

# Spirited Away

*Sen to Chihiro no kamikakushi*, 2001, Japan

## Film Overview



The highest grossing film in Japanese box-office history, Hayao Miyazaki's *Spirited Away* (*Sen to Chihiro kamikakushi*) is a dazzling film that reasserts the power of drawn animation to create fantasy worlds. Like Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz* and Lewis Carroll's Alice, Chihiro plunges into an alternate reality. On the way to their new home, the petulant adolescent and her parents find what they think is a deserted amusement park. Her parents stuff themselves until they turn into pigs, and Chihiro discovers they're trapped in a resort for traditional Japanese gods and spirits. An oddly familiar boy named Haku instructs Chihiro to request a job from Yubaba, the greedy witch who rules the spa. As she works, Chihiro's untapped qualities keep her from being corrupted by the greed that pervades Yubaba's mini-empire. In a series of fantastic adventures, she purges a river god suffering from human pollution, rescues the mysterious No-Face, and befriends Yubaba's kindly twin, Zeniba. The resolve, bravery, and love Chihiro discovers within herself enable her to aid Haku and save her parents. The result is a moving and magical journey, told with consummate skill by one of the masters of contemporary animation. MPAA Rated: PG ("Some scary moments") --Charles Solomon, Amazon.com

The film received many awards, including the second Oscar ever awarded for Best Animated Feature, the first anime film to win an Academy Award, and the first (and so far only) non-English speaking animation to win. It overtook *Titanic* in the Japanese box office to become the highest-grossing film in Japanese history.



Hayao Miyazaki is a prominent Japanese filmmaker of many popular animated feature films. He is also a co-founder of Studio Ghibli, an animation studio and production company. In 2006, Time Magazine voted Miyazaki one of the most influential Asians of the past 60 years. In 2005, he was named one of the Time 100 Most Influential People.

## Cultural Notes

- **Kami** is a difficult concept to translate, as there is no direct similar construct in English. The word *kami* means "superior" or "upper" and *kami* is generally accepted to describe the innate supernatural force that is above the actions of man, the realm of the sacred, and is inclusive of gods, spirit figures, and human ancestors. The *kami* reside in all things, but certain places are designated for the interface of people and *kami* (the common world and the sacred): *sacred nature*, *shrines*, and *kamidana*, miniature shrines that can be displayed on walls of houses or martial arts *dōjō*. There are natural places considered to have an unusually sacred spirit about them, and are objects of worship. They are frequently mountains, trees, unusual rocks, rivers, waterfalls, and other natural edifices. In most cases they are on or near a shrine grounds. The shrine is a building built in which to house the *kami*, with a separation from the "ordinary" world through sacred space with defined features based on the age and lineage of the shrine.

(Adapted from Wikipedia)

- **Public Bathing in Japan** In the past, many homes in Japan were not equipped with a bathtub. To fill this void, the neighborhood *sentō* or public bath was a place where the locals could go to wash themselves, soak in a tub and socialize with neighbors. Nowadays, as most households have their own bath, the number of traditional *sentō* has decreased. However, new types of public baths and bath complexes, which feature a range of different pools, saunas, fitness centers, etc. have been emerging, some of which more resemble theme parks than simple bath houses. <http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2074.html>

Bathing in Japan is very different from the U.S. A person washes thoroughly outside of the bathtub, and enters the tub completely clean. The bathtubs themselves are for soaking (in very hot water), relaxing, and

enjoying conversation with others. The vast majority of *sentô* have separate dressing rooms and bathing areas for men and women. A *sentô* today usually has several choices of hot baths, as well as a cafeteria or drink and food machines, a lounge with TV, coin operated massage chairs or massage services, a little gift shop, and other amenities. Entire families might converge on a local *sentô* on the weekends or in the late afternoon. Tour groups also visit *sentô*. (B. Jordan)

