

niponica

Discovering Japan
2016

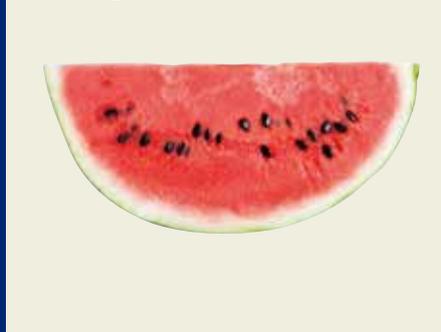
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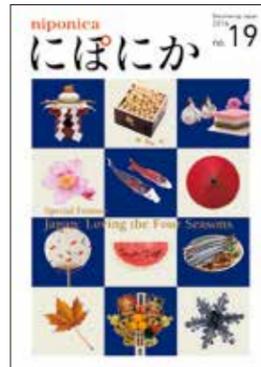


Special Feature

Japan: Loving the Four Seasons



niponica is published in Japanese and six other languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish), to introduce the world to the people and culture of Japan today. The title *niponica* is derived from "Nippon," the Japanese word for Japan.



Cover photos: Traditional events and other features of the four seasons are introduced from January to December. (Photos: amanaimages Inc., PIXTA)

Special Feature

Japan: Loving the Four Seasons

Japan is a land rich in natural beauty and blessed with four distinct seasons. Since ancient times, its people have been sensitive to the changing seasons and worshiped nature's gifts.
 Come journey with us through Japan to discover a land with undying love for the four seasons.

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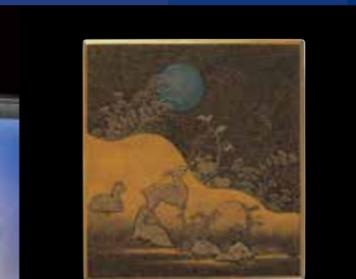
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Photo: Aflo



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Changing Seasons

Photos by Tanji Yasutaka

Spring is the season of beginnings. School, company, and fiscal years all begin from April in Japan. New life sprouts forth from the earth in this green season, when flowers bloom and the earth overflows with fresh beginnings. It is a loving time when everyone is joyous.



Reeling Under the Moon

Spring

From the time of the *Man'yōshū*, Japan's oldest poetry anthology, cherry blossoms have been a key cultural touchstone. Even today, viewing parties under the boughs remain a vital seasonal custom, and the mystic appearance of night blooms and the ephemeral sense of fallen blossoms are still greatly esteemed. Japanese have a unique sensitivity about cherry blossoms.



Autumn

Autumn broadcasts its fiery hues across a huge variety of plants and trees, such as bright red maple and golden yellow ginkgo. Colors mix and unfold to create lively scenes from the season's rich palette, each unique. Since time immemorial, Japanese have been drawn by red maples to journey out to mountains and fields for viewing the autumn leaves.

Dancing Among Colors



Prancing on Snow

As winter nears, word of the arrival of cranes spreads across Japan. They wing their way to Japan to winter here and in spring return to their breeding grounds. Of old, Japanese have loved the sight of noble-looking cranes prancing on snow. The scientific name for the beloved red-crowned crane is *Grus japonensis*, which means "crane born in Japan."

Playing in Light

Summer



Winter



Four Seasons and Art

Text: Noguchi Takeshi, Chief Curator, Curatorial Division, Nezu Museum
Photos: Nezu Museum



and Art

Shiki kacho-zu byōbu ("Birds and Flowers of Four Seasons") Attributed to Kanō Motonobu Japan Muromachi period, 16th century Nezu Museum



Japanese Culture and the Four Seasons

Seasonal weather occurs throughout the world, and Japan, positioned in the mid latitudes, is susceptible to effects from air masses that form over oceans and the Asian continent. Thus, spring, summer, fall, and winter are clearly divided, each with its rich features.

In such climate, the culture responded sensitively to the changing seasons. Washoku

(Japanese cuisine), now a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, is one example. Another is *waka* poetry of 5-7-5-7-7 syllabics. Sensitivity to nature is everywhere apparent throughout *Kokin Wakashū*, a Heian-era (794–1185) poetry anthology compiled in 905 that began the tradition of opening a collection with the four-season theme.



Susuki ni uzura-zu ("Quail and Pampas Grass") By Ogata Kenzan Japan Edo period, dated 1743 Nezu Museum



Shiki-e and *Tsukinami-e*

The four seasons became an important theme in art as well as poetry. A folding screen appearing the same year as *Kokin Wakashū* shows a four-season painting (*shiki-e*) being created. At this time, Japan-themed *yamato-e* painting was born in contrast to China-themed *kara-e*. From then, *shiki-e* (seasonal) and *tsukinami-e* (monthly) paintings became the main subjects of *yamato-e* screens of the Heian era.

Early in the Kamakura period (1185–1333), poet and courtier Fujiwara no Teika in 1214 composed poems on monthly flowers

and birds that were to be painted. The poems were based on the tradition of Heian-era *tsukinami-e*. When interest revived for court culture during the Edo period (1603–1867), paintings in the Birds and Flowers of the Twelve Months genre—based on Teika's poems—became popular.

In Ogata Kenzan's album of this genre, *Quail and Pampas Grass* stands for September. Note how the gifted painter, calligrapher, and potter deploys simple brushstrokes that precisely capture the dark mood of autumn.



Seasons Thrive in Craft

Yamato-e seasonal expressions also make their fine appearance in crafts. Consider this lacquerware writing box.

The lid exterior portrays three deer on the slope of a hill thick with autumn grass, all under a full moon. Its interior shows a man looking out from a thatch-roof house. Look closely and you'll see Japanese characters

hid in the design, a fine clue that the writing box design derives from the following *Kokin Wakashu* poem: Autumn comes lonely / to this mountain village / where cries of the deer / constantly wake me. The lid design communicates a melancholy seen in a doe calling for a stag as autumn deepens.

Important Cultural Property *Fujihana-zu byobu* ("Wisteria") By Maruyama Ōkyo Japan Edo period, dated 1776 Nezu Museum

Seasons Reflected in Folding Screens

During the Heian era, folding screens became a medium for *shiki-e* and *tsukinami-e*. They subsequently evolved as a form of large-scale painting and grew more visually intense, while retaining their esteemed portrayal of the seasons. Many screen paintings are set in a single location for which images of flowers and birds, or mountains and rivers, are portrayed in tune with the turning seasons.

Of all seasons, spring and fall are especially adored by Japanese. A pair of six-panel screens—*Cherry Blossoms in Yoshino and Maple Leaves in Tatsuta*—presents cherry blossoms in full springtime bloom (right-hand screen, above), and autumn maple trees (left-hand). The titles incorporate places in Nara Prefecture famed for the flower and

the leaf, and the screens, seen as a whole, are most notable for the vivid contrast of spring and autumn scenes. Also depicted are poem strips of compositions about cherry blossoms or autumn leaves. This pair of *yamato-e* screens, an Edo-period work, distinctly celebrates the rich features of each season.

Please note another painting, *Wisteria*, by Maruyama Ōkyo, a painter of 18th-century Kyoto. Its most striking feature is an unconventional pictorial element recalling French Impressionism. As you unfold the screen, it exudes the air of early summer—when wisteria flowers bloom. The screen painting is endowed with a sensibility attuned to the four seasons that has been cultivated for centuries.



Yoshino tatsuta-zu byobu ("Cherry Blossoms in Yoshino and Maple Leaves in Tatsuta") Japan Edo period, 17th century Nezu Museum

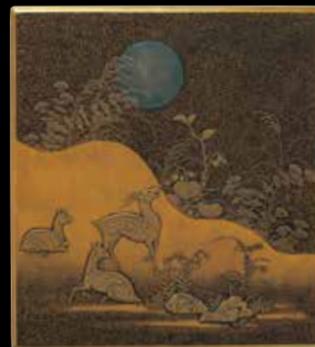


Waka Inspire Seasonal Paintings

Attending carefully to such exquisite work, we note the portrayal of four seasons in Japanese art is closely related to *waka*. Artists may be said to draw inspiration for painting seasonal features from this poetry genre.

In fact, *kachofugetsu* (literally, flower-bird-

wind-moon) refers to Japan's beautiful natural world and denotes a refined soul that loves nature. No doubt this literary sensitivity lies at the very root of elegant evocations of the four seasons that occur in Japanese art.



Outer lid



Inner lid

Important Cultural Property *Kasugayama makie suzuri-bako* ("Writing Box, known as *Kasugayama*") Japan Muromachi period, 15th century Nezu Museum

Noguchi Takeshi

Chief Curator, Curatorial Division, Nezu Museum



Born 1966. M.A. in Art History, University of Tokyo. Worked at the Museum of Kyoto before taking up Nezu Museum post in 2008. Specializing in the history of Japanese early modern painting, Noguchi currently researches the Kyoto Kanō and Rinpa schools as well as Kyoto painters of the latter 18th century like Maruyama Ōkyo.

Unique Window

on the
Seasons

MIKIMOTO



Mikimoto (Autumn 2012)
Mt. Fuji, undeniable symbol of Japan, is expressed in crimson paper craft foliage. At the foot of the mountain, a maple leaf cradles a single pearl on a lake of glass. It is a breathtaking presentation seen from a distance; up close, an intricate world of craft unfolds, topped with an iridescent jewel. A fabulous universe of autumn opens before your eyes.
Note: The Mikimoto flagship store is being renovated as of September 2016.



Tradition



Matsuya Ginza (Summer 2015)

Wearing yukata, light cotton kimono, is a summertime tradition. The display is cool and refreshing!



Shiseido Ginza Bldg. (Spring 2016)
An elegant folding screen placed on a Japanese stone garden depicts trees gently swaying in the breeze. The elements are distinctly traditional yet marked by magical modernity.



Nihombashi Takashimaya (Autumn 2014)

Contemporary



Isetan Shinjuku Honten (Spring 2016)



Isetan Shinjuku Honten (Spring 2016)

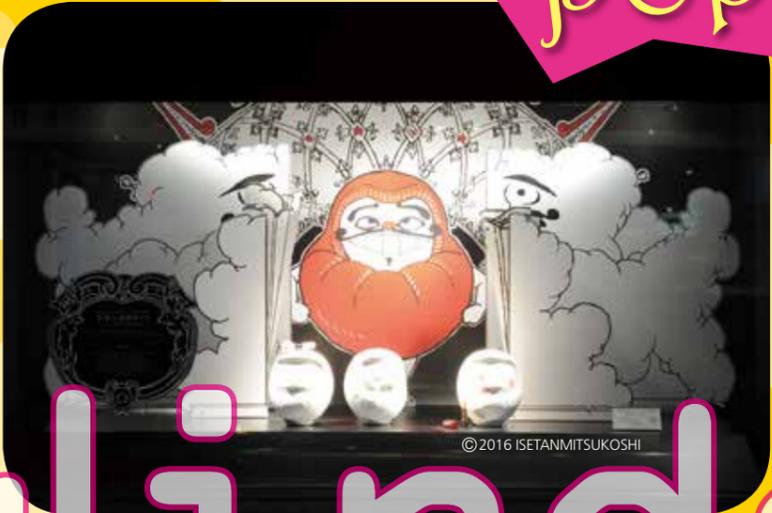
Isetan Shinjuku Honten (Winter 2016)
Daruma doll (modeled after Bodhidharma seated in meditation) is one of the good-luck items indispensable to Japanese New Year's celebrations.



Ginza Wako (Winter 2014)
Christmastime in Ginza: a sparkling, wondrous vision. An interesting object inspired by owl eyes—each eye, when peered into, reflects its own holiday-time story.



Pop Culture



© 2016 ISETANMITSUKOSHI

Pop motif expresses the fun and cheer of New Year's gatherings.



Store windows are mirrors reflecting present-day Japan. Unexpected modernity peeks through traditional aesthetics. Tokyo stories and adventures are told via art beyond borders. Manga and anime motifs resemble ancient gods of Japan. The old, the new, the pop, and the contemporary—all are fused as an explosive palette of vivid colors that catch the eye of passersby.

Each store window is unique, unrepeatably—offering a once-in-a-lifetime glimpse of the seasons.

A kaleidoscope-inspired winter forest of crystal!



Photos: K. Mikimoto & Co., Ltd., Shiseido Company, Limited, WAKO Co., Ltd., ISETAN MITSUKOSHI HOLDINGS, MATSUYA CO., LTD., Takashimaya Co., Ltd., amanaimages Inc.

Show Window!

Advanced Energy-Efficient Home Dressed for the Season

—LCCM house incorporates the insights of traditional Japanese architecture—

Photos by Kusu Seiko, amanaimages Inc., PIXTA
Collaboration: Building Research Institute, Japan and Koizumi Atelier



From construction to occupancy to demolition, LCCM (Life Cycle Carbon Minus) houses result in negative lifecycle CO₂ emissions. To this end, a Demonstration House is built with a traditional Japanese architecture approach to simulate LCCM living.



Chief Research Engineer Kuwasawa Yasuo, BRI, is responsible for design and calculations of energy saving for LCCM Demonstration House. "Our calculations show the house will achieve negative lifecycle CO₂ emission balance within 30 years."

Today's crucial issues for building homes in Japan and elsewhere include reducing energy consumption and CO₂ emissions. The LCCM Demonstration House, an experimental house constructed in Tsukuba City, Ibaraki Prefecture, has advances like solar generation and storage batteries to generate, save, and reduce energy.

Yet there's more to the house than its considerable equipment. The structure purposefully utilizes human agency, presenting a lifestyle wherein house interiors are skillfully configured in harmony with nature. Movable elements like sliding doors and louvered partitions all save energy.

"Occupants create a comfortable indoor environment by opening and closing interior elements to suit season and weather. This is like the house changing clothes in response to the changing seasons, using insights from the traditional Japanese way of life," says Chief Research Engineer Kuwasawa Yasuo, Building Research Institute (BRI), who participated



LCCM Demonstration House, BRI; Tsukuba, Ibaraki Prefecture (opposite). Movable elements like lattice partitions and window treatments (above) feature in LCCM living. (Photos: Kusu Seiko)

in the building design.

Traditional Japanese homes often feature *engawa*, long verandas linking interior and exterior. Between support pillars are large openings called *mado* that draw pleasant breezes into the rooms and provide an enjoyable view to those within. Meanwhile, opening and closing *shoji* sliding doors and rain shutters manages the inflow of rain and sunlight. Thus we see Japanese people actively adapting to the four seasons.

The LCCM Demonstration House uses exactly the same approach in the way it "changes clothes" in sync with the seasons and incorporates sunlight and air into the lives of its occupants. This is a truly energy-efficient Japanese house.

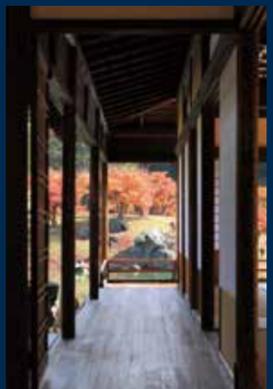
Traditional Japanese Home: Integrating Outer and Inner



(Photo: amanaimages Inc.)

POINT 1 Layers of Clothing

Indoor environment is modified to match the season by changing such clothing layers as rain shutters (to guard against rain and wind), *shoji* sliding doors, and sliding partitions (*fusuma*). (Photo: PIXTA)



POINT 2 Partitioned Living



The space can be divided as needed by moving *shoji* doors and sliding partitions (*fusuma*). (Photo: PIXTA)

POINT 3 Creating Air Flow

From spring to autumn, a pleasant breeze is actively brought into the house. (Photo: PIXTA)



Dressing for the Season

Moving interior elements can modify the living environment to match the seasons. LCCM Demonstration House comprises a number of features that utilize traditional Japanese architectural insights.

POINT 1 Layers of Clothing



Wood louver window treatments in layers have their own purpose. In winter, *shoji* window treatments are opened by day to draw in gentle sunlight and allow *engawa* black tiles to store heat. At night, heat insulation panel is lowered to trap warm air. In summer, the wood louver window treatments are closed to block out harsh sunlight. Screens of material that softens incoming light and thin wood louvers are features inspired by the Japanese aesthetics of latticework and *shoji* sliding doors.

(Left) There are several screening elements on both sides of the *engawa*: window side has heat insulation screens and movable wood louvers; between *engawa* and living room is a lattice glass door. (Right) Heat insulation screen is made from two honeycomb layers that prevent heat from escaping. (Photos: Kusu Seiko)



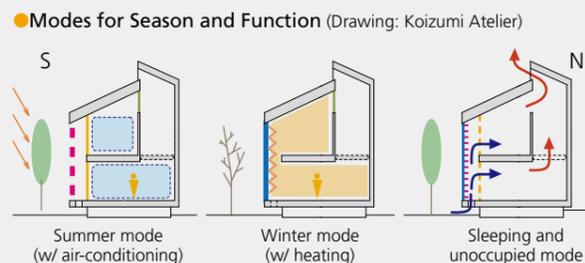
POINT 2 Partitioned Living

(Right) When screen in the second-floor bedroom is lowered, it shifts the relaxed space to sleep mode. (Below) This continuous space can be partitioned with sliding doors. (Photos: Kusu Seiko)

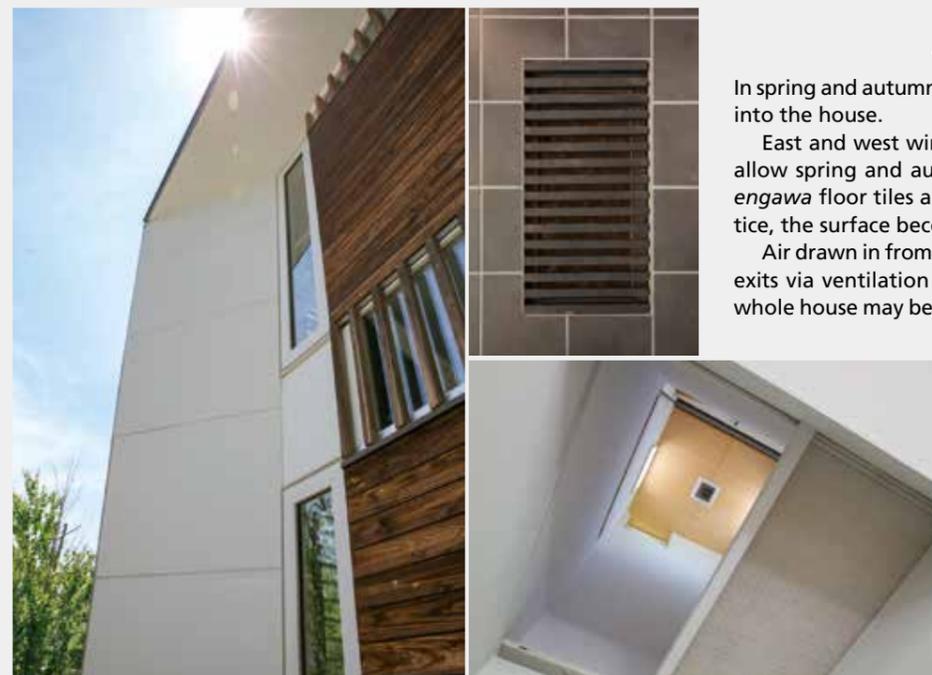


The living space in traditional Japanese homes can be divided by opening and closing *shoji* sliding doors and *fusuma*. In this house, too, movable partitions make efficient and varied use of space.

Dividing the space this way also saves energy. When room partitions are closed, the space becomes smaller and requires less energy for heating or cooling. Partition between *engawa* and living room is designed to be closed in summer so that hot air from *engawa* doesn't enter the living space and opened in winter to draw *engawa* warmth into the living space.



POINT 3 Creating Air Flow



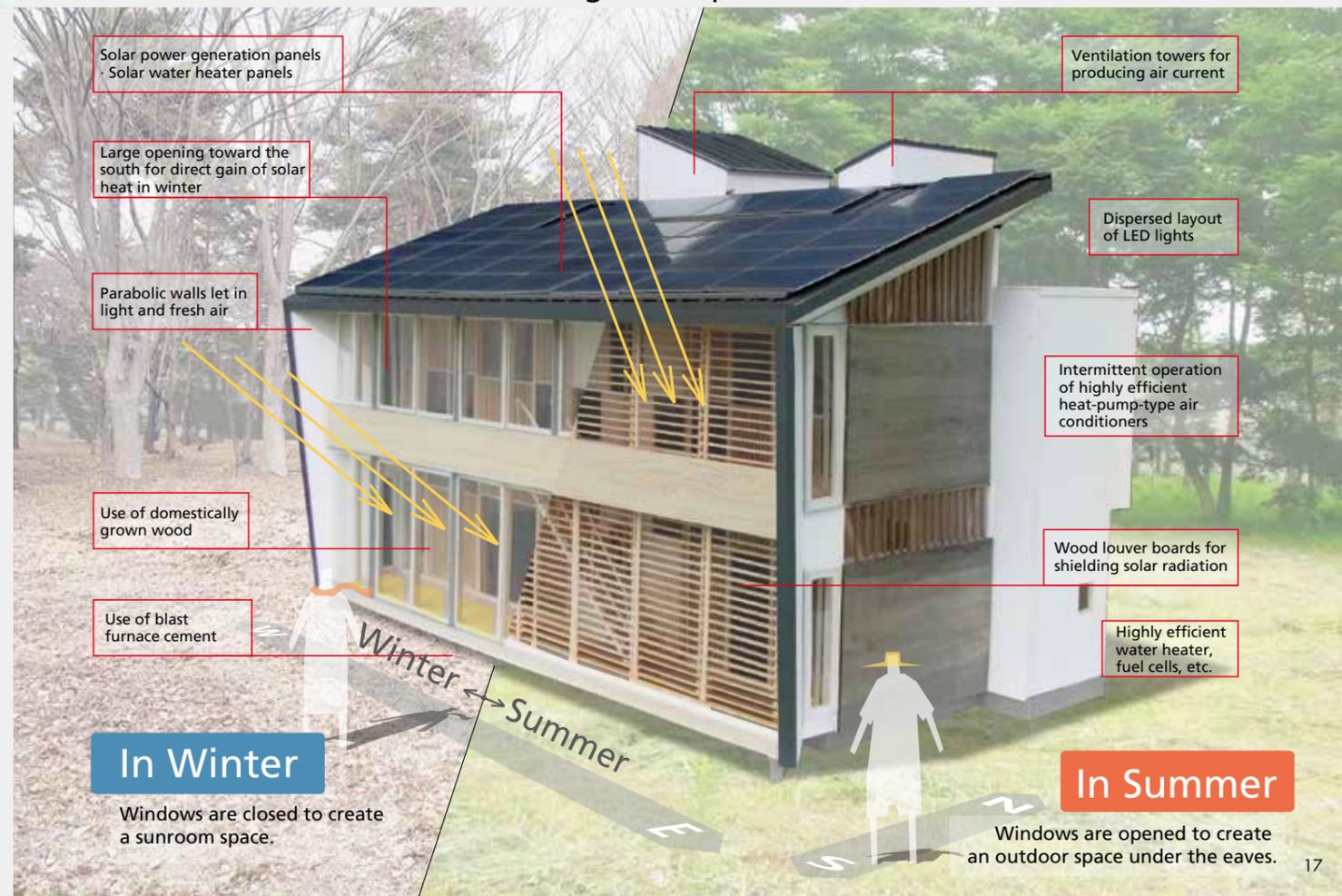
In spring and autumn, a pleasant breeze is actively brought into the house.

East and west windows can be opened at angles that allow spring and autumn breezes to enter easily. When *engawa* floor tiles are exchanged with a replaceable lattice, the surface becomes a vent for cooling breezes.

Air drawn in from outside blows through the house and exits via ventilation tower shaped to draw breezes. The whole house may be seen as a device for effective airflow.

(Far left) Windows on either end of the *engawa* act as vents for east and west breezes. Wall angle draws in more air. (Top) *Engawa* floor is made with a removable lattice so breezes enter from below. (Left) Ventilation tower seen from hallway. Manually operated screens can be closed to trap warm air. (Photos: Kusu Seiko)

LCCM Demonstration House / Design concepts (Artist rendering: Koizumi Atelier)



Japan in Four Seasons

Journeys to Floral Paradise

Written by Sasaki Yukitsuna

Photo: amanaimages Inc.



Man'yōshū: A Garland of Flowers

The *Man'yōshū* (Myriad Leaves Anthology), compiled in the eighth century, is Japan's oldest collection of poetry and contains about 4,500 *waka*. A third of them, some 1,500, allude to plants and flowers, making for a rich garland. These nature images appear not only in seasonal-themed works but also in love, elegy, travel, and celebratory poems.

What's more, many different species appear, a total approximating 160 plant varieties comprising 50 flower types. Few people today can recite 160 species of plants, let alone 50 flowers, and you'd be hard pressed to find an anthology anywhere in the world with so many plant and flower names.

What makes Japan unique? There are four distinct seasons here, which means that spring comes with bright green leaves and buds, and autumn its beautiful crimson and gold. Every season brings its particular

bouquet. For these reasons, flowers have long been ingrained in Japanese culture, as seen in *ikebana* and floral-print kimono.

The *waka* genre of seasonal poems has extensive history, including the delightful practice of getting together with friends or fellow courtiers for composing spring-themed "songs" to enhance appreciation of the season. It was common to include flower names like *ume* (Japanese plum), *sakura* (cherry blossom), and others. Such traditions may be why Japanese people are good at learning a wide variety of plant and flower names.

It was also common to send a gift accompanied by flowers and *waka* composed with reference to them. Those traditions likely contributed to a great increase in poems about flowers and more allusions to species varieties.

The *Man'yōshū* flower cited most often is *hagi* (bush

clover), an autumn bloom appearing in about 140 works. The next most frequently mentioned in about 120 poems is *ume*, which blooms in spring. The plum was a new species back then, imported around the same time the *Man'yōshū* was compiled—and very popular among the aristocracy. After *ume*, in frequent appearance order come *tachibana* (tachibana orange) and cherry blossoms.

It's curious to note that *hagi*, *ume*, *tachibana*, and *sakura* are all petite blossoms. In ancient Japanese, "*kuwashi*" was used as a compliment regarding small things, which were considered beautiful. This sensitivity, feeling the beauty of small things, is particularly Japanese.

Enjoy the following small, personal garland of *sakura*.

Poem and *sakura* sent by a poet to a young lady:

These blossoms on a single sprig
each conceal a hundred words of mine.
Do me the favor of not dismissing either.

— Fujiwara no Asomi Hirotsugu (VIII: 1456)

This love poem appears in *Man'yōshū* with an intro, much like liner notes, explaining how it got composed: a man gifted this *waka*—meant to be chanted or sung—with a dainty cherry tree branch and a request. Imagine the aesthetic sense and sensibility it took, some 1,300 years ago, to send an emotive poem about a flower along with blossoms of that flower to a lover.

In northern Awaji Island is a park of rolling hills famed for being home to a huge variety of stock flowers. Some 9,000 blossoms in five colors fill the air with their unique perfume. (Photo: Awaji Flower Gallery)



Stock; Awaji, Hyogo

Narcissus blooming along Echizen Coast, one of Japan's three largest narcissus colonies, is known as Echizen *suisen* and can be viewed from December. (Photo: Echizen-town Tourism Federation)



Suisen (narcissus); Echizencho, Fukui

Every spring, the city of Tonami hosts the Tonami Tulip Fair, one of the largest in Japan. During the festival, three million tulips of 700 varieties adorn Tonami Tulip Park. (Photo: Tonami Tulip Gallery)



Tulip; Tonami, Toyama

In northern Nagano, on Togakushi Plateau, tiny buckwheat flowers bloom all at once and give the illusion of a white carpet spread before your eyes. (Photo: Togakushi Tourism Association)



Soba (buckwheat); Togakushi Plateau, Nagano

July

Lavender; Nakafurano-cho, Hokkaido



In Furano, located roughly in the center of Hokkaido, arrival of lavender's bright purple hues and calming fragrance is the harbinger of a short but sweet summer up north. (Photo: Farm Tomita)

Nanohana (field mustard); Yokohama-machi, Aomori



The hilly terrain of about 150 hectares in Aomori's Yokohama, located within Shimokita Peninsula, becomes completely filled with field mustard—a 360-degree view of flowers as far as the eye can see. (Photo: Yokohama-machi)



Kiku (chrysanthemum); Kasama, Ibaraki

At Kasama's annual Chrysanthemum Festival, Japan's oldest, some 10,000 flower pots of chrysanthemum in colorful varieties adorn the city. (Photo: Kasama Inari Shrine)

May

Nanohana (field mustard); Yokohama-machi, Aomori



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Kiku (chrysanthemum); Kasama, Ibaraki

At Kasama's annual Chrysanthemum Festival, Japan's oldest, some 10,000 flower pots of chrysanthemum in colorful varieties adorn the city. (Photo: Kasama Inari Shrine)

August

Himawari (sunflower); Tsunan-machi, Niigata



Set on the border between Niigata and Nagano prefectures, the town of Tsunan, one of Japan's snowiest areas, is home to a massive four-hectare sunflower field. (Photo: Tsunan-machi Tourism Association)

November

Kiku (chrysanthemum); Kasama, Ibaraki

At Kasama's annual Chrysanthemum Festival, Japan's oldest, some 10,000 flower pots of chrysanthemum in colorful varieties adorn the city. (Photo: Kasama Inari Shrine)

October

Yellow cosmos; Yamanakako-mura, Yamanashi



A plateau park on Lake Yamanakako's 1,000-meter shoreline, southeast Yamanashi, is a great place to enjoy yellow cosmos with Mt. Fuji, now a World Heritage site, in the background. (Photo: Hanano Miyako Park)

June

Ajisai (hydrangea); Uji, Kyoto

Mimuroto-ji, known as Hydrangea Temple, is home to a grandiose cedar-lined garden of about 1.7 hectares featuring 10,000 hydrangeas in 50 species. (Photo: Mimuroto-ji)



February

Suisen (narcissus); Echizencho, Fukui



April

Tulip; Tonami, Toyama



September

Soba (buckwheat); Togakushi Plateau, Nagano



December

Stock; Awaji, Hyogo



March

Ume (Japanese plum); Dazaifu, Fukuoka



On the shrine grounds of Dazaifu Tenmangu are some 6,000 Japanese plum trees, which Sugawara no Michizane, the "god of literature," adored. (Photo: Dazaifu Tenmangu)

Okinawa's cherry blossoms have pride of place when it comes to being first to bloom in Japan: *Ryukyu kanhizakura* (*P. campanulata*) is dark pink in bellflower formations, adorning hillsides facing Nago. (Photo: Nago City Tourism Association)



Kanhizakura (winter cherry); Nago, Okinawa

January

Kanhizakura (winter cherry); Nago, Okinawa



Heavenly Blooms for Every Month

Japan's archipelago, stretching east to west, offers beautiful blossoms throughout the four seasons. Here are some of the finest places to experience a monthly floral paradise.

Sweets for All Seasons

Photos and Collaboration: TORAYA Confectionery Co. Ltd.



春 Spring


Afternoon snacks are generally known in Japan as *oyatsu* and include treats like *wagashi* (traditional Japanese sweets) enjoyed seasonally. Folks in Japan get a sense of the season by the kind of confection seen in stores.

The charmingly apt name of *oyatsu* comes from a time designation of the Edo period (1603–1867) called *yatsu*, both the 2:00–4:00 PM period and the custom of eating seasonal snacks at that time. These nibbles are pleasant treats still favored in Japan today.

Choice *oyatsu* in spring, popular from the Edo period to today, are *wagashi* known as *sakura mochi*. The unique aroma of these sweets comes from the salt-pickled cherry leaf, which wraps around a thin outer layer of wheat dough and bean-paste filling. They vary interestingly in Western and Eastern Japan: in the west region, sticky rice is the dough of choice; in the east, it's wheat.

Come summertime, the treat to eat is fluffily shaved ice—often frozen slowly, as in nature—cherished for its cooling effect and mouth-watering array of tasty syrups. One variety we highly recommend is *Uji Kintoki*, a delicious combination of green tea syrup and adzuki bean paste.

Autumn is the time for chestnuts and *kuri kanoko*, a bean paste ball covered with candied chestnuts.

As for something hot and sweet in winter, *oshiruko* is a heartwarming adzuki bean soup with floating *mochi* (rice cakes). Rice cakes are offered to deities for the New Year's holidays, and a common family custom is eating *oshiruko* with *mochi* on January 11.

Oyatsu communicates a seasonal sense. In the calm repose of mid-afternoon, you too can savor the world of each colorful season arising from a single moment, in a single bite of sweet delight.



夏 Summer




秋 Autumn




冬 Winter


top — Spring: sakura mochi
left center — Summer: shaved ice (Uji Kintoki)
right center — Autumn: kuri kanoko
bottom — Winter: oshiruko



Seasonal Beauty from Hot and Cold Extremes

Sapporo

Sapporo is the capital city of Hokkaido, the northernmost prefecture of Japan. Many tourists come to enjoy winter snow and avoid summer heat. Here we introduce you to some of the many sights, experiences, and tastes of the city's changing seasons.



P24: Sapporo Clock Tower, longstanding city symbol, has watched over the history of Sapporo for more than 130 years. (Photo: PIXTA)

P25, top left: The former Hokkaido Government Office Building, an important cultural property of Japan, is affectionately called Red Brick Office by local people.

P25, bottom left: Hokkaido University's campus row of ginkgo trees is only about 10 minutes on foot from Sapporo station. (Photo: PIXTA)

P25, top right: Horomi Pass Lavender Garden, near Maruyama Park, west Sapporo, is filled with the sweet scent of lovely blooms.

P25, bottom right: Experience the real meaning of "winter sports" at any one of the many ski slopes less than an hour away from city center. (Photo: Sapporo Teine)



Japan has four large islands and over 6,000 smaller ones. Hokkaido is the second biggest after Honshu. In winter, many people from around Japan and overseas come for powder snow and to enjoy winter sports. Crisp summers and no rainy season make Hokkaido the perfect escape from Japan's average summer heat and humidity.

Sapporo has the fourth largest population of any city in Japan, and not only is close to nature but also offers the excitement and convenience of a city. Take advantage of the extensive subway, tram, and bus systems to view autumn leaves from high on a mountaintop; enjoy early summer blue skies seen from wide green plains; or thrill to the feeling of snow as you stroll the city. The metro area has big-scale scenery, the kind you won't find elsewhere in Japan: the perfect place to experience the arrival of spring, summer, autumn, and winter.

Spring in the city may be brief but begins with a

flourish. When the city wakes from its long winter sleep, Odori Park—which crosses city center, east to west—overflows with blooms, and the former Hokkaido Government Office Building is resplendent with colorful tulips.

In June the Yosakoi Soran Festival arrives like a harbinger, and Sapporo instantly switches into a festive summer mood. One must-see in summer is the lavender garden at Horomi Pass, with views over the entire city. Nowhere else can you take in both a carpet of lavender and Sapporo's cityscape. Moerenuma Park, known for its collection of works by world-famous sculptor Isamu Noguchi (1904–1988), is also busy with summertime events.

Then comes autumn, a time when Sapporo's most romantic vista is the row of ginkgo trees at Hokkaido University. And the rear garden of Sapporo Shiryokan (west end of Odori Park) is a well-hidden but excellent place to also view the autumn leaves.



Sapporo Snow Festival
Three sites host giant snow sculptures of popular characters and world structures (right above and below), some by teams from around the world competing in the famous annual International Snow Sculpture Contest (left above). Also in good taste is Hokkaido Winter Food Park, a must-do for those eager to warm up with a fine sampler of food from Hokkaido—all in one spot! (Photo: Sapporo Snow Festival Executive Committee, PIXTA)



Above: Yosakoi Soran Festival During the month of June, various locations in Sapporo turn into stages for Yosakoi Soran Festival dancers. (Photo: YOSAKOI Soran Festival Organizing Committee)



Below left: Odori Park and Sapporo TV Tower Odori Park, stretching 1.5 kilometers west from Sapporo TV Tower, is the perfect stage to see the dramatic change of seasons. (Photo: Sapporo TV Tower)

Below right: Moerenuma Park Combining beautiful views of nature and art with seasonal attractions like cherry blossoms, fountains and places to play in water, autumn leaves, and cross-country skiing and sledding. Learn what it means to truly enjoy the delights of the four seasons.



Miso ramen
Sapporo *ramen* (far left) is a famed, familiar presence on the city food scene: curly noodles float in pork bone (*tonkotsu*) broth flavored with rich *miso*. (Photo: SUMIRE Sapporo Honten)

Genghis Khan
Barbecued lamb known as Genghis Khan (left) is Hokkaido soul food, made in a pot with a convex central section. (Photo: Sapporo Beer Garden)

Odori Park is at peak performance in winter. Every February, about two million people from around Japan and around the world gather for the Sapporo Snow Festival. It likely started in 1950, when middle- and high-school students made snow sculptures from snow cleared from the streets and piled up in a spot on Odori 7-chome. A festival highlight is to see row after row of elaborately carved snow sculptures, from anime characters to World Heritage site architecture.

There are heaps of fun to follow the cool sculptures: outdoor ice-skating, snow rafting, and, if you've had your fill of walking but need to fill your tummy, there are food stalls galore. And when it comes to food, choose from a host of local specialties famed throughout Japan: Hokkaido *ramen*, with its uniquely rich *miso* soup; Genghis Khan, Japanese

barbecued lamb dish made in a special pot; soup and seafood kebabs of fresh scallop, squid, crab or oysters from Otaru and other Hokkaido fishing ports. Last but not least is Hokkaido's unique *zangi*, deep-fried chicken. In fact, the snow festival is a mouth-watering opportunity to sample all Hokkaido's culinary delights in one place.

There is no end of the pleasures to be had here—food, sightseeing, art, and more—every season in Sapporo, the city combining the finest delights of city and nature all in one place.

Getting there

Travel in general from Tokyo International Airport (Haneda) to New Chitose Airport should be about 1.5 hours. Travel time by Rapid Airport train is 35 minutes to Sapporo station. Buses take around 70 minutes.

For More Info

● **Sapporo Snow Festival Executive Committee**
TEL: 011-281-6400
<http://www.snowfes.com/english/index.html>

● **Yosakoi Soran Festival Executive Committee**
TEL: 011-231-4351 FAX: 011-233-4351
<http://www.yosakoi-soran.jp/about.html#english>





Tenugui:

Traditional and Contemporary Appeal

Photos by PIXTA, Aflo



Tenugui is a traditional towel of great versatility going back to ancient Japan. The name originally derived from *te* (hand) and *nuguu* (wipe), which implies varied usage: sweat absorber and wipe, bath washcloth, head wrap as sunscreen or bandana. Thanks to superior water absorbency, cotton is the material of choice. Patterns range from simple to painterly, in dynamic designs that today are appealing for contemporary interiors as wall decor. *Tenugui* is the ideal souvenir or gift from Japan: eminently portable and light, with traditional to pop patterns for friends and family of all ages.