

Kimono F.A.Q.

What is a kimono?

A kimono is a piece of traditional Japanese clothing. It is a long, T-shaped robe with straight-seams and wide sleeves, tied with a type of sash called an obi.

Tell me about the word kimono... How is it pronounced? What does it mean?

The word kimono came into use in the mid-1800s. It means “the thing worn” or “thing to wear.” Kimono is pronounced key-moe-no.

When were kimono first worn?

The T-shaped, long-sleeved garment that we think of as a “kimono” first emerged during the Edo period (1615 – 1868). However, there are many precursors to kimono, such as the kosode. Kosode (which has smaller sleeves than a kimono) were the primary clothing item worn by Japanese people during the 1500s.

Who wears kimono?

When kimono first came into existence, everyone (men, women, adults, children, aristocrats, commoners) wore them. After 1850s (when Japan opened to the West) and into the 1900s the Japanese began to abandon their kimono for western-style clothing. Today, kimono are generally only worn for formal occasions, though older generations, actors, geisha, or individuals involved in tea ceremonies may wear kimono on a more regular basis.

How is a kimono made?

Kimono are made from single bolts of cloth, which are cut into long, straight strips. The fabric itself is woven (by hand originally and then later by machines) and dyed. Kimono are embellished by weaving patterns into the materials, dying, or embroidery.

What images might decorate a kimono? What do they mean?

Color and imagery on a kimono are very important. These are all symbols of the wearer’s age, gender, social status, personal tastes, and wealth. The types of decorative motifs are also related to the time of year or the events at which the kimono is to be worn. Images might be inspired by nature, traditional Japanese stories, or Japan itself.

How much do kimono cost?

Kimono made today are very expensive. A new “inexpensive” kimono might cost \$2,000.

Where can I learn more about kimono?

We recommend checking out the Victoria and Albert Museum’s web pages on kimono at www.vam.ac.uk/collections/asia/asia_features/kimono/index.html. JapaneseKimono.com is a good introduction to kimono history and types of kimono. Rising Sun Imports has an excellent guide on how to wear a kimono at www.risingsunimports.com/obi/howtowearkimono.html.