

The Japan Fact Sheet

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1. The Land and Geographic Facts of Japan

The Land:

Japan is a country located in Pacific Ocean, east from China and Korea. The surface area of Japan is 374,744 square kilometers. Japan is actually smaller than California which has area of 411,00 square kilometers. After World War II, Japan's land was reduced to it's present size. Okinawa remained however under American control until 1971.

Japan is a country on volcanic land - most unsuitable for urbanization. This makes the land very fertile but also produces many earthquakes. There are 80 active volcanoes in Japan, 10% of world's 800 volcanoes. The highest point of Japan is a dormant volcano [Mount Fuji](#). It has a height of 3,776 metres (12,388 feet).

The Islands:

Japan has five main islands, Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku, Kyushu and Okinawa. Okinawa is the southernmost island, while Hokkaido is the northernmost. In addition to these largest islands, there are many small islands around Japan. Such are Kagoshima, south from Kyushu (not shown in the map) and Kunashiri-to which is northeast from Hokkaido.

Also, south from the Bay of Tokyo there are so called **Izu islands** that consists O-shima, To-shima, Nii-jima, Miyake-jima, Mikura-jima Hachijo-jima, Aoga-shima and most distant, small Tori-shima, famous of it's volcano Izu-Torishima. Island is called "shima" in Japanese, which explains the suffix.

The Lakes:

There are about 100 lakes in Japan. The most famous and largest freshwater lake is Biwa, located near Kyoto. Lake Biwa has been the subject for haiku poets and artists through times. The area of Biwa is 670 square kilometers.

Inawashiro-ko, in Fukushima prefecture, and Kasumiga-ura in Ibaraki are another famous lakes in Japan.

Lakes are called "ko" in Japanese. Therefore it's Biwako.

The Rivers:

Rivers of Japan flow rapidly since Japan is mountainous country. This causes rivers of Japan to be prone to flooding. River called Tone in Ibaraki prefecture floods almost every spring. Most famous river in Japan could be Sumidagawa which flows literally inside Tokyo. As Lake Biwa for people in Kyoto, Sumidagawa has been a lyrical paradise for

haikuists in Tokyo. Rivers in Japan are galled with suffix "gawa". Rivers are facing a serious pollution problem especially in large populated areas in Japan if something is not done and fast.

The Cities:

The capital city of Japan today is [Tokyo](#). In fact it has not always been the capital - [Kyoto](#) was the capital of Japan until Meiji Restoration of 1868, when Emperor packed his bags and moved to Edo. The name was then changed from Tokyo which means eastern capital. Other famous cities in Japan are are Nakano, Sapporo city in Hokkaido island, Hiroshima and Fukuoka in Kyushu.

Suburbs in Japan are formed usually around the railway lines and stations. Most Japanese do not use car to get to work since trains are more fast and convenient, even if very crowded.

The Prefectures:

Japan is divided to 47 prefectures that all carry out independent administrative duties. You can see these prefectures illustrated in [Hanami Web Maps](#).

Timezone:

Japan time zone is GMT +9.

Climate:

Since northern islands reach up north, while southernmost islands south, there is great variation in weather conditions in Japan. Winter is as cold as in Finland in Hokkaido, while Okinawa is in fact a tropical island. The rainy season, *tsuyu* is in June and actual summer begins in Japan usually in July. Summer is generally very hot and humid season in Japan. Almost every house is airconditioned in Japan not only to remove moist from the air but to cool down the temperature into a bearable level.

Natural disasters:

Japan is a country on volcanic soil - therefore there are earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. Mt.Fuji is an active volcano only in dormant state and is expected to wakeup sometimes not too far in the future..

Most recent terrible earthquake happened in Kobe, 1995 and is known as "The Great Hanshin Earthquake". It is expected that Tokyo would have it's most terrible earthquake ever, the so called "Big One" soon. The earthquakes in Pacific can also cause the feared tsunami.

Typhoons are storms that come from Southern Pacific Ocean. Although they are not as dangerous as earthquakes and tsunamis are, it's wise to stay inside when typhoon warning has given.

2. Nature and Animals

Forests:

Although Japan is so crowded with people, there are still lots of untouched forests and nature. Since mountains cannot be urbanized, they are left pretty untouched. There are also many national parks in Japan. Hokkaido has most untouched natural resources and is Japan's cradle for agriculture. Hokkaido is also home of the ainu.

Japanese national tree is [cherry tree](#) called *sakura*, that blossoms in late March and beginning of April. Other trees in Japan are plum tree, bamboo and camphor tree, known

as *hinoki*. Hinoki is commonly used as material for incense.

Legendary animals:

In legendary tales, foxes and a raccoon called *tanuki* have been long time played important role for the Japanese. In Akira Kurosawa's movie **Yume**, there is a poetical scene of weddings of the foxes in the forests. It was said that if one secretly watches their weddings, it will make foxes angry.

Other important animals for Japanese are tortoises and cranes. The most famous figure for *origami*, handmade paper art, is a crane. It's called *tsuru*. It is said that cranes live for thousand years and tortoises for ten thousand years.

National Fish:

Japanese national fish is the colourful carp known in Japanese as *koi*.

Domestic animals:

Dogs and cats are most popular domestic animals in Japan.

Flowers in Japan:

Chrysanthemums are most sold flowers in Japan. Carnations, roses and lilies are also popular.

3. People and Society

Population:

Population is currently 127 million. Approx. eight of the Japanese live in Tokyo. Since Japan has lot of uninhabitable areas of mountains and volcanos, cities in Japan are pretty packed. Population of Japan is growing, although it is nothing similar to China and India. Japan's population density is currently around 340 people per square km. Remember, Japan is no larger than California. It is in fact, smaller.

Religion:

Shintoism and Buddhism are largest religions in Japan. However it is to be noted that when asked from Japanese themselves, they will most often answer that "they do not believe in anything". Still, most of the Japanese go to pray in shrines and temples and follow religious customs.

Ethnic groups in Japan:

Ainus, aboriginals of Japan are rarely seen these days, living up north in Hokkaido island. 1000 years ago, Ainus incorporated so called Satsumon culture which encompassed a region spanning Sakhalin, the Kuril Islands, Hokkaido and Northern part of Honshu. This ended however in 15 century when Japanese from Honshu took their lands and banished them to Hokkaido. Ainus called their Japanese attackers Wajin - which means people from Honshu. In today's Japan, Ainus are struggling hard to keep their cultural heritage, using political activism as their tool. Ainus have joined together to preserve their woods and land and hunting rights. The Ainu lived and still live their life depending on nature, hunting and fishing.

Language:

Japanese people speak and write Japanese in Japan. Characters "kanji" which is essential part of Japanese language are originally from China. Japanese have developed Hiragana and Katakana, a vocal writing styles, while the latter is mostly being used in loan words. Therefore there can be said to be three ways of writing Japanese. Roman alphabet is hardly used when writing Japanese.

Currency:

The Japanese currency is the Yen (JPY). There are following paper notes: 1.000, 5.000,

10.000, and coins of 500, 100, 50, 10, 5, and 1. By the way, 1 yen coin is only coin in the world that can [float on water](#). Maybe that's why they added hole to 10 yen and 50 yen coins.

4. Government

Japan is a democratic country, and is governed by parliament called diet (nothing related with food). It is made up of the **House of Representatives** and the **House of Councillors**.

Prime Minister of Japan is chosen by the Diet, but not everybody can be a prime minister. Candidate of prime minister must be a civilian and must be member of the diet.

Current prime minister is **Junichiro Koizumi**.

Political parties of Japan:

The Liberal-Democratic Party

The Democratic Party of Japan

The Social Democratic Party

The Liberal Party

The Conservative Party

Sakigake

The Japanese Communist Party

Komeito

Constitution of Japan:

Constitution of Japan was made 1947. In fact this was a revised version of Meiji Constitution made in January 1946, made by **General MacArthur**. Some of the characteristics of the Constitution of Japan are:

1. Sovereignty of the people

2. Respect for fundamental human rights

3. Opposition to war.

Flag:

Japanese flag is called *hinomaru*, meaning "circle which is the sun". The red circle symbolizes the rising sun. The flag with sunrays instead, is a Japanese Naval flag. It is not old version of the flag. Either it is not a symbol of war.

Military:

Japan does not have military. Japan does however have **Japan Self Defense Force**, JSDF. Japan does not have nuclear arms or aircraft carriers, but four types of submarines, couple of different type of destroyers, airforce and ground forces. JSDF mostly does rescue work. JSDF is also doing humanitarian mission in Iraq at this moment.

5. The Emperor

Current emperor is His Imperial Highness *Emperor Akihito*. He is married to Empress Michiko. Emperor Akihito is the son of the **Showa Emperor**. The Japanese emperor rules until his death. Emperor Akihito started to rule 1989 which also marked the beginning of new era, Heisei. The family of Japanese emperors is oldest in the world. Over 1400 years there has been Emperors in Japan - and the first Emperor was said to be child of Sun Goddess, *Amaterasu Omikami*. According to legend, she created Japan. Japanese emperor does not have power in national decisions, but a high value as a symbol of the Japanese and the Japan.

6. Electric & TV systems

Electricity:

Japan uses 110 volts at 50/60 herz, same as in America. The plug is the same with two flat pins. Americans won't therefore need to do anything if they want to use their equipment in Japan. Also it's fairly easy to import Japanese electronics from Japan.

Europeans and Australians however, must prepare, not only to have a plug adapter but to make sure that their equipment is really happy with 110 volts current. Sometimes a power converter is needed.

TV & Video:

Japan uses NTSC video and television standard, same as in America.

DVD:

DVD discs are region 2, the same used in Europe.

7. Emergency Numbers & Police

In all areas in Japan: **110 POLICE** and **119 FIRE/AMBULANCE**.

You can call toll-free to these numbers from public telephones by pressing the red button and dialing the number.

Police boxes are around everywhere in cities. These *koban* are handy not only in serious emergency, but smaller one too - if you are lost for example.