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**SUMMER FUN IN JAPAN:
SEASIDE FESTIVALS AND EVENTS**

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The Long Sword ("Tachi"), Known as the "Uesugi Tachi" —Gunchomon Hyogo-gusari Tachi (Title: Uesugi Tachi) (Blade signature: Ichi)—

THEME FOR JUNE:

Summer Fun in Japan: Seaside Festivals and Events

Japan is one of the world's leading maritime nations, surrounded by the sea on all sides. Its summers are hot and humid, and many festivals and other events unique to its coastal areas are held to bring in the cool. The origins of these festivals and events can be traced back to the elegant pastimes of the aristocracy, to *mikoshi* (portable shrines) that are carried to pray for the end to an outbreak of disease or a good catch, or to events that send the souls of ancestors back to the sea in the summer during the Obon¹ period. This issue of *Highlighting Japan* introduces the seaside festivals and events held across Japan, including the Itsukushima Shrine Kangen-sai, a festival with a history and tradition of more than 800 years, and the Miyazu Toro Nagashi Fireworks Festival, a lantern floating ceremony that has been held for about 400 years. We also highlight more recently conceived events, including the unique Amami Sea Kayak Marathon Race in Kakeroma, which is held on an island in southern Japan, and another event to pick up and reduce marine litter² wearing cosplay costumes.

1. A Japanese custom that combines Japan's ancient ancestral beliefs with the Buddhist event "Urabone." A series of events in which the souls of deceased ancestors periodically return to this world and then are sent back toward their world. The timing of Obon festivals vary according to region, generally falling in mid-July or mid-August.
2. Marine litter refers to the collective term for washed-up litter on coastlines, drifting litter on the sea surface and underwater, and litter accumulated on the seabed.



Swimmers carry up a 600 kg mikoshi (portable shrine) across the sea, all while keeping it afloat.

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FEATURES

Summer Fun in Japan: Seaside Festivals and Events



Photo: SHINTANI Koichi



Photo: PIXTA

Above: A scene from the Kangensai Festival: a gorgeously decorated *goza-bune* (center) sails through the Seto Inland Sea accompanied by three smaller boats.

Below: Both *seireisen* boats and red-and-white lanterns sway on the waves, gradually catching light and burning.

Japan is one of the world's leading maritime nations, surrounded by the sea on all sides. Its summers are hot and humid, and many festivals and other events unique to its coastal areas are held to bring in the cool. The origins of these festivals and events can be traced back to the elegant pastimes of the aristocracy, to *mikoshi* (portable shrines) that are carried to pray for the end to an outbreak of disease or a good catch, or to events that send the souls of ancestors back to the sea in the summer during the Obon¹ period. This issue of *Highlighting Japan* introduces the seaside festivals and events held across Japan, including the Itsukushima Shrine Kangen-sai, a festival with a history and tradition of more than 800 years, and the Miyazu Toro Nagashi Fireworks Festival,

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2. Marine litter refers to the collective term for washed-up litter on coastlines, drifting litter on the sea surface and underwater, and litter accumulated on the seabed.



Various Seaside Festivals Bring Vibrant Colors to the Japanese Summer:

A Historical and Cultural Perspective

Japan is a maritime nation, surrounded on all sides by the sea. Among the summer festivals held throughout Japan, many take place at the sea or by the seashore. We asked ANAMI Toru, Specially Appointed Professor at the College of Sociology, Edogawa University, who specializes in folklore and cultural anthropology, about the unique characteristics and origins of summer festivals.

In Japan, summer is a time of numerous festivals and events. How do they relate to the history and culture of Japan?

Extremely hot and humid, the Japanese summer is a very uncomfortable season. Summer festivals are, first and foremost, closely related to these climatic characteristics, as they form a specific background for the creation of culture. Looking back at the history of festivals in Japan, summer was a time when infectious diseases tended to spread, and festivals were held all over the country to pray to ward off such diseases¹. Two famous

festivals representative of Japan, the Gion Festival at Yasaka Shrine in Kyoto and the Tenjin Festival at



ANAMI Toru
Specially Appointed Professor,
College of Sociology,
Edogawa University

Osaka Tenmangu Shrine, originated as rituals to ward off epidemics. The Owari Tsushima Tenno Festival at Tsushima Shrine in Tsushima City, Aichi Prefecture, is another famous example of such traditions. Originally centered around a procession of *mikoshi*² (portable shrines) carried in the hope of driving away epidemics, these festivals attracted large crowds of spectators, added a variety of elaborately decorated floats called *yama*, *hoko*, and *yatai*³, and gradually evolved into large-scale festivities. Another popular seaside event is the Abare Festival (literally “Rampage Festival”) held at

Ushitsu Yasaka Shrine in Noto Town, Ishikawa Prefecture. It is one of the so-called “valiant” festivals⁴, in which more than two dozen *kiriko* (tall paper lanterns) are paraded, large torches are erected, and portable shrines are thrown into the sea, rivers, and fires, or smashed into the ground.

Instead of parading portable shrines, some festi-



Ohara Hadaka Festival held in Isumi City, Chiba Prefecture. Participants carry *mikoshi* into the sea.



The Abare Festival held at Ushitsu Yasaka Shrine in Noto Town, Ishikawa Prefecture



Photo: Aomori Tourism and Convention Association

The Nebuta Festival of Aomori City is held every year from August 2 to 7. Large lantern floats are paraded through Aomori City.



vals held to ward off epidemics involve floating the dolls representing the plague-bringing deities into rivers or the sea.

Another type of summer festival in a seaside region is the Nebuta Festival in Aomori City, Aomori Prefecture. It is famous both in Japan and overseas. Experts believe that Nebuta originated from the *nemuri nagashi* ritual of exorcising drowsiness (also called “the sleep demons”). I think the reason for such exorcism rituals was the belief that the sleep demons or drowsiness interfered with midsummer agricultural work. Similar festivals, albeit with different names, still exist on the Sea of Japan coast in eastern Japan, in Noshiro City, Akita Prefecture, and Kurobe City, Toyama Prefecture. Maritime transportation had been well developed in the Sea of Japan coastal regions of the country since ancient times, which probably contributed to the spread of a similar culture. The Nebuta Festival, which now features large lanterns paraded through Aomori City (see photo), was originally a ritual held to ward off the sleep demons or drowsiness by lighting small lanterns and floating them downriver and into the sea. However, as the ritual became more of an event and people began to compete over the size and design of the lanterns, they grew into giant lantern floats.

In addition to such festivals, which were originally intended to ward off the spread of summer-specific diseases and drowsiness, during this season the Japanese also do the events of Obon. It is a Japanese custom that combines the ancient Japanese belief in ancestral spirits and the Buddhist-derived event “Urabon-e,” in which the souls of deceased ancestors periodically return to this world and are sent back again toward their world, and the summer period when this tradition is practiced is called Obon. Its timing varies from region to region, but generally it is observed in mid-July or mid-August. There are some summer festivals and events that take place during the Obon period. For example, Miyazu City in Kyoto Prefecture, which is located on the coast of the Sea of Japan, holds a *toro⁵ nagashi* (lantern floating) ceremony to send the souls of ancestors back to the other side of the sea. The Nebuta Festival in Aomori, which I mentioned earlier, may be similar to this ceremony, because on the last day of the festival, a few selected large lanterns are placed on a boat and floated through the harbor of Aomori.

Thus, experts believe that the fusion of summer seasonal characteristics with ceremonies to ward off illness, the sleep demons or drowsiness, and other threats to daily life, and rituals rooted in folk beliefs

such as Obon, which honors the spirits of ancestors, may have led to the custom of people gathering together in the form of summer festivals.

From the perspective of their relationship to history and culture, what are some of the characteristics of festivals and events held at the sea or by the sea-shore?

In coastal areas with a thriving fishing industry, there are many festivals to pray for a good catch, although these festivals are not necessarily held in the summer. In many places, there are ceremonies where people carry the portable shrines into the sea or take them on boats across the sea. The Kifune Festival, held on Sukumo Island in Yamaguchi Prefecture, is a summer festival influenced by both prayers for successful fishing and *misogi*, a traditional practice of ritual purification in which Shinto priests wash their entire body to remove defilement. Festivals are also common along the coastal areas of Chiba and Kanagawa prefectures near Tokyo. The Hadaka Festival (literally “Naked Festival”) in Ohara, Isumi City, Chiba Prefecture, and the Hamaori Festival (also known as the “Dawn Festival”) in Chigasaki City, Kanagawa Prefecture, are major summer events. The climax of these festivals is the truly magnificent spectacle of more than a dozen



The Hamaori Festival in Chigasaki City

portable shrines in Ohara and about 30 in Chigasaki coming together and crossing them in the sea. These festivals attract large numbers of tourists.

However, I think there are also events where people carry portable shrines into the sea not to pray for a prosperous fishing industry or a big catch, but simply as a purification ritual. When the *mikoshi* is plunged into the sea, the deity also enters the water, and the lively gathering of many people on the beach to experience the divine power of the deity firsthand is in itself a joyful and exciting event. It is also great fun to see many portable shrines from other towns gather,



The Awa Odori of Tokushima Prefecture is a Japanese festival that is well known even overseas.

with participants competing to see who can carry the *mikoshi* with more flair, lift them higher, or decorate them better. From ancient times to present day, festivals have always been not only serious, but also enjoyable events. That is perhaps why they have taken root in the community and have been preserved to this day.

In Japan, there are many festivals and events that have been passed down from generation to generation since ancient times. Has there been any change in the way these festivals are conducted between the past and the present?


One significant change between past and present is the way festivals have become increasingly tourist-oriented. Organizers strive to make it easier for tourists to enjoy festivals in a comfortable environment by charging for seats or otherwise providing spectator seating. There seems to be a variety of creative approaches. In some places, for example, visitors can enjoy the festivities over a meal. At the Aomori Nebuta Festival, there are even viewing seats that cost 1 million yen per seat. To accommodate these new trends, festivals are held in locations where it is easier to set up spectator seating, or are rescheduled to holidays when it is easier to attract large numbers of people. Such creative approaches to organizing festivals have led to their increasing popularity as tourist attractions in the modern era.

How are Japanese festivals known overseas?

Los Angeles in the United States, for example, has a large Japanese-American population, so I think the Japanese festivals that they present to the general American public can be a useful reference. Some of the most commonly performed events are modeled after Awa Odori⁶ and Yosakoi⁷. Another frequently seen feature is Tanabata decorations. They originate from the Tanabata Festival⁸, which is famous for its beautiful Japanese-style ornaments attached to bamboo grass.

The Aomori Nebuta Festival, which I mentioned earlier, is a typical example of a Japanese festival that is well known not only in the U.S. but around the world.

What summer festivals or events in Japan would you recommend to visitors from overseas?

Shoronagashi (The Spirit Boat Procession), a traditional event held annually on August 15 in Nagasaki City on the island of Kyushu in the southwestern part of the Japanese archipelago, is truly fascinating. On the first Obon after a person's death, the surviving family members take the spirit of the deceased on board an elaborate boat-shaped vehicle and parade it through the streets, setting off firecrackers in a lively, festive manner to send the spirit off in the hope that it will safely reach paradise, the place where souls find peace after death. The ceremony involves a series of events, beginning with lively firecrackers to scare away evil spirits as the procession makes its way to the harbor, and ending with the spirits of the deceased being placed on a boat and taken back to across the ocean. Shoronagashi is a unique ritual that is only held in Nagasaki and the surrounding area, so I would recommend experiencing it firsthand if you have the opportunity to visit Japan during the summer. 



Shoronagashi (The Spirit Boat Procession) in Nagasaki City. The spirits of the deceased are placed on boats (in the center of the photo) and taken back to across the ocean.

1. In an age when the existence of pathogens was unknown, people believed that infectious diseases were caused by vengeful spirits or plague deities, and customs were devised in various parts of the country to ward them off.
2. A sacred vehicle that allows deities to travel outside the shrine
3. A general term for a parade of floats pulled or carried through the streets during festivals. The name and form vary depending on the festival and region.
4. Festivals dedicated to Susanoo-no-mikoto, a valiant and boisterous deity in Japanese mythology. It is believed that the excitement of engaging in rampage during such festivals, when portable shrines carrying the deity are thrown into the sea, rivers, or into fire, and are smashed or destroyed, attracts the deities and thereby brings people closer to them.
5. A traditional Japanese form of illumination in which the flame is enclosed in a wooden frame

6. Traditional Bon dance performed in Tokushima City and other areas of Tokushima Prefecture
7. A dance performed during the Yosakoi Festival in Kochi City, Kochi Prefecture. The performers dance while beating small wooden clappers called *naruko*.
8. A festival that originates from a fusion of various traditions based on an ancient Chinese legend and the legend of Tanabata-tsume (a celestial maiden who weaves clothes for the gods) passed down from generation to generation in Japan, as well as the custom of praying for a rich harvest. Inspired by the legend that Orihime (the heavenly weaver) and Hikoboshi (the heavenly cowherd) meet once a year, people write wishes on strips of paper called *tanzaku* and hang them on bamboo grass on July 7.

Fireworks during the Murooran Port Festival with a large cruise ship docked at Murooran Port

FEATURES



Grand Summer Festival in a Northern Port Town

Murooran City, situated in the southwestern part of Hokkaido, Japan's northernmost island, hosts a major summer event known as the Murooran Port Festival. This vibrant celebration takes place over three days at the end of July every year.

(Text: TANAKA Nozomi)



A scene from Murooran Nerikomi, where participants carry *mikoshi* portable shrines as they parade



Photo: Muroran Tourist Association

A group performs an eye-catching drum dance

Muroran City, along with its ironworks and steelworks, represents one of the cities in Hokkaido that has developed as a center of heavy industry. Muroran Port, opened in 1872, has long been renowned as a natural harbor. It continues to serve as a critical part of the international maritime cargo transportation network, designated as an ‘international hub port¹,’ playing a crucial role in logistics. We spoke with SATO Mizuki, in charge of tourism public relations at the Muroran City Office, regarding the 78th Muroran Port Festival to be held in 2024 around Irierinkai Park facing Muroran Port.

“The first festival dates back to 1947. To lift the spirits of the port town, which had been low following the end of the war in 1945, the citizens organized a week-long series of diverse events, including a marathon, a costume parade, and a sailors’ baseball tournament. After various twists and turns and the dedicated efforts of the community, the festival evolved into its current form as the Muroran Port Festival,” says SATO. “The festival kicks off with a grand fireworks display, featuring around 2,200 fireworks launched over Muroran Port. Other highlights include the Muroran Nerikomi, where illuminated *mikoshi* (portable shrines²) parade through the main streets, and a dance parade by local citizens. Traditionally held over a three-day weekend at the end of July, last year’s event (2023) attracted over 100,000 visitors.”

The main venues for the festival are Irierinkai Park, located along Muroran Port, and the adjacent plaza. This area also serves as the viewing spot for the first day’s fireworks display. The plaza comes alive with

food stalls and a stage featuring dance and music performances. Depending on the year, visitors can enjoy the festivities while admiring the large cruise ships docked at Muroran Port, immersing themselves in the vibrant atmosphere of the harbor.

In addition, the citizen dances, which involve active participation from the residents, feature around 600 local residents dancing to the tunes of ‘Muroran Bayashi’ and ‘Hokkai Bon Uta.’ This parade showcases a large group dance through the shopping streets. The festival finale, ‘Yosakoi Soran in Muroran,’ features around 15 groups from within and outside the city performing their unique group dances. This event takes place on the port stage, bringing the festival to a close.

“Each team dances to their own unique arrangements of the Soran Bushi³, a traditional folk song of Hokkaido. The dancers, wearing colorful costumes and holding *naruko*⁴ clappers, perform in perfect harmony. The large flags and drums used to enhance the performances are must-sees. The festival reaches its climax with a grand group dance featuring all the participants, which is both spectacular and impressive,” says SATO, describing the highlights of the festival. **7**



Photo: Muroran Tourist Association

A drum performance showcased against the backdrop of a large cruise ship

1. Ports are classified based on their overall capabilities and intended uses in relation to national economic activities. Muroran Port is particularly significant in terms of trade and is categorized as an ‘international hub port’ that has a major impact on the nation’s economic activities.
2. A *mikoshi* is a portable shrine modeled after a Shinto shrine for the gods to ride in. It is carried and paraded through the streets during festivals. The carriers shout chants and shake the *mikoshi* as they move.
3. A traditional folk song of Hokkaido, originally a work song sung by fishermen at herring fishing grounds.
4. A percussion instrument consisting of a wooden clapper attached to a handle, which is shaken to produce sound.

Kashiwazaki's Grand Fireworks Display Illuminates the Sea of Japan

Niigata Prefecture, situated roughly in the middle of the Sea of Japan coast on Honshu, hosts the coastal industrial city of Kashiwazaki. Every summer, this city holds the Gion Kashiwazaki Festival, which concludes with a renowned fireworks display. We spoke with an official from Kashiwazaki City about the highlights of this fireworks festival. (Text: TANAKA Nozomi)

Kashiwazaki City is located in the southwestern part of Niigata Prefecture along the Sea of Japan. Its 42-kilometer gently curving coastline offers views of crystal-clear waters. The area is dotted with 15 attractive beaches, drawing many visitors from both within Niigata Prefecture and beyond, making the beaches lively every summer.

One of the most prominent summer events in Kashiwazaki is the Gion Kashiwazaki Festival. The city is home to Yasaka Shrine, which shares its name and traditions with Kyoto's Yasaka Shrine. Historically, this shrine has hosted summer festivals aimed at warding off epidemics. Since 1950, the summer festival has merged with local shopping district events to form the Gion Kashiwazaki Festival, which continues to this day. Typically held over three days from July 24 to 26, the festival's highlight is the grand Seaside Fireworks display. This amazing event makes full use of Kashiwazaki's extensive coastline, offering a dynamic show. The fireworks are launched over a stretch of 1.5 kilometers, with approximately 16,000 fireworks illuminating the sea and sky. The display is dominated by fireworks larger than 5-inch shells¹, featuring a spectacular sequence that includes fireworks launched diagonally towards the sea and those striking the ocean surface, in addition to those

launched into the sky. This powerful combination of continuous launches makes for a breathtaking spectacle. In 2023, the festival attracted a bustling crowd of approximately 170,000 people.

KOYAMA Yoko from the Kashiwazaki City Commercial Tourism Division shares her thoughts on the fireworks festival: "It's an impressive spectacle set against the sea, on a grand scale with breathtaking intensity. Particularly striking are moments such as the two consecutive rounds of 100 synchronized fireworks and the amazing launch of 300 large fireworks in rapid succession against the backdrop



Large fireworks are launched against the backdrop of the Sea of Japan at twilight.

of the Sea of Japan at twilight, overwhelming in their sheer volume of sound and light. A standout feature includes fireworks unfolding on the sea's surface, a unique spectacle made possible by its expansive setting."

She continues, "Kashiwazaki is conveniently located about two and a half hours from Tokyo by taking the Shinkansen north and then transferring to local trains. We welcome visitors from overseas to come and visit us and enjoy the charm of the fireworks festival, a source of pride among local residents." **■**

1. The size of fireworks is expressed in gauge numbers. A 5-inch shell has an approximate diameter of 15 cm, reaches a height of about 190 meters upon launch, and has an average burst radius of about 85 meters when it explodes.



A scene from the fireworks festival, showing different types of fireworks being launched simultaneously.

Photo: Kashiwazaki City



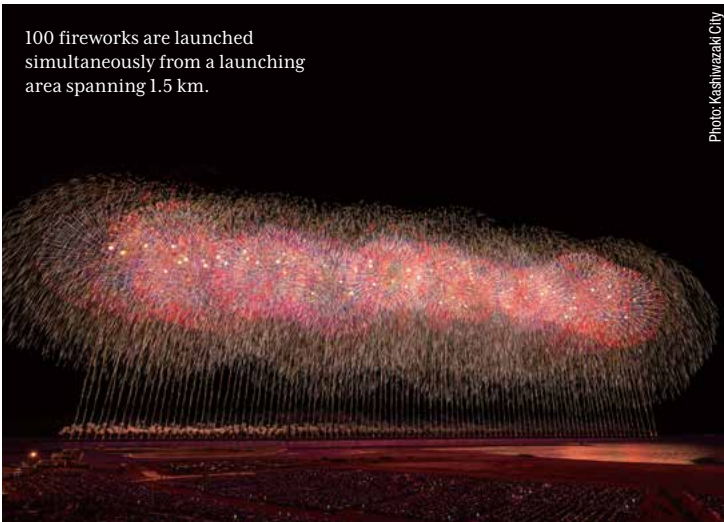
In the opening of the fireworks festival, continuous launches of fireworks decorate the twilight sky.

Photo: Kashiwazaki City



The fireworks display is a vibrant mix of sound and light, showcasing a range of fireworks from small to large.

Photo: Kashiwazaki City



100 fireworks are launched simultaneously from a launching area spanning 1.5 km.

Photo: Kashiwazaki City



The grand finale of the festival, where large fireworks known as 'shakudama' are launched in a series of 300 bursts, spanning approximately 6 minutes.

Photo: Kashiwazaki City



Colorful fireworks adorn the night sky while lanterns light up the surface of the sea

Miyazu Toro Nagashi Fireworks Festival Lights Up Miyazu Bay

The Miyazu Toro Nagashi Fireworks Festival is held annually on August 16 in Miyazu City, Kyoto Prefecture. On this night, following the enchanting sight of lanterns floating on Miyazu Bay, the event comes to a climax with a grand fireworks display. We spoke with a person in charge of organizing the event. (Text: TANAKA Nozomi)

Miyazu City, located in northern Kyoto Prefecture, is a coastal town facing Miyazu Bay on the Sea of Japan. Within Miyazu Bay lies Amanohashidate¹, ranked as one of the three most scenic views in Japan. The grand fire festival known as the Miyazu Toro Nagashi Fireworks Festival takes place in the bay on August 16 every year. MINATO Nanaka, a

staff member of The Miyazu Chamber of Commerce and Industry talked with us about the festival.

“Miyazu’s Toro Nagashi, or lantern-floating, dates back around 400 years. The event was originally held to see off ancestral spirits welcomed during Obon² by floating small offerings and candles out to sea. Exactly 100 years ago in 1924, fireworks were added to cel-



Photo: PIXTA

Amanohashidate faces the Sea of Japan on the Kyoto Prefecture side. It is characterized by beautiful pine forests and sandy beaches.

celebrate the opening of the railway, and the tradition has continued since then. In recent years, the event was canceled due to COVID-19 but resumed in 2023 after a four-year break, drawing approximately 75,000 attendees.”

Toro Nagashi is characterized by floating both boat-shaped lanterns called *seireisen*, adorned in various colors, and box-shaped lanterns decorated in red and white (see photo). Families experiencing their first Obon after a loved one’s passing prepare and decorate *seireisen* in a vibrant and elaborate manner. It is believed that by floating boats lit with fire, the souls of ancestors are sent to paradise. The box-shaped lanterns are also referred to as *okkake-toro* (chasing lanterns) because they are floated downstream as if following the lantern boats.

“By around 7pm, as the sky retains some daylight, we launch the *seireisen* boats followed by fire-lit lanterns into the sea. As the sun sets, around 10,000 red and white lanterns light up the entire Miyazu Bay. The *seireisen* boats, also lit on the water, gradually catch fire due to the motion of the waves and other factors, slowly burning away. Around this moment, the night sky bursts with approximately 3,000 varied fireworks launched both individually and in synchronized displays, reaching the climax of the fireworks festival,” explains MINATO.

“Local residents make the red and white lanterns by hand each year. The Miyazu Toro Nagashi Fireworks Festival is a cherished event which we strive to uphold and pass down as a precious tradition for our entire community.”

During the day, visitors explore Amanohashidate. At night, they witness the emotional spectacle of thousands of red and white lanterns being lit and floated in the ocean—a tribute and prayer for the souls of the departed that occurs but once a year in summer. The event comes to the climax with a magnificent fireworks display filling the night sky over Miyazu Bay. The day promises an unforgettable experience and visiting Miyazu is highly recommended. 🗨️

1. Amanohashidate is a sandspit approximately 20 to 170 meters wide and 3.6 kilometers long, adorned with approximately 6,700 pine trees. Its appearance resembles a bridge floating in the sky, which is the essence of its name ‘Amanohashidate’ in Japanese.
2. In Japanese folklore, Obon is a traditional event where it is believed that the spirits of deceased ancestors return to the mortal world periodically and are subsequently sent off again to their own world. This custom has taken root in various regions.



Photo: PIXTA

In 2023, 33 pairs of *seireisen* boats were floated, with each one set alight on the sea.



Photo: PIXTA

Both *seireisen* boats and red-and-white lanterns sway on the waves, gradually catching light and burning.



Photo: The Miyazu Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Lanterns light up the sea surface as fireworks explode in the night sky.

Elegant Boat Ritual Featuring Traditional Music Performed on the Sea

A ritual that replicates the graceful boating traditions of ancient nobility takes place at Itsukushima Shrine in Hatsukaichi City, Hiroshima Prefecture. (Text: TANAKA Nozomi)



Photo: SHINTANI Koichi

A scene from the Kangensai Festival: a gorgeously decorated *goza-bune* (center) sails through the Seto Inland Sea accompanied by three smaller boats.

Itsukushima Shrine, registered as a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage site in 1996, is located on the island of Itsukushima in Hatsukaichi City, Hiroshima Prefecture. The island, floating in Hiroshima Bay in the western part of the Seto Inland Sea, is more popularly known as ‘Miyajima,’ literally ‘shrine island.’

In the lush green forests of Itsukushima, which extend to the coastline, historical wooden structures lining toward the sea create an impressive landscape. The most splendid ritual at Itsukushima Shrine is the *Kangensai*. In the 10th to 11th centuries, in the capital at the time, Kyoto, nobles would float boats on ponds

and rivers, playing musical instruments in a leisure activity known as *kangen*¹. This occurred more than 800 years ago. Taira no Kiyomori², who oversaw the construction of Itsukushima Shrine, began conducting the *Kangensai* ritual to please the gods, adapting this pastime. The event is held annually on the 17th day of the sixth month according to Japan’s old luni-solar calendar, which in 2024 falls on July 22. It takes place from evening until late at night, illuminated by moonlight, where boats glide back and forth on the sea while musicians play *kangen* music. It is a sight of great elegance and beauty, reminiscent of ancient imperial court rituals being recreated.



Photo: SHINTANI Koichi

Passing under the grand torii gate, the *goza-bune* makes its return.



Photo: SHINTANI Koichi

The *goza-bune* arrives at the narrow space (*masugata*) surrounded by corridors of Itsukushima Shrine and rotates three times.



Photo: PKYA

Japanese lanterns, or *Chochin*, prepared to welcome the boats at Nagahama Shrine

We spoke with SUZUKI Naotomo from the Miyajima Tourist Association about the Kangensai Festival. “During the Kangensai Festival, a portable shrine (*mikoshi*) said to carry the gods of Itsukushima is placed on a ceremonial boat called a *goza-bune*, which is towed by three smaller boats. Onboard are musicians playing traditional *kangen* music while circling Itsukushima Shrine and its surrounding auxiliary shrines³,” explains SUZUKI.

“Departing from Itsukushima Shrine in the evening, the *goza-bune* boat with three smaller boats visit several auxiliary shrines, including Nagahama Shrine, before returning. At around 11pm, they pass through the O-torii, a grand torii gate standing approximately 160 meters offshore from the shrine’s main hall. The highlight of the festival is when each boat circles three times when arriving and departing from the shrine. The most impressive scene occurs during the final return to Itsukushima Shrine, where the ceremonial boat circles closely along the corridor of the shrine’s hall in the narrow *masugata*⁴, accompanied by *kangen* music. This powerful spectacle reaches its climax with hand clapping and cheers from visitors. After completing this ritual, the gods return to the main hall, concluding the festival.”

The Kangensai Festival attracts around 10,000 visitors annually, including tourists to Itsukushima. Many

visitors come from overseas as well.

“At Nagahama Shrine, where the ceremonial boat circles, there are events such as welcoming the boats with Japanese lanterns called *Chochin*⁵ and opportunities for reserved boat rides alongside the ceremonial one. These activities offer participants a more immersive experience of the festival,” explains SUZUKI, while sharing ways to enjoy the event.


This grand and elegant summer ritual unfolding on the Seto Inland Sea until late at night is truly a spectacle. For those who have the opportunity, it is well worth experiencing it firsthand. 



Photo: SHINTANI Koichi

The O-torii gate, repaired in 2022, stands in the sea at a height of 16.6 meters.

1. *Kangen* is a style of *Gagaku* music, a traditional form of Japanese court music that includes purely instrumental ensemble performances known as *kangen*. *Gagaku* has been passed down since ancient times, incorporating Japan’s own songs such as *kagura-uta*, and blending elements of ancient music and dance from various Asian mainland countries from around the 5th century, influenced by the introduction of Buddhist culture from China and the Korean Peninsula. Traditional instruments used include the *sho*, *hichiriki*, flutes, and other wind instruments, the *koto*, *biwa* and other string instruments, as well as the *kakko* and *taiko* drums, among others.
2. Born in 1118 and died in 1181, this military commander established a warrior government at the end of the 12th century. He was the first samurai to be appointed as the Grand Minister of State, the head of Dajokan, the Grand Council of State, equivalent to today’s Cabinet.
3. Shrines within a shrine complex, associated with the main shrine, dedicated to gods closely connected with the enshrined deity.
4. A square area surrounded by the corridors of the shrine. In 2024, due to repairs on the corridors, scaffolding has been set up, and the boats will circle in a different location.
5. A lighting fixture that uses thin bamboo or wooden frames covered with paper, with candles placed inside for illumination.

A Mikoshi Crosses the Sea with Prayers for A Good Catch and Safety at Sea

Yamaguchi Prefecture is located at the westernmost tip of Japan's main island of Honshu. Surrounded by sea on three sides, it is characterized by its abundant nature and mild climate. Sukumo Island in Shunan City, situated in the southeastern part of the prefecture, has a festival in which a *mikoshi*¹ (portable shrine) is carried across the sea. We interviewed a person in charge of this festival at the Sukumojima City Center. (Text: TANAKA Nozomi)

Sukumo Island is at the tip of the Oshima Peninsula in Shunan City. This island is the birthplace of longline fishing for pufferfish (*haenawa ryo*²) and is known for a rite in which a *mikoshi* portable shrine is carried across the sea as a part of the summer festival at Kifune Shrine³, which is located at the northern tip of the island. The island has a circumference of 3.7 km, and only about 250 people reside there. However, the festival, which is held every year on a late-July or early-August Sunday, teems with tourists in the summer.

TAKAMATSU Marina, a staff of the Sukumojima City Center says, "The details of this festival's origin of Kifune Shrine on Sukumo Island are not clear, but the story handed down says that the festival began as

a summer festival of Kifune Shrine about 300 years ago, when the fishing industry was thriving, to pray for good catches and safety at sea. The current practice of *mikoshi* crossing the sea accompanied by boats was adopted about 150 years ago. This was said to have been done at the suggestion of a local shipping company. About 40 men dressed in white, who have purified themselves, carry the roughly 600 kg *mikoshi* from Kifune Shrine into the sea shouting "*chosayoi*"⁴ and then swim and carry up it across about 500 meters to the opposite shore. The crossing takes about one hour.

Another highlight of the festival, TAKAMATSU explains, is the small *tenmasen* boat that guides the *mikoshi*. "At the bow of the boat is a dancer holding a bundle of colored paper called a *bonden*, and at the

Swimmers carry up a 600 kg *mikoshi* (portable shrine) across the sea, all while keeping it afloat.





Photo: Sukumojima City Center

Left: A dancer at the bow of the *tenmasen* boat

Right: The *tenmasen* boat that leads the *mikoshi* has dancers and 16 rowers.

stern are two dancers who hold oars about 1 m long as they dance. It is said that these dancers and their calls of *hohran'ei* serve to lead the *mikoshi* carrying the spirits of the deities in a resplendent way, inspiring the 16 rowers."

The island's dwindling population has caused concern in recent years, but after the main *mikoshi* ceremony, you can also see a children's *mikoshi* carried by children, who are expected to carry the main *mikoshi* someday, or to be the future rowers of the *tenmasen* boat.

TAKAMATSU ended with some tips for visiting tourists on how to enjoy the festival. "On the day of the festival, islanders gather from their homes wearing in festival attire. On your visit, taking a commemorative photo with them will make a nice memory for you while also encouraging the islanders to continue the festival and look forward to more such interactions. The summer festival at Kifune Shrine has been passed


down on the island through the generations. It is an important part of our culture, and our heartfelt wish is to again pass it on to the next generation." 



Photo: PKTA

Pufferfish is a specialty of Sukumo Island. The island's fishermen devised *haenawa ryō*, a method of longline fishing that allows them to catch pufferfish without damaging them.

1. A portable shrine in which the sacred object of worship of a god is placed and carried during festivals. It is said that the spirit of the deity, which usually resides in a shrine, temporarily rests in the *mikoshi* when it goes outside of the shrine.
2. A fishing method in which a number of ropes with hooks are attached to a single long trunk rope and set in a certain depth of water. The sharp teeth of the pufferfish can chew through the rope, so the Sukumo Island fishermen devised a longline fishing method (called *haenawa ryō*) that uses steel wire. This became popular as a fishing method that can be used to harvest fresh pufferfish without damaging them.
3. Kifune Shrine is one of the shrines that enshrines the god of water, the source of life for all things. There are 2,000 such shrines in Japan.
4. A meaningless shout that is made when moving heavy objects.

The festival is held from the end of July to the beginning of August.



Photo: Sukumojima City Center

FEATURES



The view of Oshima Strait from Amami Oshima overlooking Kakeroma Island. This strait serves as the stage for the sea kayak race.

Sea Kayak Race Speeding Through Southern Island Seas

Every summer, a sea kayak competition is held with Amami Oshima Island in Kagoshima Prefecture as its starting and ending point. It is said to be the largest event of its kind in Japan, attracting numerous participants from across the country. We spoke with the organizers of this event.

(Text: TANAKA Nozomi)

Kagoshima Prefecture, located in the southernmost part of Japan's Kyushu region, is a prefecture with 28¹ inhabited islands of various sizes, making it one of Japan's foremost remote island prefectures. The largest of these islands is Amami Oshima. Located approximately 380 kilometers south of Kagoshima City in the open sea, it is the fifth largest island among Japan's remote islands². Positioned approximately midway between



Participants of the sea kayak race starting from Koniya Port in Amami Oshima, swiftly paddling away.



Photo: Setouchi Town

Left: Immediately after the start, boats are packed together, crossing the strait.

Right: Race participants navigating the designated landing points of the sea kayak race receive warm cheers from the residents.

Kagoshima Prefecture and Okinawa Prefecture, this island features a warm and humid subtropical maritime climate year-round. As a result, it is endowed with rich natural landscapes and scenic spots, including pristine mangrove forests³.

Every July, the Amami Sea Kayak Marathon Race in Kakeroma is held between Amami Oshima Island and its neighboring island, Kakeroma. The race is conducted using sea kayaks⁴, a type of canoe designed for enjoying the sea. Kakeroma Island is a nearby island, approximately a 15-minute ferry ride from Koniya Port, located at the southern tip of Amami Oshima Island. The race is said to be the largest of its kind in Japan. We spoke with the Setouchi Town Fisheries Tourism Division, the organizers, to learn about the event.

“The course is set in the Oshima Strait between the southernmost coast of Amami Oshima Island and Kakeroma Island, where participants navigate in sea kayaks to compete based on their times. Starting from Koniya Port on Amami Oshima Island, the course includes landing at two beaches on Kakeroma Island and passing through Tawarako Island, covering approximately 33 kilometers round-trip back to Koniya Port. The race follows a rule where participants visit three designated landing checkpoints along the course. At each checkpoint, locals offer refreshments, fostering enjoyable interactions between participants and local residents. In addition, there is a half-course option of approximately 20 kilometers that bypasses the Tawarako Island checkpoint. In 2023, 360 participants from across the country took part. This year, the event is scheduled to take place over two days, July 6 and 7, 2024.”

In recent years, it has been reported that between 200 to 250 kayaks, involving 350 to 400 people, regularly take part in the race. Many participants are known to participate without fail each year. Riding on sea kayaks allows participants to appreciate up

close the beautiful sea of Amami with its expansive coral reefs and the majestic nature of Kakeroma Island. This closeness to nature is a significant attraction. Repeat participants from afar often express that the event offers a sense of accomplishment akin to a marathon at sea. They also savor the taste of *onigiri* (rice balls) prepared by local residents, making the race about more than just competing for time; it's also about enjoying interactions with islanders when landing.

There are currently no participants from overseas in the race, but they say entry would be possible with proper preparation. Of course, visiting the island just to watch the race, cheering alongside the islanders at landing points, and enjoying the blue sea and beautiful beaches, would also be enjoyable. Try and visit Amami Oshima Island at least once during the summer when the sea kayak competition is held and experience the allure of the southern Japanese island seas. 📌



One of the landing points, Surihama Beach in Kakeroma Island, boasts a beautiful beach with white sand.



At the post-race festival, in addition to the awards ceremony, there are performances by musicians, providing everyone with a chance to unwind and celebrate.

Photo: PIXTA

Photo: Setouchi Town

1. Source: <https://www.pref.kagoshima.jp/ac07/pr/shima/gaiyo/pamph2022.html> (Japanese only).
2. Based on measurements from Japan's electronic national basic land maps issued by the Geospatial Information Authority as of April 1, 2023.
3. A collective term for plant communities and forests that grow in areas where freshwater and seawater mix in tropical and subtropical regions.
4. A type of canoe used for enjoying the sea. Unlike traditional canoes, it has a deck covering most of the boat except for the seating area, making it less likely for water to enter the boat even when waves come, thus providing excellent stability and straight-line performance.



Photo: World Cosplay Culture Promotion Association

Participants in the Cosplay for Zero Marine Litter Campaign held in Yokohama in September 2023

Working Towards Zero Marine Litter While Enjoying Cosplay

Marine litter continues to increase worldwide¹. In Japan, various activities are being conducted for reducing marine litter, which is damaging the global environment. We spoke with the organizer of a unique event where participants engage in cleanup activities while enjoying cosplay. (Text: TANAKA Nozomi)



Photo: World Cosplay Cultural Development Association

Participants dressed as popular manga and anime characters at the Cosplay for Zero Marine Litter Campaign held in Fukuoka City in June 2024



Photo: World Cosplay Cultural Development Association

Participants dressed as popular manga and anime characters pick up litter in the streets during the 2024 Cosplay for Zero Marine Litter Campaign.

TAKEYARI Kyohei, from the World Cosplay Cultural Development Association, which aims to revitalize regions through cosplay culture, explains, “Among cosplayers² who immerse themselves in characters from manga, anime, games, and more, many take the lead in picking up litter to ensure they don’t pollute locations used for photography for their own social media posts. We collaborate with cosplayers who have such high environmental awareness and social media influence to actively engage in reducing marine litter.”

In Japan, since 2019, The Nippon Foundation³ and the Ministry of the Environment have jointly established Zero Marine Litter Week, during which nationwide cleanup activities are promoted twice a year, in spring and autumn. In 2024, Zero Marine Litter Week is scheduled from May 30 to June 9, and again from September 20 to 29. Many organizations participate in these weeks, including groups like TAKEYARI’s organization, which conducts an event called ‘Cosplay for Zero Marine Litter Campaign’ and operates it as the organizing committee. In 2024, the event was held in Fukuoka City on June 1. Approximately 400 cosplayers from across the country gathered in the bustling streets of Fukuoka, collecting around 90 liters of trash, equivalent to about 19 bags.

“In fact, about 80% of marine litter flows into the ocean from land through rivers. That’s why we not only focus on coastal areas but also actively engage in organizing litter-picking events in urban areas. For the Cosplay for Zero Marine Litter Campaign in Fukuoka City, a pioneering initiative took place with simultaneous cleanup events held in Busan, South Korea, and Cebu Island in the Philippines. Participants from each location connected and interacted via online streaming. In recent years, along the coast of Fukuoka Prefecture, marine litter has been increasingly drifting in

from overseas. So, we have not only limited our efforts to Japan but also reached out to neighboring countries to encourage their participation,” explains TAKEYARI. Participants expressed joy in connecting with overseas cosplayers through litter picking and voiced hopes for the broader expansion of combining cosplay with cleanup efforts.

In addition to the Cosplay for Zero Marine Litter Campaign, there is another event related to Zero Marine Litter Week called Blue Santa⁴, which aims to enhance environmental awareness and express gratitude to the ocean on Marine Day⁵ in July. TAKEYARI’s committee collaborates with overseas cosplayers to organize the event, Cosplay de UMI-GOMI ZERO feat. BLUE SANTA, combining Blue Santa and the Cosplay for Zero Marine Litter Campaign. This event is also held internationally, and involves cosplayers dressed in blue attire, known as ‘Blue Santas,’ picking up marine litter with the aim of presenting clean seas as a gift to children.

“Moving forward, I want to continue our efforts to leave behind rich and beautiful seas for the next generation, while also promoting cosplay culture,” says TAKEYARI.

The world is interconnected by the oceans. Cooperation on a global scale is essential to ensure that future generations inherit beautiful seas. Japan’s cosplay culture plays a role in uniting these thoughts and actions. **■**



Cosplay de UMI-GOMI ZERO feat. BLUE SANTA in Indonesia. The event is held at Christmas time overseas.

Photo: World Cosplay Cultural Development Association



At the event venue where the opening ceremony and other activities were held, participants interacted online with the Cebu Island venue in the Philippines, which was held simultaneously.

Photo: World Cosplay Cultural Development Association



Picking up marine litter in Busan, South Korea

Photo: World Cosplay Cultural Development Association

1. Marine litter refers to the collective term for washed-up litter on coastlines, drifting litter on the sea surface and underwater, and litter accumulated on the seabed. The majority of this litter is plastic. According to the Ministry of the Environment, at least eight million tons of plastic waste flow into the ocean every year globally, adversely affecting marine life and causing severe environmental issues.
2. Cosplay refers to the practice of dressing up as characters from manga, anime, games, and other media for fun. People who engage in cosplay are called cosplayers.
3. A public interest incorporated foundation that engages in social contribution activities by collaborating with people from various backgrounds, regardless of race or nationality. It was established as a foundation in 1962.
4. In Japan’s Blue Santa event, general participants wear blue clothing and pick up litter. In 2023, the main venue was Enoshima in Fujisawa City, Kanagawa Prefecture, where approximately 2,000 people took part.
5. A Japanese national holiday observed annually on the third Monday of July to express gratitude for the blessings of the sea.



Photo:PIXTA

New Japanese Regulations Start for Businesses Selling Overseas and Children’s Products: Aiming for Better Product Safety

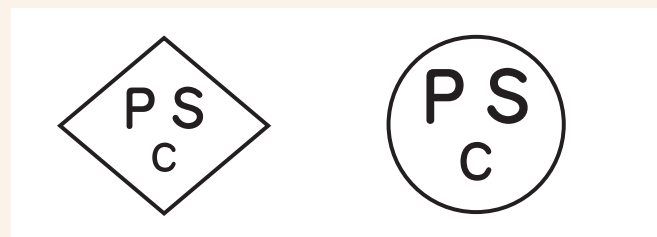
The market for online shops and other e-commerce (EC) sites conducting Internet transactions has continued to expand in recent years, and consumers are increasingly purchasing products directly from overseas businesses through online malls that serve as networks of multiple online shops. There has also been an increase in the number of accidents caused by overseas products that are not sufficiently safe. Given these circumstances, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) plans to ensure the safety of overseas products by partially amending the Consumer Product Safety Act and the rest of the Four Product Safety Acts¹ to introduce new regulations on overseas business operators, including requiring the appointment of domestic supervisor who is legally responsible for these products sold in Japan. The Government of Japan aims for these amendments to go into effect by the end of 2025.

Expanding the EC Market, Clarifying Responsibility

With the proliferation of personal computers and smartphones, the Internet has become an extremely familiar shopping channel for many consumers. Due in part to the COVID pandemic, the B-to-C EC market² reached nearly 14 trillion yen in 2022. More than double the figure of 10 years ago, the shift to EC³ for the sale of goods has grown significantly, from 3.85% of sales in 2013 to 9.13% in 2022⁴. In addition to the conventional structure of an importer or distributor acting as intermediary between overseas business and consumer, a new business model has emerged by which overseas businesses sell products directly to consumers through online mall-like digital platforms for shopping (DPF). As a low-cost, easy to use business model, this new structure is expected to expand even further in the future. However, many of these overseas businesses do not operate offices in Japan, and the question of who has legal responsibility for the safety of these products has been unclear. To address these issues, the Four Product Safety Acts will be partially amended with the goal of achieving the following: (1) clarifying that overseas businesses have legal responsibility when selling products directly to consumers through DPF and other means and requiring these businesses to appoint a representative located in Japan

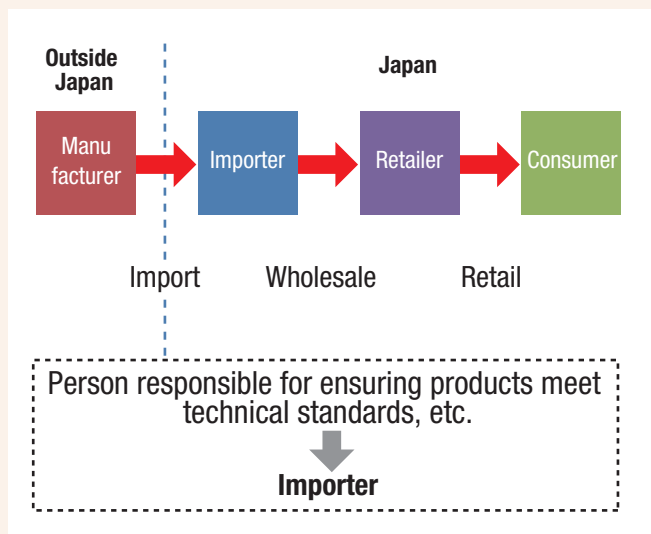
(domestic supervisor); (2) allowing for requests that DPF remove products that do not meet safety standards from the marketplace; (3) publicly disclosing the names and other information of business operators submitting notification, domestic supervisors; and (4) publicly disclosing the names of business operators that have violated laws, regulations, and standards.

These amendments are expected to help create a safer environment for consumers using overseas products.

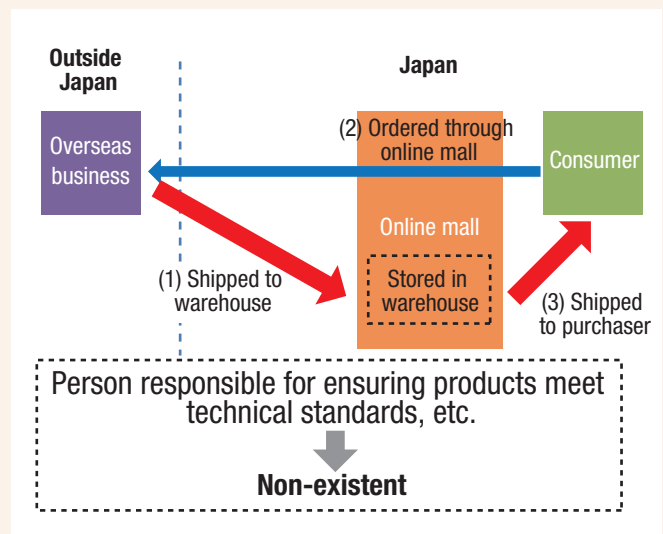


The amendments pertain to businesses that intend to bring into Japan, distribute, and/or sell 493 items (as of June 2024), including electrical products and gas appliances, which are designated by the Four Product Safety Acts as products that may cause harm (products requiring Product Safety marks).

Previous Import Business Model



Recent Business Model



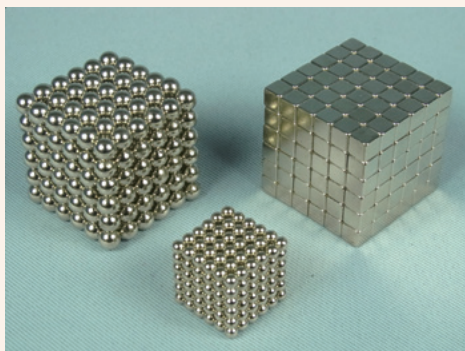
With conventional transactions, the importer is legally responsible for such matters as ensuring that products meet the technical standards stipulated by the Government of Japan. With the direct transactions through online malls in recent years, however, this responsibility is not clearly defined in some cases, as when no one located in Japan has been appointed as legally responsible.

Figures: Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry

Regulating Children's Products

Amending the Consumer Product Safety Act will also establish regulations on toys and other products for children to ensure greater safety. To date, Japan's toy safety regulations have been limited to certain designated products, with no mechanism for preventing the distribution in Japan of certain toys, even those banned in other countries. However, the amended law will create a "specified products for children" category that is subject to regulation. Manufacturers and importers of products in this category specified separately by cabinet ordinance will be required to meet the technical standards stipulated by the Government

of Japan, as well as to indicate the product's intended age range and precautions for use. Products that do not comply with this mandatory labelling will not be able to be sold in Japan. However, the government plans to establish a special exception to allow the sale of used products that do not have packaging and for which the labeling cannot be verified, provided that the seller has a system in place to ensure product safety. In addition, sales of products in the "specified products for children" category manufactured or imported before the amendment takes effect will be permitted for an unrestricted amount of time.



The magnet set (left) and water-inflatable ball (right) will be subject to regulation from May 2023 under the amended Consumer Product Safety Act. Sales of both products are currently restricted due to the risk of internal organ damage and other serious health problems that can result from accidental ingestion.

Photos: National Consumer Affairs Center of Japan

1. These four laws — the Consumer Product Safety Act, the Electrical Appliances and Materials Safety Act, the Gas Business Act, and the Act on the Securing of Safety and the Optimization of Transaction of Liquefied Petroleum Gas — designate products that may cause harm to consumers and require manufacturers and importers to meet the technical standards stipulated by the Government of Japan.

2. Internet-based transaction marketplace where businesses sell directly to consumers

3. Proportion of e-commerce market to total commercial transaction market size

4. Market size is determined based on surveys of publicly available information and interviews with industry association representatives and businesspeople.

Source: Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry "2022 Digital Transaction Environment Improvement Project" (e-commerce market research)

For more information on the partial amendments, visit the URL below.

<https://www.meti.go.jp/english/policy/economy/consumer/index.html>

TRANSPARENT SCREEN FILM ENABLES IMAGE PROJECTION WITH SIMPLE APPLICATION TO GLASS WINDOWS



Daytime view from the observation deck of the Abeno Harukas facilities in Osaka City and integration of image projection after dark with the actual nighttime scenery (bottom right). The large glass windows, to which Kaleido Screen® has been applied, feature high transparency, allowing visitors to enjoy clear views out over Osaka.

Photo: NISHIMURA Suzushi, Tokyo Institute of Technology

Clear images can now be projected onto transparent glass windows, which light would ordinarily pass straight through. This advance has been made possible with light scattering¹ technology using nanodiamond particles. The technology was developed in an industry-academia collaboration project involving a university and private companies. Enabling practical use as a transparent screen, it offers an expanded range of applications, including projection mapping and digital signage on glass windows.

FUKUDA Mitsuhiro

Repeated attempts have previously been made to project images onto transparent sheets of glass or acrylic plates. However, since these surfaces are transparent, light typically passes straight through them. In order to project images onto such surfaces, the light must be made to scatter rather than pass straight through when it hits the glass. It was a research team led by TOKITA Masatoshi, professor at the Tokyo Institute of Technology, and NISHIMURA Suzushi, specially appointed professor at the same university, that

eventually succeeded in solving this dilemma. They began working on the difficult challenge in 2009, drawing on previous research they had done on nano² structural design.

Their work was conducted as part of the Strategic Promotion of Innovative Research and Development Program (S-Innovation), an initiative of the Japan Science and Technology Agency (JST), on the theme of “Developing New Device Technologies Through Polymer Nano Orientation Control.” S-Innovation was founded with the aim of supporting large-scale, innovative technological research through industry-academia collaboration. For this project,

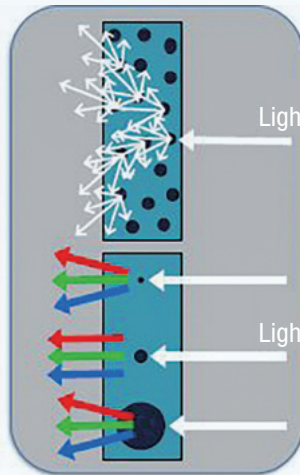
the Tokyo Institute of Technology served as the research leader and the ENEOS Corporation as the development leader. With the success of this technological development, professor TOKITA and specially appointed professor NISHIMURA were honored with the Award for Science and Technology (Development Category) for fiscal 2024 by the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) for their work on transparent screen development.

A key to their successful transparent screen development was “nanodiamond” material introduced by Vision Development Co., Ltd., a company that participated in



Cherry blossoms viewed through transparent screen film. They appear almost identical to parts of the blossoms not viewed through the film

Photo: NISHIMURA Suzushi, Tokyo Institute of Technology



When making the thin film, nanodiamond particles are mixed into polyvinyl alcohol (PVA). Differences in the particles' sizes affect the way the light is scattered, changing the way colors appear. If the particle concentration is too high, the film does not maintain transparency, becoming cloudy and white.

Figure: NISHIMURA Suzushi, Tokyo Institute of Technology

the project. Nanodiamond is a type of carbon material, a form of artificial diamond produced by shock waves created by gunpowder explosions in airtight containers. They are extremely tiny, with particle diameters as small as about 5 nanometers. They have the same crystal structure as diamonds and are characterized by a high degree of hardness and high refractive index of light. Although it is generally difficult to disperse nanoparticles in a suitable manner, nanodiamond particles created with this method have the property of easily dispersing in water. Not only that, they disperse uniformly.

To create a thin film, nanodiamond particles are dispersed in polyvinyl alcohol³ (PVA), the base material of the film, in very low concentrations. If the particle concentration is too high, the film will become cloudy and white, lowering the degree of transparency. On the other hand, if it is too low, its light-scattering effectiveness is negatively affected, making it unsuitable for showing projecting images. Also, even extremely minor differences in the sizes of particles will affect the way the light is

scattered, changing the way colors appear. After conducting processes of trial and error, changing the size and concentration of nanodiamond particles in the film, the team succeeded in establishing technology capable of showing projected images with colors that appear natural to the human eye, even while maintaining a high degree of transparency.

A film called Kaleido Screen^{®4}, which can be applied to window glass, was then developed based on this technology. It caught the attention of video artists as a highly transparent film with the potential to transform glass surfaces into video displays and has been adopted at art events using large-scale projection mapping.

The transparent screens main-

tain views of city scenery through clear glass during the daytime, while also allowing visitors to later enjoy beautiful video projections matched to the nighttime scenery. Currently, the screens have been adopted in locations including the Tokyo Tower and Shibuya Hikarie facilities in Tokyo, observation and commercial facilities including Abeno Harukas in Osaka City, public facilities such as the Saga Prefectural Office, sports events, shops, and more, where they help attract visitors. The screens will undoubtedly be made use of in many more places in the future to create welcome signboard images for office buildings and provide digital signage projecting advertisements, announcements, and more.



Kaleido Screen[®] is applied to the windows of Tokyo Tower's observation deck for a projection mapping event. The projection mapping event "TOKYO TOWER CITY LIGHT FANTASIA –Summer Landscape 2024" will run through September 1, featuring images of beautiful fireworks, falling stars, and more against the nighttime scenery of Tokyo.

Photo: ©TOKYO TOWER

1. The diffusion of light in various directions when it hits physical media. Light that can be seen with the human eye is known as visible light. While the color of visible light is determined by wavelengths, if the balance of scattering in the wavelengths is poor, the colors will not have an attractive appearance.
2. "Nano" is a prefix meaning "one billionth." One nanometer (nm) is one billionth of a meter. Technology related to the research and development of extremely small materials is called nanotechnology.
3. A type of synthetic resin. It is used in liquid glues and adhesives, as well as in making textiles, fibers, and films.
4. A registered trademark of the ENEOS Corporation, a company that participated in the project.



Expert Tips for Enjoying Japan: The Gourmet Edition

Hiroshima-style *okonomiyaki*

Photo: ISHIZAWA Yoji

Photography cooperation: Micchan Souhonten Shimbashi

Kaaisan is a Kyoto-based creator who promotes Japanese culture in English day-by-day. In this month's issue, Kaaisan talks about Japanese cuisine.

Kaaisan

“I had Hiroshima-style *okonomiyaki* in Hiroshima, so I want to try Kansai¹-style *okonomiyaki*² in Kyoto to compare!” These words came up in a conversation I had recently with an Indian tourist visiting Japan. Although Japan is not a very large country, there are many regional differences, and the uniqueness of each region is reflected in local versions of the same types of dishes. In this issue, I will introduce some representative dishes. If you are a food connoisseur or are considering another trip to Japan, why not try to enjoy Japan as a seasoned gourmet would by comparing foods from different regions of the country?

Okonomiyaki

O*konomiyaki*, which I mentioned at the beginning of this article, is one of the most popular dishes among tourists visiting Japan from overseas. In fact, there are two main types of *okonomiyaki*. Both

types share the same flour batter and ingredients such as cabbage, pork or seafood, etc. However, the cooking method is different. For the Kansai-style *okonomiyaki*, all the ingredients are mixed before grilling. Hiroshima-style *okonomiyaki*, on the other hand, is prepared by piling each ingredient on top of the other and grilling, with thinly sliced cabbage and usually noodles. I recommend trying both styles.

Ramen

R*amen*, which is enjoying growing popularity around the world, is another type of dish with diverse characteristics that vary from region to region and restaurant to restaurant. *Tonkotsu* (pork bone broth) *ramen*, mainly from the Hakata region of Kyushu³ is characterized by a strong aroma and thin noodles; *miso ramen* from Sapporo in Hokkaido⁴ is made with thick noodles topped with corn and other vegetables; and soy sauce-based *ramen* from Tokyo is a classic noodle dish that has



Kansai-style *okonomiyaki*

Photo: ISHIZAWA Yoji

Photography cooperation: BOTEJYU

been beloved over the years for its simplicity.

It is said that there are about 200 varieties of *ramen* including light salt-based *ramen*, *ramen* with seafood-based broth, and various regional specialties, etc. In addition, local *ramen* varieties are often sold in packaged kits that can be prepared at home. These kits make great souvenirs.

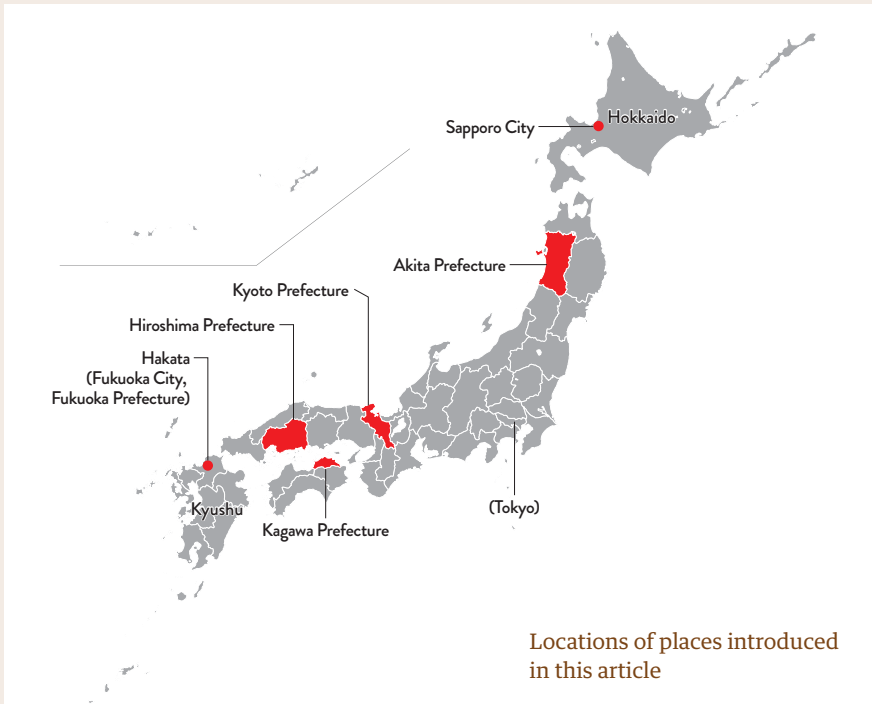
Udon

Made from wheat-based noodles and a broth called *dashi* or *tsuyu*, depending on the



Kaaisan

Creator of English-language short film introductions to Japan. She manages an online community for like-minded people interested in Japanese culture and worldview to meet and learn together. She also plans and organizes various events on an irregular basis.



Locations of places introduced in this article

region, with meat, vegetables, or other toppings, *udon* is a deceptively simple dish, but in fact there are reportedly more than 30 varieties of *udon*. The Sanuki Udon of Kagawa Prefecture is famous throughout Japan. It is characterized by its firm noodles with a chewy texture. Kagawa Prefecture is so renowned for its *udon* noodles that it has promoted itself as “The Udon Prefecture.” Next in popularity is the Inaniwa Udon from Akita Prefecture. It is characterized by its thin, flat noodles and is favored for its light, simple flavor. There are many other types of *udon*, so try to find the one you like best.

Japan has a strong artisanal national character, so Japan is home to a large number of restaurants specializing in a

particular type of cuisine, with each restaurant striving to be the best. Visitors should take advantage of opportunities to travel around the country and enjoy the unique styles and flavors of each region and restaurant.



Sanuki Udon

Photo: ISHIZAWA Yoji
Photography cooperation: Tokyo Mentsudan



Hakata Ramen

Photo: ISHIZAWA Yoji
Photography cooperation: ICHIRYU



Sapporo Ramen

Photo: ISHIZAWA Yoji
Photography cooperation: Ramen Kaede



Inaniwa Udon

Photo: PIXTA

1. The area roughly around Kyoto, Osaka, Kobe, and their neighboring prefectures
2. A dish consisting of flour-based batter, cabbage, and other ingredients such as pork or seafood, grilled on a hot plate and served with sauce or mayonnaise
3. The area is the southwestern part of the four main islands of Japan, including Fukuoka.
4. Japan's northernmost island, surrounded by the Pacific Ocean, the Sea of Japan, and the Sea of Okhotsk



The kimono is a traditional Japanese clothing item important in *Rakugo* as part of the professional costume. *Rakugo* storytellers typically wear shorter *haori* jackets decorated with family crests over ordinary (ankle-length *nagagi*) kimonos.

Photo: Katsura Fukuryu Office

What the Kimono and Japanese Accessories Mean to Me

KATSURA Fukuryu is a *Rakugo* storyteller originally from Canada who has lived in Japan for over 20 years now. Onstage in *Yose* *Rakugo* theaters, he plays the parts of a variety of characters in the traditional storytelling form, wearing a kimono and using accessories and props including *sensu* folding fans and *tenugui* hand towels. We asked him to share his thoughts on the special appeal of the kimono, Japanese accessories, and more, drawing on his extensive knowledge of traditional Japanese culture.

KATSURA Fukuryu

For *Rakugo* storytellers, the kimono is an important as part of the professional costume. When you become an apprentice to a professional *Rakugo* storyteller, you are first given thorough instruction by senior apprentices on how to properly wear and handle a kimono. This is not just about how to wear one yourself. It is also your job as an apprentice in training to fold the master's valuable kimonos. If you make even the slightest mistake in how you handle them, they will get very upset with you, so I did feel nervous at first.

Kimonos feature a wide range of designs and materials. Part of their

appeal is the way you can enjoy coordinating them with *obi* kimono belts. For me, I like pairing a kimono with a hat in different ways to take advantage of the fashion possibilities. Mixing Japanese and Western elements together can be fun.

For a lot of people from other countries, however, I think it can be challenging to learn to wear a kimono properly. With that in mind, I recommend the *yukata* for those who might be interested in a more approachable taste of Japanese culture. The *yukata* is a type of cotton kimono worn in the summertime, after bathing, and times like that. You might have seen one when staying at a *ryokan* inn. As light

and simple to wear as they are, I think they would be perfect as gifts and souvenirs from Japan. When you wear a *yukata*, I definitely recommend wearing *tabi* – traditional Japanese socks with split toes – rather than ordinary socks. While socks can have a feeling of tightness when you kneel on the floor *seiza* style, *tabi* are more comfortable, without that feeling of pressure.

A Japanese accessory I find particularly interesting is the *tenugui*, a long towel-like cloth made of cotton that is often used as a prop in *Rakugo*. *Rakugo* storytellers might treat them as letters or wallets in performances. In day-to-day life, they can be used for wiping one's hands, drying sweat, wrapping



KATSURA Fukuryu

He is a *Rakugo*¹ storyteller originally from Canada. In October 2016, he joined the KATSURA Fukudanji Ichimon (House), and became the 11th disciple of KATSURA Fukudanji. He is based in the Kansai region², and performs at Yose (*Rakugo* theaters) throughout Japan. With the goal of showing the charm of *Rakugo* to the world, he has appeared in shows in Las Vegas, San Francisco, and Hawaii in the United States, as well as in Canada and the Philippines.

 KATSURA Fukuryu

other accessories, and so on. Appealing aspects of *tenugui* include their practicality, of course, but also their colorful and varied designs. The way they not only give a sense of Japanese tradition, but can also be enjoyed for their artistic value, I feel like they would also be appreciated as souvenirs from Japan. I particularly love to use *tenugui* with tropical, southern island designs. Being born and raised in such a cold location as Winnipeg, Canada, the cultures of warm places like Okinawa tend to attract me.

For the same reason, I also really like *kariyushi* wear, which has come to be widespread as formal summer attire in Okinawa during the summer. You might think of it as the Okinawan version of the Hawaiian aloha shirt. The shirts have a relaxing feeling, and they feature such a diverse range of designs. I have been collecting them ever since I came to Japan. They are easy to incorporate into daily use, too. I really recommend them!

While we are on the theme of Japanese accessories, I would like to finish up by touching on some small furniture items we use in *Rakugo*. In *Kami-gata Rakugo*, a form of the performing art rooted in the Kansai region¹, there are a couple of small furniture items that *Rakugo* storytellers are responsible for providing on their own. One is a small desk called a *kendai*, and another is a board that hides the performer's knees from view, called a *hiza-kakushi*. While I had the ones I use specially made in foldable forms inexpensively, I learned recently that it can be quite expensive to have them made by craftsmen ordinarily. These are such valuable items, I plan to keep

using them with great care for years to come.

Japanese accessories are full of associations with Japanese traditions.

I think you can really appreciate their appealing aspects more deeply if you learn about their significance and the history behind them.



Colorful *tenugui* with tropical, southern island designs favored by KATSURA Fukuryu

Photo: Katsura Fukuryu Office



A set of Japanese accessories often used by KATSURA Fukuryu when he wears a kimono. He particularly recommends the split-toe *tabi* socks at bottom left for their comfortable, loose feel.

Photo: Katsura Fukuryu Office



The *kendai* (small desk) and *hiza-kakushi* (knee-concealing board) KATSURA Fukuryu uses in his *Rakugo* performances. The pieces' rare folding forms reveal the aesthetic sensibilities of Japanese craftsmen in the details of their constructions.

Photo: Katsura Fukuryu Office

1. The traditional Japanese storytelling art of *Rakugo* originated more than 400 years ago. For more information, please see this article in the May 2024 issue of "HIGHLIGHTING Japan."(=>https://www.gov-online.go.jp/hlj/en/may_2024/may_2024-11.html)

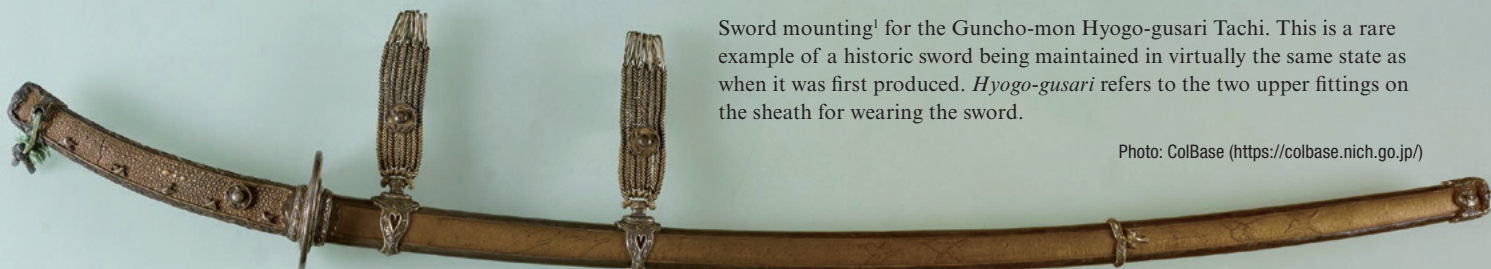
2. Kansai region: The area roughly around Kyoto, Osaka, Kobe, and their neighboring prefectures

The Long Sword ("Tachi"), Known as the "Uesugi Tachi"

— Guncho-mon Hyogo-gusari Tachi (Title: Uesugi Tachi) (Blade signature: Ichi)—



The famous Japanese sword, Guncho-mon Hyogo-gusari Tachi, also known as the "Uesugi Tachi." The handle at the left of the photo is inscribed with the character "一" (meaning "one").



Sword mounting¹ for the Guncho-mon Hyogo-gusari Tachi. This is a rare example of a historic sword being maintained in virtually the same state as when it was first produced. *Hyogo-gusari* refers to the two upper fittings on the sheath for wearing the sword.

Photo: ColBase (<https://colbase.nich.go.jp/>)

The Guncho-mon Hyogo-gusari Tachi, inscribed with the character "一" (*ichi*, meaning "one") on the blade, is also known as the "Uesugi Tachi." This another name derives from the fact that it was originally owned by the famed Uesugi samurai family and then donated by that family to Mishima Taisha Shrine, in Mishima City, Shizuoka Prefecture. Subsequently, the sword was presented by the shrine to the Meiji Emperor (the 122nd Emperor of Japan, who reigned from 1867 to 1912). It is currently housed in the collection of the Tokyo National Museum.

The sword is thought to have been crafted in the 13th century by the Fukuoka Ichimonji School of swordsmiths, which flourished in Bizen Province (currently southeast Okayama Prefecture). This *tachi* (long sword) exists as a valuable sword of its type remaining virtually unchanged since the time it was made. Its length is 76.1 cm and its warp, 3 cm. This is thought to be a rare existing example of a sword together with the exterior and mounting for the sword crafted together with it at the same time. Metal fittings on the sword, including the *saya*² (sheath/scabbard) and *tsuba*³ (guard) feature exquisite and skillfully represented designs of birds in flight.

1. External mountings for wearing the sword. Such sword fittings (*toso*) are also known as sword mountings (*toso-gu*). From left in the photograph below, one can see the *tsuka* (handle), *tsuba* (guard), *saya* (sheath/scabbard), and further detailed parts.
2. The sheath or scabbard for the blade.
3. A metal fitting in between the *saya* (sheath/scabbard) and blade.



Group of metal fittings crafted for this sword with three-dimensional forms, featuring the flock of flying bird decorations, the *guncho-mon*.

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