# Festivals and Cultures of Japan

As in The Bahamas, people in Japan celebrate many special days during the year, but their festivals are very different from Junkanoo Festival, for example, on the first day of January- New Year's Day, many Japanese families dress in their best clothes and meet to share a drink of sweet spiced Rice Wine. The wine is said to destroy evil spirits and build up strength.

Traditional New Year's foods have meanings also. Some examples are rice cakes called Mochi, meaning good fortune. Food made from seaweed is for happiness and potatoes also help to drive away evil spirits.

Children's Day is another big holiday in Japan. On this day, children might receive small gifts of envelopes containing money from relatives and friends who may visit during this holiday. Whenever people visit one another in Japan, small gifts are exchanged. It is an important part of Japanese culture always to give a gift when accepting one.

Another festival is the Iris Festival or Children's Day, which is celebrated on the 5th of May. In the past, boys in Japan were given more attention than girls, and the celebration was mostly for boys. The Iris leaves are a symbol of courage and strength. They are put into a boy's bath to make him strong and brave.

On the day of the festival, gaily coloured paper and cloth kites fly from bamboo poles in the garden. The children also have kites that they fly high in the air, and they wage kite battles with their friends. Some kites are made in the shape of dragons, butterflies, dragonflies, and carp.

The carp is a fish which, like the Iris is a symbol of strength and courage.

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