

Welcome to  
**Grand Pennant**

An introduction to  
Shōwa-era souvenir travel pennants  
(a Shōwa retro subculture)

by Kat Avila

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# History of pennants

Souvenir pennants have been around in the U.S. since about the **1890s**, only a little over a hundred years (per Gasoline Alley Antiques).

*"We all remember our school field trips, weekend family outings, and all of our summer vacations.*

*"EVERY souvenir stand, gift shop, and corner drugstore sold them!"*

— from Gasoline Alley Antiques:  
Antique Toys & Collectibles

*"For those of us growing up on the East Coast during the 1950s, the names of certain tourist attractions were indelibly linked to a car decal ... or bumper sticker ... or a pennant hanging on a friend's bedroom wall."*

— from The-Forum On-Line  
Antiques Mall

**Japanese** souvenir pennants originated in the **late 1950s** after WWII (1939-1945).

The **'60s and '70s** were a period of **strong economic growth** in Japan. Leisure travel increased proportionately.

Pennant Cost: 150 yen or 42 cents

(June 1973 exchange rate: 360 yen = 1 dollar; June 2009: 96 yen = 1 dollar)

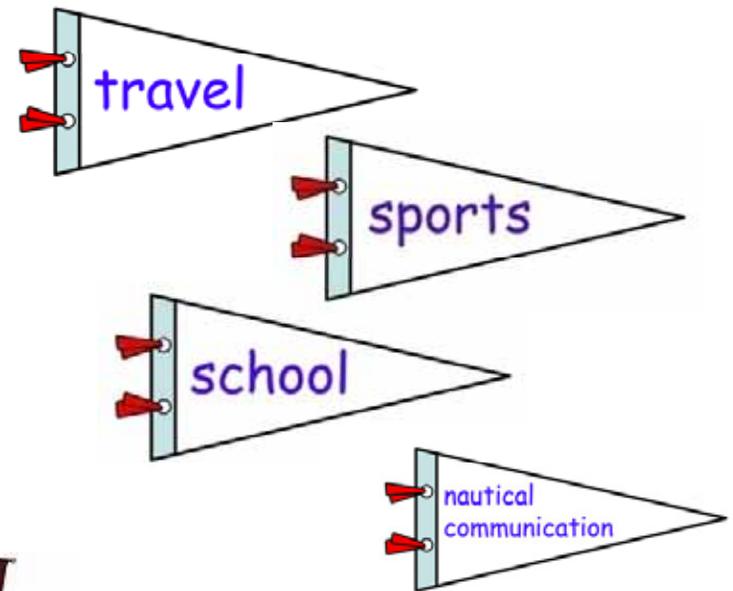


**ASO-KUJŪ NATIONAL PARK**, Kumamoto Pref., Kyūshū  
Site of one of the world's largest calderas.  
A group of five volcanic peaks are referred to as Mt. Aso.

# What's a pennant?

A pennant is a symbol, and a symbol is (per Merriam-Webster's):

1. Something that **suggests something else** by reason of relationship, association, convention, or accidental resemblance;

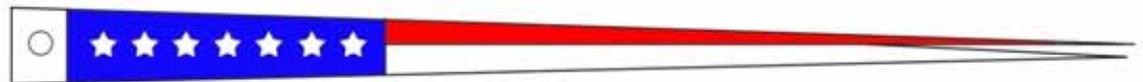


medieval pennants

Pictured is a Celtic dragon pennant by Medieval Collectibles.

Navy commission pennant

The longest was 70 feet long (per Naval Historical Center).



2. An act, sound, or **object** having **cultural significance** and the capacity to excite or objectify a response.



Disneyland: theme park  
Sleeping Beauty Castle  
familiar, domestic

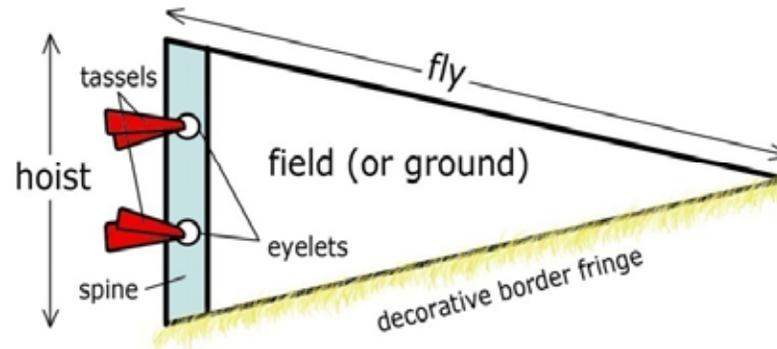


Tokyo: city  
Tokyo Tower, National Diet Bldg., Imperial  
Palace, (circles) Ueno Park - statue of Saigō  
Takamori with dog; bullet train  
foreign, international

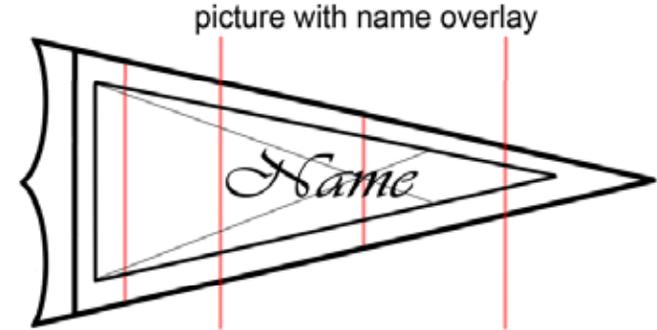
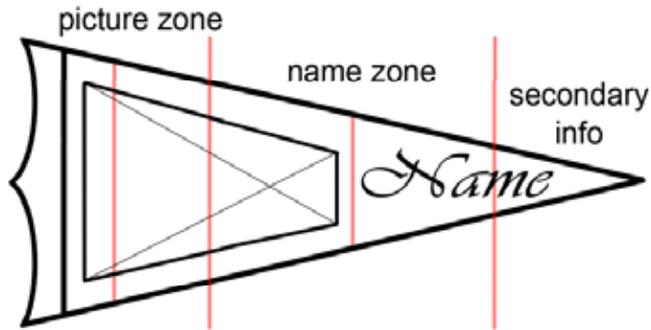
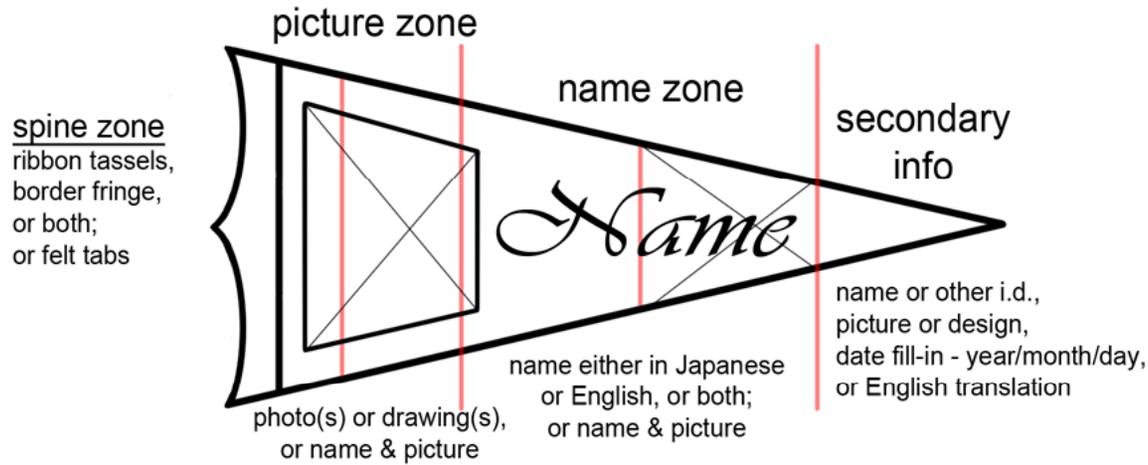


Great Buddha, Hachiman Shintō Shrine  
Kamakura: city  
foreign, international

### 3. Design elements



- **Text** (Japanese or English; print or script)
- **Motifs or themes** (historic, historico-religious, nature, leisure, technological, promotional, etc.)
- **Craftsmanship** - artist - manufacturer
- **Method of reproduction** (screenprint, photograph, hologram, appliqué, embroidery, etc.)
- **Material(s) used** (felt, flannel, linen, nylon, plasticloth, polyester, sturdy paper, wool and acrylic blend, etc.)
- **Ornamentation** (border fringe, tassels, tabs, etc.)



Historico-political icons

Feudal castles

Historico-religious icons

Shintō shrine

Buddhist temple

Catholic cathedral

Natural icons

National Parks

Mountains

Gardens

Aquariums

Cultural icons

*Mon* (crests)

Folk dancers

Geisha

Civil icons

Ships

Bridges

Highways

Lighthouses

Towers

Statues

Ise Island National Park,  
Mie Pref., Honshū



The most famous and well-known shrine site in Japan is Ise-jingū. The shrine buildings are rebuilt from the ground up every 20 years. The last time was in 1993. Only the tops of the main buildings are visible over the fences and are allowed to be seen by the public.

Shimoda,  
Shizuoka Pref.,  
Izu Peninsula, Honshū



Townshend Harris was the first American diplomat to live in Japan, and he lived in Shimoda. The Black Ship Festival held every May in Shimoda remembers the arrival of U.S. naval ships in Japan in 1853 to demand the opening of ports to foreign trade.

Yasukuni Shrine,  
Tōkyō, Honshū



Yasukuni Shrine is a memorial to Japanese soldiers who have died in action. Visits to this shrine by the Japanese premier are viewed by neighboring countries as supporting Japan's WWII militarism. Next to the shrine is a military museum.

Zenkō-ji Temple,  
Nagano, Nagano Pref.,  
Honshū



The town of Nagano grew up around the temple. The first statue of Buddha brought into Japan is said to be at this temple, and a replica of the statue is put on public display every 6-7 years.

Echizen-Kaga Quasi-National Park,  
Fukui Pref., Honshū



This area is famous for its snow crabs as the perfect winter cuisine.

Himeji Castle,  
Hyōgo Pref., Honshū



Himeji Castle is the most visited of the "Three Most Famous Castles" (Himeji Castle, Kumamoto Castle, Matsumoto Castle). This 16<sup>th</sup>-century castle is also called White Heron Castle, recalling a flock of herons lifting off heavenward.

Hirado Castle,  
Hirado Island, Saikai National Park,  
Nagasaki Pref., Kyūshū



Hirado is known for its castle and the traditional *jangara* harvest dance. *Jangara* comes from the sounds of festival flutes, gongs, and drums.

The city was the focal point for overseas trade before its importance was surpassed by Nagasaki. In 2009, Hirado celebrates the 400th anniversary of trade with the Netherlands. The area's multicultural history includes *Kakure Kirishitan* (Hidden Christians), who went underground with their faith during a period of persecution.

Nagasaki,  
Nagasaki Pref., Kyūshū

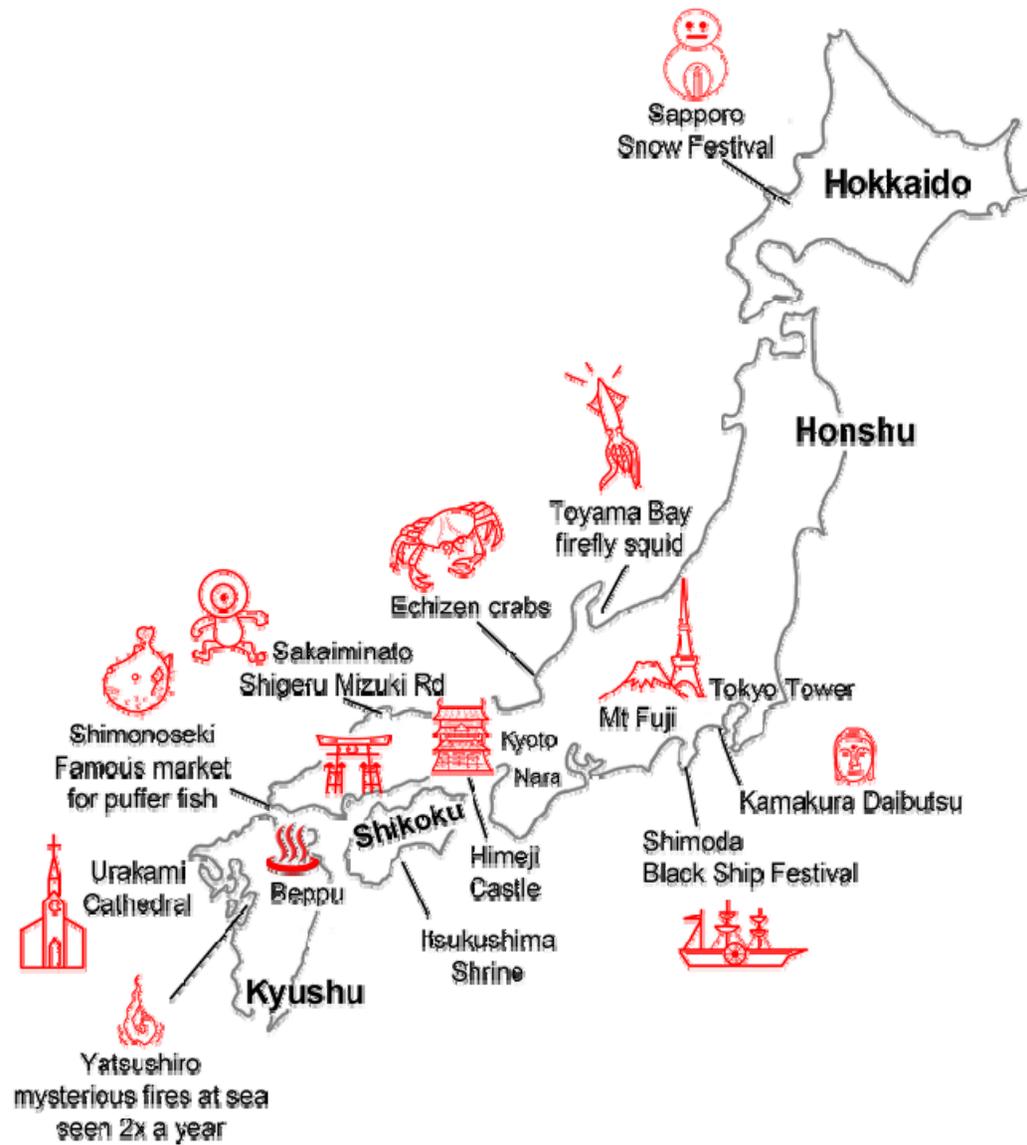


Pictured is Japan's oldest church Ōura Roman Catholic Church. For a long time, Nagasaki was the only Japanese port open to the West. The 2nd atomic bomb to be dropped fell on August 9, 1945, yards away from Urakami Roman Catholic Cathedral, the first Roman Catholic Church in Japan.

Beppu,  
Ōita Pref., Kyūshū



Beppu is famous for its hot springs and *jigoku* or "hells," which are boiling ponds of mud. There is a well-known grouping of eight major hot spring areas known as the *Beppu Hatto*.



## Recommended Travel

"The exhibition of the souvenir pennant in Japan," since 2002,  
<http://homepage3.nifty.com/nipponpennant/index.html>  
(in Japanese only). *A virtual museum.*

Japanese banner & split-panel shop curtain manufacturer,  
TECHNICA Co., Ltd., Takamatsu, Kagawa Pref., Shikoku,  
<http://www.nobori-noren.com/> (in Japanese only)

"Nobori: Colourful Banner Designs," by Ryoko, trans. Rie Ishimi,  
*PingMag*, pub. Nov. 29, 2007,  
<http://pingmag.jp/2007/11/29/japanese-shop-flag/>

*Pennant Japan*, by Ken Tanimoto, PARCO, © 2004,  
ISBN: 4-89194-684-9. *A comprehensive survey and catalog of 100  
vintage souvenir travel pennants.*

"Rubber stamps from Japan: Tokyo and Kyoto—2003,"  
<http://www.dotpattern.com/artwerk/rubber-stamps/japan-rubber-stamps.html>