

Parts of Kimono : A Guide to Traditional Japanese Dress

What are the Parts of Kimono?

The kimono is the national dress of Japan and a tangible symbol of Japanese culture. Kimonos have several parts that each serve a purpose when put together. Learning the names and functions of the different parts of kimono provides insight into this historic garment.

A kimono consists of the following identifiable elements:

Kosode

The kosode is the main body or robes of the kimono, consisting of a long T-shaped robe with very wide sleeves. The long, flowing sleeves are an iconic part of the kimono, intended to accentuate graceful arm movements. The length of the kosode varies, with some modern versions shorter for mobility.

Obi

The obi is the belt that is wrapped around the waist over the kosode. The obi is usually the most ornate parts of a kimono ensemble. It can be up to 13 feet long and 13 inches wide. Obis may be brightly colored or have lavish embroidery. Properly tying the obi in various knots is an intricate art form in itself.

Eri

The eri is the stiff “collar” found at the back of the neck. It is made of fabric covered cardboard and helps the kimono retain its shape. The eri is secured by silk ribbons tied under the collar. An eri is not always present on modern kimonos.

Susoyoke

The susoyoke is a thin half-slip that goes under the kosode. Usually white, it prevents the outer colored robe from clinging too closely to the body. The susoyoke opens in the back to allow access for using the bathroom.

Datejime

The datejime is a sash tied around the susoyoke. Datejimes may be simple cloth or elaborately decorated. The datejime helps hold all the layers in place.

Tabi

Tabi are traditional Japanese split-toe socks. The split makes it easy to wear tabi with zori sandals. Tabi are usually white and made of cotton. For formal wear, they may be silk and even have embroidery.

Zori

Zori are flat, thonged sandals made of rice straw, cloth, lacquered wood, or leather. They easily slip on between the split toes of tabi socks. Zori allows for quick on/off when entering and exiting temples or homes.

Nagajuban

The nagajuban is an under-kimono, usually white cotton. It protects the outer silk kimono from sweat and wear from the body. A nagajuban also helps the robes slide smoothly over each other.

Koshihimo

A koshihimo is a narrow waist cord or ribbon. It ties around the waist over the obi for extra security and to help hold the kimono robes in place.

Getas

Wooden getas are sandals elevated off the ground by two teeth. They keep the feet clean from dirt and mud outdoors. Getas make a distinctive clacking sound when walking.

How to Wear Kimonos Properly?

Putting on a kimono properly involves knowing how to layer and tie all the different garments. Here are some tips:

>> First put on the tabi socks and zori sandals so they don't wrinkle the rest of the ensemble.

>>Next, wrap the susoyoke around your body under the kosode, with the open part in the back.

>>Put your arms through the kosode sleeves and pull it closed in front. Adjust the neckline and eri collar.

>>Wrap the datejime snugly around the waist over the susoyoke.

>>Wrap the obi several times around your waist over the datejime and tie it in an appropriate knot in the back. The obi knot should be tight and secure.

>>Fan out the kosode layers smoothly once the obi is tied. Adjust the sleeves to drape evenly.

>>Add the koshihimo waist ribbon for extra stability if needed.

>Stand and walk gracefully to show off the flowing sleeves and robes! Move slowly with small gliding steps.