Top 10 Japanese films

Japanese cinema is among the most famous and celebrated in the world. It dates all the way back to 1897, when the Lumière Brothers' cinematograph (a camera which could record, develop and project film) arrived in Japan.

However, moving pictures already existed in the form of Utsushi-e. This was a type of magic lantern show which used a projector to show colourful figures moving on the screen as a storyteller narrated. Kagee (shadow puppets), emakimono (picture scrolls like the one above) and manga (graphic novels) were also developed in Japan and inspired modern Japanese anime (hand-drawn or computer animation).

We've picked some of our favourite films so snuggle up and get stuck in!

All the films on this list have a PG rating.

Let us know if you watch any of our recommendations! You can email your reviews to youngfriends@britishmuseum.org
Spirited Away (2001)
千と千尋の神隠し
This wonderful animated film is written and directed by the famous Japanese director Hayao Miyazaki. It features the adventures of a 10-year-old girl called Chihiro. After accidentally discovering an abandoned theme park, she is soon swept into a world of magic, spirits and witches.

Netflix

The Castle of Cagliostro (1979)
ルパン三世 カリオストロの城
Part action, part comedy, this is the story of a charming thief who embarks on a quest to free a princess from an evil count. The main character, Arsène Lupin, was originally a character in a manga series called Lupin III!

Netflix, Amazon Prime

My Neighbor Totoro (1988)
となりのトトロ
This is the story of two girls called Satsuke and Mei who move into an old house in the countryside. While exploring their new home, they become friends with the spirits who live in their house and nearby forest, including the cuddly Totoro!

Netflix

Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind (1984)
風の谷のナウシカ
This animated film is set 1,000 years in the future, in a world which has been destroyed by pollution and wars. It tells the tale of Nausicaä, a young warrior princess who is tasked with protecting her people from war and bringing peace to the planet.

Netflix

ハウルの動く城
This fantastic film tells the story of a young woman called Sophie who is cursed by a witch and turned into an old woman. Follow her journey trying to break the curse and enjoy the wonderful characters she meets on her way.

Netflix
Seven Samurai

This is a classic movie and often tops lists of best films of all time. Set in 1586, this action-packed tale follows the story of seven samurai, hired by a village to protect them against bandits. If you like dramatic battle scenes, this is the film for you!

Amazon Prime

Kiki's Delivery Service (1989)

This is a truly magical film. Meet Kiki, a young witch who moves to a seaside town by herself as part of her training. This is a charming coming-of-age adventure with lots of funny bits too!

Netflix

Castle in the Sky (1986)

This beautifully animated film tells the story of a young boy and girl who embark on a search for a legendary floating castle. But first they must face flying pirates and shady government agents!

Netflix

Steamboy (2004)

Unusually, this film is set in Victorian England and tells the story of Ray, a young inventor. After his grandfather sends him a powerful mechanical ball, Ray gets entangled in the struggle for steam power. This is an action-packed story with incredible animation – it uses more than 180,000 drawings!

YouTube, Amazon Prime, Google Play

Princess Mononoke (1997)

This dramatic film combines fantasy with history (it’s set in the late Muromachi period of Japan, around 1336 to 1573). It’s a truly epic film featuring Prince Ashitaka who goes on a journey to lift a curse.

Netflix

*Streaming platforms correct at time of publication.*