



The Japan Club of LaGuardia Community College presents
New Year Celebrations in Asia 2024

- Date: Wednesday, January 17, 2024
- Time: 10:00am - 1:00pm
- Place: Poolside Cafe, LaGuardia Community College

Japan

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The Japanese New Year (お正月 [Shōgatsu]) is an annual festival with its own customs. Since 1873, the official Japanese New Year has been celebrated according to the Gregorian calendar, on January 1 of each year, New Year's Day (元日 [Ganjitsu]). However, many traditional events of the Japanese New Year are still celebrated on the first day of the year on the modern 天保 [Tenpō] calendar, the last official lunisolar calendar which was used until 1872 in Japan.

おせち料理 [osechi ryori] Japanese people eat a selection of dishes during the New Year celebration called osechi-ryōri, typically shortened to osechi. Many of these dishes are sweet, sour, or dried, so they can keep without refrigeration – the culinary traditions date to a time before households had refrigerators, when most stores closed for the holidays. There are many variations of osechi, and some foods eaten in one region are not eaten in other places (or are considered inauspicious or even banned) on New Year's Day. Another popular dish is ozōni, a soup with mochi rice cake and other ingredients that differ based on various regions of Japan. Today, sashimi and sushi are often eaten, as well as non-Japanese foods. In today's event, we are serving sushi and displaying food sample of osechi.



餅つき [mochi tsuki] Another custom is to create and eat rice cakes (mochi). Boiled sticky rice (mochigome) is put into a wooden container 臼 [usu] "mortar" and patted with water by one person while another person hits it with a large wooden 杵 [kine] "mallet". Mashing the rice, it forms a sticky white dumpling. This is made before New Year's Day and eaten during the beginning of January. Mochi is made into a New Year's decoration called kagami mochi, formed from two round cakes of mochi with a tangerine (daidai) placed on top. The name daidai is supposed to be auspicious since it means "several generations." In today's event, we are demonstrating the mochi-pounding ceremony. Please do not eat mochi since we are not allowed to serve unprocessed food due to the hygiene policies for on-campus events.



年賀状 [nenga-jo] The end of December and the beginning of January are the busiest times for the Japanese post offices. The Japanese have a custom of sending New Year's Day postcards (nengajō) to their friends and relatives, similar to the Western custom of sending Christmas cards. Their original purpose was to give your faraway friends and relatives tidings of yourself and your immediate family. In other words, this custom existed for people to tell others whom they did not often meet that they were alive and well. Japanese people send these postcards so that they arrive on 1 January. The post office guarantees to deliver the greeting postcards on 1 January if they are posted within a time limit, from mid-December to near the end of the month and are marked with the word nengajō. To deliver these cards on time, the post office usually hires students part-time to help deliver the letters. People get their nengajō from many sources. Stationers sell preprinted cards. Most of these have the Chinese zodiac sign of the New Year as their design, or conventional greetings, or both (2024 is the year of dragon). Conventional greetings include:

- 今年もよろしくお願ひします (I hope for your favor again in the coming year)
- 新年あけましておめでとうございます (Happiness to you on the dawn [of a New Year])
- 謹賀新年 (Happy New Year)
- 賀正 (to celebrate January)
- 初春 (literally "early spring", in the traditional lunar calendar a year begins in early spring)
- 迎春 (to welcome spring)

In today's event, we prepared a station where you can make your own nengajō with traditional Japanese calligraphy ink.

書き初め [kakizome] Kakizome (literally "first writing") is a Japanese term for the first calligraphy written at the beginning of a year, traditionally on January 2. Traditionally, kakizome was performed using ink rubbed with the first water drawn from the well on New Year's Day. Seated facing a favourable direction, people would write Chinese poetry containing auspicious words and phrases such as long life, spring, or perennial youth. These poems were then often burned. In modern times, people often write out auspicious kanji rather than poems. School pupils up to senior high school are assigned kakizome as their winter holiday homework. In today's event, we have prepared a station where you can try kakizome with authentic Japanese calligraphy equipment.



初詣 [hatsumode] Hatsumōde is the first Shinto shrine visit of the Japanese New Year. Some people visit a Buddhist temple instead. Many visit on the first, second, or third day of the year as most are off work on those days. Generally, wishes for the new year are made, new omamori (charms or amulets) are bought, and the old ones are returned to the shrine so they can be burned. There are often long lines at major shrines throughout Japan. Most of the people in Japan are off work from December 29 until January 3 of every year. It is during this time that the house is cleaned, debts are paid, friends and family are visited and gifts are exchanged. It would be customary to spend the early morning of New Year's Day in domestic worship, followed by sake – often containing edible gold flakes—and special celebration food. During the hatsumōde, it is common for men to wear a full kimono—one of the rare chances to see them doing so across a year. The act of worship is generally quite brief and individual and may involve queuing at popular shrines. The omamori vary substantially in price. Some shrines and temples have millions of visitors over the three days. Meiji Shrine for example had 3.45 million visitors in 1998, and in the first three days of January 2010, 3.2 million people visited Meiji Jingū, 2.98 million Narita-san, 2.96 million Kawasaki Daishi, 2.7 million Fushimi Inari-taisha, and 2.6 million Sumiyoshi Taisha. Other popular destinations include Atsuta Jingū, Tsurugaoka Hachimangū, Dazaifu Tenman-gū, and Hikawa Shrine.



絵馬 [ema] Ema (lit. "picture-horse") are small wooden plaques, common to Japan, in which Shinto and Buddhist worshippers write prayers or wishes. The ema are left hanging up at the shrine, where the kami (spirits or gods) are believed to receive them. Typically 15 cm wide and 9 cm high, they often carry images or are shaped like animals, or symbols from the zodiac or the particular shrine or temple. In ancient times people would donate horses to the shrines for good favor; over time this was transferred to a wooden plaque with a picture of a horse, and later still to the various wooden plaques sold today for the same purpose. Once inscribed with a wish, Ema are hung at the shrine until they are ritually burned at special events, symbolic of the liberation of the wish from the writer. In today's event, we have prepared a station where you can make your own ema.



Games and Entertainment It was also customary to play many New Year's games. These include hanetsuki (racket games), takoage (kite flying), koma (top), sugoroku (board game), fukuwarai (whereby a blindfolded person places paper parts of a face, such as eyes, eyebrows, a nose and a mouth, on a paper face), and karuta (playing cards). There are many shows created as the end-of-year, and beginning-of-year entertainment, and some being a special edition of the regular shows. For many decades, it has been customary to watch the TV show Kōhaku Uta Gassen aired on NHK on New Year's Eve. The show features two teams, red and white, of popular music artists competing against each other.

In today's event, we have prepared stations where you can try these Japanese games & entertainment.

- Karuta (Japanese traditional card game)
- Koma (Japanese top spinning game)
- Otedama (Japanese juggling with small beanbags)
- Kami-fusen (Japanese paper balloon)
- Origami (Japanese paper crafting)
- Tako (Japanese traditional kite)
- Taketonbo (Japanese bamboo-copter)