

JAPANESE GIVING

The Japanese have elevated gift wrapping, and indeed, gift giving itself, to an art form.



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DURING MY UNIVERSITY DAYS IN Japan I was lucky enough to work part time in a department store in Kyoto. One department I worked in was selling men's ties - this included intense training on how to wrap precisely and beautifully, which to be honest I never totally mastered.

The other section I worked in was serving Japanese tea to customers, whilst they were making their choices for corporate gifts. This is done twice a year - ochuugen お中元 in Japanese summer (July/August) and oseibo お歳暮 in winter during December.

Gift giving in Japan is a way of life. Every time you visit someone it is important to take a small gift and every time you travel it is important to take omiyage お土産 souvenirs.

With a population of 127 million people this means big business. New Zealand companies could benefit by offering unique and well packaged gifts for the Japan market.

Recent research from New Zealand government agency NZ Story has highlighted New Zealand products need to be "Made for Japan" versus "Made in New Zealand". You can read the white paper at www.nzstory.govt.nz/assets/155384.

Gift giving is far reaching and whilst monetary gifts are given for weddings, funerals, graduations and other celebrations, the recipient will often reciprocate. Hikidemono 引き出物 for weddings - which usually consists of cake and some porcelain or other gift are received by guests and funeral attendees receive koden gaeshi 香典返し.

Japan not only celebrates Valentine's Day - where traditionally females give males gifts - but also has "White Day" one month later on March 14. This time males give females gifts. This includes ギリチョコ "giri chokko" - gifts where men give gifts to females they feel obligated to.

In Japan relationships are complex and entail a great deal of thought and protocol. Gift giving is an integral part of building and maintaining relationships.

From my long association with Japan since university days it still fascinates and excites me to receive beautiful items, reflective of the current season or a particular region. Reciprocating with unique and beautifully wrapped New Zealand gifts requires a lot more thought.

One of my favourite parts of running Team Japan is gift giving and I feel privileged to take part in the joy that people get from receiving a unique and thought-out gift.



