

A Calendar of Words Seasonal words for January

Another term for January is *mitsuki*. It comes from the term *mitsubi-tsuki*, which literally means “month of harmony,” when all family members come together to celebrate the new year. As a verb, *mutsumu* means “to get along” or “to deepen relationships” and indeed, that is what people do when they come together to join in the New Year festivities, share special New Year’s meals together and celebrate the year ahead.

Speaking of New Year festivities, *hatsumoude* is one of the most popular traditions in Japan. Soon after ushering in the new year, people pay a visit to a shrine or temple to pray for peace and prosperity throughout the year. They might also buy a good-luck charm such as an *omamori* amulet or *hamaya* arrow, write their wish or resolution on an *ema* tablet, or draw an *omikuji* fortune, with hopes of good health and happiness in the new year.

A variety of special foods are eaten during the New Year’s holidays, but the most representative is the *osechi ryori*. Originally, *osechi ryori* referred to food offerings that were made to the gods at the turning of each season, or at each *sekku* (= *sechi*). However, it has eventually come to refer specifically to certain New Year’s dishes, because the new year is the most significant *sekku* of all.

Osechi ryori includes a lavish assortment of dishes featuring blessings from the sea and mountains, each of which has symbolic meaning relating to good harvests, family health and safety, and descendent prosperity.

さいじき ことばの歳時記 がつかきご ～1月の季語～

1月の別名を睦月（むつき）と呼び、語源的には、新年を迎えて親族一同集って宴をする睦び月（むつびつき）の意があるそうです。睦むとは、仲よくする、親しみ合うといった意味があり、正月ならではの行事を行ったり、正月料理を食べて、新しい年を盛大に祝います。

正月ならではの行事といえば、「初詣」。年が明けてから初めて神社・寺院に参拝し、一年の無事と平安を祈る行事です。参拝して、お守りや破魔矢（はまや）などを買ったり、絵馬（えま）に願い事や目標を書いたり、おみくじを引いたりして、一年がよい年であるように祈ります。

そして正月料理の代表といえば、「おせち料理」。もともと季節の変わり目、節句（節（せち））に、神様にお供えした食べ物が「お節料理」で、やがて正月がもっとも重要な節句であることから、正月料理のことを「おせち料理」と呼ぶようになりました。五穀豊穰、家族の安全と健康、子孫繁栄の祈りを込めて、海の幸や山の幸がふんだんに盛り込まれています。