

FESTIVALS

Feb. 3 SETSUBUN 節分

Setsubun literally means the parting of the seasons and it is the eve of the first day of each season (*Rishun* 立春 spring, *Rikka* 立夏 summer, *Rishu* 立秋 autumn, and *Ritto* 立冬 winter). Gradually it came to indicate only the eve of *Rishun*. It was said that "bad air" rises at the changing of the seasons, so people would pray to avert trouble (*yakuyoke* 厄除). This custom was introduced from China in ancient times and became an annual event in the Heian era (8th -12th century). Scattering roasted beans, *mame-maki*, on *Setsubun* became popular among people in the Muromachi era (14th -16th century). People scatter roasted beans at *oni* (devils) to drive them away from their houses. Beans have been used as a charm against demons since ancient times. A "praying-the-devil-away ceremony" is held at many temples and shrines.

Yakudoshi 厄年

According to a popular Japanese belief, a person is apt to fall ill or to experience other misfortunes at certain ages called *yaku-doshi* during his/her life span. The common belief is that men enter these critical stages in their 25th, 42nd, and 61st calendar years and women in their 19th, 33rd, and 37th calendar years, and the most critical year in a person's life (*tai-yaku* 大厄) is said to be age 42 for men and 33 for women. They pray at temples or shrines to avoid an evil spirit. The year before and after *yaku-doshi* are called *mae-yaku* 前厄 and *ato-yaku* 後厄 and precaution is called for.

Feb. 3 SETSUBUN HOSHI-MATSURI (Star festival)

Ishite-ji temple

Prayer service to Bodhisattva for safety and good health (*Yakuyoke-kigan* 厄除け祈願) is held to exorcise devils. Soybeans and rice cakes are scattered by the priests and *toshi-otoko*, 年男 men who were born in the year of the horse (*uma* 午) in Chinese astrology. (※ 2026 is the year of the horse.) They scatter lucky roasted beans (*mame-maki*) and rice cakes (*mochi-maki*), shouting "*Fuku wa uchi*, 福は内 *Oni wa soto* 鬼は外 (let fortune in and devils out)". Priests dressed as devils whack the evil spirits out of you with a long stick. People bring their old fortune papers and New Year's decorations to be burned in a huge fire. Many events start in the early afternoon.

13:30 *Yakuyoke-kigan* (prayer)

11:00 / 13:30 / 14:30 *Mochi-watashi* (given hand to hand, not scattered)

Feb. 3 YAKUYOKE-TAISAI (Warding-off-evils festival)

Henjo-in temple 遍照院 Hama, Kikuma-cho, Imabari City 今治市菊間町浜

Henjo-in temple in Imabari City and Yakuo-ji temple in Tokushima Prefecture are the two most famous *Yakuyoke* temples in Shikoku.

9:00-17:00 *Yakuyoke-kito*

10:00, 14:00 *Mame-maki* and *mochi-maki*

Dedication ritual of *Onigawara* (devil-shaped roof-tiles)

61-year-old men (and women if they want) scatter lucky roasted soybeans and rice cakes, shouting, "*Fuku wa uchi, Oni mo uchi*" (Fortune in, Devils in, too), a twist on the usual *mame-maki* chant 'Fortune in, Devils out', since Kikuma-cho is known widely for making devil-shaped roof-tiles. They welcome the devil as a symbol of prosperity of the town. After *mame-maki* and *mochi-maki*, men at the age of 42 carry a big portable shrine with a devil figure clay tile called *onigawara-mikoshi* attached, which weighs about 400 kilograms, around the temple precinct.

Many visitors come for *yakuyoke* and pray for their good health and fortune. There are many stalls

such as *takoyaki*, *watagashi*, *yakisoba* and sweet candies.

(Tel. 0898-54-3128)

Transportation: Take the Iyotetsu bus bound for Omishima at Matsuyama city station gate A2 and get off at Kikuma bus stop. Or take the JR local train bound for Imabari and get off at Kikuma station. From the station it takes about 7 minutes on foot.

Feb. 8 HARI-KUYO 針供養 (Memorial Service for Needles)

Hari-kuyo started in the 18th century to give women a break in those days of *danson-johi* 男尊女卑 (dominance of men over women). Broken or old needles were placed at a small altar and people gave thanks to the needles' faithful service. Women did not do needlework on that day. This traditional event has been handed down as an annual event of schools for tailors, dress and *kimono* makers. In Matsuyama it is observed at Matsuyama Designer College in Tsujimachi 1-33, where about 50 teachers and students stick about 1,300 used needles into large *konnyaku* (devil's tongue) cakes at an altar, giving thanks to them and praying for better sewing skills. The priest of Shojū-ji chants a sutra. Then the needles are put in *Harizuka* (a burial mound for needles) at the temple.

Feb. 23-25 TSUBAKI-MATSURI 椿祭り (Camellia festival)

Tsubaki-jinja shrine

This is one of the most famous festivals in Matsuyama and is held at the coldest time of the year at Iyozuhiko-no-mikoto-jinja commonly known as Tsubaki-jinja shrine, in the southern part of Matsuyama city just off Route 33. In Matsuyama, it is said that spring won't come until after this festival. This is a shrine to the patron of prosperity and good luck and popular with merchants and businessmen who wish for better luck in business. Beside the offering box at the main building, there is a place where you borrow ¥ 20, which is called *mamori-gane* 守り金 (protective money). The next year you must come back to the shrine to give thanks and pay back double the money by working hard for the past year. This ritual custom is called *kashi-zeni* 貸銭 (lending money). On the evening of the middle day of the festival, the sacred ritual event *Oshinobi-no-togyo* お忍びの渡御 is held. The shrine god is moved into a golden and gorgeous *mikoshi* (portable shrine) and *kakite* (carrying men) carry it to the *torii* (shrine gateway) not uttering a word without trembling. After passing through the gateway, they carry it to Kotohira shrine in Kitadoi-cho calling loudly to each other. More than 800 stalls line the street. Good luck products such as *otayan-ame* (special candies for the festival), lucky bamboo grass rakes and treasure ships are very popular among visitors.

Transportation: Take the Iyotetsu bus at Matsuyama city station gate A3, A4 and get off at Tsubaki-mae bus stop (20 minutes).

During the festival there is a shuttle bus service from JR Matsuyama station, and Iyotetsu Matsuyama city station to Tsubaki-jinja. The details have not been announced yet.

<http://www.tubaki.or.jp> (Tel. 089-956-0321)

Feb. 11 KENKOKUKINEN-NO-HI 建国記念の日 (National Foundation Day)

National holiday

This holiday was formerly called *Kigensetsu* 紀元節, which started in 1872 (Meiji 5) to commemorate the accession to the throne of Emperor Jimmu 神武 who is said to be the first emperor of Japan. At that time this day was recognized as the 'birthday of Japan', but after World War II, the name *Kigensetsu* was banned due to its nationalistic connotations. In 1966 this holiday was revived as *Kenkokukinen-no-hi*.

Feb. 23 TENNO TANJOBI 天皇誕生日 (Emperor's Birthday) National holiday

The Reiwa Emperor was born in 1960. We celebrate this day and pray for his longevity.