

VIVA! ひめじ English

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The New Year in Japan	・・・P1
Information on Winter Events	・・・P2
Holidays around the World	・・・P3
Some Good Ways to Save Electricity in Cold	
Weather	・・・P4
People – Interview –	・・・P5
Medical Institutions during the Year-End and	
New Year's Holidays/Letter from the Editor・・・	P6

Himeji Cultural and International Exchange Foundation
– newsletter editing volunteers

The New Year in Japan

In Japan, the New Year's holidays are from January 1st to January 3rd. It is a traditional event to welcome the gods.

Customs

Hatsumode : Many people visit shrines and temples with family and friends to pray during the New Year's holidays.

Otoshidama : Putting money in a New Year's gift envelope and giving it to children in the hope for their happiness.

Kagami-mochi : Displaying stacked rice cakes inside the house to welcome the gods. (※1)



※1

Traditional games

Fuku-warai : It is a game in which a blindfolded person places parts such as eyes, nose, and mouth onto a face drawn on paper. The finished expression will make you laugh. (※2)



※2

Sugoroku : It is a traditional Japanese board game in which players play to win or lose by rolling dice.

Takoage : It has long been said that looking up at the sky during this season is good for your health. So, people started flying kites to pray for good health.

Food

Osechi : Many kinds of dishes are packed in the *jubako* (New Year's cooking box) (※3), and each dish has its own meaning.



※3

Ex) Shrimp: When boiled or grilled, its back arches, so people eat shrimp with the desire to live long enough to bend their backs. And its bright vermilion color is believed to have the effect of warding off evil spirits.



Others : Herring roe⇒Prosperity of descendants, Black beans⇒Health

※4

Tazukuri (dried small fish with sweet and spicy flavor) (※4) ⇒Good harvest

Ozoni : People make it by boiling *mochi* and vegetables (carrots, radish, etc.) together, and eat it in hopes of a bountiful harvest in the new year. Each region has its own *ozoni* with different seasonings and vegetables.

Information on Winter Events

●Himeji Otemae Street Illumination

Event Dates: From November 22 (Wed), 2023 to February 29 (Thu), 2024

Lighting Hours: From sunset to 10:00 PM

Location: Otemae Street

★Highlights★

Along Otemae Street, 130 trees are decorated with LED lights, and projection mapping embellishes pedestrian walkways. Additionally, a digital stamp rally for exploring the monuments is held. Leading up to Christmas, illuminations also light up Himeji Station North Plaza and Miyuki Street. It's a recommended spot for a date.

▼Illustration



●Himeji Castle “Sai-Un” Illumination

Lighting Hours: From sunset to midnight

★Highlights★

The illumination has been renewed with LED lights, enhancing the whiteness of the plaster on the castle walls. At 8:00 PM and 9:00 PM, the castle is illuminated with colors for 15 minutes. Special displays are also held depending on the season and events.

▼Himeji Castle “Sai-Un”

Illumination on Youtube



※*Sai-Un*: A phenomenon where various colors can be seen in the clouds, believed to be a sign of auspicious events to come.

●Fire Department New Year's Ceremony

Date: January 7, 2024 (Sun) from 9:30 AM to 11:50 AM (scheduled)

Location: Himeji Shirotopia Memorial Park

★Highlights★

There will be a *wadaiko* drumming performance, a concert from Fire Department's music, ladder climbing demonstrations (※1), and synchronized water spraying displays (※2).



※1

※2

Let's Go Witness an Early Spring ~Nearby Plum Grove Spots~

Masuiyama Plum Grove (Shirakuni, Himeji City, near Zuiganji Temple)

Period: Mid-February to Early March

Admission: Free Parking: Free

Access: Take the Shin-Ki Bus from Himeji Station (North Exit) buses 81, 82, 84, or 86. Get off at "Shirakuni" and walk approximately 30 minutes. By car, it's about a 15-minute walk from the Masui Sanjo Hiroba parking lot.



Holidays around the World

In the last issue, we mentioned that Japan is the country in the world with the second most holidays. This time, we looked into unique holidays around the world.

★February 2nd (2/2) Ground Hog Day North America

This is a fortune-telling event that uses a groundhog (a type of squirrel) to predict the arrival of spring. When this animal comes out of its burrow, it is said that spring is near if it does not return to its burrow immediately. It started as a small gathering, but it has received widespread attention.



★March 8th(3/8) International Women's Day China

This day is “Women in the Leading Role Day,” and working women get a half-day off. Sometimes, only women get discounts, or they receive gifts from men.

★August 2nd Sunday Melon Day Turkmenistan

Once upon a time, there was a king who loved melon, so he made August 2nd Sunday a holiday. This country is famous for producing melons and there are many varieties. On this day, melon tasting events and various melon contests are held.



★Horse Racing Day Australia

The days when the Launceston Cup (in February) , Adelaide Cup (in March) and Melbourne Cup (in November) are held are holidays in each state. Horse racing is a social event in Australia, so men wear suits and women dress up.



In addition, those who purchase tickets for these events will receive free public transportation from the city to the racecourse.

Some Good Ways to Save Electricity in Cold Weather

Power (electricity and gas) and fuel (gasoline) are rising in cost these days. Here are some measures that you can take at home against the cold winter weather.



※1

1. Wise choice of clothing

Wear scarves, leg warmers (※1) etc, to keep your neck, wrists, and ankles warm.

2. Adjust the temperature of heating equipment

The Ministry of the Environment recommends a temperature of 20°C for keeping rooms warm and comfortable. However, it should depend on each person to decide the temperature which is the most comfortable for them.

3. Reconsider the use of air conditioning

Clean filters regularly to improve the efficiency of your air conditioner.

If you are going out only for a short time, leave it on and avoid turning it on and off too often.

Circulating warm air by using a circulator is also effective.

4. Window insulation

Use insulating curtains on the windows or put insulating sheets on the window panes. Replacing them with double windows can also be effective. (Installation of double windows may be eligible for subsidies from the national and local governments. Check the website for further information.)

5. Use heating devices other than air conditioners

Make use of hot water bottles (※2) , lap blankets, *kotatsu* (※3) , etc. Also, a humidifier in the room will make you feel less cold and more comfortable even if the temperature in the room is rather low for you.



※2



※3

Here is another way to cut down your electricity bill; use a kerosene heater or a fan heater. You will have to pay, of course, for fuel such as kerosene. However, think of the following fact; about 60% of the energy inherent in fossil fuels is believed to be wasted when producing and transmitting electricity. Overall, kerosene stoves and fan heaters are more economical because they use fossil fuels directly as a heat source.

People Interview



Mr. Cessan Eoghan Smith (from Scotland)

Cessan is from Scotland, which is in northern part of Great Britain Island. He came to Himeji right after his graduation from university.

He works as a CIR(Coordinator for International Relations) in Himeji. His job includes translating emails and interpreting for events. You'll see him working in events such as the Himeji castle cherry blossom viewing party (*Himeji-jo kann'ou kai*).

Q Tell us about your homeland.

A I was born in Stornoway on the Isle of Lewis. It's about an hour drive from Edinburgh, the capital. Science and art museums are everywhere, which creates the cultural atmosphere.

Q You speak fluent Japanese. How did you learn?

A When I was 11, I moved to Australia due to my mother's job. I began studying Japanese when I was in high school there. I wasn't happy with the very first exam result because it was not as good as my classmates', so I started studying very hard. The more I studied, the more I was drawn to it. Besides classes in school, I learned by listening to Japanese music and reading a lot of novels. I went back to Scotland for university and kept learning on my own.

Q Tell us about unique customs and foods.

A We have "Burns Night" in January, where we celebrate the birth of Robert Burns, a great poet. We recite his poetry and honor his achievements. We eat haggis, which is boiled sheep stomach stuffed with oats and sheep organs. It's very delicious since it's cold around that time of year. Kilt, a traditional garment, is worn at festivals and weddings. Tartan's patterns and colors vary from family to family just like family crests (*Kamon*) in Japan. The tartan of this necktie I wear right now is the tartan of my family.



▲the tartan necktie

Q What do you do in your free time?

A I like traveling, so I'd like to go travel. I can experience so many things through it. In Scotland, I enjoyed traveling with my backpack, staying in youth hostels.

Q What do you want to do in the future?

A I'd like to introduce the culture and customs of my country to the world. I hope that I can have cross-cultural exchange through it.

Medical Institutions during the Year-End and New Year's Holidays

Many medical institutions are closed during the year-end and New Year's holidays. As a result, December and January are very busy months for medical facilities. In addition, if you visit on a holiday or a night clinic, the amount you pay will be higher than usual. If you receive medication from your healthcare provider or have some symptoms that concern you, please complete your visit as soon as possible.

Some infections can be prevented by washing hands, gargling, and wearing masks in public. Please make it a habit to wash your hands and gargle.

Disaster Prevention Vocabulary of This Issue

かんそうちゅういほう

乾燥注意報 (*kanso chuiho*)

: A forecast issued when there is a fire hazard due to dry air.

(Example): A dry weather warning (*kanso chuiho*) has been issued for today. Please handle fire with care.



The cold season has come again this year. The winter solstice this year is December 22.

In Japan, the custom on this day to take a *yuzu* bath (a bath with lots of *yuzu* floating in it) and eat braised pumpkin with soy sauce in hopes of good health during winter.

I hope you all take care of yourselves and have a happy New Year.

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You can read previous issues of "VIVA! ひめじ" on the website of Himeji Cultural and International Exchange Foundation International Exchange Section.

The next issue will be available in March, 2024

We welcome your comments and suggestions. We are also looking for translators and native speakers to assist us with translating and proofreading upcoming editions. If you are interested, please contact us at the address on the right.



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