

3・4月の暦、行事や習慣あれこれ

国民の祝日:

春分の日 3月20日(水): 二十四節季の一つ。(二十四節季とは、1年を日数によって24等分し、その分割点の日に季節を表す名前をつけたもの。ちなみに、春分の日は「昼と夜の長さがほぼ同じ」と言われていますが、実際には昼の方が少し長い。)「春分の日」を真ん中に挟んで前後合わせて7日間は「春のお彼岸」と呼ばれ、お彼岸の間に家族そろってお墓参りをする伝統があります。また、「ぼたもち」を仏壇に供えたり食べたりする習慣もあります。(春は「牡丹」の花にちなみ「ぼたもち」、秋は「萩」の花にちなみ「おはぎ」と言いかえますが、同じ和菓子のことです。)

昭和の日 4月29日(月): 昭和天皇が御在位中の1989年までは「天皇誕生日」でした。その後は「みどりの日」とされましたが、2007年から「昭和の日」となり、「みどりの日」は5月4日に移されました。

伝統的な行事や習慣あれこれ

ひな祭り 3月3日は、「女の子の幸せと成長を祈り祝う日」とされています。2月ごろから「ひな人形」を飾り、ひしもち、白粥、ひなあられ、白酒などを供えます。また、3月3日は「桃の節句」とも呼ばれ、桃の花を飾って災いを祓う習慣もあります。

啓蟄(けいちつ) 3月5日。二十四節季の一つ。寒い冬の間に、土の中で冬眠していた虫たちが、春の気配に誘われて目を覚まし、地上に這い出してくる時季であるという意味です。

花見 花見の対象は、ほとんどの場合、「ソメイヨシノ」という種類の桜で、関東地方では、毎年たいてい3月末ごろから4月初めころにかけて一斉に咲きます。そして、2週間足らずで、はらはらと散っていきます。桜は、花びらの「可憐な美しさ」と「散り際のはかなさ」が多くの日本人に愛され、「国花の一つ(*もう一つは菊)」に選ばれています。「お花見スポット」は皆さんの近くにもたくさんあると思います。最近では、日本人に交ってお花見を楽しんでいる外国出身の皆さんの姿も多く見られるようになりました。国際的な「お花見」が盛んになるといいですね!

年度末・年度はじめ 日本では、役所や学校をはじめとして、4月から3月までを1年とする組織がほとんどです。そのため、年度末の3月には、たいていの学校では卒業式が行われます。そして、年度はじめの4月には、学校では入学式が、役所やおおきい会社でも入社式が行われ、たくさんの人たちが人生の新しいスタートをすることになります。この時期は、桜の咲く華やかな季節とも重なり、「希望の春」と言われています。



Calendar, Events & Customs of March and April

National Holiday:

«Vernal Equinox Day» March 20th (Wednesday): one of the 24 points of old solar calendar "niju-shi sekki". (*The whole year is divided into 24 parts equally and a name unique to the season is given to each point. By the way, it is said that the length of night and day on Vernal Equinox Day is almost the same, but in reality, daytime is a bit longer.) The term of seven days with 'Vernal Equinox Day' in-between is called "haruno o-higan" or the equinoctial week; there is a tradition in Japan that each family visits the grave during the week. There is also a custom of putting "botamochi" (*rice cakes covered with bean jam, ground sesame, or others.) on the family Buddhist altar or eating them. (*In spring, the cake is called "botamochi" after the name of flower "botan" or peony flower, while in autumn it is called "ohagi" after "hagi" or Japanese bush clover.)

«Showa Day» April 29th (Monday): until 1989 in the reign of Emperor Showa, the day had been celebrated as "Emperor's Birthday", and then it was changed to "Greenery Day" and finally in 2007, it was named "Showa Day", while "Greenery Day" was moved to May 4th.

This and That of Traditional Events and Customs:

«Hina-matsuri» or Girl's Doll Festival > March 3rd is the day to celebrate and pray for happiness and growth of girls. On some day in February, "hina-ningyo" or small pretty Japanese dolls are displayed together with offerings of "hishi-mochi" (*diamond-shaped rice cake only associated with Hina-matsuri), "hina-arare" (*colorful snow-pellet size sweet rice crackers) and "shiro-zake" (*white sake). The day is also called "momo no sekku" because of the custom to put "momo no hana" or 'peach blossoms' on display for the festival; peach blossoms are believed to remove misfortune from people.

«Kei-chitsu» March 5th; one of the 24 points of the old solar calendar. It's the time of the year when insects which have hibernated in the earth during cold winter awake and come out of the ground with the sign of spring.

«Hana-mi» The kind of blossoms for viewing is "somei-yoshino" cherry blossoms in most cases. Usually in Kanto region, cherry blossoms simultaneously begin to bloom from around the end of March to early April, and the petals will flutter to the ground in less than 2 weeks. Many Japanese love 'the simple beauty' and 'the fragile life' of the blossoms; it is selected one of the national flowers (*the other one is chrysanthemum). There seem to be a lot of viewing spots of cherry blossoms in your area, and these years, quite many foreign people can be seen enjoying "hana-mi" together with Japanese. It'll be very nice if cherry blossoms viewing will become more and more popular among international residents.

The Beginning and the End of Fiscal / School Year

In Japan most organizations like public offices and schools have the system of one year that begins in April and ends in March of the following year. So, at most schools, a graduation ceremony is held at the year end in March, and an entrance ceremony at the beginning of the year in April, while public offices and many companies have an entrance ceremony to welcome the new employees at the beginning of April. In this way many people are expected to get a new start in life. This season is overlapped by the brilliant season of cherry blossoms in bloom. That's why it is called "Hopeful Spring".

