

# ひな祭り Doll Festival

**The 3rd of March is Hina Matsuri or Dolls Festival in Japan and it is a festival to wish for the wellbeing and prosperity of girls in a family. The festival has a lesser used name Momo no Sekku or Peach Festival which points to festival's traditional meaning. Still today sprigs of peach blossom are part of a Hina Matsuri display.**

*Hina Matsuri* has a strong link to a family's wish for their daughter to be happily married. Peach blossoms are said to symbolise happiness in marriage and also to embody virtues of a mild manner that has been regarded desirable in a woman in Japan. How much this thought is behind modern parents' thinking is arguable. Wishing for health and happiness seems to be today's focus. However, there is still a superstition surrounding the dolls; many people think that if you leave the dolls out too long it spoils the daughter's chances of getting married or will lead to her marrying late.

The display of dolls is the main feature of *Hina Matsuri* and became common during the Edo Period as doll manufacture became more widespread. The well-known multi-tiered displays of dolls on red carpet are based on imperial court dolls that originally daughters of the aristocracy played with throughout the year. In fact the more historical *hina* dolls are a pair dolls, a man and a woman. Perhaps for reasons of space some families today opt for a pair of dolls instead of the multi-tiered display—it is also a less expensive option. Just the pair of dolls can make an attractive display.



The dolls here stand in front of *hishimochi*, a delicacy of the festival which is a rice cake made up of pink, white and green diamonds. In front of the dolls is of course a sprig of peach blossom.

**The 5th of May is Kodomo no Hi or Children's Day. Nowadays it is a day to wish for the health and happiness of children, and unlike Mother's Day and Father's Day, Children's Day is a public holiday! You will know that Children's Day is coming up when you see colourful koi-nobori—carp streamers—flying overhead.**

Despite its name, it is still largely celebrated in the traditional way as a festival for boys—a partner for the *Hina Matsuri*.

The *koi-nobori* streamers are the most striking element of the festival and are probably best described as huge windsocks decorated as carp fish. They are hung from poles or strung on ropes across rivers or playing fields. To watch them blow on the spring breezes against a vivid

blue sky reminds you of fish swimming. The carp is said to symbolise strength and success which has its basis in a Chinese legend in which a carp swam up a waterfall to become a dragon. In urban areas you may see instead mini-versions of *koi-nobori* tied to balconies or protruding from windows. This is not surprising as *koi-nobori* can measure up to 3 metres long.

Other families may choose to display *musha-ningyo* or warrior dolls inside the house. Some *musha ningyo* displays come with attractive purple iris flowers. To Australian eyes this might look a little unusual, but there is nothing sissy about these warrior dolls which normally have fierce looks of determination. An alternative name for this day is *Shobo no Sekku*, *shobo* meaning iris. It used to be common to have children take a bath with several iris leaves as this was believed to protect children's health and protect them from evil. And that is why the iris is still associated with this day.



## Children's Day

こどもの日