

All About Kimonos

* What is a kimono?

Kimono literally means "thing to wear," but usually refers to Japan's traditional garment, which reach down to the ankles, wraps around the body and is held together by a wide sash, called **obi**. Its origins can be traced back to about 1200 years ago, while the kimono became known in its present form approximately 500 years ago.

* Do the Japanese wear kimonos today?

Kimonos were a part of daily life up until about 100 years ago, but today are only worn on special occasions, such as weddings, funerals New Year's Day, Seijin-shiki (the coming of age ceremony for women), and Shichi-Go-San (7-5-3 Festival for children). During the summer, the sight of people in **yukatas** (casual cotton kimonos) at street festivals is still a familiar one.

* Are there different kinds of kimonos?

Yes, there are many different kinds of kimonos, depending on the occasion. In general, women's kimonos are much more decorative than men's. Married and unmarried women's kimonos are different, in that the latter are much more colorful and elaborate, and have sleeves which may be up to four feet, called **furisode**. Kimono sleeves for married women are shorter, and the colors and patterns more reserved.

* What are kimonos made of?

A formal kimono is usually made of silk. A summer kimono can also be made of cotton or fine linen, for casual and formal wear. Casual winter kimonos are made of wool. Today, synthetic fabrics are also used, making them easier to clean and maintain.

* Is it difficult to clean a kimono?

Traditionally, a silk kimono is first taken apart along the seams. The sections are washed and laid out on thin bamboo sticks (**shinshibari**) or stretched on a board to dry (**araihari**). As kimonos are not washed very often, daily care is very important. Kimonos are hung to air after every wear and the collar, sleeves and hem should be cleaned frequently by hand.

* How is a kimono made?

All adults kimonos are cut in eight sections from one roll of cloth, measured in "tan." Ichi (one) "tan" is a roll of fabric about 14 inches wide and 12 yards long. The seams are cut straight and always the same width, so regardless of the wearer's size, no cloth is left over. Adjustments to fit the individual are made while putting on the **kimono** and **obi**, the silk sash which holds it in place.

