

Moon-Viewing and Jūsanya (Thirteenth Night) in Japan

『 日本のお月見十三夜について 』

Japan has a traditional custom, named *o-tsukimi*, of watching the moon in the autumn sky. The concept of observing the full moon on an autumn evening, as it finally starts to cool down after the summer, is one of the most well-known images of autumn in Japan. In this month's *Living In Miyazaki*, we would like to give a brief explanation of the concept of *o-tsukimi*.



What Is O-Tsukimi?

O-tsukimi refers to an annual event where, when the sky is at its most clear, people observe the clear, bright moon on a night known as *jūgoya* (literally “Fifteenth Night,” referring to the fifteenth night of the month on the lunar calendar). The exact date of *jūgoya* varies each year, but it usually falls around mid September to early October. This year, *jūgoya* was on October 1st, but besides *jūgoya*, the concept of which originated in China, there is another custom, known as *jūsanya* (literally “Thirteenth Night”) that is said to have originated in Japan. Similarly to *jūgoya*, the exact date of *jūsanya* is different every year. This year, *jūsanya* will be on Thursday, October 29th.

Jūsanya

The custom of *jūgoya* may be more widely known, but where on *jūgoya* people pray to the gods for good harvests, by *jūsanya*, many regions have already finished harvest for the year, and so instead the main sentiment is to appreciate the beauty of the moon, and give joy and thanks for the successful completion of the autumn rice harvest. There are many and various possible explanations for how the concepts of moon-viewing on *jūsanya* came about, but similarly to *jūgoya*, it is said that the origin of the custom of formally celebrating the occasion was when the Emperors of the Heian period (794-1185 CE) would hold moon-viewing parties and compose poetry.



Offerings

Just as with *jūgoya*, there is also a custom of making offerings on *jūsanya*:

- Crops – By offering freshly-harvested crops such as chestnuts or beans, people give thanks for a successful harvest.
- *Susuki* (Pampas grass) – This is offered to protect crops from disasters or evil spirits, and has the meaning of praying for a good harvest for the following year.
- *O-Dango* – By offering round sweet dumplings modeled after the shape of the moon, these are offered to give thanks to the moon for a successful harvest. On *jūsanya*, thirteen *o-dango* are traditionally offered, usually arranged in two rows – a row of four on top of a row of nine.

Why not enjoy *o-tsukimi* in your own home by looking out at the beautiful moon on a pleasantly cool



autumn evening, eating some *o-dango* and putting up some decorations?

If you have any questions, comments or suggestions about this column, please contact the Miyazaki

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