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Blessings for the new year

The Japanese custom of "Hatsumode" draws people from all backgrounds in the isles

By Pat Gee POSTED: 01:30 a.m. HST, Dec 28, 2013



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In Japan, millions of people flock to Shinto shrines for New Year's blessings called "Hatsumode." In Hawaii, people of all sorts of backgrounds and faiths also take part in the custom during the first three days of the new year. Many participants in the islands are especially interested in buying a variety of omamori, elaborately fashioned good-luck charms.

"Hatsumode is a powerful ritual that lays an excellent foundation for the new year," says a news release issued by Hawaii Kotohira Jinsha-Hawaii Dazaifu Tenmangu. "The purpose

is to enhance the new year with health, joy, abundance and positive energies, which will uplift and empower our lives."

Japanese Buddhists and Shintoists ring in the new, as Westerners do, on Jan. 1. They've done this since 1873, when Japan adopted the Gregorian calendar, says the Rev. Reyn Tsuru of Shingon Shu Hawaii, a Buddhist temple that also recognizes the indigenous Shinto religion of Japan each year. According to the Chinese lunar calendar, 2014 is the Year of the Horse, which officially starts Jan. 31.

Here are Tsuru's predictions for 2014:

"The horse is a capricious animal. By nature, it loves to run and run. The freedom of being unbound and wild is the true nature of a horse, not the beast of burden we humans have domesticated the beautiful creature to be. 2014 will be a year that runs fast, and very possibly wild. It will take strong convictions and a steady hand to rein the year in and make things happen for us at our bidding, rather than letting everything lie to fate. So please, when making decisions, research and study!"

Tsuru continued: "In romance, the year will gallop by, with many prospects popping up, but again stay focused and in control. In health, the breakneck speed the horse enjoys will easily tire the other animals of the zodiac, so REST. The stability of the snake year (2013) imparted good health and positive finances for most, which prepared them for the entrance of the horse and the wild ride it will bring. The gentle ram follows and will bring some peace in 2015."

JAPANESE NEW YEAR OBSERVANCES

Here is a schedule of some Japanese New Year events:

Daijingu Temple of Hawaii, 61 Puiwa Road, 595-3102.

» The Rev. Akihiro Okada will perform the ooharai purification ceremony at 10 p.m. Tuesday. It will be followed by an 11 p.m. Jyoya Sai, the last blessing of the year, which includes prayers of thanksgiving and for a safe and happy new year. At midnight, Okada will beat a giant taiko drum to usher in the new year.

» New Year's Day blessings will be offered from midnight to 5 p.m. Wednesday. The Hawaii Gagaku Kenkyukai, a Japanese court music group, will perform at 2 p.m.

Izumo Taishakyo Mission of Hawaii, 215 N. Kukui St., 538-7778.

» Prayers and blessings will be available from midnight to 5 p.m. New Year's Day. Blessings will also be offered on Thursday and Friday during daytime hours. Omamori for the blessing and protection of the business, home and individuals will be available for a nominal donation. Email izumotaisha@hawaii.rr.com.

Honolulu Myohoji Mission, 2003 Nuuanu Ave., 524-7790.

» An 11:45 p.m. service will be held Tuesday; a New Year's Day service, set for 10 a.m., will be followed by special refreshments.

Hawaii Kotohira Jinsha-Hawaii Dazaifu Tenmangu, 1239 Olomea St., 841-4755.

» Midnight to 5 p.m. New Year's Day:

Complimentary bowls of ozoni mochi soup will be served from midnight to 2 a.m., and also from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Then from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., OKO Guys Food Truck will serve okonomiyaki and wafu hot dogs.

New Year's Day festivities include a 10 a.m. taiko performance with Tsutomu Nakai and Dragon Beat Wataiko welcoming the Year of the Horse, and Shishimai lion dances throughout the day. Omamori amulets and other good-luck items will be available for sale. Parking is available at Damien School, 1401 Houghtailing St., with free shuttle to and from shrine. Visit www.e-shrine.org.

Shingon Shu Hawaii, 915 Sheridan St., 941-5663.

» An "End of the Year" service will start at 11:30 p.m. Tuesday.