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December 2014 & January 2015



AKEMASHITE OMEDETOUI NEW YEAR'S TRADITIONS IN JAPAN



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AKEMASHITE OMEDETOUI NEW YEAR'S TRADITIONS

IN JAPAN



Issue 25



A kemashite Omedetou, or Happy New Year! As one of the most important holidays in Japan, New Year's takes not one, but three days to celebrate. We've rounded up the most popular Japanese New Year's traditions, and explain their meanings.

We also have reviews of the Hilton Hotel lunch buffet and A-Danny. Plus, don't miss our Total You article, the latest dive report from Reef Encounters and Weird & Wonderful. You can view the magazine online at: www.totalokinawa.com



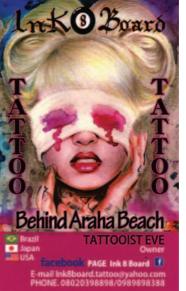
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by David Higgins

The Hilton Hotel Lunch Buffet

Restaurant Review

Get the royal treatment and all you can eat, too!



The lunch buffet is on the first floor, just to the left of the entrance. We were seated right in front of the window with a stunning view of the Chatan harbor. The buffet itself is so big that the distance to the end and your table is quite far; I almost feel like you shouldn't feel any guilt because you are burning calories walking back and forth. The restaurant is spotless and so clean. Everything looks perfectly organized and well designed.

The food was incredible. The buffet starts with sushi with a sushi chef cutting and slicing fish in front of you. There are also salad, meat and

vegetable stations. Instead of being the usual assortment of plain steamed vegetables, all the vegetables were

prepared with exotic sauces.

It was remarkable how unique all the dishes were. Moving on from the vegetables you come across Indian curries with lamb and traditional Okinawan dishes like goya champuru.

The desserts at the Hilton did not disappoint. There were an assortment of pies, exotic puddings and mousses. As a bonus, there was even a yogurt chef who would mix any type of frozen yogurt and fruit for you by hand. The biceps on this yogurt chef were huge from smashing all that frozen yogurt together. I am not a big fan of chocolate waterfalls, but as far as aesthetics go, there was a pretty impressive looking chocolate waterfall.



We started and ended the buffet with coffees, and the coffee was delicious. I felt that it was all such high quality food, and probably some of the highest quality food on the island. Although the Hilton Buffet is a bit more expensive than other places on Okinawa, it is well worth it. One person admission to the buffet is 2400 yen. This would be perfect for any special occasion, a birthday, or maybe just a celebration of your pay day.







Winter Dive Season Is Underway

As another year of diving gets added to the log books, it's time to start anew in 2015. As the water cools in December and January, it's time to dig out those 5mm suits and hoods so you can continue to enjoy the waters around Okinawa.

to

The cooler months here allow us to enjoy new sights and sounds underwater. Soon the humpbacks will be visiting the islands to calf and their haunting songs will be heard both day and night throughout the dive sites



of Okinawa and the Kerama Islands. As the water cools, larger fish will be moving south and visiting our waters, including the hammerhead sharks in Yonaguni.

Reef Encounters has announced its dates for the 2015 Sharks and Ruins tours and sign-ups are ongoing. Seats are limited, so make reservations early for this once in a lifetime experience. Trips to Yonaguni will include diving on the mysterious "pyramids" found surrounding the island at depths from 5 meters to 20 meters, along with drift dives on Hammer Way, where schools of up to hundreds of hammerheads cruise majestically in the crystal clear waters of the East China Sea. Land tours of the historical sites and dramatic viewpoints of this tiny island are also part of these all-inclusive tours.

The winter season is also a great time to upgrade that open water card – classes for advanced divers, rescue, and master scuba diver are offered throughout the year. Reef Encounters offers these and a full slate of technical classes for qualified divers, including Intro to Tech, Decompression Techniques, and Trimix. For those looking to make their hobby a career, a full slate of divemaster and instructor courses will also be available. By taking these professional development courses now, you could be teaching students by the spring of 2015.

Instead of packing up that dive gear for the winter, it's time to dig out the 5mm suit and neoprene hood and continue your underwater adventures in Okinawa with Reef Encounters. Contact us today to explore the waters around our island paradise.

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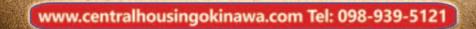








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The year 2015 marks, according to eastern or Chinese astrology, the year of the sheep. It's thought to be a time of peace, contentment and creativity, as well as a time to travel, take risks, and appreciate family and friendships. Whether or not you follow eastern horoscope, one thing is certain: with the new year comes new opportunities to learn and explore the world and its cultures, including Japan's.

There are few countries more steeped in tradition than Japan, and that is particularly evident in all the preparations and customs for its biggest holiday of the winter season: The New Year. While many countries celebrate with fireworks displays and parties on New Year's Eve, Japan's celebrations last at least three days, and include customs like cleaning the house from top to bottom, preparing symbolic dishes that are only eaten during the holiday, and making visits to shrines as well as family and friends' houses.

On the next pages, we've listed Japan's most popular New Year's traditions, and explained their cultural significance. Use this guide as a starting point to understanding some of the sights and celebrations you may encounter this holiday season, and to go beyond wishing others "Akemashite Omedetou!" (Happy New Year!).

CEREMONIES



Most Japanese visit a Shinto shrine or Buddhist temple sometime between January 1-3. During this first visit, called "hatsumode," many visitors dress in colorful kimono. Once there, they usually ring a bell, clap twice, and pray for prosperity and peace for the year. In Okinawa, many visit Shuri Castle (left), whose New Year's festival includes a reenactment of the Ryukyu Kingdom's New Year's ceremony, traditional dance and prayers for prosperity.

MOCHI

Though it can be purchased throughout the year, mochi is traditionally a New Year's food. People visiting shrines on New Year's Day take turns pounding rice in large wooden bowls with mallets, as water is added, forming the soft, glutinous texture of the mochi rice cake. Mochi can also be colored and flavored or filled with ingredients like fruit, custard or red bean paste.







You might notice some interesting decor at the entrances of many homes and other buildings. Called "kadomatsu," the arrangements usually consist of bamboo stalks, pine tree branches and rope, plus other embellishments. Kadomatsu welcome the Shinto gods and offer a temporary place for them to reside, as the gods were thought to live in trees. The bamboo stalks are three different heights, and represent, from tallest to shortest, the heavens, humanity and earth. The rope signifies that the home or building has been purified to welcome the gods. As such, cleaning one's home from top to bottom is also a Japanese New Year's custom.

GIVING MONEY

On New Year's Day, Japanese people traditionally give money to children. Elders obtain crisp, new bills from the bank, fold them into three sections, and place them in specially decorated envelopes, called "pochibukuro." The custom of giving money to children, called "otoshidama," is not limited to family; close friends, neighbors and even teachers often give to children when they visit on or after New Year's Day. Children generally receive money until they finish high school, and older children tend to receive more money than younger siblings.







Besides mochi, other foods are customarily eaten during New Year's. This special fare, called "osechi-ryori" or just "osechi," includes seaweed, fish cakes, mashed sweet potato with chestnut, and black soybeans. The foods symbolize what eaters wish for in the new year, including joy, health and good fortune. On New Year's Eve, many eat buckwheat soba, as the noodles represent long life. The most auspicious New Year's food is ozoni (left), a clear broth made with mochi and regional vegetables and ingredients. It is believed that eating ozoni will surely bring one success in the new year.





Many places throughout the world celebrate the moment the new year begins with fireworks. If you live anywhere near a Japanese Buddhist temple, you might instead hear bells tolling to literally ring in the new year. During this traditional bell ringing, called "Joya no Kane," the bells are rung exactly 108 times, representing the 108 earthly temptations that Buddhists believe humans must overcome to achieve nirvana.



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Mask Marketing

A small company in Japan recently donated 10,000 masks for use by health professionals dealing with the Ebola virus in west African countries. The masks, which normally cost ¥7500, are coated in chemicals and kill 99% of viruses, including Ebola. The good deed also turned out to be good marketing, as now New York City, France and other countries are calling for orders.

Diaper Dilemma

Three Chinese men were arrested in



Japan for buying disposable diapers. They entered the country on culinary licenses, but violated their visas by buying 990 packs of Merries brand diapers to send to buyers in China.

Watch where you pour that thing

A 20-year old Tokyo man was arrested for pouring urine from a plastic bottle on a 14-year old girl. You could say he put the "pee" in PET.

A win for gender equality at work

The top court in Japan ruled that employers cannot discriminate against women by demoting them or denying requests for lighter work, especially when pregnant or returning from maternity leave. This is a big step for a country that still experiences a lot of gender inequality in the workplace. This discrimination is being dubbed "maternity harrassment."

Disney's "love letter" to Japan

After Disney's film "Frozen" became the 3rd top-grossing film of all time in Japan (after "Titanic" and Miyazaki's anime classic "Spirited Away"), Disney execs created "Big Hero 6," and dubbed the film its "love letter to Japanese culture." It remains to be seen whether a story about Japanese whiz kid "Hiro" and his robot companion can draw Japanese audiences as well as two sister princesses.

Porno Park Dump

An elderly man was caught dumping almost a quarter ton of pornography in a park in Osaka. Because the stash belonged to an ill friend, neither he nor the elderly "dumper" is likely to be charged.

Tourism Up, says JNTO

The number of foreign visitors to Japan has already exceeded 10 million this year, two months earlier than predicted, according to the Japan National Tourism Organization. Two contributors: increased international flights at Haneda Airport and easing of visa regulations in southeast Asia.

Ban on Japan basketball looming

Japan faces a ban from basketball's international governing association, FIBA, for failing to merge its two top leagues, the 22-team Basketball Japan League and the 13-team National Basketball League. The ban would prevent Japan's national teams from participating in international competitions. Hopefully they figure things out before the next summer Olympics rolls around!



by Denise Manning

Stress Free Zone!



t's so easy to get stressed out these days and especially through the holidays. Small things can irritate us. Okinawa traffic, people parking on the side of a busy street, those 10 last pounds that just won't go away



can bring anyone down! It's such a misfortune if we allow those things to kill our vibe while trying to enjoy this island. How do we get rid of all the stress and negative feelings and

actually start enjoying okinawa? Well, seems like there's a few simple rules that can make our lives happier. And here they are:

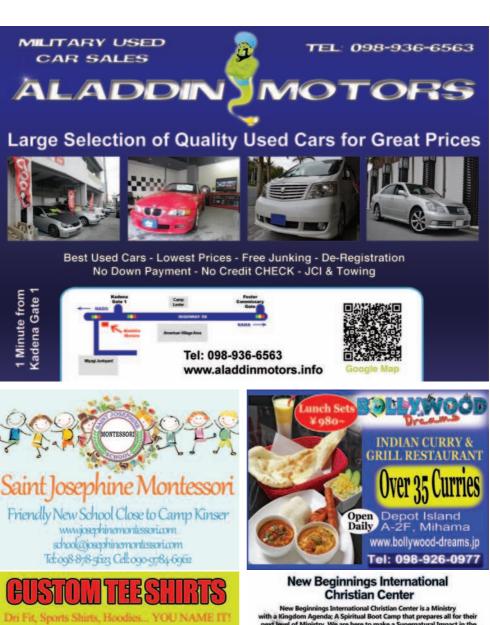
1. Take a 10-30 minutes walk every day. And while you walk, smile. Think positive thoughts.

- 2. Take advantage of the different spas here on island! Relax!
- 3. Get some sleep
- 4. Go explore! Get out and see new and different things.
- 5. Play more games.
- 6. Read more books
- 7. Make time to practice meditation, yoga, and prayer.
- 8. Spend time with people that uplift and motivate you.
- 9. Dream more
- 10. Eat healthy
- 11. Drink plenty of water.
- 12. Smile more
- 13. Don't waste your precious energy on the wrong people
- 14. Forget and forgive issues of the past.
- 15. Let go of anything that doesn't make you happy.

I know that some things may be harder to do than others. It's important to take baby steps when changing anything. Remember to embrace your journey and experience here on the island don't get consumed on what others are doing... Everything here is for your greater good, BE the TOTAL YOU in Okinawa!!

T. Denise Manning, Certifed Life Coach, founder/owner of Imagine Potential Life strategies firm, joined the total Okinawa Team June 2014 and will be writing our "total you" section that highlights, inspires and encourages our readers to be the best they can be by utilizing okinawa's services and resources! Want your health, fitness, beauty or wellness business featured? Contact Ms. Denise today! OkinawaLifeCoach@gmail.com

T. Denise Manning is the president and owner of Imagine Potential Life Strategies Coaching Firmwww.imaginepotentialnow.com

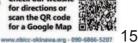


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Restaurant Review

Asian Dining Bar A-Danny

Ignore the name - it's a great Indian restaurant!

With quite possibly the most confusing name for an Indian restaurant we had been avoiding this place because we weren't sure what to expect. The name conjurs up images of maybe a bar with small snacks but in fact although it does have a bar, it's actually a very good Indian restaurant.

Walking in we were surprised to find a tastefully decorated restaurant with hanging curtains, wall art and a fake tiled roof above the booths arranged around the sides of the restaurant. This gives a wonderful feeling of privacy and comfort whatever group size you are dining with.



On first glance at the menu, we were amazed to see several pages of imported bottle beers all priced at an even more amazing 600 yen each. There were probably around five full menu pages with we would guess close to 100 imported beers from all around the planet. It would make a good stop if you just want to sample some foreign brews

a wide variety of in Okinawa. Some of which ranged in All include curry, appetizers. The appetizer of



along with some Indian snacks. When it comes to the main meal we weren't sure what to expect. There's quality when it comes to Indian food our group chose from the set menus price from 1280 yen up to 1980 yen. naan and salad then choices of meat

vegetable pakoras was fresh and not

greasy with a generous filling and the naan breads we chose including cheese and vegetable options were all delicious with the right balance of ingredients. The star here though was the curry. In contrast to other dishes we've had locally you could tell that the chicken curry contained tandoori chicken and had good, fresh cuts of meat giving it a slight tandoori flavour even through the curry sauce. They even have a choice of spice levels to customize your temperature of curry. All in, A-Danny has a somewhat strange name but is a definitely recommended Indian restaurant, go for the beer and stay for the curry!





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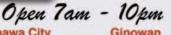


Steak Sandwich

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