


All the Best for the Coming Year!

「みなさん、お年をお迎えください。」

There are only a few days left of 2019. Just after having gotten used to the new Reiwa era, next year also brings the Olympic and Paralympic Games. In this month's *Living in Miyazaki*, we'd like to explain a little bit about New Year's in Japan.

A good place to start might be to explain when the Japanese New Year celebrations actually start and end: December 28th is the last workday of the year, and many businesses close from December 29th to January 3rd, so generally you could refer to that period as Japanese New Year's. Ringing in the new year is particularly important for Japanese people and the start of a new year is a particularly important time, so a lot of rituals and ceremonies are carried out at New Year's. For this reason, a lot of people prefer to celebrate the New Year's holiday at home in the traditional way.

How Japanese People Traditionally Spend New Year's:

- ① After *O-soji* (a thorough clean of the house), people decorate their houses with New Year's decorations, such as *kagami-mochi* (two rice cakes stacked on top of one another), *kadomatsu*, (a decoration made with pine branches) and *shimenawa* (sacred straw rope), so that they can bring in the new year feeling clean and refreshed.
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- ② Buying the ingredients for, and making, *osechi-ryori* – the traditional food eaten to celebrate New Year's – is important. Each part of the *osechi-ryori* meal has its own specific meaning, and is held to be a good omen in its own way.
 - ③ On New Year's Eve (December 31st), people eat *soba* while awaiting the coming of the new year.
 - ④ People then go and watch the first sunrise of the new year. This is called "*hatsumode*" in Japanese. Because the sun is regarded as particularly sacred and important in Shinto, people pray for health and happiness while watching the first sunrise of the new year.

Then, After the New Year has Begun:

- ① On the morning of January 1st, people get together with their families, eat *osechi-ryori* and drink *toso* (spiced sake) to welcome the new year.
- ② After that, people go for *hatsumode* – their first visit to a shrine or temple of the new year, and give thanks for everything good that



happened the previous year and pray for an auspicious year to come. Many people do this at the same time as watching the first sunrise of the year. Generally though, this is done before January 7th.

New Year's is a great opportunity to celebrate and reaffirm family ties, as it's a chance to meet up with relatives that generally live a long way away. Each household has its own way of celebrating New Year's, but the practice of getting together as a family and wishing for a happy and prosperous new year is something they all have in common. How are you all planning to spend New Year's?

Thank you all so much for reading *Living in Miyazaki* this year! We wish you all the very best for 2020, and hope you'll keep reading in the new year. As always, if you have any questions, comments or suggestions about this column, please contact the Miyazaki International Foundation:

TEL 0985-32-8457 FAX 0985-32-8512 E-mail miyainfo@mif.or.jp