

*The Most
Charming
Japanese
Souvenirs!*



The final round of screening for the Charming Japanese Souvenir Contest 2012 was held in Tokyo in January 2012. The annual contest is hosted by the Japan Tourism Agency and this marked its eighth year. A panel comprising fifteen judges from countries including South Korea, Canada, France and Thailand as well as twelve Japanese who hold extensive knowledge of Japan's tourism, commerce and other fields, evaluated the quality and design of numerous Japanese souvenirs from the perspective of overseas visitors.

The final round of screening was based on a scoring system. The foreign judges selected five products and the Japanese judges chose three. The Grand Prize was awarded to the product that earned the most points. Of the 720 souvenirs submitted to the contest this year from all over Japan, one was awarded the Grand Prize, seven received Category Prizes, and fifteen received International Prizes.

In 2012, the Grand Prize and Traditional Japan Category Gold Prize was awarded to the Uchiwa-serving plates "Four Seasons" by Sakuda Gold & Silver Leaf Co. from Kanazawa, Ishikawa Prefecture. The plates are shaped like uchiwa (Japanese fans) and covered with gold leaf. The surface of each plate has different representative Japanese flowers of the seasons and the handle can be detached and used as a fork. The plates can be used not only for their intended function, but also as decorative ornaments. Sakuda was founded in 1919, and produces gold leaf craftwork, lotion containing gold leaf, greeting cards decorated with gold leaf, and a number of other items. Visitors to its store can purchase these items and experience the gilding process.

Manufacturing of gold leaf in Kanazawa is thought to have started at the end of the sixteenth century, and almost all of Japan's domestic production of gold leaf now takes place in the city. Even minor

static electricity can break gold leaf, which has a thickness of just 1/10,000 mm. Kanazawa's high humidity sufficiently prevents this from occurring, and this climatic advantage is one of the reasons why the city has become a center for production.

Kazunori Sakuda, president of Sakuda Gold & Silver Leaf, says, "Since our store was introduced in the Michelin Guide in 2009, we started to see many people visiting from Western and Asian countries. The Uchiwa-serving plates are particularly popular as souvenirs visitors purchase for themselves or their families since they present Japanese traditional features." He adds, "Foreigners have long held an image of Japan as the 'country of gold.' I think these have become so popular because the gilded plates are paired with the uchiwa shape characteristic of Japanese folk crafts."

Products that were awarded prizes are now sold at Sakura, a souvenir shop in Narita International Airport. Sakura also sells some products awarded in previous contests. Some prize winning products will be sold at Gift & Travel, a souvenir shop in Central Japan International Airport in the near future. The products show local characteristics and culture. When you get the chance to visit Japan, please take a look. 



A craftsman lays gold leaf (left) on an Uchiwa-serving plate (selection, right), winner of the Grand Prize and Traditional Japan Category Gold Prize in the Charming Japanese Souvenir Contest 2012.

TADASHI AIZAWA

GRAND PRIZE AND TRADITIONAL JAPAN CATEGORY GOLD PRIZE

Uchiwa-serving plates “Four Seasons”

Uchiwa-serving plates “Four Seasons” are manufactured and sold by Sakuda Gold & Silver Leaf at ¥6,090 for a set of five. Individual plates are also available for ¥1,365. The plates measure approximately 13 cm in diameter and are about 1 cm thick. They are available at souvenir shops and department stores in Kanazawa as well as Narita International Airport and Central Japan International Airport. In Tokyo, they are sold at Kaga Noto Kanazawa Edo Honten (Toho Twin Tower Bldg. 1-5-2 Yurakucho, Chiyoda Ward, Tokyo)



TRADITIONAL JAPAN CATEGORY SILVER PRIZE

Tatami Clock

The face of this wall clock manufactured and sold by Norimoto Tatami of Toyokawa City, Aichi Prefecture is made of tatami. Numerals are made of wood and written in kanji characters. It is approximately 22 cm wide and sells for ¥8,400.



COOL JAPAN CATEGORY GOLD PRIZE

Original mug bottle

Original water flasks sold by Izutsuya of Kyoto, are coated with traditional Japanese lacquer. They come in a choice of two colors, red or black, and three designs: bell, cherry and plum blossoms, or maiko geisha. The flask holds 260 ml, measuring 17.5 cm high with a diameter of 5.5 cm, and sells for ¥2,500.



LUXURY JAPAN CATEGORY GOLD PRIZE

Kamata Kiriko Pair of Cut Glass Tumblers with modern design “Suikyo”

The Kamata modern glass pair set is manufactured and sold by Forest Co. of Tokyo. The glass is crafted from Tokyo’s traditional Edo-kiriko (cut glass) technique and applies retro and modern designs. At about 8.7 cm high and with a diameter of approximately 7.8 cm, these glasses are sold in a red and blue pair at ¥31,500.

