioned above, young people receive lots of money from the adults around them, so for them Coming of Age Day is an incredibly wonderful day.

By Masako

NEW YEAR IN FRANCE

Starting from January 6th and continuing through the remaining three weeks of the first month of the New Year, French people prepare what we call the Galette de Rois or “King’s Cake.” The bakeries or boulangeries compete for the best galette, and a local or regional prize is given to the winner.

This traditional cake celebrates the Epiphany. This is a Christian feast day that commemorates the visit of the Magi, or the three wise men, to the infant Jesus after his birth - to pay homage to him as the newborn King of the Jews.

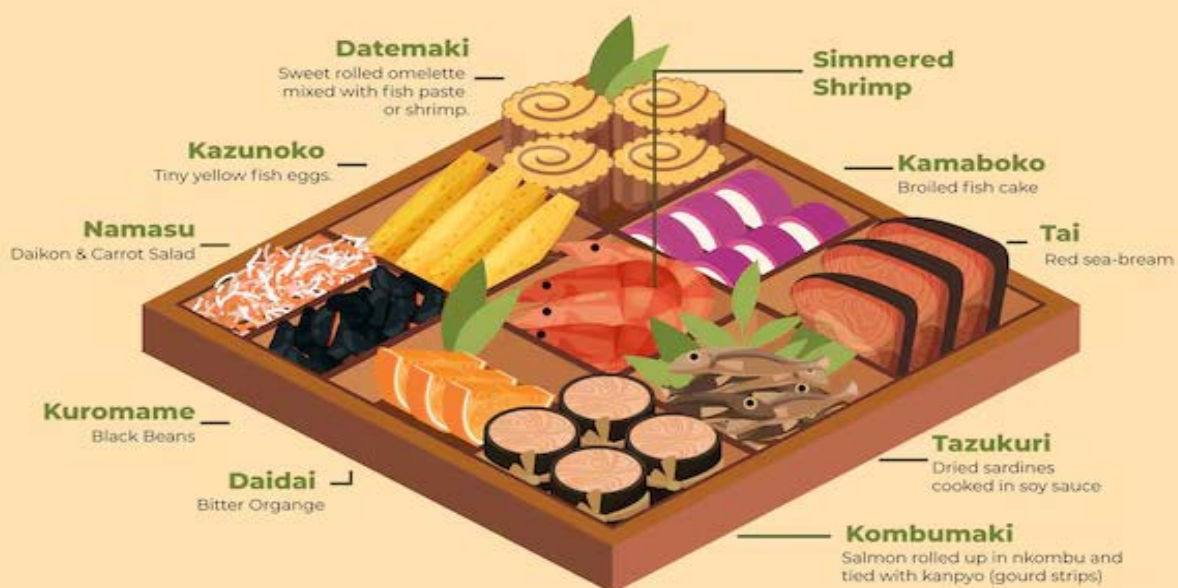
A small figurine made of ceramic known as fève is hidden inside the galette. The person who finds this little charm in his or her slice will be crowned as the king or queen of the day.



By Ana Maria

NEW YEAR IN JAPAN

I'm from Kagoshima, Japan. I'm going to share three things about the culture of the New Year celebration in Japan: the food, getting money, and writing postcards. The first thing I would like to share about is the food. Japan has wonderful traditional foods that are often prepared and shared on this special day. One of the foods prepared for the New Year is called "Osechi". Osechi (oh-sey-chee) is a very special collection of foods that are presented in a box. Many people buy or prepare this collection of treats to share with family or friends. What can you find in this tasty box? Osechi contains many ingredients such as beans, fish, shrimp, taro, meat, etc., and everything has a meaning! For example, beans mean health, and shrimp means that you can live long until your back becomes round like a shrimp. It's so interesting! There are many wishes in Osechi.



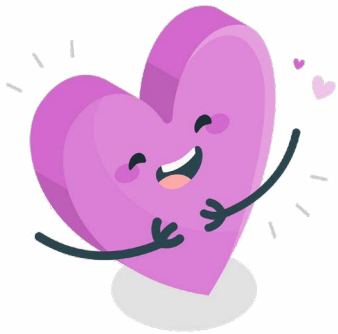
Osechi-ryōri

The second thing is getting money. It is called “otoshidama”. Otoshidama (oh-toh-shee-dah-ma) is the tradition of elders giving money to the younger generation. Otoshidama’s money contains the wish that you will be healthy and have a good year this year. It is similar to Chinese and Korean culture, but Japan is not as formal as those countries. Children can get a lot of money so they look forward to New Year’s as much as Christmas.

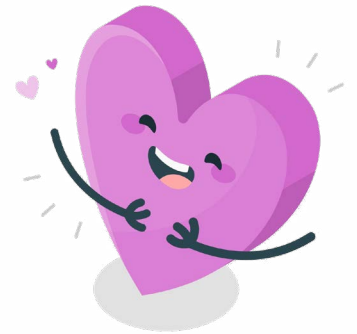


The third thing is writing postcards. In Japan, we write and send postcards before New Year’s Eve so that the postcards can be delivered in the new year. It is called, “Nengajo”. Nengajo (nen-gah-joh) is said to have been around for about 1000 years!! On the Nengajo, you can write New Year’s greetings and a thank you messages from last year, and you can also draw pictures and share photos. However, recently, due to the popularity of social media apps, the number of people writing Nengajo is decreasing. When I was in Japan, I looked forward to waking up early in the morning on January 1st and counting how many Nengajo postcards were in the mailbox. I want to continue to protect the tradition of Nengajo!

By Yu



REUNITED WITH FAMILY



I've noticed that time never passes without showing us that things tend to change for the better or worse. I say this because I've been here in L.A. for almost two years, and two weeks ago it was the first time that I reunited with my father after this long period.

Our relationship never was the best, but this time that we had the opportunity to spend time together. Both of us noticed that we have changed for the better. I'm his only little girl and he missed me, so we did things we did not do when we lived together. I think we also had the opportunity to know each other on aspects that we used to ignore and that we now really appreciate. For example, I did not know that he easily gets impressed with tiny details and that even sharing something that is "not important enough" could make him happy (and it consequently makes me happy too).

I'm now thankful for many things. Even though it sounds weird, loneliness is one of them. I've learned to appreciate many things, and I've grown in a way that makes me feel like a better person.

Obviously, there are moments that I regret but I always try to remind myself that we only have one opportunity to make things happen. When I think about my future and all the things I would like to achieve, this pushes me to continue.

By Domenica



JAPANESE NEW YEAR CUSTOMS

I am going to talk about traditional Japanese New Year customs. First, we have special foods for the New Year. One of these foods is “toshikoshi soba”. It’s a noodle with some tempura and different toppings. Secondly, we have “osechi.” It’s like bento and has a special meaning like many foods for the New Year.

On New Year’s Eve, Buddhist temples across Japan ring their bells 108 times in a ceremony called “joya no kane”. This number represents the 108 worldly desires or sins in Buddhist belief. The bell ringing purifies people’s hearts and minds, allowing them to enter the new year with a clean slate. It’s a special and wonderful start to the New Year.



Lastly, is “hatsumode.” After the New Year begins, many Japanese people visit Shinto shrines or Buddhist temples for hatsumode – the first shrine visit of the year. People pray for health, happiness, and success in the new year. It’s common to draw “omikuji” (fortune slips) to see what kind of luck the year might bring. I love omikuji because it makes me more excited for the new year!! I recommended omikuji! Let’s have fun in the New Year!

By Sena

SLOVAK HAPPY NEW YEAR

My name is Mia and I am from Slovakia. Slovakia has its own specific New Year traditions. They include: how Slovak people spend the last day of the year, what kind of food is usually on the table, and what happens after midnight. I will also talk about a holiday which is associated with Christmas and New Year on January 6th called “The Day of Three Kings”.

Slovakia celebrates the end of the calendar year on December 31st when the name “Silvester” shines in the calendar. On that day, Slovak people spend time with family or friends. Usually they are at somebody’s place or in the town square. On the last day, people choose their outfits, make sandwiches or prepare different kinds of canapes. Some people cook Silvester’s cabbage soup which is a dense cabbage soup with potatoes, dry mushrooms, sausages and spices. Last, but not least, one of things which must not be missed on Slovak tables is alcohol and bottles of champagne! When midnight strikes, people open their bottles of champagne and say “Cheers” and wish “Happy New Year” to each other. After that, they usually go out and watch the colourful show in the sky and continue celebrating until the morning.



The first day of the New Year, people try to be kind to each other, rest, not have any conflicts or debt. In Slovakia, we stick to the sentence, “As for the beginning of New Year, the same for the whole year.” On this day, Slovak people usually do not consume poultry because the belief is that if you eat poultry, your happiness will fly away. Also, according to Slovak traditions, people do not wash and hang wet clothes. This is to not call death into the house. It is also recommended to not throw away trash to avoid getting sick.

As I mentioned, the 6th of January, also known as “The Day of Three Kings” is a component of the Christmas and New Year season. It’s a Christian holiday where people sing carols and children take on the king’s disguise and go from house to house. They can get small rewards such as cakes, chocolates, or money. It’s rather typical for life in villages. Usually on this day, priests also bless houses with holy water and they write the initials of the Three Kings, “C, M, B” and the year of the blessing. The 6th of January marks the official end of the Christmas season and it is the time to take off Christmas decorations and prepare for another season.



By Mia

CHRISTMAS IN COLOMBIA

1. TRADITIONAL CHRISTMAS FOOD

Colombian Christmas is synonymous with delicious food. Families gather to enjoy natilla (a creamy custard dessert), buñuelos (golden fried cheese fritters). Tamales - made with corn dough and filled with meat, vegetables, and spices - are also a staple during this season. These dishes symbolize warmth and sharing among loved ones.

2. PUBLIC DECORATIONS

Colombia's cities shine during Christmas with stunning public decorations. Medellín's Alumbrados Navideños is globally renowned, featuring elaborate light displays along the river and city streets. Bogotá's plazas and parks transform with dazzling lights and Christmas trees. These spaces become hubs for families and tourists to enjoy festive concerts and activities.

3. CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS

Colombians cherish traditions like La Novena de Aguinaldos, a nine-day prayer gathering with songs and readings, leading up to Christmas Eve. On December 7, Día de las Velitas kicks off the season with streets lit by candles and lanterns. Festive celebrations often last until Día de los Reyes Magos in January.

Colombian Christmas blends rich culinary delights, vibrant public decor, and deep-rooted traditions into a truly magical experience.

By Hector



JAPANESE NEW YEAR



Modern technology has changed the tradition of New Year's postcards: New Year's Day in Japan is a special holiday. It is a time to give thanks for the new year. Many people spend time with their families. New Year's cards arrive and families enjoy reading them. These days fewer people are sending postcards for the holiday. Social media and other tools have increased and the habit of actually writing postcards has disappeared.

The Chinese Zodiac is also part of the celebration of New Year's in Japan: You may be unaware but there is a legend or history called the twelve Zodiac signs. It originated from the Chinese astrological system divided into 12 blocks based on the Jupiter cycle to count the years. The 12 animals that appear in the Chinese Zodiac are all associated with wishes for happiness, so it has long been said that displaying an ornament of the animal of the year is auspicious. 2025 is the year of the snake. Since ancient times, it has been worshipped as a god of fertility and money, and has been recognized as a sacred creature.

The special foods that are part of the Japanese New Year: One of the New Year's dishes is "ozoni". This is a soup with rice cakes in it. Japan is a small country, but the taste of food changes from east to west, north to south. For example, the north is a colder region, so it has a stronger flavor. It is said that cold regions eat more flavorful foods to raise their body temperature. On the other hand, in Kansai, there seems to be a culture of taking advantage of the taste of the ingredients. The taste of the Japanese home has been passed down from our ancestors. Japanese traditions are profound.

By Makio