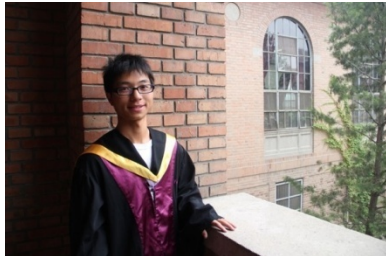




My first experience in Japan (Japanese New Year)

S.K (China)



Hello! Does everyone know Japanese New Year? I experienced a very interesting and special Japanese New Year.

Before I came to Japan, I have heard that Japanese New Year is a very special and traditional festival for Japanese people. Last October I came to the University of Tokyo for my further study. Therefore, I had an opportunity to experience this festival.

Japanese New Year starts from Dec 29th to Jan 3rd every year and Dec 31st is New Year's Eve. On Dec 31st last year, my friends and I went to Asakusa together for Hatsumode (the first trip to a shrine or temple) to pray for the good luck and our families' health for the coming year after we watched the NHK Kokaku Uta Gassen (an annual music show on New Year's Eve produced by Japanese public broadcaster NHK). There were so many people that it was very congested. Around 12 a.m. we arrived at the front of Kannon (literally "Bodhisattva Guanyin").



After that we became hungry and we had Takoyaki (a ball-shaped Japanese snack made of a wheat flour-based batter), Toshikoshi-soba (buckwheat noodles eaten on New Year's Eve) and Amazake (sweet, low or non-alcohol). Japanese subway kept going all night on that day and I arrived at home at almost 5 a.m. I did not get up until 12 p.m. I was so tired and I didn't have Hatsuyume (Japanese word for the first dream had in the New Year).



On Jan 2nd, I was invited to visit my host family in Kamakura and it took me about 2 hours to go there. My host family is Mr. Okada, an old man who is very nice and spry. Before lunch, Mr. Okada introduced the history of Kamakura to me and I got to know that this city became famous since Kamakura period. Around 12 p.m. we began to have lunch together and it was the first time for me to see Osechi-ryori.

Osechi-ryori is traditional Japanese New Year food with Japanese characteristics. They were so delicious! After lunch, I received Otoshidama (New Year gift-money) from Mr. Okada. This tradition is the same as Chinese culture. However, the color of the bag is a little different. In Japan the money is usually put in white bags, but Chinese people usually use red bags.

After a short rest, we went to Kotoku-in, Tsurugaoka Hachiman-gu and Hase-dera. I chose an Omikuji (random fortunes written on strips of paper at Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples in Japan) at Tsurugaoka Hachiman-gu and Mr. Okada explained the contents to me. I bought some souvenirs and after the supper I went back home.



This was my first experience of Japanese New Year. Although my families were not here with me and I felt a little lonely, I was very happy to experience the traditional Japanese culture. I hope I can get to know and learn more Japanese culture in the future.

Note: Some terms are explained based on Wikipedia.