

All things Japanese on show

By RHIANNON HORRELL05:00, Feb 26 2010



PHOTO: JASON OXENHAM

INSPIRING KIMONOS: From left: Keiko Yamamoto, Sumi Iso, Kumi Hatherley, Elly Sekikawa, Kumi Sekikawa, Kazuko Price and Kay Gunji.

An enlightening mix of all things Japanese is set to inspire this Sunday. The ninth annual Japan Day is taking place, with an array of cultural experiences on offer. About 60 participants are flying in from Japan for the event, which will include kimono shows, calligraphy, folk-dancing, singing, taiko drums, martial arts and food stalls.

"It's the biggest cultural Japanese event in New Zealand – people can eat, watch and dance together," says Japanese Society of Auckland president Masa Sekikawa.

Held at the ASB Showgrounds, the day will also host a master flower arranger, providing a three metre by three metre display near the entrance.

Professional Kyoto-based dyer Ryuzo Okamoto will entertain, as he places finishing touches on one of his hand-dyed kimono gowns.

Mr Sekikawa says it usually takes about three hours for someone to get decked out in a kimono.

"It's not easy. You need helpers."

He says a simple kimono, complete with an obi around the waist, has three to four layers while a traditional one may have 12.

Long strips beneath the sleeves indicate the wearer is unmarried, transferring to shorter sleeves when married.

Participant Kay Gunji says her striped silk kimono belonged to her late mother, who was 18 years old when she wore it.

"That would make it around 70 years old," she says.

It is considered to be daywear, with a summer lining, compared with more formal kimonos. Mrs Gunji and her husband plan to make traditional rice cakes on Japan Day. "We will make 400 to 500 rice cakes," she says, through a process of steaming and hand-making rice balls.

Fellow kimono-wearer Kumi Sekikawa is originally from Sendai, north of Tokyo. She wears a kimono once a week to practise a tea ceremony with friends.

"It only takes me 15 minutes," she says of putting it on. "I'm quite experienced." New Zealand has a Japanese community of about 12,000 people, with steady numbers arriving each year.

"About one third are long-term residents, one third are students or on a working holiday and one third are here for a short-term stay," says Mr Sekikawa.

Japan Day takes place at the ASB Showgrounds from 10am this Sunday, with an official opening at 10.30am. Admission is free.