

The Charms of Winter

「冬の風物詩」

Miyazaki is often referred to as a subtropical kind of place, but in winter we do get a lot of cold days that make you not want to go outside. Even so, winter has its own good points, and there are still things to look forward to about it. A lot of people say that winter in Japan has a lot of unique charms, so in this month's *Living In Miyazaki*, we'd like to write about a few of them:



◆New Years

New Years, or *o-shōgatsu*, is regarded as the oldest traditional Japanese custom, so it might be worth writing first on the list of Japanese winter charms – there's a lot to look forward to about it, like eating *osechi ryōri*, and *o-zōni*, the traditional New Year's food, going on a *hatsumode*, the first visit to a Shinto shrine of the new year, receiving money in the form of *o-toshidama*, and *fukubukuro* – lucky bags filled with mystery items for sale in shops.

◆Christmas

Shinto may be Japan's indigenous religion, but in recent years Christmas has started to hold a firm place in the list of things people look forward to in winter. People like to decorate a Christmas tree at home, and eat cake and fried chicken. The towns are decorated with beautiful lights, and a lot of people enjoy going to see them. Giving and receiving presents is also one of the most popular things about this time of year.



◆Setsubun

Throwing beans during setsubun is another famous traditional Japanese seasonal ritual. People throw beans in and outside their house while chanting "*Oni wa soto, fuku wa uchi*" ("Out with the demons, in with the good luck"). It is thought that the ritual custom of scattering beans during the changing of the seasons to ward off bad luck was brought to Japan from China.



◆Valentine's Day

Valentine's Day, on February 14th, is famous all over the world. Overseas, it's usually the case that men give their partners flowers and cards, but in Japan, women customarily give men chocolates.



◆Nabe-ryōri (Hot-pot)



Nabe-ryōri is a tasty winter custom that also helps to keep people healthy through the colder months. These hot-pot dishes consist of meat and vegetables simmered together and eaten straight from the pot. There are many variations on the theme, but generally people gather round the pot, divide up the ingredients and enjoy. More recently, many people also enjoy *nabe-ryōri* on their own.

Besides the examples shown here, winter in Japan has plenty of other great things to enjoy about it. We hope you enjoy trying a few of them and that they help you enjoy getting through the winter cold. However, during the current pandemic, make sure to be careful to avoid cramped spaces, crowded places and close contact.

• If you have any questions, comments or suggestions regarding this column, please contact the Miyazaki International Foundation (MIF):

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• Also, if you ever have any questions or concerns about daily life in Miyazaki, please feel free to get in touch with the Miyazaki Support Center for Foreign Residents:

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