Hands On Learning
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JAPAN; COSTUME AND ORNAMENT G90/A

Child's Pair of Geta Sandals



Geta are a style of traditional Japanese footwear. They elevate the feet and would have been worn outside to prevent clothing from trailing on the ground. They have a flat, rectangular, wooden sole, a "V" style toe thong, and are raised up on two wooden strips. In Japanese the strips are called "Ha" which is the Japanese word for tooth or teeth. Often the front "Ha" have a slightly tapered edge, which causes the wearer to lean forward with each step. The thong goes between the big toe and the other toes and is centred between the two sides of the sole, so that the left and right sides of the shoe are identical. This means that when they are worn, one side of the foot hangs of the edge of the sandal slightly. Unlike our shoes, there is no left and right with geta. Either shoe can be worn on either foot. Geta sandals are not easy to walk on and it takes practice to walk correctly. The term geta comes from the Japanese for the "clack clack" sound they make when you walk in them.

Zori Sandals

Zori sandals are considered a casual Japanese sandal and are the most popular for daily wear. Traditionally made ones are also called tatami, which means straw as the surface of the sandal is made from woven straw like the tatami mats used on the floors of Japanese homes. The thong is usually made of velvet and often red or black. The design of zori means feet keep cool in a hot, humid climate as air can circulate around the foot. They are also easy to slip off and on, which is practical as it is the custom in Japan to remove shoes and leave them in the entrance hallway, before entering a room in a house.



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Tabi



Tabi are traditional Japanese socks. Unlike our socks they have a separation between the big toe and other toes, allowing them to be worn with zori, geta and other traditional thonged footwear. Tabi are worn with traditional clothing, such as the kimono (see below). The most common colour is white. White tabi are also worn in formal situations such as tea ceremonies, when men will sometimes wear blue-black or jet-black as well. Patterned and coloured tabi are also available and are worn most often by women.

Yukata With Belt



The yukata is a Japanese summer garment worn by both men and women. The yukata is a casual form of kimono, usually made from 100% light weight cotton. The name yukata comes from the word "yu" (bath) and "katabira" (under clothing). Thousands of years ago, Court Nobles wore linen "yukatabira" which were draped loosely after taking a bath. It gradually became worn by Japanese warriors and then by the general public when Japanese public baths became popular. Traditionally yukata were mostly made of indigo-dyed cotton but today a wide variety of colours and designs are available. Often younger people wear brighter, bolder patterns. This yukata is decorated with a bamboo pattern, which signifies good luck and prosperity. Yukatas often come from the manufacturer with a matching 2” cotton sash made of the same fabric as the yukata. For normal daily or night attire, just the cotton sash is used. For festivals and public occasions a larger wider yukata belt is worn for a more formal appearance. A matching purse, tabi socks and Japanese sandals often complete the look.

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Costume Figure

Dolls play a huge part in Japanese culture and as such have been made in Japan for at least three thousand years. This costume doll is of a type commonly known as isho dolls in Japan and often referred to as geisha dolls. They are typically young standing women, dressed in a kimono and often holding a fan or a parasol.

These dolls often vary greatly in quality, from very nice dolls, which can cost a great deal, to very cheap dolls marketed towards tourists. These silk-skinned or "mask-face" dolls became a popular craft in Japan in the 1920s and 1930s as they allowed the craftsman to design elaborate kimono for dolls representing women of various periods of Japanese history, particularly the Edo period. Dolls of this type continued to be made and were a popular item for servicemen and tourists to bring back after World War II. Nowadays they are still widely available in Japan.



This figure wears a decorated kimono. Around her waste she wears obi, the belts which are worn for formal or ceremonial occasions. The decorated belt wraps several times around the waist and ends in a knot or bow, which resembles a butterfly, at the back. On her feet she wears a pair of tabi socks. Her hair is swept up into an elaborate, high, style and decorated with hairpieces.

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Japanese Fan



The Japanese folding fan or sensu is made of the very simple materials of "Washi", Japanese traditional paper on a framework of bamboo, which is then folded over in many layers. The paper is often decorated on side with colourful images of flowers, blossoms and grasses. Early Japanese fans are thought to have been influenced by fans of the Han dynasty in neighbouring China. They soon became an important feature in court life, being a fashionable and practical way of keeping cool in the hot weather. Later the fan became firmly established in Japan as an essential item for daily use during the hot summer months through all levels of society and were used by both men and women. The poor made use of cheap and simple rigid fans of bamboo, while the wealthy bought more sophisticated, decorated, folding fans. Men usually opted for plainer, more restrained fans, with little colour or decoration- a custom that remains in Japan to this day. In the second half of the nineteenth century foreigners and outsiders began to have increased contact with Japan and Japanese products became highly sought after in the west. Japanese craftsmen began to adapt their skill and goods to provide what they thought the western market wanted. As a result, goods such as sensu fans were mass produced and exported in vast quantities to countries in Europe where they became a popular fashion accessory.

Bamboo Hair Slide

This hair slide is made from bamboo. Bamboo is the name given to many species of tropical giant grasses. As bamboo is strong, flexible and light it is used to make many different things, including houses, furniture, tools and clothing accessories. To the Japanese bamboo symbolises prosperity, strength and purity. This beautiful hair slide demonstrates the art of bending bamboo into different shapes. Bamboo can be permanently bent if heat, either dry or wet, is applied while applying pressure, however it takes great skill not to split the wood in the process.



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Lacquer Box

This box may have been used to contain cigars or cards. It is made to imitate high quality, expensive Japanese lacquer boxes. Craftsmen have been producing laquerware in several Asian cultures for hundreds of years. Lacquer is a resin that comes from a tree common in many areas of southeast Asia. When used as a varnish, it gives any surface it covers a hard, highly polished finish and gives the illusion of depth. Lacquer can carry several pigments, but red, black or a combination were used most frequently. Lacquer is extremely hard wearing and once hardened it is usually resistant to moisture, alcohol and food acids.

