



Japan Now December 2025

Japan Now is the email newsletter of the consular office of Japan in Anchorage



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Consular Office of Japan in Anchorage



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How Japan Spends the New Year

As the year comes to an end, Japan enters one of its most important holiday seasons. Although in America, the busy, festive Christmas period seems to be the biggest cultural event of the year, in Japan, the New Year (Shogatsu) takes that spot as a time for reflection and new beginnings. Here are a few traditions you can see across Japan around this season.

□ **Year-End Cleaning** (Osoji)

In late December, families clean their houses from top to bottom to welcome in the New Year with a fresh start. The idea is not only to tidy up the home but also to clear away the past year's worries.



□ **New Year's Eve Soba** (Toshikoshi Soba)

On December 31st, many people eat a bowl of simple buckwheat noodles. The long noodles symbolize a wish for longevity and a smooth transition into the new year.

□ **First Shrine or Temple Visit** (Hatsumode)

During the first few days of January, millions of people visit shrines or temples to pray for good health, good fortune, and a peaceful year ahead. They also draw paper fortunes known as omikuji.



□ **New Year's Meals** (Osechi Ryori)

Families enjoy beautifully prepared dishes arranged in lacquered boxes. Each dish come with symbolic meanings, like good health, prosperity, or happiness. It's both delicious and meaningful!



□ **New Year's Cards and Gifts** (Nengajo and Otoshidama)

Japanese families traditionally send nengajo (New Year's postcards), which are delivered exactly on January 1st. Children also receive otoshidama, small envelopes filled with money.



Two of our staff members will be spending their New Year holidays in Japan, and we asked them what they are most excited about during their stay.

Staff A: I'm excited about the gorgeous osechi ryori, something I could never make on my own!

Staff B: I can't wait to visit a shrine for hatsumode with my family. I haven't seen them in a whole year!

Head Consul Hamada's Visit to Chitose City

From November 25 to 26, Head Consul Kiyohiko Hamada visited Chitose city in Hokkaido and exchanged views with Mayor Yokota of Chitose and other senior officials of the Chitose City Hall. Mayor Yokota noted that, following his visit to Anchorage in August last year to commemorate the 55th anniversary of the Sister City relationship, Mayor LaFrance of Anchorage and her delegation made a reciprocal visit to Chitose this October. This visit further strengthened the friendship between the two cities, which he regarded as highly gratifying. Head Consul Hamada expressed that the various people-to-people exchanges have built strong bonds between the people of both cities, and that the Consular Office of Japan in Anchorage will continue to provide support to the extent

possible. Head Consul Hamada also visited the Chitose Ainu Association, where Chairperson Nakamura shared insights on the history and culture of the Ainu people, as well as their exchanges with Alaska Native communities.





2025 JAA Rice Pounding Festival

The 2025 Rice Pounding Festival was successfully held, organized by JAA and supported by the Consular Office of Japan in Anchorage.

We hope that those who participated were able to gain an insight into Japanese culture by enjoying a variety of mochi, taking part in rice pounding, and watching Taiko and Sumie performances.



Announcing the Online Arctic Symposium

The Consular Office of Japan in Anchorage is again hosting an Online Arctic Symposium taking place **January 14th and 15th, 2026, from 3:00-6:30 PM (AKST)** each day.

This two-day virtual event will explore current and emerging areas of cooperation between Japan and the U.S. Arctic. Sessions will focus on:

- Arctic and Indo-Pacific security
- Energy and Alaska's changing development landscape
- Scientific research and Arctic observations
- Critical minerals and resource development

The event is free and open to the public, and we welcome participation from government, academia, industry, and others with an interest in Arctic issues. We invite you to register via Eventbrite to receive important updates and view the agenda for the event once published.

Stay tuned to our Facebook page in the coming weeks as we highlight the distinguished speakers who will be joining us at the symposium. Don't miss this opportunity to deepen your understanding of the Arctic and participate in this cross-sector international dialogue.

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