

niponica

Discovering
Japan
no.

29

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Special Feature

The Ties Binding the Heart of Japan



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Cover: A New Year decoration, arranged with a crane tied with gold and white strings called *mizuhiki*, along with auspicious rice plant ears, a fan and pine.
Photo: PIXTA

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▲ *Mizuhiki* decorations tied in the shape of cranes, which are venerated as symbols of longevity, and the plum blossom that adorns early spring.

Special Feature

The Ties Binding the Heart of Japan

The numerous “ties” that have been passed down to transcend the ages emulate the distinct aesthetics of the Japanese. Heartfelt prayers, practical wisdom, and other diverse cultural elements are woven into each of these knots. Through this Special Feature, we will unravel the unique spiritual culture found nowhere else in the world.

Ties in Japan:

Symbolizing Various Hopes



Ties through a prayer

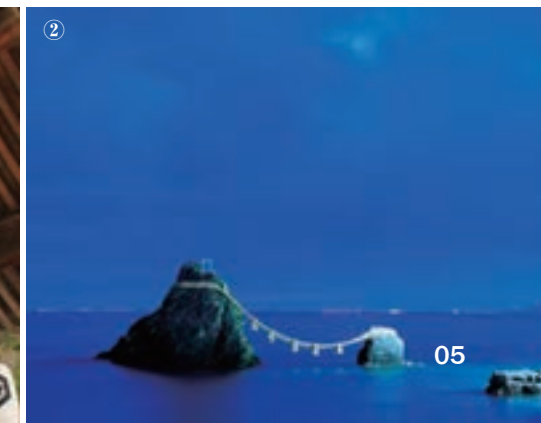
The massive Gotobiki-iwa boulder tied with *shimenawa*, a Shinto straw rope, marks a sacred location on a precipitous cliff called Amanoiwatate. This is where the local gods are said to have first descended to earth.

Kamikura Shrine (Kumano Hayatama Taisha Shrine) / Wakayama Prefecture

Photos: PIXTA

① A mighty *shimenawa*, made by tying an enormous volume of straw that has been devotedly grown from rice plants. Izumo Ooyashiro (Izumo Grand Shrine) / Shimane Prefecture

② Two rocks joined with *shimenawa* resemble a married couple at each other's side. This Meoto Iwa, literally meaning "wedded rocks," symbolizes a happy marriage and family. Futami Okitama Shrine / Mie Prefecture





Tying together relationships

Photos: PIXTA, Getty Images

Weddings tie new relationships between groom and bride and their respective families. The white strings seen on the bride's bustline are tied with a tight *awaji-musubi* which cannot unravel easily.



Tying together landscapes

Bamboo nodes are lined up and tied with black ropes with careful consideration paid to the balance and harmony with the surrounding landscape.
Take-no-Michi (Bamboo Road) / Kyoto Prefecture



Tying adornments

Having evolved as decoration from around the 8th century, *kumihimo* literally meaning "braided strings," were later used as sturdy cords to support heavy armor weighing several dozen kilograms.



Forging bonds through heartfelt gifts

Strings called *mizuhiki*, created by twisting *washi* (Japanese traditional hand-made paper), are tied in the shape of auspicious plum blossoms to wrap betrothal monetary gifts.
Tsuda Mizuhiki Orikata / Ishikawa Prefecture

Forging Bonds Through Heartfelt Gifts

Gifts are given to extend congratulations to someone dear for us, or to express feelings of appreciation to someone who has been helpful and supportive to us. The culture of exchanging gifts is a cherished, time-honored custom in Japan. The *origata* tradition that lives on today, embodies those sentiments and customs; and, *mizuhiki* decorations are used to adorn places of celebration.

▲ This photo shows a highly decorative work of *origata* for a *choshi-* (Japanese sake pouring bottle) and *hisage-* (ceremonial Japanese sake decanter) *kazari* (ornament). These vessels are used in pairs, reminiscent of the sight of two butterflies cheerfully fluttering together in the air.

Origata

▼ *Origata* is still used today on occasions such as when providing hospitality to others or as an appreciative acknowledgement for a congratulatory gift.



Origata, with a 600-year history, is a protocol with detailed rules that instruct how gifts are wrapped and tied with strings. This protocol was passed down among samurai families as a form of etiquette, and later it entered into the lives of the common people as well.

Gifts are wrapped in a way so that recipients can open them easily with their dominant hand. The giver extends their consideration for the recipient by leaving a part unwrapped, thereby allowing the recipient to see the contents partially.

Scissors are never used for *origata*, even with the most intricate wrapping designs. Rather, items are wrapped by folding *washi* (Japanese traditional hand-made paper) in multiple layers. The size and quality of the *washi* express respect and are selected to befit the quality of the gift and the status of the recipient. Elegant and pure white *washi* is most typically used, but this is sometimes layered with several sheets of pastel *washi* to provide further formality.

Court nobles used hemp or silk string to tie the wrapping, while samurai used *koyori*, which is string

made by twisting thin *washi*. In later years, it became popular to use red and white or silver and gold *mizuhiki* strings hardened with starch.

Origata has long been part of traditional Japanese culture, having been passed down through the generations. The type of *origata* used is determined by what kind of gift is to be wrapped; however, the sentiment behind *origata* is not bound by its forms and is actually quite liberal. The regard for others that underpins the custom of gift-giving continues to live on in the hearts of the Japanese people today.



Left: *Kusabana-tsutsumi* is for presenting the rustic charm of freshly-cut seasonal flowers.

Right: Items that were essential to the daily life of samurai, such as writing brushes, would be casually wrapped and given by using a typical *origata* wrapping.

▲ *Origata* can be considered as an art form for paper, created with a single sheet of *washi*. The photo shows a wrapping example for an auspicious ceremony.

Left: An exquisite *obi-tsutsumi* wrapping of an expensive sash.

Middle: Based on descriptions in Japanese ancient writings, *Noshiawabi-mushibi* replicates a kind of wrapping to wrap dried strips of abalone, which are a rarity today.

Right: Wrapped *Katsuobushi* (dried bonito), as an offering to the gods.

▼ Yamane Kazuki, Head of the Yamane Origata School
Yamane Kazuki devotes himself in spreading the historically grounded principles and charm of *origata* methods so *washi* culture may be incorporated into people's modern lifestyles. "*Origata* is about making the effort and keeping good faith to better relationships with others," he says. "Regard for others is what underlies the unbroken tradition of *origata*."

All works on p.8-9 are by Yamane Kazuki.



Mizuhiki Decorations



▲ Mizuhiki

Basic mizuhiki knots



Left: The basic mizuhiki knot for a celebration. *Awaji-musubi* is difficult to unravel once tied.

Middle: *Musubi-kiri* is used when one wants to convey congratulations more casually.

Right: *Yorikaeshi* symbolizes the wish for successive good fortune, like a sequence of waves. This is used for celebrations other than marriage.

Mizuhiki is made by twisting thinly-cut *washi* (Japanese traditional hand-made paper) strips to form a string and then hardening this with starch. This makes it not only pliant, but it also has a sturdiness preventing it from breaking easily and allowing it to be tied into various forms.

There are several theories about how *mizuhiki* originated in Japan, but it is said to have started in the early 7th century, when hemp threads dyed red and white were used to wrap offerings to the Imperial Court of Japan. As *mizuhiki* gradually started being used in place of threads, it became possible to tie elaborate decorative knots and uniquely evolved thereafter.

In Japan, when couples become engaged, there is a traditional rite called *yuino* for both families to meet and forge a new bond. The custom here is to exchange betrothal gifts, which embody special sentiments and are beautifully adorned with *mizuhiki* decorations.

Cranes and turtles that symbolize longevity, pine and bamboo that are vibrantly green even in the winter, and plum blossoms that flower before spring are auspicious motifs in Japan. These *mizuhiki* decorations which adorn the celebratory occasion are indispensable to betrothal gifts.

▼ Ishikawa Prefecture is famous for the traditional mizuhiki decorations. The photo shows celebratory wrapping of a betrothal monetary gift.



Mizuhiki decorations are used as elaborate adornments during celebrations. Taking betrothal gifts as some examples, let's look at the congratulatory sentiments expressed with each item.

Tomoshiraga

Tomoshiraga literally means "together until gray haired." This is tied with sturdy hemp thread that won't break and symbolizes the wish that husband and wife will live happily together into old age.



Betrothal monetary gift

Money is placed in a box inside the wrapping. The amount is written in a single stroke so the number cannot be altered afterward, a custom that remains to this day.



Kombu

Kombu, kelp, is often used for celebrations because the word sounds similar to "yorokobu" which means to be delighted. It also symbolizes fertility.



Ring case

Festive *awaji-musubi*, a *mizuhiki* decoration which is perfect for a heartfelt gift.



Suehiro

Suehiro refers to a traditional fan used in ceremonial occasions. This represents the wish that both families will continue to prosper and live happily for many years to come. *Mizuhiki* used in *Suehiro* is approximately 90 cm, and is never, ever cut, because it is considered to be the bond itself. If it is too long, the tips are curled up for adjustment.



Tsuda Mizuhiki Orikata, with around 100 years of history since its founding, follows the basics of traditional *origami*, but they have also incorporated creativity and ingenuity into their beautiful work of *mizuhiki* decorations. This maintains the tradition of tying together sentiments of celebration while also blending in with the modern lifestyle.

The photo is of the fifth-generation proprietor, Tsuda Rokusuke.

"Betrothal gifts are precious in establishing a bond between the families of the bride and groom," he says. "Each gift has different meaning, and we tie the *mizuhiki* decorations from our heart. Our commitment to making these as beautiful as possible adds to the celebration."

All works are by Tsuda Mizuhiki Orikata, in Ishikawa Prefecture.



Embracing Style

Obi-musubi (Sash knots)

With the arrival of the 18th century, Edo (present-day Tokyo) grew to a population of one million and became one of the top consumer cities in the world. As warfare ceased and society became peaceful, prospering tradesmen and artisans began to foster culture amidst remarkable progress in the economy.

Obi-musubi came into fashion around this time as well. Before then, *obi* was nothing more than a belt that tied the kimono. It gradually evolved to a broader, longer item—an accessory that people used not just for function, but also to look stylish. *Obi* became more elaborate with variations in weave, color, and pattern, which triggered trends in new ways to tie them.

There was also a social class system at the time, classified by occupation—samurai, farmers, craftsmen, and merchants—and there was a certain way to knot their *obi* according to their occupation. Thus, it was possible to discern social position, occupation, marital status, and so forth by how someone tied their *obi*. Within those rules, people were creative and expressed their own sense of



房陽
茶川
友竹
筆

Hishikawa Moronobu is said to be a forebear of the *ukiyo-e* (Japanese woodblock prints) genre. His depiction of a woman in the Edo period pausing in motion and looking back gives us a glimpse of the fashion trends of the time. The edges of the tied *obi* droop to the left and right in a way known as *kichiya-musubi*, which was introduced by Uemura Kichiya, a popular *onnagata* (male kabuki actor who plays female roles). The young women of Edo were enamored with this *obi-musubi* style.

Hishikawa Moronobu: “*Mikaeri Bijin-zu* (Beauty Looking Back)” 17th century
Source: ColBase (<https://colbase.nich.go.jp/>)



She swiftly studies the *obi* material and body figure before quickly tying the single *obi* into the ideal form.



For *tateya-no-ji-musubi*, it is said that the *obi* was angled up toward the right shoulder when inside the castle, and toward the left shoulder when walking outside the castle.



Fukura-suzume evolved from *tateya-no-ji-musubi*. This *obi-musubi* is still commonly used when young women wear kimono.

style with a diversity of *obi-musubi*.

It is said that there are now over a hundred ways to tie *obi*, but most are variants of knot styles born in the Edo period (1603–1868). This culture has been passed down through the generations.



▲ Sasajima Sumi researches *obi* culture and studied the art of wearing kimono in the context of classical performing arts. For half a century, she has examined the history and significance of *obi-musubi* in Japanese culture as she has taught and demonstrated, both in Japan and abroad, how to wear a kimono. To her, tying an *obi* is “akin to embracing the individual’s spirit and straightening oneself,” she says.



▲ Every January, Coming of Age ceremonies are held throughout Japan to celebrate youth who turn 20, the legal age of adulthood. Many women wear *furisode* kimono (long-sleeved formal kimono) to attend this ceremony. The photo show modern-day arrangements of *tateya-no-ji-musubi* and *bunko-musubi*.

Tateya-no-ji-musubi

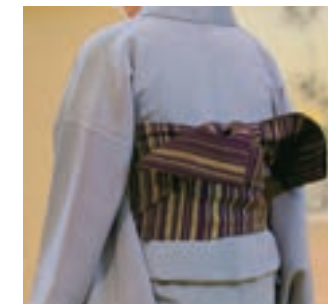
Fukura-suzume

Bunko-musubi

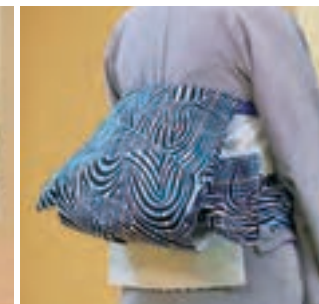
Tsunodashi-musubi

Otaiko-musubi

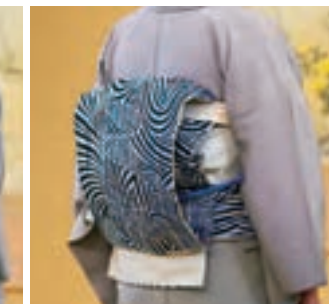
Kata-basami



The *bunko-musubi* can be tied tightly and does not unravel easily. The modest yet dignified look was meant to signify the vitality of a samurai family woman.



This femininely-puffy and gentle-looking *tsunodashi-musubi* is a knot style of the townsfolk.



The *tsunodashi-musubi* was simplified and transitioned into having a cord used to secure the *obi-musubi*, thereby transforming it into the *otaiko-musubi*. This spread widely throughout the population.



Kata-basami is a knot used by samurai that can be tied easily yet is very secure. When a sword is inserted into the *obi* at the waist, the abdomen is tightened and improves the posture.



▲ *Sageo* that samurai wrapped around their swords.



▲ Founded in 1652, for over 360 years, Domyo has been making *kumihimo* in Ueno, Tokyo. More than 500 types of *objime* can always be found in their store.

Kumihimo (Braided cords)

Photography: Takishima Yoji Photos: Getty Images, amanaimages

Kumihimo are cords made by braiding silk or cotton threads. Becoming popular among the nobility in the 8th century, varied and sophisticated *kumihimo* braiding methods were gradually conceived to birth a decoration culture around them. As elegant and intricate works of art, they were used to adorn clothing and Buddhist altar items as well as sword straps for nobility. As Japan became a samurai society in the 12th century, *kumihimo* became popular among samurai for not only their beauty, but also for their practical features, such as excellent durability and elastic tightness, making them

useful for supporting heavy armor and other equipment that weighed several dozen kilograms.

In the 17th to 18th centuries, making of *kumihimo* sword straps called *sageo* flourished in Edo (present-day Tokyo). It was considered the way of the samurai to make their own *sageo*, so it is said that many of them mastered *kumihimo* techniques.

However, carrying swords was banned in 1876. *Sageo* craftsmen and merchants were about to lose their livelihoods before they set their focus on *objime*, which shares similar manufactured characteristics with *sageo*.

Objime is the cord that is tied around the center of *obi* as a finishing touch to hold *obi-musubi* in place. Boosted by the wide popularity of the *otaiko-musubi*, one of the variations of sash knots and which requires *objime*, *kumihimo* gained a new surge of demand and was revitalized. Thus, *kumihimo* played an excellent supporting role to the kimono and rapidly developed to become an essential presence today in Japan's kimono culture.

▼ *Objime* is tied last, in the center of the *obi*.



Left: The *kumihimo* are all dyed and braided manually, preserving the legacy of artisanal braiding.

Right: Techniques to reveal patterns or lettering on *kumihimo* spawned new patterns which reflected the stylish tastes of Edo citizens.



▲ Domyo Kiichiro is the 10th generation proprietor of Domyo.

He is dedicated to creating new *kumihimo* while preserving the historical and enduring *kumihimo* techniques found throughout Japan.

"A unique Japanese aesthetic is incorporated into small *kumihimo*, measuring just a few centimeters," he says. "I hope to challenge myself technically by combining differing materials to create new ties tailored to the modern lifestyle."



▲ The *fuuji-musubi* served as a key while taking the form of a beautiful decorative knot.

The Beauty of Knots, Refined

Decorative knots

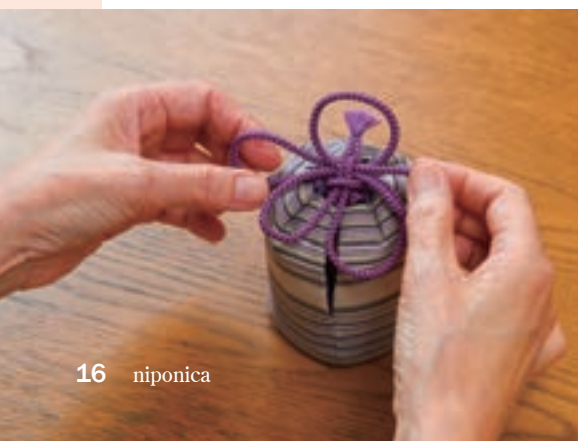
Tying a single cord can turn it into a key or even a pretty flower. Yet no matter how elaborate the knot becomes, it will revert to a single cord when unraveled. Over the years, decorative knots have made a beautiful transformation through the delicate and refined handiwork of the Japanese people.

The ability to make creative and stunning decorative knots was considered to be an important skill for women of the nobility in the 12th century; thus, it was deemed to be one of the most important skills that they studied. Around this time, *hana-musubi*, literally meaning “flower knots,” were popular.

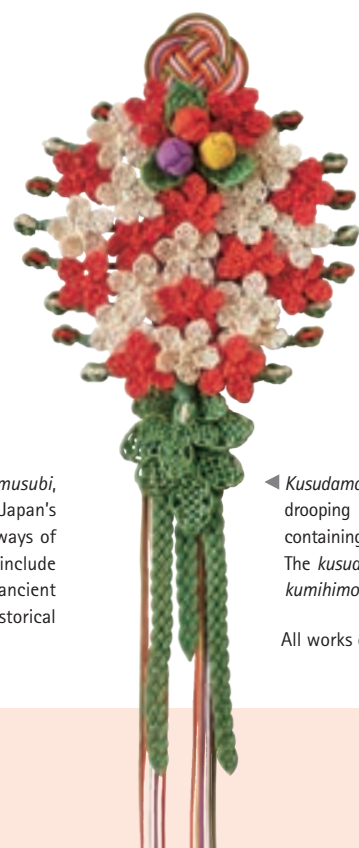
However, the history of the adorning *hana-musubi* met dramatic change in the Warring States period, from the end of the 15th century through the end of the 16th century. Samurai lords valued the tea ceremony, but they feared the possibility of poisoned tea. To avert this, the tea masters who served samurai lords initiated the custom of tying the pouches containing tea powder in their own complex way which could not be imitated. If by any chance the knot could be unraveled, it would be impossible to tie it again in the same way, making it obvious if someone had opened it. These untraceable knots were called *fuuji-musubi*, literally meaning “seal knot”—a single cord which brilliantly served as a key.



▲ During the Edo period (1603–1868), skills to create the authentic beauty of *hana-musubi* were enhanced for use on pouches that held tea powders and accessories.



◀ Sekine Miyuki is a researcher of *musubi*, knots, and an artist who renders Japan's seasons and events with various ways of *musubi*. Her creative activities include the reproduction of *musubi* from ancient ceremonies and events based on historical documents and other materials.



◀ *Kusudama* has five colored strings drooping at a length on a pouch containing incense and medicinal herbs. The *kusudama* in the photo is tied with *kumihimo*, braided cords.

All works on p.16 are by Sekine Miyuki.

by Unique Techniques

Bamboo fence knots

Bamboo fences are woven with bamboo, and, more than just dividing the premises, they serve as a charming backdrop to many Japanese gardens. By the middle of the Edo period (1603–1868), bamboo fences were often portrayed as stylish motifs in *ukiyo-e* (Japanese woodblock prints) and were also adopted in the homes of commoners.

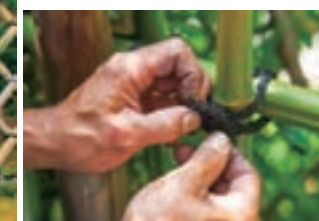
Bamboo fences can be constructed to either make the inside garden visible from the outside or to obscure the inside garden. The tying methods using a black hemp-palm rope also vary from simple clean knots to decorative dimensional knots and knots with long, dangling working ends. Regardless, however, there is a beautiful contrast of color between the bamboo and rope knots, adding a unique aesthetic to Japanese townscapes while harmonizing with the rich colors of the four seasons.



▲ The Kenninji fence, named after a temple in Kyoto that is famous for its exquisite gardens and bamboo fencing. It provides isolation from the outside bustle, creating a tranquil space.



▲ This bamboo fence is at Koetsu Temple in Kyoto, which is famous for its Japanese garden. Split bamboo is tied in a rough diamond pattern, thus distinctively providing a view of the other side of the fence.



◀ Using the best type of knot among several types is a testament to the level of his craftsmanship.

▶ Hada Tamiki of Hada Zoen, one of the few landscapers today who has preserved the tradition of bamboo fence making techniques. His work includes the restoration and maintenance of Japanese gardens with historical significance. When making bamboo fences, he methodically places the vertical bamboo so that their joints do not line up left or right. He decides how to knot the black hemp-palm rope while calculating knot intervals and intensity, among other factors, aiming to balance both function and beauty of the knots.



Linking People and Their Lifestyles: Bridges



▲ The wooden five-span Kintai Bridge harmonizes with its natural surroundings.



① From under the bridge, the very complex configuration of the timbers is visible.

② When you cross the bridge, a steep slope and steps unfold in front of you.

Japanese bridge construction boasts the world's leading levels of technology. Remaining steadfast in the face of various hardships, bridges have both made dreams become a reality and served as a link to the lives of countless people throughout Japan.

Kintai Bridge

Kintai Bridge is a wooden five-span bridge about 200 meters long and 5 meters wide over the Nishiki River in Iwakuni City, Yamaguchi Prefecture in the western part of Japan. The three sections in the center are arched. The elegance of the form inspired the name *kintai*, which means gold brocade sash, because of its similarity to the traditional brocade sash for kimono. Six types of meticulously-selected quality timbers and special rust-resistant metal fittings were used for the arch structure, and this is said to be an excellent example of engineering, even against modern bridge-construction standards.

The bridge is a culmination of technology, conceived with the fervent aim to construct a bridge that would stand steady against the torrents. Since about 1600, the people have built a bridge here again and again, only to be washed away by flooding. To create a bridge that could withstand the broad width of the river and furiously rapid currents, they began researching an arching bridge with no piers and arrived at the bridge as it stands today, with four stone-walled islands built across the river to support five spans. Piers were installed on both sides of the river, where the current is weaker, and three arching

bridges without piers were constructed in the center. After approximately a decade since its conception, Kintai Bridge was completed in 1673.

However, just a year later, the bridge was washed away. The foundations of the stone-walled piers were immediately upgraded and a stronger bridge was constructed. After then, it endured for 276 years until a powerful typhoon

washed it away again in 1950. The Kintai Bridge that was rebuilt in 1953 is still with us today, projecting the legacy of what was first built 350 years ago.

Abundant nature surrounds the beautifully rhythmical construction of the five-span bridge granting beautiful views throughout the four seasons: cherry blossoms in spring, fireworks in summer, the changing colors of leaves in autumn, and snowy landscapes in winter.

The three famous bridges of Japan

Kintai Bridge is said to be one of the three most famous bridges in Japan, along with Megane Bridge, literally meaning “spectacles bridge,” in Nagasaki Prefecture and Nihonbashi Bridge in Tokyo.



① Kintai Bridge, which is illuminated at night, offers a magical view.

② Megane Bridge, is one of the iconic sightseeing spots in Nagasaki.

③ At the time of its construction, Nihonbashi Bridge was the starting point of five major roads. Work to remove the elevated expressway above it is scheduled to be complete in 2040.





Locations for *En-musubi*

The Japanese word *en* means relationships, connections, bonds and the like between persons and events. Desiring to find a wonderful romantic partner or a good job? Hoping to maintain amicable relations with friends and family? Japan's *en-musubi* spots are traditionally known for making these wishes come true and for tying together positive *en*. Let's visit several *en-musubi* spots!



Hakuto Shrine (Tottori City)

In the *Kojiki*, Japan's oldest existing literary work, there is a myth of an injured white rabbit being saved by a god, and traces of this are scattered throughout Hakuto (literally meaning "white rabbit") Shrine. It is also known to be a backdrop to the oldest love story in Japan.

Tottori

鳥取



Megane Bridge (Nagasaki City)

Megane Bridge (literary meaning "spectacles bridge") is Japan's first arched stone bridge, constructed in 1634. It is named so because its reflection on the river resembles a pair of eyeglasses. Finding a heart-shaped stone in the embankment is said to make a wish come true.

Nagasaki

長崎



Chiringashima (Ibusuki City)

Chiringashima is an uninhabited island in Kagoshima Bay. Only at low tide from March through October, a sandbar approximately 800 meters long emerges to "connect" the island and the land, making it possible to walk over. It is thus known as an island of *en-musubi*.

鹿児島

Kagoshima



Toyoni Lake (Horoizumi District)

This is known as a sightseeing spot for sealing romantic relations. Surrounded by majestic primeval forest, an aerial view of the lake reveals it to be in the shape of a heart.

Hokkaido

北海道

Fukushima

福島

Bishamon-numa Pond (Yama District)

Part of the Goshiki-numa (literally meaning "five-color ponds") group of ponds and lakes, Bishamon-numa Pond is popular for being home to a white carp with a red heart on its side that is said to bring happiness to those who are fortunate enough to spot it.



Saitama

埼玉

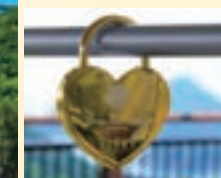


三重

Mie

Mieshima Observatory (Watarai District)

The spectacular view of the beautiful heart-shaped bay of Kasaragi Pond is exclusive to the Mieshima Observation Platform inside Ise-Shima National Park. This is also referred to as a special spot for lovers, who can lock a "love devotion padlock" on the key rack placed there.



Kawagoe Hikawa Shrine (Kawagoe City)

Every year in July and August, over 2,000 Edo wind bells resonate with their refreshing timbre. For weddings, there is a unique ceremony for the bride and groom to mutually tie special red strings, signifying the couple's destiny, around their pinky fingers.

Linking a festive spirit *Chakin-zushi*

▼ The elegant look of being tied with Japanese parsley, reminiscent of a kimono sash and intended to prevent the thin omelette from opening up, is popular for special occasions like the March 3rd *Hina Matsuri* (Doll Festival or Girls' Festival) when people celebrate the happiness and healthy growth of girls.



▲ Specially-blended eggs are used to ensure a beautifully-colored finish. The delicate taste is exceptional.



▲ Head chef Sasaki Hiromi preserves the classical and traditional flavor.
Courtesy: Akasaka Yushoku



▲ The thin omelette, which tears easily, is carefully wrapped and tied with *kombu* (kelp).

Chakin-zushi is made by mixing rice with various ingredients and wrapping it with a thin omelette. The name comes from *chakin*, which is the rectangular fabric used to wipe the tea bowl during the Japanese tea ceremony that inspired the shape of the thin omelette.

It is said that about a century ago, a cook who served a noble family first conceived of *chakin-zushi* for a tea ceremony, and it became popular thereafter.

The rice in *chakin-zushi* is seasoned with vinegar, salt, and sugar. Richly-flavored ingredients from the

mountain and sea are mixed into the rice, such as *kampyo* (dried gourd strips), shiitake mushroom that have been cut into strips and simmered, sesame seeds, as well as grilled red snapper or crab flakes and so forth.

The rice is formed into a small ball with a seasonal touch. In the spring to summer, it is topped with a large, sweet runner bean and in the fall, with a sweetly-simmered chestnut. This is then wrapped with a thin omelette, tied up with a thin strip of *kombu* (kelp) so the rice doesn't spill. When it is in shape, the *chakin-zushi* is complete.

Today, there are various arrangements and presentations for *chakin-zushi*, and a range of recipes are enjoyed at festive occasions with family and friends. The ingredients that go into the rice and how it is eaten are arranged as preferred. This is a dish which brings smiles to the table.



Where people, history, and nature are tied into one

Nikko

Known for its World Heritage shrines and temples, scenic Nikko is blessed with lush natural surroundings.

Take in the sounds of gushing clear streams as you stroll through the mountainous townscape.



▲ The white dragon sculptures over Yomeimon gate



▲ Yomeimon gate at Nikko Toshogu Shrine, an icon of Nikko

Located in north-western Tochigi Prefecture, Nikko City welcomes over 10 million domestic and international visitors yearly.

Altitude variation is extreme in Nikko, ranging from 200–500 meters in the central area to 2,578 meters on Mt. Shirane, the highest peak of the Nikko mountains. Because of this, cherry blossoms bloom and autumn trees change color at a staggered pace allowing long flower- and autumn foliage-viewing seasons enjoyable at different locations throughout Nikko.

Despite being in the central area, visitors can revel in the sense of traveling to the distant past on the Cedar

Avenue of Nikko. Its three roads (Nikko Road, Reiheishi Road, Aizu-Nishi Road) combined are approximately 37 kilometers long and lined with about 12,000 giant cedar trees on both sides. This is listed in the Guinness Book of World Records as the longest avenue of trees. Even across a gulf of 400 years, when these trees were first planted, the three roads give us insight into the pulse of the travelers of those ancient days, leading to Nikko Toshogu Shrine, the virtual symbol of Nikko.

The Shrines and Temples of Nikko comprise the 103 religious buildings of Nikko Toshogu Shrine, Nikko Futarasan-jinja Shrine, and Nikkozan Rinnoji Temple,

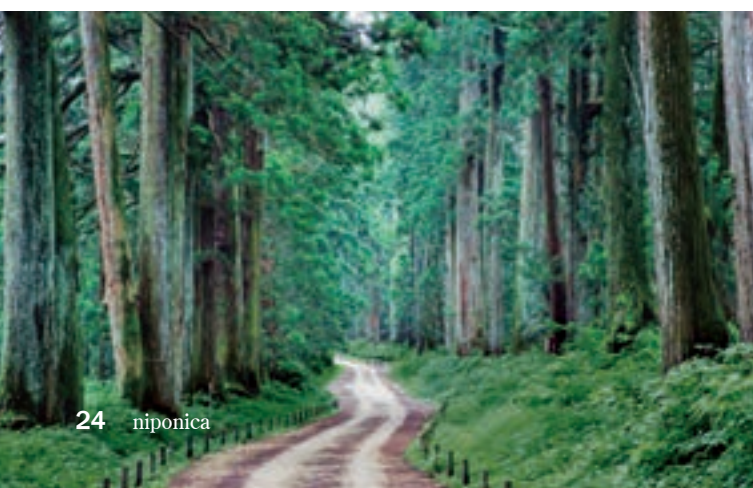
and the surrounding remains (cultural landscapes). These were created by integrating the sentiments of people toward nature, with the shrine buildings constructed with the vast fortune and power of the Tokugawa Shogun family (the nucleus of the Edo Shogunate that was founded in 1603 by Tokugawa Ieyasu and continued until 1868).

Yomeimon gate, with its resplendent and vividly-colored ornamentation, is especially eye-catching at Nikko Toshogu Shrine. This was built in 1636 and is representative of the skills of the top metal and lacquer craftsmen at the time. One enjoyable part of

Nikko Toshogu Shrine is in the discovering of its many carvings and paintings of creatures. There are more than 500 highly refined carvings alone of persons and animals.

Near the entrance to the Shrines and Temples of Nikko, visitors can immerse themselves in a retro-modern mood amidst the scenery of several historical buildings—including a historical hotel founded in 1873 as one of the first resort hotels in Japan, and souvenir shops, offering the traditional handicrafts of Nikko and also local specialties.

▼ Cedar Avenue of Nikko



▼ The Three Wise Monkeys are a Japanese pictorial maxim, embodying the proverbial principle "see no evil, speak no evil, hear no evil."



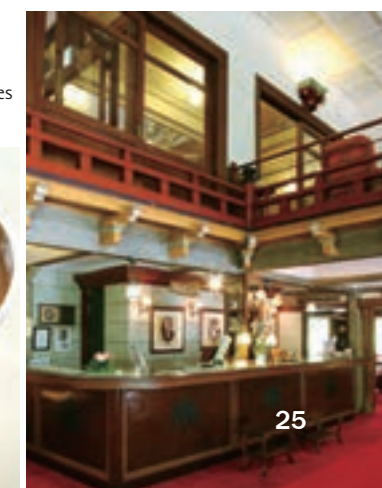
▼ The *Nemurineko* (sleeping cat) at the Sakashita-mon gate symbolizes the prayer for peace, allowing it to doze in *nikko*, which literally means sunlight.



▼ The "Hundred Years Rice Curry" recreates the traditional taste of a secret recipe.



▼ The history of the renowned Nikko Kanaya Hotel can be gleaned from the ambience of the front desk.





▲ Irohazaka Slope is a popular spot during the autumn foliage season.



Top: The Kegon Falls dynamically splashes water with a roar.

Bottom: Senjogahara Plateau is also registered under the Ramsar Convention*
*A convention on internationally important wetlands, especially as a waterfowl habitat.



▲ Nature of the four seasons can be enjoyed at Lake Chuzenji.

Irohazaka Slope, a sightseeing road that connects central Nikko and Okunikko, is very popular for its stunning scenery during the autumn foliage. They are a pair of roads—one ascending, the other descending—and they have a total of 48 tight curves. There are many waterfalls throughout Nikko that offer breathtaking sights of spraying water against a beautiful natural backdrop. The Kegon Falls is especially famous; the water of Lake Chuzenji cascading down a steep 97-meter cliff is a magnificent spectacle. In the surroundings, the wetlands of Senjogahara Plateau stretch over an area of 400 hectares. From the observation points built at various spots, visitors can experience the sights of a grand and richly diverse ecosystem.

If you wish to enjoy a typical Nikko delicacy, we recommend *yuba*. This is made by simmering soy milk and extracting the film that forms on the surface. This delicacy spread throughout Nikko, with its many shrines and temples, as a valuable protein source for monks who, as part of their ascetic training, abstain from eating meat and fish. Nikko's *yuba* is thick and satisfying to eat. This can be eaten raw with a sauce, simmered, or deep-fried. Nikko is also revered for its shaved ice. Slowly frozen with the cold of winter, high-quality natural ice is used to create airy shaved ice that

Yuba (soy milk skin) dishes from ► Takaiya, a restaurant with over 200 years of history.



▲ Exhilarating rafting down the torrent of Kinugawa River.



▲ Okukinu Onsen

can be enjoyed year-round.

The thrill of rafting can be enjoyed in the rapid streams of the Kinugawa River, surrounded by the majestic beauty of the valley. Not only that, this region is also blessed with many *onsen* (hot springs) villages that boast plentiful water. The area brims with rich nature that will warm and soothe your soul.

Craftsmen from all over Japan have been brought to Nikko to construct the many temples and shrines, and their advanced workmanship has taken root in the region in the form of traditional crafts with a unique depth.

Nikko-bori woodcarving is distinctive for its flowing curves created with special chisels and the vermillion lacquer coating, which is unique to Nikko and highlights the beauty of the grain.

Nikko-geta are made by attaching *geta* (traditional Japanese footwear) wooden soles to the bottom of the straw sandals that are worn when entering shrines and temples. The surfaces of the straw sandals are woven with bamboo bark. These were conceived to prevent slipping on Nikko's many hills and regular, abundant snow.

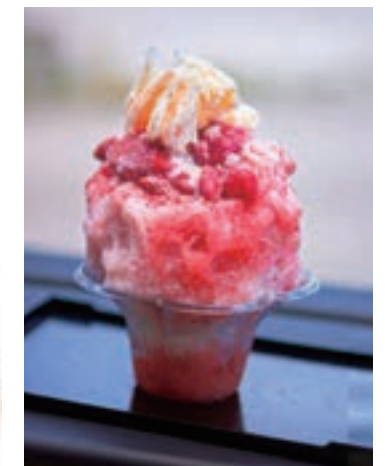
Nikko is an iconic tourist destination of Japan. Its convenient location, which makes a day trip from Japan's capital city of Tokyo possible, is one of the reasons for its popularity.



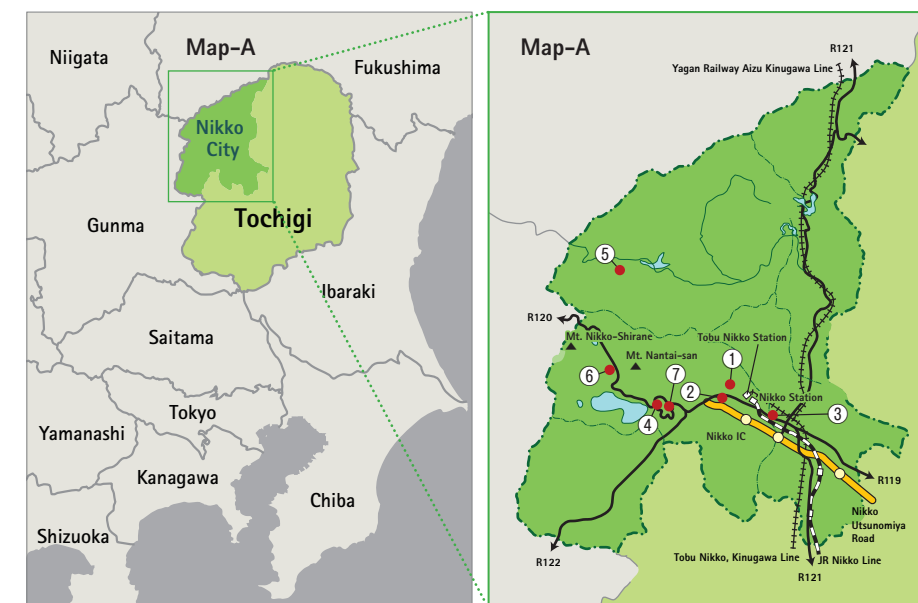
▲ Nikko-bori woodcarving



▲ Nikko-geta



▲ Delicate shaved ice made with thinly-shaved natural ice and local-specialty strawberries that have been sweetly simmered and frozen are the perfect combination.



Nikko area map

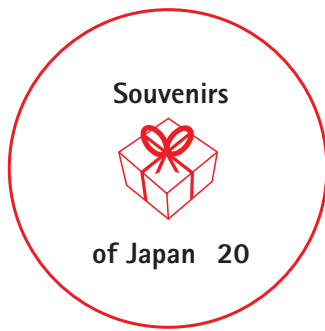
- ① Nikko Toshogu Shrine
- ② Nikko Kanaya Hotel
- ③ Cedar Avenue of Nikko
- ④ Kegon Falls
- ⑤ Okukinu Onsen
- ⑥ Senjogahara Plateau
- ⑦ Irohazaka Slope

Access

Tokyo (50 min. by Shinkansen) →
Utsunomiya (Approx. 40 minutes by JR Nikko Line) → JR Nikko Station
Asakusa (Approx. 2 hours by Tobu Limited Express) → Tobu Nikko Station

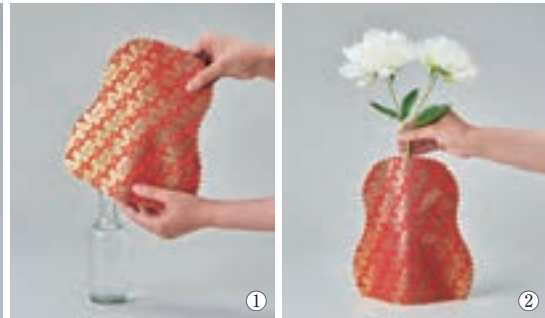
Contact information

Nikko City Tourism Association
<https://www.visitnikko.jp/en/>



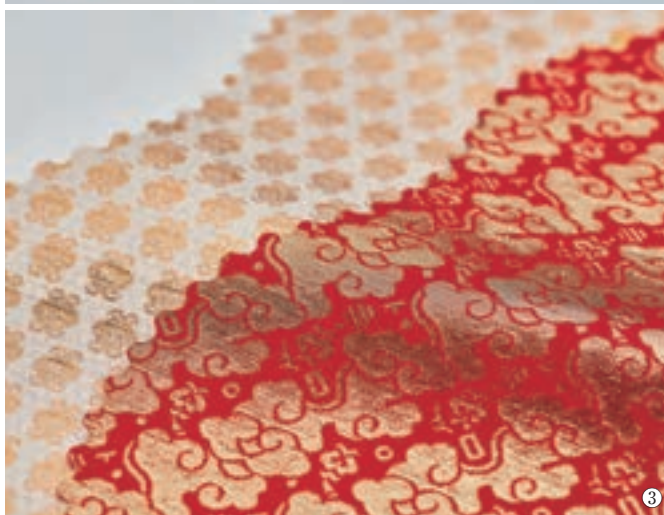
Cloth Flower Vase

A flower bottle cozy
made of beautiful woven fabric



We embrace the changing seasons with flower decorations. This can be enjoyed at any time with this flower bottle cozy, inspired by the material used in *kakejiku* (Japanese hanging scrolls). Even if you don't have a vase specifically for flowers, this useful item can be used as a cloth festive flower vase simply by placing it over an empty bottle.

Kakejiku in Japan highlight calligraphy or paintings, and have a beautiful textile frame. These meticulously-woven fabrics with traditional Japanese patterns are called *hyosogire*. Patterns vary, such as stylized natural motifs like clouds and water, or plant themes, such as plum blossoms and pine trees. These exquisite fabrics, woven with gorgeous gold threads or a variety of traditional colors, make for a charming interior item.



- ① Pour water into an empty bottle or other container and slip the "Cloth flower vase" over it.
- ② Put flowers, and here's your vase!
- ③ *Hyosogire* with the motif of clouds, which are said to be an omen that something auspicious is about to happen.

Courtesy: TORII Co., Ltd., Igarashi Design Studio

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Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan
2-2-1 Kasumigaseki, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 100-8919, Japan
<https://www.mofa.go.jp/> (Ministry's official website)
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