

FRIENDSHIP
NEWS

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TSUUSHIN

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So, now we have come through the busy time of year. For us the big event is Christmas. And though New Years Day follows only a week later, and is a time of celebration, the main show is Christmas. In Japan, the order of celebrations is reversed. In this edition of *Friendship News* are brief articles which describe these two celebrations in Japan. In addition there is news from the Sister City Committee, the 2010 Delegation to Omitama, and Abilene Japan Club.

The members of the Sister City Committee wish you all



Akemashite omedetou
gozaimasu.

(Happy New Year!)



2010
Year of the Tiger



Christmas in Japan

Unlike in America, December 25th is not a Japanese national

holiday. Unless it is on weekend, Japanese people work and go to school on the day. Christmas is mostly a commercial event in Japan. Because of the absence, by and large, of the Christian foundation of Christmas, many people don't know exactly what the origin of Christmas is. The big corporations do the main decorating. They light their buildings and the trees.

Many Western customs related to observing Christmas have been adopted by the Japanese. Christmas trees are placed at home and Christmas parties are held around Christmas Day. Although they are different from Christmas parties, many *bonenkai* (forget-the-year-parties) gatherings are held among co-workers and friends.

The Japanese tend to find things of interest from abroad and transform them into something that is uniquely Japanese. It's a Japanese way to celebrate Christmas Eve by eating Christmas cakes, a tradition borrowed from the British during the 1800s. (For a nice recipe for Christmas cake check out <http://japanesefood.about.com/od/japanesecake/r/christmascake.htm>).

A favorite Christmas food is fried chicken, so KFCs are quite busy on Christmas eve and day. Christmas Eve has also become a night for couples to go out and spend a romantic night out.

Besides exchanging Christmas gifts, there is a custom of sending *oseibo* (the end of the year gift) in Japan.

The above is by Shizuko Mishima, and is taken from her website at www.gojapan.about.com.

New Year in Japan

Of much more importance is the New Years holiday.

December, *junigatsu* (12th month) is also called *shiwasu* in Japan, which literally means "teachers run around." This word reflects the busiest month of the year. Actually, Japanese people run around a lot to welcome a new year with a clean state. All cleaning need to be done by the end of the year in contrast to "spring cleaning" that is common in the U.S.

How is New Year celebrated in Japan? Japanese New Year celebration called *shogatsu* takes place from January 1-3. New Year's Day on January 1 is called *gantan* and is a Japanese national holiday. It's the most important holiday in Japan. People say to each other "*yoi otoshiwo*" which means "Have a nice year passing" on New Year's Eve and "*ake-mashite-omedetou-gozaimasu*" (Happy New Year) whenever they see at the first time in the new year.

Japanese people eat special dishes called *osechi ryori* during *shogatsu*. *Osechi ryouri* is packed in a *Jubako* box, which has several layers. The foods are colorful and artistically presented. Each dish has a particular meaning. For example, prawns for long life, *kuro-mame* (sweet black beans) for health, *kazu-noko* (herring roe) for fertility, *tazukuri* (candied sardines) for a good harvest, *kurikinton* (sweet chestnuts and mashed sweet potato) for happiness, and so on. It is also traditional to eat *mochi* (rice cake) dishes during New Year's holidays. *Zouni* (rice cake soup) is the most popular mochi dish. The ingredients vary depending on regions and families.

People usually spend New Year's holidays quietly at home eating various food. There is a custom of giving money to children during New Year's holidays in Japan. It's called *otoshidama*.
(continued on page 4)

(Continued—New Year in Japan)



Abilene Sister City Committee

Donna Reynolds, Chair
Ron Rein, Vice-chair
Jackie Bisnette, Treasurer
Connie Rein, Secretary
Corina Ryland
Jerry Rankin
Ann Strunk
Dan Sexton
Jim Price

Meetings of the Sister City Committee are held the fourth Tuesday of each month starting at 7:30 p.m. and are open to the public. Meetings are held in the conference room of the Convention and Visitor's Bureau (use west entrance).



To contact us with questions, comments; for information or requests:

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CALL FOR REMINISCENCES AND

MEMORIES: If you are a recent or past delegate to Minori/Omitama, have hosted a visitor from our Sister City, have served as and English Teacher, or have been involved in building up our Sister City program and you have an interesting story, memory, anecdote or experience to share, we would really like to hear from you so that we might share your story through the pages of this Newsletter. Simply mail your memory to Jerry Rankin, 406 Hillside, Abilene, KS 67420 or email it to jdrankin@sbcglobal.net.
Domo arigato gozaimasu.

Abilene Delegation: 2009 presented some unique challenges for the board. An Abilene delegation was supposed to have traveled to Omitama in July. A great group had been selected. The delegates participated in several fundraisers: a car wash, Friendship Water sales, a raffle, a garage sale, butter bread sales, and a July 4th concession stand. Cultural lessons were attended by the group where Japanese language was studied, the Japanese Culture was presented, and many aspects of international travel was discussed.

The board and the delegates were surprised when the Omitama City Officials expressed their concern about the H1N1 flu pandemic which was affecting both America and Japan. The decision was made to reschedule the visit until July 2010.

Five of the original delegates were unable to make the trip in 2010 so the board found replacements. The delegation is eager to resume preparations in the coming months.

Japan Club: Japan Club is in its second year. The Club meets on the third Sunday of each month from 3-5 at the Community Center. There is an average of 20 in attendance. Each week there is a language lesson by Daniel Sexton, an origami activity by Donna Reynolds, a Japanese food experience, plus one other activity organized by Jerry Rankin. There has been a kendo demonstration, a video of Omitama, Japan, and field day activities. The food has been carefully prepared by Keiko Sexton and several helpers: Hiroko English, Ann Foltz, Corina Ryland, and Connie Rein. The 2009 session close with a party. The Japanese anime *The Cat Returns* was viewed and Japanese snacks were served. The members dressed in traditional Japanese clothes to have their picture taken. The Spring session is shaping up to have some great activities for the members.

Upcoming: The board is working on a project to record the history of Sister City. Please submit any interesting stories or information you feel would be beneficial. We are looking forward to having a place in the newly renovated library to showcase some of the gifts from Japan.

The Board looks forward to 2010. The program has been in existence for 20 years and the 10th delegation will travel to Japan in July. We look forward to a great year.

Japan Club of Abilene
Sunday, January 17, 3 pm—5 pm.
Abilene Community Center

(from page 2—New Year in Japan)

Kakizome (the first calligraphic writing) is a traditional event held on January 2nd. People write auspicious words or phrases with a brush. Elementary schools and junior high schools have *kakizome* competitions annually.

Hatsuyume is the first dream of the New Year. It is said that good dreams are *Ichi-fuji, ni-taka, san-nasubi* (Mt. Fuji at the first, hawk at the second, eggplant at the third)." It is believed that if you have these auspicious dreams, you will have a good year.

It is also traditional for Japanese people to visit to a shrine or a temple during New Year's holidays. People pray for safety, health and good fortune. The first visit to a temple or shrine in a year is called *hatsumoude*. Many well-known temples and shrines are extremely crowded. Some temples and shrines expect a couple million visitors during New Year's holidays each year.

Government offices are usually closed from December 29 to January 3. Financial institutions are usually closed from December 31 to January 3. Since most businesses are closed during the first three days of the year, the streets tend to be quiet except for those near shrines and temples. Many department stores hold New Year's special sales.

For more information and recipes for special New Year's foods, you might like to check out www.japanesefood.about.com.



Websites to check out -

If you are interested in exploring more about Japanese language, foods, holidays, or travel to Japan, you may find the following websites of interest.

Omitama

www.city.omitama.lg.jp (Note: There is an English language selection for this page, but it does not contain as much information. A better option is to download the Google toolbar (toolbar.google.com) which has an excellent translation feature. Simply go the Japanese language cite and then hit the 'Translate' button on the toolbar.)

Cooking & Foods

www.japanesefood.about.com

www.bento.com/tf-recp.html

Language

www.japanese.about.com

www.studyjapanese.org

Especially for Children

www.web-japan.org/kidsweb

www.activityvillage.co.uk/japan_for_kids.htm

Travel

www.japan-guide.com

www.gojapan.about.com

General Information

www.web-japan.org

