

Fire brigade New Year's ceremony



This annual event will include presentation of commendations for distinguished service in firefighting, demonstrations of firefighting skills, water spraying by all units, and gifts of ornamental kites to the first 150 visitors.

Date & time: Jan. 8 (Sun.), 9:30 a.m. (demonstrations start around 10:30 a.m.; if rain, ceremony only in gym at 10 a.m.)

Place: Higashi Elementary School
Inquiries: General Affairs Section, Fire Department Headquarters, Tel. 352-3550

International Exchange and Cooperation Festival 2006



-Festival

Under the theme of "cross-cultural sharing and assistance that can be done in the community," local NGOs and other citizens' groups will run booths to present their various activities and sell items related to their programs. There also be all sorts of stage performances, including Okinawan *esdo* dancing, children's hula dancing accompanied by a Hawaiian band, a short samba concert, juggling, a magic show, and a Mongolian *morin khuur* (horse-head fiddle) performance.

Date & time: Jan. 15 (Sun.), 10 a.m.-7 p.m.

-Panel Exhibition

Panel exhibits will be displayed to present the activities that local elementary schools and community groups sponsor for cross-cultural interaction and support.

Date & time: Jan. 10 (Tue.)-15 (Sun.), 10 a.m.-9 p.m. * Until 7 p.m. on Jan. 15.

Place: Shoppers Plaza Shin-Urayasu

Inquiries: Cultural and International Affairs Section

Oral hygiene guidance

Free one-on-one instruction will be offered on proper tooth brushing techniques for preventing periodontal disease, bad breath and caries. The instructor will also check participants' lifestyles to identify habits that are harmful to oral health.

Date & time: Jan. 21 (Sat.), 9 / 9:30 / 10 / 10:30 / 11 a.m.

Place: Health Center

Open to: Residents 20 and older, pregnant

women (first 6 to apply for each time)
Bring: Toothbrush, oral care products currently used at home, cup, handkerchief, and Health Handbook (*Kenko Techo*) or Mother and Child Health Handbook (*Boshi Kenko Techo*)
Registration/inquiries: Call the Health Promotion Section at 381-9059.

Bone checkup

Nearly 70% of women over 80 are believed to suffer from osteoporosis, so it is critical for women to start building up solid bone structure at an early age to prevent bone deterioration later in life. To help those concerned about their bone health, the city is sponsoring free bone checkups that will include a bone density exam, explanation of the results, and nutritional guidance.

Date & time: Jan. 31 (Tue.), 9:30-11:30

a.m., 1-4 p.m. (indicate preferred session when registering)
Place: Health Center
Open to: Residents 20 and older (first 150 to apply), excluding the following: pregnant women or women who suspect they may be pregnant, those who received a bone density exam at the Health Center in fiscal 2004, and those currently receiving osteoporosis treatment or observation at a medical facility.
To register: Call the Health Promotion Section at 381-9065 on Jan. 6 (Fri.), or at 381-9059 on subsequent business days.
Note: If you received a city-sponsored bone density exam in fiscal 2002 or 2003, you will need to give the ID number in your Health Handbook (*Kenko Techo*) when registering.
Inquiries: Call the Health Promotion Section at 381-9059.

Flu precautions

Influenza is a viral infection that is usually prevalent in the months from November to April. In addition to such cold-like symptoms as a runny nose, sneezing, and coughing, flu infections affect the whole body, producing high fever, headaches, muscle pain, and other problems. Unlike the common cold, the flu can result in serious complications. The disease is contracted through inhalation of airborne viruses released when infected persons cough or sneeze. To lower your risk of infection, avoid crowded places during the flu season. Also, wear a surgical mask when going out and keep your home humidified at an appropriate level, since dry air increases susceptibility. Another good preventive measure is to always wash your hands and gargle whenever you return home. For more information, call the Health Promotion Section at 381-9051.

Regulation garbage bag collection starts Jan. 23

Beginning on Jan. 23 (Mon.), garbage must be disposed of in city-designated bags. Here are some FAQs on the new bags.

Bag types, sales

Q: Where are the bags sold?

A: The bags can be purchased at supermarkets, convenience stores, and retail outlets.

Q: How much do they cost?

A: A package of ten 30-liter bags usually runs somewhere around ¥90-¥130, while a package of ten 45-liter bags is in the neighborhood of ¥120-¥180.

Q: Do prices vary by outlet?

A: As with general merchandise, the pricing of bags varies from store to store.

Usage

Q: When can I start using the bags?

A: You can start using them before Jan. 23, if you like.

Q: How long can I use the non-regulation bags I have now?

A: You can use them until Jan. 21.

Q: What happens if garbage is put out in a non-regulation bag?

A: A yellow warning sticker will be attached to the bag and the garbage will not be collected.

Q: What can I do about garbage I don't want seen by others?

A: You still need to use a regulation bag, but you can wrap such garbage in newspaper or ads.

Q: Can I use clear or semitransparent garbage bags sold at stores?

A: Please dispose of all combustibles and non-combustibles in the city-designated bags.

Q: Can I dispose of hazardous garbage in the regulation bags?

A: As is the current rule, please put hazardous garbage in clear bags.

Q: How do I dispose of kitchen waste?

A: After draining the liquid, put kitchen waste in a regulation bag.



For more information, contact the Garbage-Free Section or see the brochure that will be sent to residents' homes in mid-January.

Times and Seasons

New Year's Greeting Cards

Families in Japan typically start off New Year's Day by exchanging greetings with other family members and sitting down to a delectable *osechi ryori* breakfast that includes *ozoni* rice cake soup. After that comes one of the highlights of the day—opening the mailbox to retrieve the pile of New Year's greeting cards (*nengajo*) waiting for them.

The sending of *nengajo* to friends, relatives, teachers, and other benefactors remains a popular, widely practiced custom. Traditionally, one would visit such people to personally give them New Year's greetings, but today these greetings are usually expressed through *nengajo*. Although *nengajo* were originally intended to be written and sent after the arrival of the new year in order to fittingly express one's sense of renewal, most Japanese now mail the cards in December so that they will be delivered on New Year's Day.

Instead of just putting their greetings in words, some people carve images in a piece of sweet potato or wood and then stamp the pictures on the cards they send. Handwriting is another personal aspect of *nengajo*—a message or address inscribed in beautiful lettering makes the sender's face appear

in the mind's eye.

Like many other elements of life, this custom has become caught up in the information technology revolution, with *nengajo* software a must-have for many computer owners. Used with the right touch, these programs allow users to generate attractive cards from a diverse stock of images and greetings. Moreover, the use of cursive fonts in the message and the address has become a standard in computer-generated cards, so even people with poor handwriting can easily create eye-pleasing text for their *nengajo*.

Since for many people *nengajo* are the only non-electronic messages they send to intimate friends, it seems that a warmer, more personal approach should be used to create these once-a-year missives, but in today's world, the only non-computerized process of *nengajo*-making is checking if the addresses are up to date.



Recyclable Waste disposal schedule for January

Collection Area	Bottles/Cans/PET plastic bottles	Newspapers/Magazines
Nekozone, Kitazakae, Todajijima	Every Tue.	Every Mon.
Horie, Higashino, Fujimi, Maihama	Every Wed.	Every Sat.
Kairaku, Mihama, Irifune, Hinode, Akemi	Every Thurs.	Every Mon.
Tomioka, Imagawa, Benten, Tekkodori, Takasu, Minato, Chidori	Every Fri.	Every Sat.

* Please put out your garbage between 7 a.m. and 8 a.m. It is against the rules to put it out earlier or later than this designated time, and could become a nuisance to your neighborhood.
* Bulky items will be collected separately on request by phone. Call the Bulky Items Reception Center, ☎ 305-4000. For inquiries, contact the Garbage Disposal Administration Section.

FOREIGN RESIDENTS' ASSISTANCE DESK

Urayasu City provides consultation services concerning daily life such as medical, educational or job-related matters.

HOURS: 10 a.m.- noon, 1 p.m.- 4 p.m. weekdays * Closed until Jan. 9.

LANGUAGES: English, French, Chinese, Polish, Spanish, Russian and Japanese

PHONE NUMBER & LOCATION:
☎ 351-1111 Ext.1665,
Cultural and International Affairs Section
(Urayasu City Hall 4FI)

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URAYASU

人が輝き躍動するまち・浦安



URAYASU CITY

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Population: 155,221 (Male: 78,697 Female: 76,524) Households: 67,147 International Residents: 3,341 (As of November 30, 2005)



A Happy New Year!

As Mayor of Urayasu, I cordially wish that you all enjoy a pleasant, dream-filled new year.

Already, 2006 is set to become a milestone in the pages of our city's history. In addition to marking the 25th anniversary of Urayasu's incorporation as a city, this year will see the launch of our Third Action Plan, a package of focused initiatives for enhancing the city during the next three years.

One of our focuses will be to sustain our city's development in the future by nurturing and protecting our children. Our plans include issuing the city's first "Healthy Citizen Bonds," opening three new nursery schools to get children off waiting lists, and responding to the increased population of students in recently developed communities by opening three new public schools—Takasu Kita Elementary, Meikai Minami Elementary, and Meikai Junior High. In addition, we are considering staffing our schools with guards and implementing other measures to preserve the children's safety.

Another area of concern is disaster preparedness. The lengthy disruption of mobile phone service, public transportation, and other elements of daily life by last July's level 5-minus earthquake reawakened our awareness of the need for a solid system of safety that gives residents peace of mind.

Accordingly, the city government is now in the process of re-evaluating its set of earthquake damage scenarios, beefing up its first-response system and other disaster management strategies, and revising the current Community Disaster Prevention Plan.

To help keep our streets safe for everyone, we will continue to run the "Bohan Kakekomi 110-ban no Mise" crime prevention network

that was launched last year. The more than 600 local businesses participating in the program are prepared to assist crime victims or witnesses who come to their stores or other establishments for help.

We also plan to implement other safety-related projects intended to eliminate some of the worries from residents' lives. For example, we will construct a new fire station to improve the city's firefighting capabilities, and install automated external defibrillators at public facilities.

This year's agenda includes various other important enhancements, such as the opening of Mare, the new complex in front of Shin-Urayasu Station, the addition of new routes to our "Sanpobasu" community bus service, environmental development projects that will capitalize on the skills of seniors, and the promotion of greenification efforts with residents.

The underlying objective of these and other urban development initiatives is to bring to reality our vision of "Urayasu—A City of Cheerful, Dynamic People." However, this goal cannot be achieved without collaboration between the city and residents, so I call upon you all to continue offering your kind cooperation and support to these endeavors.

Best wishes for the New Year!



New Year's in Japan



Since ancient times, *Oshogatsu* has been reverently celebrated in Japan as a time to pray for bountiful harvests and happiness in the new year. Today's Japanese spend the holiday in a variety of ways, including snacking down on tangerines with the family while sitting at a *kotatsu* (a low, covered table heated below), drinking with bosom buddies, or even taking a trip overseas. Despite this diversification, however, the traditional customs of *Oshogatsu* are still very much alive, so let's take a look at how one Japanese family practices these time-honored rituals. One way to enhance your stay in Japan is to experience the culture by trying out these customs yourself.

There is some variation in how long *Oshogatsu* is considered to last, with Jan. 1–3 and Jan. 1–20 being two of the more commonly defined periods. Dec. 31 is called *Omisoka*, New Year's Day is *Ganjitsu*, and the morning of New Year's Day is *Gantan*.

Dec. 31 (Omisoka)

In Japan, the word *misoka* refers to the last day of a month, and the last day of the last month, or December 31, is dubbed *Omisoka* (literally, "the big *misoka*"). In the days leading up to *Omisoka*, the family members busy themselves with preparations for *Oshogatsu*, which include thoroughly cleaning up the house, putting up *kadomatsu* (pine branches), *shimenawa* (straw festoons), and other decorations, and making *mochi* (rice cakes) and *osechi ryori* (festive dishes).



Putting up the adornments on Dec. 29 is called *nijuku* ("double whammy," pronounced the same as "29"), while decorating on Dec. 31 is deemed *ichinichi kazari* ("one-day decoration"), and both are considered disrespectful toward the deities. Accordingly, tradition holds that decorations should be put up by Dec. 28 or on Dec. 30.

The dishes that make up *osechi ryori* are food that does not perish quickly, and thus they allow homemakers to take a respite from their usual cooking chores during the first three days of the year. Once all the preparations for New Year's are completed, many Japanese eat buckwheat noodles for good luck, perhaps as part of dinner, or as a treat for satisfying the late-night munchies.

Before midnight, Buddhist temples across Japan begin sounding their bells in a ritual called *Joya-no-kane* ("New Year's Eve Bell"). Each temple's bell is struck 108 times, representing the 108 worldly desires of humans, and some people reflect on the past year as they listen to the bell resound.

Jan. 1 (Ganjitsu)

With the 108th peal of the temple bell at midnight, the family members wish each other a happy New Year with the phrase *Akemashite omedeto*, which also conveys gratitude for everything done for them in the past year. In fact, this expression is used to greet everyone encountered on New Year's Day.

Next, the family makes its *hatsumode*, or first visit of the year to a shrine. After passing through the *torii* arch to the front of the shrine, they make a money offering, shake the bell, bow twice, clap their hands twice, make a prayer, and bow once more. While at the shrine, they write their first wish of the year on an *ema* votive tablet, and draw an *omikujii* oracle to divine their fortune for the year ahead.

Breakfast consists of *osechi ryori* and *ozoni*, a soup containing rice cakes. With everyone gathered together, the head of the family gives a New Year's message in a ritual that puts his esteem to the test.

This is also the only day of the year when one can start drinking at midday without being frowned upon, and red-faced people are likely to be found wandering the streets. The day ends as everyone in the family drifts off to sleep to have the first dream of the year, or *hatsuyume*.

Jan. 2

After *osechi ryori* is again eaten for breakfast, the father turns on the TV to watch the Hakone Ekiden, a long-distance relay race, while the mothers goes out shopping to take advantage of the New Year's bargains, especially the *fukubukuro* grab bags that offer a hodgepodge of merchandise below normal prices. The children enjoy such traditional pastimes as kite-flying, card games like *hyakunin isshu* or *karuta*, battle-dore, and *sugoroku*, a Parcheesi-like game. The day is also spent visiting others to greet them and thank them for favors extended in the preceding year.

New Year's around the World

The more than 190 nations around the world are home to a multitude of ethnic groups, each with its own culture, religion, and lifestyle, but there is one thing that unites them all—the desire for peace and health that is felt at the start of every new year. This year, let *Oshogatsu* be an opportunity for you to explore other cultures by learning how they celebrate the arrival of a new year. To help you do this, we talked with some foreign residents of Urayasu, and here's what they had to say about New Year's celebrations in their homelands.



Members of Urayasu Foreign Residents Association

Taiwan



Although the Western solar calendar has been adopted in Taiwan, many aspects of daily life continue to revolve around the traditional lunar calendar, including the grand celebration of the lunar New Year. In preparation, mothers and grandmothers pound sticky rice in a mortar to make rice cakes that are subsequently mixed with such ingredients as dried shrimp or *shitake* mushrooms (much like the daikon-mochi served at Chinese restaurants in Japan, or coated with brown sugar).

On New Year's Eve, Taiwanese partake of ramen noodles for dinner for the same reason that *toshikoshi-soba* are eaten in Japan—the long noodles symbolize the wish for a long life. Dinner also includes a whole chicken (so that all things will go smoothly in the year ahead) and spinach with the roots left on (so that the family will prosper).

The entrance, doors, and other parts of the house are adorned with red paper inscribed with auspicious characters, such as those for "spring" and "fortune," in gold lettering. The characters are hung upside down so that the deities in heaven can read them.

With the start of the new year, many people visit temples or mausoleums to pray. One of the delicacies eaten for New Year's is *jiaozi*, dumplings stuffed with meat and vegetables that are cooked in broth or other liquid (these are called *suigoza* in Japan). Since the dumplings are

shaped like coins, the family eats many of them to enhance their financial fortune. A clean one-yuan coin is inserted into one of the dumplings before cooking, and the family member who gets that dumpling will experience something very fortunate, it is said.

Osechi ryori

This is the array of festive dishes served to celebrate New Year's, and each element has its own symbolic significance. For example, *kuromame* (black soybeans) are eaten so that one will work hard and enjoy good health, as *mame* (bean) is a homophone for diligence and health. Also, *kazunoko* (herring roe), with so many eggs crammed together, is associated with the hope for flourishing offspring, while *konbu* (kelp), also pronounced *kobu*, is said to bring joy (*yorokobu*).

Ozoni

Oshogatsu cuisine includes *ozoni*, a soup that usually contains pieces of rice cake. The ingredients and flavoring vary from region to region, with Urayasu-



style *ozoni* typically consisting of rice cake, chicken, *komatsuna* (a leafy green vegetable), *naruto* (whirlpool-patterned fish cake), and other ingredients in soy-sauce-flavored broth.

Hatsuyume

This is one's first dream of the year. It is considered auspicious if the dream involves Mt. Fuji, a falcon, or an eggplant, with this being the order of preference. One theory behind this belief is that Mt. Fuji is Japan's greatest mountain, falcons are strong and wise—as suggested by the proverb *No aru taka wa tsume o kakusu* ("A capable falcon hides its claws") = Talented people don't need to show off—and *nasu* (eggplant) is a homophone for a verb meaning "to achieve."



Kakizome

Creating one's first calligraphic work of the year is a tradition known as *kakizome*. The process of preparing ink by slowly grinding an ink stick as one sits erect provides an opportunity for meditation. Once the ink is ready, the writer steadily lifts the brush and put his or her New Year's resolution on paper in an uninterrupted sequence of firm strokes. As indicated by the saying *Sho wa hito nari* ("Calligraphy is the person"), handwriting is considered a window to the person's character.

Hakone Ekiden

The Hakone Ekiden is relay race in which 10-member teams of university students, sporting their alma mater's sash, struggle to be the first team to complete a nearly 200-km round trip between Tokyo's Ottemachi district and Hakone in Kanagawa Prefecture. The race is a popular, time-honored *Oshogatsu* sports event, similar to America's football games and Britain's soccer matches held during the New Year's holiday. Moreover, this venerated event infuses many youths with the dream of running through Hakone, and even inspires scores of people to take up jogging through their neighborhood during the holiday.

Traditional New Year's games

Hagoita, or battle-dores, are decoratively patterned, oblong paddles used to hit a shuttlecock back and forth. The traditional kites flown during New Year's are made of a bamboo frame covered with handmade paper. In the game of *hyakunin isshu*, 100 cards, each featuring a famous poem, are spread on the floor, and a reader recites the first line of each poem as the players vie to snatch the card of the poem being read, with the player who collects the most cards being declared the winner. *Sugoroku* is a board game in which players advance their pieces by rolling a die, trying to be the first to make it to the final square.



Fukubukuro

One way that department stores and other retailers try to attract customers on the first day of sales is by offering *fukubukuro*, grab bags that contain a variety of merchandise sold at discount prices. Since the contents are invisible, buying a *fukubukuro* is a gamble, but that doesn't stop shoppers, especially older women, from forming long lines at long-established department stores to purchase their coveted grab bags. Indeed, many Japanese pin their dreams on *fukubukuro*.



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Another tradition is to put money in red packets and place them next to the children's pillows while they sleep, much like a visit from Santa Claus. The following morning is ushered in by shrills of delight as the children discover the gifts.

Germany & Poland



Dances and other festive gatherings are held on New Year's Eve (called "Silvester" in Germany and "Sylwester" in Poland), with the partying lasting throughout the night. Just before midnight, everyone counts down the arrival of the new year with champagne in hand. As in North America and other parts of Europe, however, New Year's celebrations in Germany and Poland pale in comparison with Christmas, which is the biggest holiday of the year and sees many celebratory events, special church services, and family reunions.

India



January 1 is not widely celebrated as New Year's Day in India, with

the festive equivalent of *Oshogatsu* being April 15. This is the most auspicious day of the year and, like *taian* days in Japan, is considered the best time for conducting weddings, work, and practically every other aspect of life.

Brazil



Many Brazilians go to the beach early in the morning of New Year's Day to watch the first sunrise of the year. Women wear certain colors of underwear as a sign of their wish for the new year, with white representing the desire for tranquility, green the hope for money, and pink the wish for a boyfriend.

Philippines



New Year's Eve is filled with the sounds of drivers blaring their horns and families rattling empty cans and popping party favors in front of their homes. At midnight, many people eat *bibingka*, a type of rice cake.

A variety of customs are practiced to bring good fortune. For example, round fruit is eaten after serving as a decoration, and clothing with polka dots or other circular patterns is worn on New Year's. Also, people open their windows to allow good luck to enter.