

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: 126.1 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.

FAMILY AND HOME LIFE

Japanese society is very homogenous although this is slowly changing. 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 before entering a home, whether in a traditional house with tatami (straw mat) flooring where people sit on cushions, or in 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) and The Emperor's Birthday (Dec. 23).

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). 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 post war constitution.

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 Amaterasu 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 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.





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 these political reforms, 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 as it tried to build an empire in East Asia, fighting a number of expansionist wars from the early 1900s through the end of World War II. After World War II, Japan's constitution was written to explicitly renounce war and the use of force, although there have been some calls for this to be changed recently.

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 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. Roughly 67% of the population lives in large cities like Tokyo and Osaka. Rural areas primarily focus on agriculture and light industry.

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 began to arrive to the U.S. in large numbers after 1868 when Japan was 'opened' to the West. Most of these immigrants came to settle on the west coast or in Hawaii. There are roughly 1.3 million Americans of Japanese ancestry in the U.S. today (Census 2010). During WWII, Japanese-Americans were wrongly forced out of their homes and interned in detention camps throughout western states because they were seen as potential 'enemies' due to their heritage.



Known as the *Hinomaru*, the Japanese flag was originally adopted in 1870, but it was not until 1999 that the Japanese government officially passed a law that established it as the national flag.



NAMES

Japanese names consist of a surname (family name) followed by a given name. Names are typically written in kanji. Middle names are uncommon. It's common 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 Yamana, and 21st century author Murakami Haruki

USEFUL PHRASES

- Good afternoon.....*Konnichiwa*
- Good evening..... *Konbanwa*
- Good morning *Ohayo gozaimasu*
- Excuse me..... *Sumimasen*
- How are you?..... *O-Genki desu ka?*
- Thank you *Arigato gozaimasu*
- Goodbye.....*Sayonara*
- See you later.....*Mata ne!*
- My name is (...)......*Watsahi wa (...) desu*
- You're welcome.....*Doitashimashite*

USEFUL LINKS

- <http://www.japan.go.jp/>
- <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)