

Ringling in the New

Photos by Lucy Birmingham



Year-end shopping can be frantic, especially for musts like the *shimekazari*. These plaited rice straw ropes decorated with fruit and ferns are hung above doorways to protect homes from evil influences.

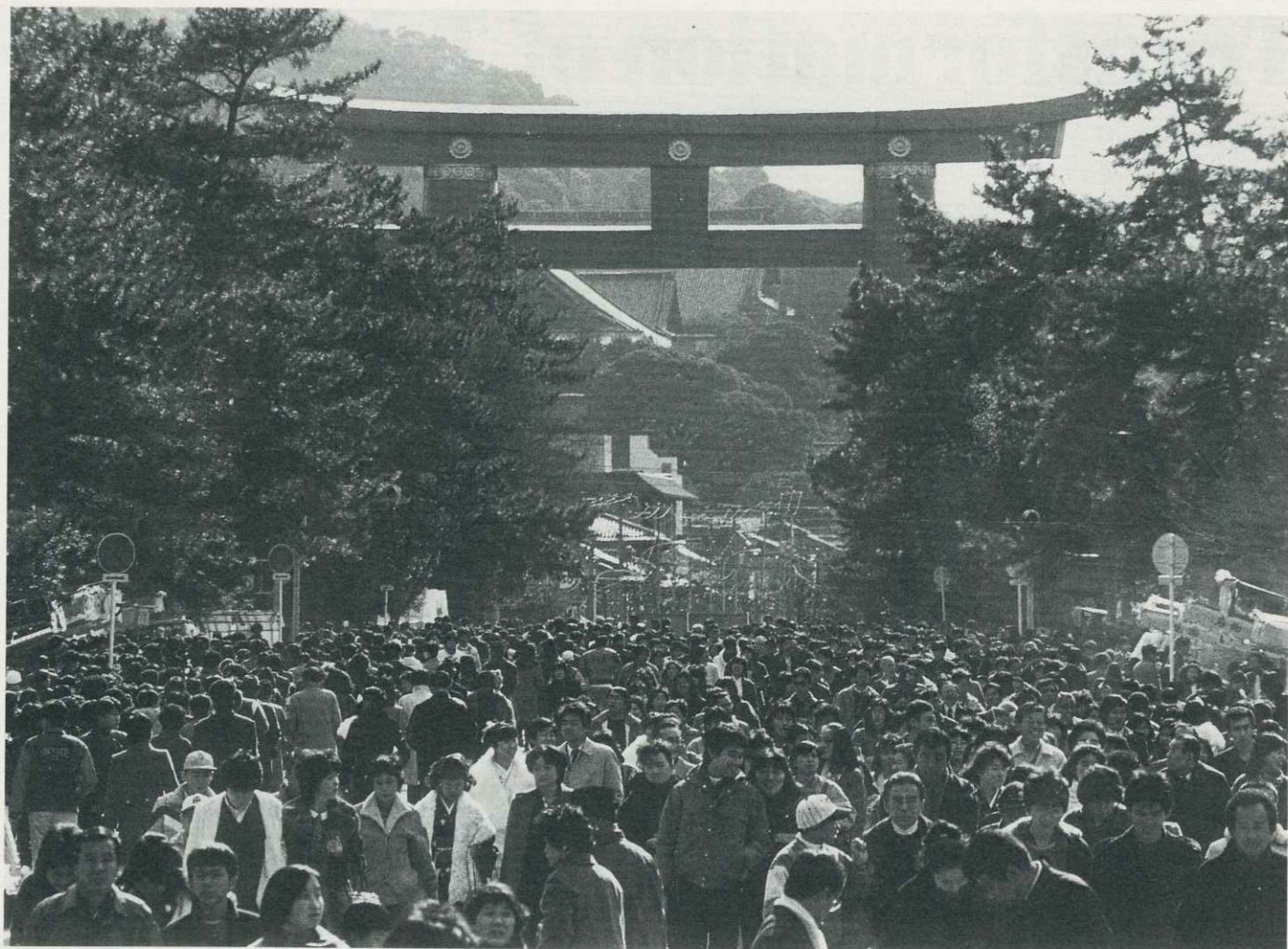


More elaborate *shimekazari* go on doors of shops and businesses as a symbol of thanks for the old year and hope for the new.



New Year cuisine is *osechi*, elegantly served in four-layered lacquered *jubako* and accompanied by special sake called *otoso*.

Lucy Birmingham is a freelance photographer living in Tokyo.



A visit to a shrine is a New Year requisite. Millions converge on the more famous, including Kyoto's Heian Shrine above.



A pine on shrine grounds is festooned with fortune strips. One's fortune is improved by leaving the *omikuji* tied to a tree or other object in the shrine compound.

Dressing in one's best for the holidays means a colorful parade of kimono-clad girls and more somber-hued men at shrines and on the streets.