

Kodomo No Hi

What is Kodomo No Hi?

Children's Day, or Kodomo no hi (こどもの日), is a Japanese celebration which takes place every year on the 5th of May.

It is the final celebration in Golden Week, and it is an opportunity to celebrate the happiness and good fortune of children.

It has been a day of celebration in Japan since ancient times and was designated a public holiday by the Japanese government in 1948.

Kodomo no hi is especially well known as there are several unique traditions and decorations that are associated with the celebration of the holiday.



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History of Kodomo no hi

The origins of Kodomo no hi originally date back nearly 1500 years.

The Day was originally called Tango no sekku (端午の節句) and was celebrated on the fifth day of the fifth moon in the Chinese calendar (or the "Double Fifth").

Children's Day was originally known as Boys' Day and purely celebrated boys and recognised fathers. This was because girls had their celebration on the "Double Third", known as Hinamatsuri (ひなまつり), which occurs every year on the 3rd of March. In 1948, the Japanese government renamed Boys' Day to Children's Day to include both male and female children, as well as to recognise mothers along with fathers and family qualities of unity.



"Boy's Festival - Fish Kites" by A.Davey is licensed under CC BY 2.0

How is Kodomo no hi celebrated?

There are many lovely traditions associated with the celebration of Kodomo ni hi. The most well known are the carp-shaped windsocks or kites, known as Koinobori (こいのぼり), which are raised to celebrate each member of a family.

The black carp, which is the largest one on the Koinobori flag, represents the father and is known as the magoi (まごい). The red or pink carp, or higo (ひごい), represents the mother, and the last carp, which is often blue, represents the child (traditionally the son). An additional carp fish, which is usually green or orange, is added for each younger sibling. These streamers fly on poles outside of houses and public buildings to bring luck, health and good fortune to the children inside.

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Within their homes, families may also display a samurai doll, which is sometimes riding on a large carp. These samurai dolls often represent the Japanese folk characters Kintarō or Momotarō, who symbolise courage and strength. Families may also display traditional Japanese military helmets, or kabuto (かぶと). Samurai and military items traditionally represent symbols of honour and bravery.

Children perform in traditional Japanese plays, often in lead roles. Thousands of children also compete in the 'Kids' Olympics' held at the National Kasumigaoka Stadium in Tokyo.

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During this celebration, children eat kashiwa-mochi (かしわもち), or rice cakes stuffed with bean paste and wrapped in oak leaves, to symbolise strength.

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Chimaki (ちまき), or sticky rice dumplings wrapped in bamboo leaves, are also eaten.

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Iris flowers, which bloom in early May, are placed in homes to ward off evil spirits. It is also customary to take baths known as syobuyu (しよぶゆ), which are filled with floating iris leaves.

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