



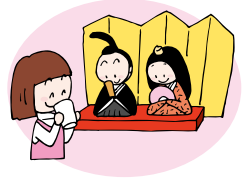
Japanese culture in four seasons

The climate of most of Japan is characterized by four distinct seasons.

The spring is from March to May. Summer is from June to August. Autumn is from September to November. Winter is from December to February. We have various cultural events for each season with distinct characteristics by area and the tradition is passed on to generations to generations as local heritage.

Spring: Hinamatsuri (Dolls' Festival)

Hinamatsuri is for girls and it falls on March 3rd. Hinamatsuri is the day when Hina Ningyo, a set of dolls dressed in ancient costumes, are displayed together with peach blossoms. A sweet drink made of rice called Shirozake is served.



Summer: Tanabata (Star Festival)



Tanabata is the event based on the legend in which lovers, Kengyu (Altair) and Shokujyo (Vega) separated by the Milky Way, meet just once a year on the night of July 7th.

Its origin is Chinese, but it was modified into Japanese style. The event has been spread from the imperial palace to common people. We set up bamboo branches in a garden and decorate them with strips of papers on which we write our wishes.

Autumn: Shichigosan (Celebration for 7, 5 and 3 years olds)



It is an event in which parents celebrate their children's growth. On November 15th, 3 and 5 years old boys and 3 and 7 years old girls visit shrines where their parents pray for their future.

Boys often wear Haori (a half coat), and Hakama (a divided skirt) and girls wear Kimonos. Some children wear suits or dresses.

Winter: New Year's Eve and New Year's Day

New Year's Eve is an important day to wrap up the old year and to start preparing for the coming year. Decades ago, preparation for New Year had kept people very busy for making rice cakes and special dishes called Osechi, but nowadays many households buy them at stores.

In old times it was customary for a family to have dinner together after they had finished preparing for New Year. They listened to Joya no Kane, bell ringing at midnight, and stayed awake till the morning of the New Year.

January is the start of New Year. It originally was an annual event to welcome the gods of harvest and the spirits of ancestors who protected their families.

People display Kadomatsu (gate pines), Shimekazari (sacred rope) and Kagamimochi, two pieces of round rice cakes, one on the top of the other.



Japanese characters

There are three types of characters used in Japan, which are Hiragana, Katakana and Kanji. Kanji is ideograms brought from China. Hiragana and Katakana are phonetically represent readings of Kanji later made by simplifying Kanji. When children start formal education at elementary school, they first learn Hiragana, and then Kanji eventually. There are some 50,000 Kanji. However, many Kanji are not necessarily used in daily life, and today about 2,000 characters have been designated as Joyo Kanji (Kanji in common use).

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A	I	U	E	O						SHA	SHI	SHU	SHE	SHO
か	き	く	け	こ						じゃ	じい	じゅ	じえ	じよ
KA	KI	KU	KE	KO						JA	JYI	JU	JE	JO
さ	し	す	せ	そ						ちゃ	ちい	ちゅ	ちえ	ちよ
SA	SI	SU	SE	SO						CHA	CHI	CHU	CHE	CHO
た	ち	つ	て	と	が	ぎ	ぐ	げ	ご	ぢゃ	ぢい	ぢゅ	ぢえ	ぢよ
TA	CHI	TU	TE	TO	GA	GI	GU	GE	GO	DYA	DYI	DYU	DYE	DYO
な	に	ぬ	ね	の	ざ	じ	ず	ぜ	ぞ	てゃ	てい	てゅ	てえ	てよ
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YA		YU		YO	PA	PI	PU	PE	PO	HYA	HYI	HYU	HYE	HYO
ら	り	る	れ	ろ	びゃ	びい	びゅ	びえ	びよ	ふぁ	ふい	ふ	ふえ	ふぁ
RA	RI	RU	RE	RO	BYA	BYI	BYU	BYE	BYO	FA	FI	FU	FE	FO
わ	うい	うえ	を	ん	ぴゃ	ぴい	ぴゅ	ぴえ	ぴよ					
WA	WI	WE	WO	N	PYA	PYI	PYU	PYE	PYO					
きゃ	きい	きゅ	きえ	きよ						みゃ	みい	みゅ	みえ	みよ
KYA	KYI	KYU	KYE	KYO						MYA	MYI	MYU	MYE	MYO
ぎゃ	ぎい	ぎゅ	ぎえ	ぎよ						りゃ	りい	りゅ	りえ	りよ
GYA	GYI	GYU	GYE	GYO						RYA	RYI	RYU	RYE	RYO