

Japan (日本)



The characters that make up Japan's name mean "sun-origin," which is why Japan is sometimes referred to as the "Land of the Rising Sun." Japan is an island nation located off the northeast coast of mainland Asia. The archipelago is composed of four main islands: Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku and Kyushu, with over 6,000 smaller islands. Japan's total area is slightly bigger than the state of California and has a wide array of climates.

QUICK FACTS

Population: 127.25 million

Area: A series of Islands in the Pacific Ocean east of Russia and the Korean Peninsula.

Capital: Tokyo

Language: Japanese

EDUCATION

Education is highly regarded in Japan and it boasts the highest literacy rate in the world; 99+% of its population can read. Education begins prior to elementary school with kindergarten and day care centers. By the time children leave elementary school, they are expected to read and write 1,000 characters (called kanji). To enter high school and college, students must pass difficult entrance exams and most students attend tutor schools called "cram schools" in the evening after normal school hours in preparation for entrance exams. Many students are involved in school clubs, which range in interests from tea ceremony to baseball. Although classes are held Monday-Friday, clubs typically have mandatory activities on Saturdays. Japanese Universities are well respected throughout Asia for their research.

RELIGION

The two main religions in Japan are Shinto and Buddhism. Shinto is native to Japan and involves the worship of deities known as kami. It was long believed that the emperor of Japan was a descendant of Amaerasu the Sun Goddess. Visitors to Japan will find Shinto shrines small and large located throughout the country. Buddhism came to Japan in the 6th century via China from India and is widely practiced today. Buddhist ceremonies are commonly practiced for funerals, while Shinto ceremonies are often used for celebrations of life such as weddings.

GOVERNMENT

Japan's government is parliamentary, a system of democratic governance of a state in which the executive branch derives its democratic legitimacy from, and is held accountable to, the legislature (parliament); the executive and legislative branches are thus interconnected. Like Sweden and the United Kingdom, the head of state is different from the head of government. The Emperor is Japan's head of state and the Prime Minister is the head of government. Japan became a constitutional monarchy after World War II, when the U.S. helped establish Japan's first constitution.

FAMILY AND HOME LIFE

Japanese society is very homogenous and family life is strong, with many households including three generations under one roof. When visiting someone's house for the first time in Japan it is customary to bring a gift to thank the host, and not unusual to receive a gift as well. It is polite to remove your shoes at the door, whether in a traditional house with tatami (straw mat) flooring where people sit on cushions, or a modern home. Major holidays include: New Year's Day; Coming of Age Day (second Monday of January); Foundation Day (Feb. 11); Vernal Equinox (around March 20); Showa Day (April 29); Constitution Memorial Day (May 3); Children's Day (May 5); Autumnal Equinox Day (around Sept. 23); Culture Day (Nov. 3), Labour Thanksgiving Day (Nov. 23); The Emperor's Birthday (Dec. 23); Christmas Day (Dec 25).



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CONTEMPORARY JAPAN

Beginning in the late 1800s Japan began to modernize politically, economically, and socially. The country's first modern constitution came about in 1889 which established a parliamentary system. Along with this political reform Japan began to industrialize and by the late 19th/early 20th century had become one of the leading industrial nations in the world. Japan's meteoric rise led to conflict. From the early 1900s through the end of the World War II in 1945 Japan fought a number of conflicts.

Much of the Japanese economy was destroyed during World War II. After the war, with the help of the United States, Japan began to once again rebuild its economy and political structure. Under U.S. guidance Japan adopted a revised constitution in 1947 and restructured its military to a defense-only force. Under this new structure Japan flourished and for a time became the second largest economy in the world only behind the United States. However, in the 1990s Japan suffered a recession and, while still prosperous, has since been passed by China in terms of economic size.

Today the Japanese economy exports many goods to the world such as consumer electronics, cars, and high-end machinery such as airplane parts, robotics, and computer processors making it the world's fourth largest exporter. Domestically, roughly 67% of the population lives in large cities like Tokyo and Osaka. Rural areas primarily focus on agriculture and light industry but the mountainous terrain makes it difficult to grow enough crops to feed the populations. Because of this, Japan imports a high percentage of its food. It is the world's fourth largest importer of food.

The average life expectancy is about 83 years. Japan enjoys one of the highest standards of living in the world.



JAPANESE IN THE USA

The first Japanese-Americans began to arrive in large numbers in the U.S. after 1868. Most of these immigrants landed on the west coast or Hawaii. The darkest period for Japanese-Americans occurred during WWII when they were forced out of their homes and interned in camps throughout western states. There are roughly 1.3 million Japanese-Americans in the U.S. today.



Originally adopted in 1870 and modified in 1999, the red disc represents the sun. In 1999 the dimensions of the flag were slightly altered with the disc shifted to the center.



NAMES

Japanese names consist of a surname (family name) followed by a given name. Names typically are written in kanji. Middle names are uncommon. It's common practice to use "ro" to end male names and "ko" to end female names. Women retain their family names when marrying and children inherit their father's names. Unlike other parts of Asia Japan has a wide variety of surnames with over 100,000 in use today. Many family names were only chosen in the 19th century. Nicknames are also very common in Japanese culture.

FAMOUS JAPANESE

A few famous people from Japan include: 17th century poet Matsui Basho, film director Hayao Miyazaki, baseball legend Ichiro Suzuki, 2012 Nobel Prize winner Shinya Yamanaka, and 11th century author Murasaki Shikibu.

USEFUL PHRASES

Good afternoon.....*Kon nichi wa*
 Good evening..... *Kon ban wa*
 Good morning *Ohayo gozaimasu*
 Excuse me..... *Sumimasen*
 How are you?..... *Genki desu ka?*
 Thank you *Domo arigato gozaimashita*
 Goodbye.....*Sayonara*
 See you later.....*Mata ne!*
 My name is (...)......*Watsahi wa (...) desu*
 You're welcome.....*doitashimashite*

USEFUL LINKS

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ja.html>
<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/>
<http://www.japantoday.com/>
<http://www.jnto.go.jp/> (Tourism Board)