

Traditional Japanese New Year's Eve and New Year's Day

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Just as there are many cultures in the world, there are many ways to celebrate New Year's Eve and New Year's Day. The New Year is the biggest holiday in Japan and is typically spent with the family. Before the New Year, people devote a few days to cleaning their homes. Some countries only celebrate New Year's day, but in Japan we celebrate New Year's Eve as well. This essay introduces Japanese traditional New Year's Eve and New Year's Day.

On New Year's Eve, many people stay home or go to a shrine. People who remain at home stay up until midnight and watch New Year's Eve TV programs such as "Kohaku uta gassen," a popular music program on New Year's Eve, and eat "Soba noodles" made from buckwheat, while listening to the temple bells toll at midnight. People who go to a shrine stay overnight and listen to the temple bells toll on New Year's Eve. Every year it rings 108 times, starting just before midnight and carrying on into the New Year. When the bells ring, they sound very peaceful and are the only sound you can hear.

On the morning of New Year's Day, many people go for a "Hatsu mohde," namely, New Year's Day visit to a shrine, and pray for the new year. After visiting a temple, we go home and my cousins come to my house. Usually, people go to a house of the oldest son or daughter. We greet each other in the New Year and children get "Otoshi-dama," which is money given by family and close relatives to their children in an envelope. Every child looks forward to getting Otoshi-dama every year. Then we eat "Ozouni," a rice cake in soup and "Osechi-ryouri" consisting of various kinds of dishes for the seasonal festival. The dishes are contained in a pile of five huge lunch boxes and last for several days. In the afternoon, we go to an ancestor's grave and clean the gravestone and pray. After that we go to the second cousin's house to exchange greetings and eat Osechi-ryori, and obtain Otoshi-dama again. A very traditional custom is to send New Year's Day cards to friends, relatives, and coworkers. An average household will receive 50 to 100 cards.

The countdown is the most exciting event on New Year's Eve. There are many places we can enjoy the countdown in Japan, but the most famous is Tokyo Disney Land, where many families and couples from all over Japan count down with Disney characters. Following the countdown, are fireworks, musicals, and dance. It is very exciting to be there on New Year's Eve.

In conclusion, these are just traditional Japanese ways to celebrate the New Year. There are many more ways to celebrate the festival. Currently, young people do not like to spend time with their families on New Year's Eve or New Year's Day. They would rather spend time with their friends or lovers. It might be interesting to spend New Year's Day in another country and see how people celebrate the festival.