



THIS MONTH IN OKINAWA SPECIAL HOLIDAY EDITION

One might associate the subtropical island of Okinawa with brilliant summer sunlight and laid-back beach days. However, there are still a lot of things to enjoy over the Christmas and New Year's period — the so-called winter season — in Okinawa.

One thing that marks the holiday season in Okinawa is the twinkling of lights decorating the entire island. From popular sightseeing spots and resort hotels to the average home, Okinawa is truly transformed into an “island of illumination” during winter, starting around November, when a number of fun and romantic events take place across Okinawa.

This holiday newsletter is dedicated to Christmas, and the highlights and important events during December in Okinawa.

I have included just a few of the many events that can be enjoyed, for more listings, please check out the Okinawa Island Guide for more!



OKINAWA Island Guide





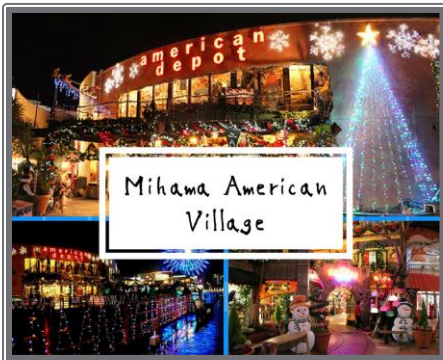
CURRENT EVENTS

MIHAMA AMERICAN VILLAGE:

Friday, November 17, 2017 to late January 2018

Time: 17:00-00:00 nightly
Mihama American Village and its environs, which feature a year-round display of twinkling lights, promise to brighten up your holiday season with even more beautiful illumination and Christmas decorations during the winter season.

Starting from Sunset Beach to the street on which the Aeon Chatan is located, the area is adorned with sparkling lights and 21 beautifully decorated Christmas trees.



This is the third edition of the Ryukyu Lantern Festival, a romantic event featuring thousands of Chinese lanterns adorning the premises of Murasaki Mura. Located in Yomitan Village, Murasaki Mura is a popular cultural theme park where a typical Ryukyuan townscape from the 14th and 15th centuries is reproduced.

Entertainment is scheduled for every night of the entire two-and-a-half-month-long festival, and food stands featuring dim sum delicacies including pork buns as well as Okinawa soba and yakitori (Japanese skewered chicken) can be found in the Tenshi-kan area, where they will recreate the world of the movie “Sen to chihiro no kamikakushi” (Spirited Away).

A variety of stage entertainment, including classical Ryukyuan kumi-odori dance and live music performances, along with projection mapping and more fun awaits you!



About 5,000 lanterns, including some featuring work by prominent Okinawan woodblock print artist Naka Bokunen, will be displayed at Murasaki Mura. The Yomitan Akari Festival is scheduled to be held simultaneously at several locations in Yomitan Village, which will also be beautifully lit up by lanterns.

OKINAWA BREAD & SWEETS FESTA:

Sunday, December 27, 2017

Time: 11:00-16:00

Place: Chura Sun Beach

The multi-purpose open event space at Chura Sun Beach’s north beach will host the annual Okinawa Bread & Sweets Festa.



The fair will feature a number of bakery and sweet shop concessions as well as beverage stands. From popular to more unusual items, visitors will be able to enjoy a variety of delicacies with a refreshing drink.

RYUKYU LANTERN FESTIVAL:

Saturday, December 2, 2017 to Sunday, February 25, 2018

Time: 18:00-22:00

Place: Murasaki Mura (Yomitan Village)



OKINAWAN CULTURE



クリスマス Kurisumasu (Christmas)

The Christmas season in Okinawa can be a pretty fun time of year. Although Christmas is not a public holiday, nor a traditional holiday, many people still celebrate it in some way.

When Westerners first learn that Christmas is a popular holiday in Japan, there is almost always puzzlement. “I didn’t know there were so many Christians in Japan!” is a common first reaction, for in Europe and America the holiday has strong religious connotations. Upon learning that only a few percentages of the Japanese population are Christian, the mystery deepens. Why, then, do they celebrate Christmas?

The most notable aspects of Christmas in Japan for a foreigner are those that are the most different from what he or she is used to. The emphasis here is placed on Christmas Eve, for example, and it usually seems odd to outsiders that the 24th would be celebrated but not the 25th. Moreover, before coming to Japan, I’d never heard of a “Christmas cake,” or associated the holiday with



chicken dinners, as many seemed to do in Japan. (In America, Turkey is the most common “Christmas bird,” with some traditionalists favoring dishes like pheasant or goose.) Presents in Japan are often given to lovers, as on Valentine’s Day, but seemingly less frequently to young children or close family members, as an American or European would naturally expect.

Since decorating homes is neither traditional nor cheap, huge illuminations displays at resorts, malls, gardens or other tourist sites is **very** popular.

Christmas is usually perceived to be more of a “date night” for couples, so many restaurants will offer a price fixed menu (almost everywhere requires reservations in advance!). Keep in mind, the actual day of

Christmas is **not** necessarily known by some Japanese/Okinawans.

Fried chicken and Christmas cakes (クリスマスケーキ) are popular. The cake is usually a strawberry shortcake with whip icing, but recently all sorts of other fancy cakes have gained popularity. Almost every single bakery/patisserie has pre-orders for cakes during the season to be picked up from the 23rd through 25th. At the grocery stores and conbini you can usually pick up a (small individual) cake on the day of, but other places you will need to place your order 2 weeks **or more** in advance, although the slots of cakes don’t fill up as quickly as fried chicken, except maybe at the most popular bakeries.

Although a not-very-Japanese holiday, many people really enjoy and get into the spirit of the holiday season and if you are in Okinawa during the holidays, be sure to enjoy some of these different “traditions”!

メリークリスマス！Merii kurisumasu! (メリークリ merii kuri is the shortened version)





OKINAWAN CUISINE

Who Needs Roast Turkey When There's KFC?

Even though it is not recognized as a day off work for most people, Christmas is still very popular in Japan.

The fact that most people have to work may be why, for their Christmas meal, families and couples across Okinawa will no doubt spend Christmas Eve and Christmas sitting around a big cardboard bucket of KFC's finest.

Christmas and KFC may not be a natural pairing for a lot of Americans. But for many Okinawans, the holiday is as much about KFC as Santa Claus and blinking lights.

And if you want to get in on the local tradition, don't waste any time; or you could risk spending your holiday waiting in long lines! During the festive season, dinner reservations are taken weeks, even months in advance at local KFC outlets.

Despite the hefty Christmas price tag (a basic KFC Christmas family meal, which includes a Japanese-style cake, costs the equivalent of about \$48), the take out meal remains incredibly popular and in Japan,



some mark KFC off their holiday to-do lists before most Americans have even finished eating their Thanksgiving turkey.

But why has this happened? Is it because the Colonel's trademark white beard makes him look a little like Santa Claus?

No. It is actually because some clever marketing exec struck gold in 1974 when he started the "Kurisumasu ni wa Kentakkii" campaign, which translates to "Kentucky for Christmas".

The idea came when a group of tourists in Japan couldn't track

down a Christmas turkey and one suggested that a KFC was the best alternative.

The company realized the marketing potential and launched its first Christmas meal (a delicious combo of Chicken and wine).

Today their Christmas offering includes cake and Champagne as well as the Colonel's secret recipe chicken.

The meal has become synonymous with the day and people come in their droves to collect their bargain buckets. Lines can be up to two hours long and people often pre-order in advance.





OKINAWAN CUISINE

Japan's Beloved Christmas Cake Isn't About Christmas At All

Only about 1 percent of the Japanese population is Christian. But you might not realize that if you visited a major metropolitan area during Christmastime. Just as in America, you'll find heads topped with red Santa hats everywhere and elaborate seasonal displays: train sets, mountain scenes and snow-covered trees. Often, these are set inside bakeries hawking one of the highlights of the holiday season in Japan: Christmas cake.

"It's basically sold on practically every street corner," says anthropologist Michael Ashkenazi from the Bonn International Center for Conversion, who studied Japanese culture and tradition. The dessert is a type of sponge cake, covered with snow-white whipped cream and topped with perfectly shaped, ruby red strawberries. It's a beloved December-time treat on the island nation — and not just because it's delicious.

In fact, Christmas cake is now a symbol of commercialism and prosperity, its story intertwined



with Japan's rise from ruins after its defeat in World War II. To understand why, we need to take a little historical detour.

After World War II, American soldiers led the work of rebuilding an occupied Japan. The Japanese economy was in shambles and food shortages were common. Even rarer were sugary sweets. The sweet treats from the U.S. that the Americans handed out were a memorable luxury to a people still recovering from the ravages of war.

"Sweet chocolates, above all, given by American soldiers epitomized the utmost wealth

Japanese children saw in American lives," cultural anthropologist Hideyo Konagaya wrote in a 2001 paper on the history of the Christmas cake published in the *Journal of Popular Culture*. Sweets fed a longing for wealth and a desire to Americanize, he says.

But it wasn't just soldiers that came to Japan. Christian missionaries also made the journey, bringing gifts and the concept of Christmas to Japanese schools and families. Missionaries had actually introduced Christianity to Japan as early as the 16th century, but Christmas didn't catch on as a





OKINAWAN CUISINE

Japan's Beloved Christmas Cake Isn't About Christmas At All (from previous page)

popular holiday until the postwar years, when the Japanese embraced a glitzy, commercial version of the holiday that was less about religion than about prosperity, explains Konagaya.

"The Christmas celebrations gave the Japanese the most tangible pictures that could convey images of prosperous modern lives in America," Konagaya writes.

And so Japan embraced the trappings of a picture-perfect, American-style Christmas — including Santa Claus, an ornament-bedecked tree and a sugar-filled cake. As David Plath, a renowned Japan scholar, writes in a paper on the popularity of Christmas festivities in Japan, "Family Christmas gatherings do not center around dinner, as in the American ideal, but rather upon mutual partaking of a Christmas cake."

So why cake? Well, sponge cake had been available in Japan since the 17th century, but several of the items needed to make this version of it — sugar,

milk and butter — were rarities on the island nation, so the cake was a luxury reserved for the elite. After World War II, Japan's economy rebounded, the ingredients became more widely available, and Japan's newly formed middle class adopted this once-exclusive dessert as a symbol that it had finally made it.

And so, inspired by America, a wholly Japanese tradition was born. "The Christmas cake became a center of attention in the whole festival [of Christmas]," writes Konagaya.

Even the cake's shape and colors are symbolic: It's red and white, echoing the Japanese flag. And traditionally it's round. "Anything that's white and round would normally be associated with shrines," says Ashkenazi.

These days, Christmas cake has become so ingrained in Japanese culture that you can even find some in your smartphone: There are two versions of the cake on the emoji keyboard. (Emoji, as the name suggests, originated in

Japan.) The cakes go on discount once Dec. 25 rolls around — a fact that gave birth to an unfortunate bit of old Japanese slang: "Christmas cake" was used to refer to an unmarried woman who was over 25 and thus, considered past her prime.)

However, while the cake has become firmly entrenched in Japanese culture, Christmas itself hasn't — it's not a national holiday in Japan. In fact, it's celebrated more like Valentine's Day is in America, and it's often thought of as a day for romantic couples to share (usually over a bucket of KFC!).



We haven't tried whipping up a Christmas cake ourselves, but if you're curious, this video from a Japanese cooking show called [Cooking With Dog](#) has a recipe. Because nothing says Christmas like a dog sous chef in a Santa hat.



KARATE CORNER



Each month a different karate master from Okinawa will be featured. The one selected for December is....



Gichin Funakoshi

If there's one man who can be credited with popularizing karate, it's Gichin Funakoshi.

Gichin Funakoshi was born in 1868 in Shuri, then the capital city of the island of Okinawa.

He started practicing karate while in primary school but didn't begin his mission of spreading it to the outside world until he was 53.

The story of Gichin Funakoshi's early years is similar to that of many greats in karate. He began as a sickly, weak boy whose parents took him to a karate master named Yasutsune Itosu for training. Because of a doctor's herbal remedies and Yasutsune Itosu's instruction, Gichin Funakoshi soon blossomed.

He became a good karate student and developed physical

expertise and a disciplined mind.

Standout Student

Funakoshi gave the first public demonstration of karate in 1917 in Kyoto, Japan. When he moved to Japan five years later, he stayed with other Okinawans at a students' dormitory in Tokyo. He lived in a small room alongside the entrance and would clean the dormitory during the day when the students were in class. At night, he would teach them karate. After a short time, he'd earned sufficient money to open a *dojo*.

Funakoshi started visiting the Shichi Tokudo, a barracks located on palace grounds, every other day to teach and was always accompanied by Hidenori Otsuka, one of his most brilliant students. In 1927

three senior students decided that the *kata* practice they had been focusing on was not enough. They introduced *jiyu kumite* (free fighting) in their training, so they created protective clothing and wore kendo masks to shield their faces against hard strikes. Funakoshi heard about these bouts and, when he could not discourage them — he considered them belittling to the art of karate — he stopped coming to the Shichi Tokudo.

Focus on Kata

Funakoshi always believed kata was the secret to becoming skilled in karate. When he moved to Japan, he brought 16 kata with him: five *pinan* and three *naihanchi*, along with *kushanku dai*, *kushanku sho*, *seisan*, *patsai*, *wanshu*, *chinto*, *jutte* and *jion*.





GICHIN FUNAKOSHI

He made students practice the pinan and naihanchi forms for at least three years before he allowed them to progress to the more advanced kata. The repetitious training paid off, though, because his students developed the most precise, exact karate taught anywhere.

Although he was sincere about teaching the art, Funakoshi had his share of critics who scorned his emphasis on kata and decried what they believed was “soft” karate that wasted too much time. Funakoshi just kept making his students concentrate on their kata.

Higher Goals

Funakoshi was always a humble man. He didn't preach the humility of virtue but a basic humility of a man who is rooted in the true perspective of things, full of life and awareness. He lived at peace with himself and with his fellow man.

Whenever Gichin Funakoshi's name is mentioned, it brings to mind the parable of “A Man of *Tao* and a Little Man.” As it's told, a student once asked, “What is the difference between a man of Tao and a little man?”

The master replies: “It is simple. When the little man receives his first *dan*, he can hardly wait to run home and tell everyone he made his first dan. Upon receiving his second dan, he will climb to the roof and shout to the people. Upon receiving his third dan, he will jump in his automobile and parade through town with its horn blowing, telling everyone about it.”

The *sensei* continues: “When the man of Tao receives his first dan, he will bow his head in gratitude. Upon receiving his second dan, he will bow his head and his shoulders. Upon receiving his third dan, he will

bow at the waist and quietly walk alongside the wall so people will not see him or notice him.”

Funakoshi was a man of Tao. He placed no emphasis on competitions, record breaking or championships. Instead, he emphasized self-perfection. He believed in the common decency and respect that one human being owes another. He was a master of masters. Funakoshi died in 1957 at age 88, after humbly making a tremendous contribution to the art of karate.

*Adapted from an original article by
Richard Kim
Black Belt Magazine*

WORDS OF WISDOM

Shikinoo chui shiuhii shiru kurasuru. – Let's live helping each other in this world.
Okinawan Proverb

