『How Japanese People Spend New Year's』
年末年始の過ごし方

Time flies, and 2024 is almost coming to an end. How was this year for you?
For Japanese people, the New Year period, known as "*Oshōgatsu*", is a particularly special time. This month's Living in Miyazaki will introduce how Japanese people spend the year-end and New Year holidays. (Note: There are various theories about the origins of these customs.)

Ō-Sōji
At the end of the year, people clean their homes, offices and schools much more thoroughly than usual, to clear up the general mess that has gathered over the course of the past year, and start the new year with a clean, fresh feeling.

Kagami-mochi
A small *mochi* rice cake is stacked on top of a larger one and placed on a pedestal in the tokonoma alcove or household Shinto altar. Supposedly, the layers signify "fortune upon fortune" and growing older in peace and serenity.

Kadomatsu / Shimenawa
To welcome the gods, entrances and other places are decorated with *Kadomatsu*, an ornament made from bamboo and pine needles which are thought to bring good luck, and *Shimenawa*, a kind of wreath made from rope.

Toshikoshi-soba
Soba noodles eaten on the 31st of December. The meal signifies cutting off calamity and hardship, due to soba noodles being easy to cut, as well as praying for a "long, thin and healthy life".



Joya no kane
On the 31st of December, a temple bell is rung 108 times as midnight approaches. This number is said to represent human Earthly desires, and the striking of the bell is thought to exorcise them.

Hatsuhinode
Hatsuhinode refers to the first sunrise of the year. People watch the sunrise and pray for happiness and good health in the coming year.

Osechi-ryōri
Osechi-ryōri refers to the traditional meal eaten on New Year's Day. Each ingredient required for osechi-ryōri has a meaning, such as prosperity, wellbeing and so on.



Hatsumōde
Hatsumōde refers to the first shrine/temple visit of the year. People pray for a good year.

How do you spend New Year holidays?
In closing, thank you for your support for the monthly Living in Miyazaki article series.
May 2025 be a wonderful year for each and every one of you!

※The original Japanese version of this article will be uploaded onto the website of the Miyazaki International Foundation soon.

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