

## Japan Seasonal Series

### November 7-5-3 Festival



The 7-5-3 Festival (*Shichi-Go-San* 七五三) is an annual celebration held on November 15. On the weekend closest to this day, families with daughters aged 3 and 7 and sons aged 3 and 5, will try to visit a shrine to pray for the future health and happiness of their children and have a priest bless and purify them.

This festival became popular during the Edo Period (1603-1868) and was originally celebrated to mark the end of infancy: three year olds were encouraged to let their hair grow long; five year old boys marked the start of their boyhood by dressing in *hakama* (loose fitted trousers) and at seven, girls celebrated being able to wear the *obi* sash with their kimonos. Nowadays, children wear kimono or their best clothes during the festivities.

#### 'One Thousand Year' Sweets (*Chitose Ame*) 千歳あめ

*Chitose Ame* (literally meaning 'one thousand year sweets') are given to children to wish them good fortune, good health and a long and prosperous life. The sweets resemble rock and are red, white and pink. They are about 30cm long and are sold in shops and shrines around the time of the Shichi-Go-San festival.



The sweets are sold in a long, thin decorated bag and are decorated with symbolic pictures, such as the turtle and crane which represent long life, as well as an old man and woman who have the same meaning. There is a saying in Japanese that "cranes live for 1,000 years and turtles live for 10,000".

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### November Autumn

#### Leaf watching (Kō-yō 紅葉)



In November, the leaves all change colour and the spectacular displays of red, orange, yellow and gold can be seen all over Japan. There are certain spots which are renowned for their autumnal colours and crowds flock to get a glimpse of the trees. Kyoto is one such place and hundreds of people queue up to take photos of the many temples and shrines beautifully framed by the fiery leaf displays. Some of the most popular trees to go and view are maple and ginkgo trees.

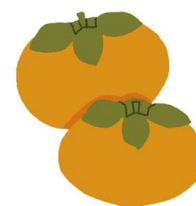
#### Shiitake mushrooms- 椎茸



These flavoursome mushrooms are extremely popular in Japanese cooking and are said to have many health benefits, including boosting the immune system. They are eaten both in dried and fresh form.

#### Persimmons (Kaki かき)

The persimmon fruit looks similar to a tomato, but it has a shiny orange skin and bright orange flesh. The fruit is very sweet and can be eaten alone or as part of another dish. It is harvested during the autumn.



#### Chestnuts (Kuri くり)



Chestnuts are also a popular flavouring in Japanese autumnal dishes. They are normally sweetened and can be found as a paste in traditional Japanese sweets and cakes. You may also spot chestnut versions of popular snacks such as kit kits during this season.