



The Japanese New Year!

明けましておめでとうございます



Of all the events that fill the Japanese calendar, none has more meaning or associated tradition than the New Year's holiday. Businesses, schools, and services are shut down and many facets of modern lifestyle are scaled back to enjoy ancient rituals, homecomings, customary foods, and gift exchanges.

Individuals and families visit their local shrine or temple to perform *hatsumode*, an important ritual to honor the New Year. Most do it on New Year's Day, but it can also be done throughout the next few days. At the larger local *hatsumode* events, thousands come (often dressed-up) to stand in line and slowly make their way up to the shrine entrance to perform this simple prayer. Wishes for the upcoming year are made and new charms (*omamori*) are purchased. *Omikuji*, or fortunes to predict the circumstances of the upcoming year, are also purchased. If it predicts a bad year, people tie it to a tree on the shrine grounds in hopes that its prediction will not be realized. Despite its religious ties, this is a festive activity and a wonderful way to participate in a unique cultural experience.

Among the many New Year's customs, greeting cards are exchanged among family, friends, and co-workers. Children receive "otoshi-dama" or New Year's gift money. Special foods are prepared and family members travel from far and wide to gather in their hometowns. Although not as common these days, some still make *mochi* (rice cake) as family and neighborhood events. There are set greetings to use for first encounters of the New Year and even special emphasis on how the "first dream" foretells what kind of year is in store. Others use it as the time to clean households and get rid of junk; while others pay off accrued debts. Regardless of family traditions, it's a break from everyday life and a wonderful occasion spent with family, friends, and loved ones.

Out with the Bad and In With the Good!!



February 3rd is Setsubun.

Locally and throughout Japan, it is celebrated by schools, households, and religious gatherings by throwing dried soy beans at men dressed as demons while chanting "Oni wa Soto, Fuku wa Uchi" to symbolically

drive away evil and welcome in good fortune and health. People of all ages enjoy this event. At homes, the father or grandfather typically puts on a demon mask while the children chase and pelt him with beans while chanting. After being expelled, children eat the beans - one for each year of age. At local shrines, huge events are planned where priests, celebrities, and people who have reached "Yakudoshi" (see page 4) stand on stages and throw trinkets and goodies out to the masses of well-wishers in an attempt to exorcise bad omens. Locally, events are planned at the big shrines to celebrate this event.

Please make 2012 a year full of wonderful experiences, good health, and new friendships!



謹賀新年

In This New Year's Edition:

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2012年



2012年 The Year of the Dragon

1916 * 1928 * 1940 * 1952 * 1964
* 1976 * 1988 * 2000

A symbol of good fortune and sign of power. The Dragon is said to bring good fortune and be a master of authority.

Dragons are free spirits and are inhibited by too many rules and regulations. They are extroverted, energetic, gifted, and irrepressible. Everything Dragons do is on a grand scale. Because they are confident, they are almost inevitably successful. However, too much enthusiasm can leave them tired and unfulfilled. Their pride can often impede them from accepting help from others. Dragons' generous personalities give them the ability to attract friends, but they can be rather solitary people at heart. A Dragon's self-sufficiency can mean that they have no need for close bonds with others.

To All Japanese Learners:

The city is sponsoring FREE Japanese Language classes three times a week to accommodate all skill levels. Please contact the International Affairs Section for more details.

0555-24-1236 or iadfuji@city.fujiyoshida.lg.jp

2011 Children's Christmas Party!

On December 10th, foreign teachers and residents hosted the 23rd annual Winter Party for about 35 children at the Shimin Fureai Center. It was a fun day of games, crafts, music, and grass-roots international exchange. The highlight was meeting Santa Claus! Since its beginnings, the party has served as a wonderful event to bring local children and foreigners together to celebrate a meaningful occasion.

NOTIFICATION OF RELOCATION:

Effective Feb 20th (MON) - The Kofu Branch of the Tokyo Regional Immigration Bureau will be RELOCATED to the North Exit of Kofu Train Station. Please contact 055-255-3350 for more information.

WINTER CLIMBING WARNING:

Many climbers test the slopes of Mt. Fuji during the winter months only to find that pride and ambition is no match for mother nature. Although most off-season climbers are highly skilled, lives and limbs are lost every year. This causes great strain on local search & rescue teams and medical care providers. Climbing Mt. Fuji during the off-season is extremely dangerous and is far too often underestimated. Unlike many mountains similar in terrain and elevation, Mt. Fuji is home to winds that rival Himalayan peaks and slopes that create perfect avalanche conditions. Climbers must submit a climbing plan to the police department before setting off. The form requires basic information and is critical in case of emergency situations or when climbers go missing.

Forms can be downloaded from our website (listed below) or obtained at the Police Department and Tourist Information Centers:



****Visit our website for tourist information, a Fuji Webcam, access, and helpful links****

<http://www.city.fujiyoshida.yamanashi.jp/div/english/html/index.html>

Winter Fun in the Local Area....

If you're wondering what all the locals are always blabbing to each other about these days, it's simple. Astonishingly, approximately 80% of all human encounters go like this:

Person A: "It's cold today isn't it?"

Person B: "Yes, it is."

Somehow, it entirely captures everything that is felt and is needed to be shared. Dependant upon circumstances, some of these conversations lead to such phrases as: "Your portable heater is torching your curtains!" or "Oh my gosh, is that frost-bite on your cheek?" But, again, the latter phrases are circumstantial and only come up infrequently. Despite the cold, there are many wonderful aspects of winter that make bearing it so much easier, here's a short list:



Kotastu tables: It's a table with a heater attached to the frame that the eating surface rests on. During the winter months, special blankets are placed between the eating surface and frame and draped to the floor. When the heater is turned on, the blankets trap the heat and provide legs and feet with toastiness! It's an incredible device that is absolutely necessary for residents. Caution: they are also very effective in trapping embarrassing odors.



Ice Skating: The Fujikyū Highland outdoor ice skating area or Fuji-san indoor ice arena are great ways to enjoy a winter day in a fun atmosphere. www.fujiq.jp and www.fujiyoshida.net



Fuji-Ten Ski Resort: Mt. Fuji has a ski area located about 20 minutes from Fujiyoshida in Narusawa Village. There are several beginner and intermediate runs and a Terrain Park to test your *flying-through-the-air-and-crashing* ability. www.fujiten.net

Yutanpo (湯たんぽ): Still very much used locally, these containers are filled with hot water and slipped into special covers to put into bedding at night. Although outdated in most parts of the world, these are brilliant.



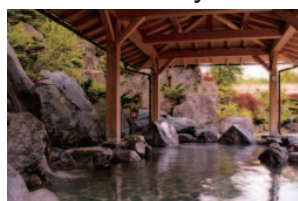
Yoshida Udon: A steamy bowl of Yoshida Udon is an absolute must during this cold season. There are dozens of shops that offer unique variations of this local speciality. The *Nabe Yaki-Udon* (鍋焼きうどん) is the most hearty and cold-busting! Look for the Yoshida Udon flag or pick up a "Yoshida Udon Guide" at major hotels, the Tourist Information Center, or City Hall. (www.city.fujiyoshida.yamanashi.jp)



Should I Feel Weird About This?

Public bathing is common in Japan and remains a popular outing for people of all ages and backgrounds. *Onsens*, or bath houses, are scattered throughout the area and become especially popular during the winter months. Most of the bigger onsens have several different bath styles where patrons can spend hours relaxing. Local onsens typically have outdoor pools where splendid views of Mt. Fuji dominate the landscape. Although some are pricey, most onsens charge less than 1000yen per adult. If you've never had an onsen experience, please make this part of your "To-do in Japan" list. You'll soon realize that the simple act of soaking in steaming hot water is an incredibly satisfying and therapeutic experience. Afterwards, there are resting and social areas to relax in and enjoy. It will surely get you over any inhibitions to strip down and loudly beckon "Who's in for some bath action tonight!" to all your friends and co-workers.

Please know that proper etiquette is very important with this activity. Basically, avoid dirtying the bath water and understand that others are there to relax. Instructional sign boards and posters are found in entrance ways and locker rooms and are easy to understand.



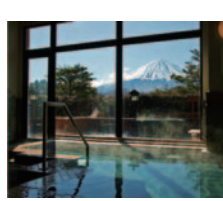
Benifuji no Yu



Fujiyama Onsen



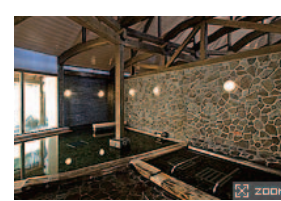
Kaneyamaen



Yurari Onsen



Tensui no Yu



Ishiwari no Yu

Upcoming Local Events

January

Jan 1st: New Years Day, *Hatsumode* Events at the *Fuji Sengen Shrine*, *Arakura Shrine*, and *Omuro Sengen Shrine*

Jan 1st-3rd: Various New Year's activities and events will be held at the *Fujiyoshida Road Station (michi no eki)*. Come pound *omochi* and enjoy New Year's performances! Everyday starting at 9:00am. FREE

Until January 15th: *Lake Yamanakako Art Illumination* at *Hana no Miyako Park*, firework displays on certain nights throughout the event – FREE (www.yamanakako.gr.jp)

Jan 9 - National Holiday - *Seijin No Hi* (Coming of Age Day) 20 year-olds celebrate becoming an adult. A *taiko* drumming concert is planned for Sunday (the 8th) at the *City Auditorium* at 12:30.

Jan 14 - Feb 19th *Kawaguchiko Winter Fireworks*. Every Saturday and Sunday 20:00-20:20 at the *Oike Park Area*. FREE (www.fujisan.ne.jp)

Jan 28th - Feb 5th *Lake Saiko Ice Festival* (www.fujisan.ne.jp)

Until January 31st - *Lake Kawaguchiko Winter Wave of Lights – Niagara Illumination* - FREE – Every night until 17:00 - 20:00 (www.fujisan.ne.jp)



Saiko Ice Festival

Aizen Festival

February

Feb 3rd: *Setsubun* events at Shinto shrines throughout *Fujiyoshida* and the *Fuji 5 Lakes Area*. 0555-22-7000

Feb 11th: National Holiday – *Foundation Day*

From Feb 13th (12:00am) to 14th (12:00am) - *Aizen Festival*. Located along the *Aizen River* bank in *Azuma-cho*. This is one of the region's largest events for expelling the bad fortunes associated with *Yakudoshi*. 0555-24-1236 (www.fujiyoshida.net)



Diamond Fuji

Feb 23rd: "Fuji-San Day" *Yamanashi Prefecture* has declared this day in honor of the great mountain! Various events will be held throughout the *Fuji 5 Lakes Area*. 0555-22-7000 for more details.

The "Diamond Fuji" sunset could be seen until the end of February from the *Lake Yamanakako* area.

The Cursed Ages!

Many Japanese believe that certain ages, referred to as *Yakudoshi*, are associated with bad things happening in their lifetime. Men's *yakudoshi* are the ages 25, 42 and 61; and 19, 33 and 37 for women. The ages of 42 and 33 are considered particularly bad years (*honyaku*). A person is believed to start aging at conception so the *yakudoshi* is typically actual age plus one.

People who have reached their *yakudoshi* visit shrines to pray for avoidance of bad things happening in their personal and professional lives. If you visit a shrine for the *setsubun* or *aizen* celebrations, you'll find many of the ceremonies and activities are centered around expelling the bad omens associated with these ages. The *Aizen Festival* in *Azuma-cho* is one of the largest events held in the *Kanto* area for individuals reaching their *yakudoshi*. This belief has great influence on the daily activities, vacation planning, health habits, and religious rituals throughout (and immediately preceding and following) these widely considered years of calamity.

Please don't drink and drive! Japan has a zero-tolerance law and enforcement is elevated during this festive season. Local taxi service is honest, safe, and affordable. You could even arrange for them to drive you back in your own car.

The *Reiho Fuji* is a bimonthly publication produced by the *International Affairs Section* of *Fujiyoshida's City Hall*.

Please send your comments, contributions, and suggestions to:

Email: iadfuji@city.fujiyoshida.lg.jp

English Website at: <http://www.city.fujiyoshida.yamanashi.jp/div/english/html/index.htm>