

One Cloth, a Thousand Ways of Using It

Furoshiki, blending traditional and modern ideas will be the ultimate, versatile Tokyo 2020 Games souvenir.

by **Kirsty Bouwers**



On the left, the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Tokyo Somekomon Wrapping cloth is shown simply as a scarf. On the right, the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic "Furoshiki" wrapping cloth is transformed into a practical and very charming handbag.

Furoshiki, or wrapping cloths, have a long-standing history in Japan, having been used as far back as the Nara period (710–784). At the time, they were simply known as *tsutsumi* (a wrapping), and were generally used to store valuables such as the clothing of the nobility. Their use became widespread a few centuries later, with people using them as cloth pouches when visiting a public bath. The word to describe the cloth thus changed to *furoshiki*: a mix of *furo* (bath) and *shiki* (a spread). Using them was an easy way for everyone to carry belongings. It also ensured one's clothing would not be mixed up with that of other bathers', and its size meant the cloth could be used as a bath mat if needed.

Beyond the bathhouse, *furoshiki* were also used as makeshift handbags, perfect to store things when wearing a pocketless kimono. They also started to be used as a way to wrap items such as bento boxes or gifts. With no prescribed size for *furoshiki*—they just need to be square—and a myriad of ways to tie them, it is a staple in many a Japanese household. Indeed, the versatility of *furoshiki* is what has kept this cloth relevant for centuries.

One of the more common ways of using *furoshiki* is as a bag for bottles and small items. Depending on the object, the cloth can be simply wrapped around the item and knotted into a clever bundle for easy handling. It is also possible to transform it into a proper carrier bag, either by tying a few points together or adding custom handles. It functions as an eco-bag, an eco-friendly and beautiful alternative to plastic bags and wrappings, while being incredibly easy to use, as it can wrap around anything regardless of shape.

Furoshiki used in this way also perfectly captures the spirit of *mottainai*, a Japanese phrase often invoked to express regret at wasting things.

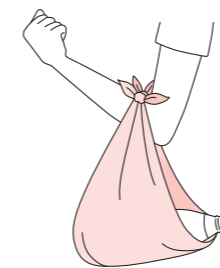
Furoshiki can even be used in emergency situations. If a natural disaster hits, the cloth can double as a makeshift sling or a nursing cover. Those that are water-resistant or repellent can even be used to carry water. Packing one of these cloths in an emergency kit is thus near-essential.

It is this heritage and innate adaptability that is embodied in the *furoshiki* products created for the Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020. All have the Kumi-ichimatsu-mon motif, derived from the traditional Japanese checkered pattern called *ichimatsu moyo*, and have the Tokyo 2020 Games emblem on the edge. The blue *furoshiki* is a traditional Japanese indigo, a color expressing refined elegance and sophistication. The *furoshiki* cloth is created with a special dyeing technique, the Tokyo Somekomon technique. It can also be used as a scarf; its texture is soft to the touch and comfortable to wear.

Another unique product of the Tokyo 2020 Games is the *furoshiki* wrapping cloth—a *furoshiki* that comes with a set of handles, so you can transform it into a proper handbag that truly captures the essence of the Tokyo 2020 Games.

For a personal touch, try one of the myriad of folding techniques, from a simple single knot carrier to elaborate gift wrapping. The *furoshiki*'s incredible versatility means it is a very easy-to-use bag. Imbued with the Tokyo 2020 Games spirit, this simple cloth has something for everyone.

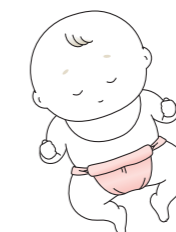
Some practical uses of *furoshiki*



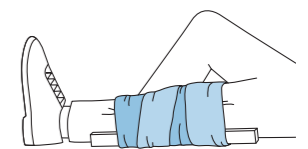
The four corners can be tied together to make a tote bag.



Diagonally folded into a triangle with both ends of the long side knotted together makes a sling.



The same triangular shape can be used as a diaper for a baby.



The *furoshiki* can also be used as a bandage or to secure splints around a broken bone.