

## Japan: Seasonal Series

### March Hina-matsuri

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Hina-matsuri, also called the Doll Festival or Girls' Day, is celebrated annually on March 3. Families with daughters will usually display an arrangement of dolls to promote their health and happiness and to ward off evil spirits. The number of dolls displayed varies, although it is common to have a tiered stand (hina-dan) with between 5-7 shelves on which the dolls are exhibited.

The stand is covered in red cloth, red being considered a symbol of luck. The dolls are dressed in ancient traditional costumes (from Heian era 794AD-1192AD) and the top shelf is always reserved for the Emperor and Empress. They will usually be seated before a gold screen as was traditional during that period.

Two lanterns will often also be placed next to Emperor and Empress. On the next shelf will be the ladies in waiting (often carrying trays of banquet food) and on the shelf below, the court musicians. Other auspicious symbols on display may include peach blossom which is associated with gentility and composure and other items of miniature furniture including an ox cart and a tea service.

The same dolls are used every year and are usually passed down through families. They are brought out about ten days before March 3, but are put away as soon as the festival is over. To leave the dolls out is considered bad luck.

The practice of displaying dolls began during the Edo period (1608-1868) and dolls at that time were traditionally made out of paper. After the Girls' Day, the dolls would be thrown into the nearest river as a means of carrying away bad luck, illness and misfortune. Some towns and villages throughout Japan still maintain this custom.