

Japan: Seasonal Series

May Children's Day

Koi Carp streamers (Koi nobori - 鯉のぼり)

Children's Day is celebrated in Japan on **May 5**. All children celebrate this event although traditionally the festival is associated with boys and is therefore often referred to as Boys' Day (girls have their own festival in March). From the end of April, most families who have a son will fly a tall pole complete with **carp shaped streamers** outside their houses. There are usually several carp on the pole, the largest one representing the father, followed by the mother and then the children. The carp is thought to be a symbol of **perseverance and courage**, since carp swim upstream. According to Chinese legend, upon completing this journey, one carp was rewarded by being changed into a dragon.



Samurai Helmets (Kabuto - かぶと)

Kabuto helmets are associated with the Children's Day festivities as they were worn by Japanese samurai warriors who were said to have fought against and eventually won a fierce battle against the Mongols on May 5. The helmet is therefore seen as a symbol of **strength and prosperity**. Up until the 17th Century, kabuto helmet designs were the most common on Children's Day streamers and it wasn't until after the 17th century that carp designs started to appear. Nowadays, most homes will display mini warrior ornaments and helmets around the time of the festival and many school children will make origami kabuto helmets.

Children's Day Rice Cakes (Kashiwamochi - かしわもち)

On May 5, to accompany the other celebrations, a special type of sweet called kashiwamochi is eaten. This is a glutinous rice cake which is filled with sweet bean paste and wrapped in an oak leaf. The oak leaf is for decoration only and should not be eaten.