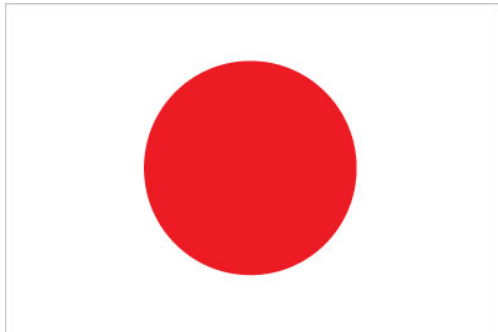




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## JAPAN

### FLAG



**A distinct island culture formed over thousands of years, although cool and colourful, Japan can also be complex and confusing to the foreigner.**

#### FACTS AND STATISTICS

**Location:** Eastern Asia, island chain between the North Pacific Ocean and the Sea of Japan, east of the Korean Peninsula

**Capital:** Tokyo

**Flag:** The national flag of Japan has a red circle in the centre of a white rectangular field and although it is officially called *Nisshōki*, it is more commonly known as *Hinomaru* which means 'circle of the sun' and reflects Japan's designation as the 'Land of the Rising Sun'.

**National anthem:** The Japanese national anthem is known as *Kimigayo*, meaning 'The Emperor's Reign'. It was adopted in 1888 and the words of the anthem were taken from a poem which dates back to the 10th century when Japan was ruled by the Emperor.

**Nationality:** Japanese

**Ethnic Make-up:** Japanese 98.5%, Koreans 0.5%, Chinese 0.4%, other 0.6% note: up to 230,000 Brazilians of Japanese origin migrated to Japan in the 1990s to work in industries; some have returned to Brazil (2004)

**Population:** 126,702,133 (July 2016 est.)

**Population growth rate:** 1.0% annual change (2016)

**Climate:** The climate in Japan varies from tropical in the south to cool and temperate in the north.

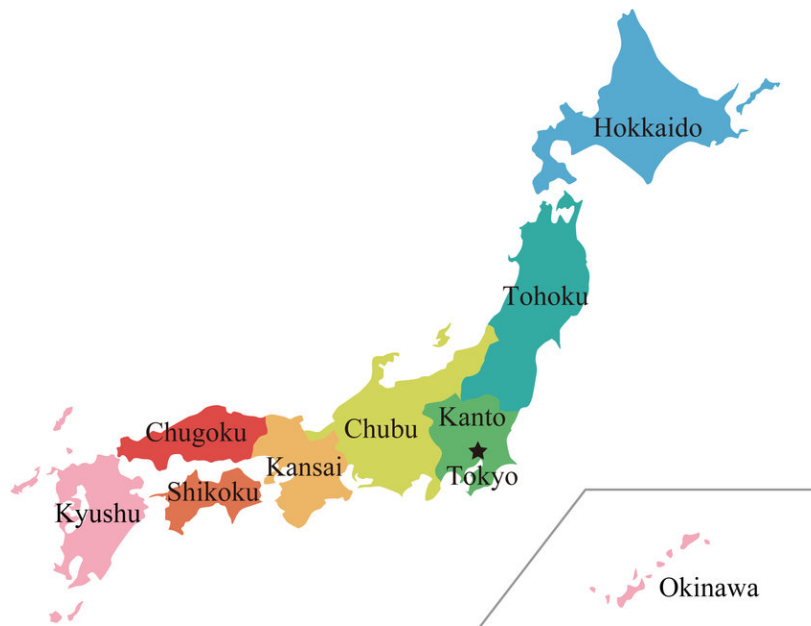
**Time Zone:** The time zone in Japan is JST (Japan Standard Time) and is nine hours ahead of UTC. There is currently no daylight-saving time in Japan.

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**Currency:** The currency in Japan is the Japanese Yen.

**Government:** The government in Japan is constitutional monarchy. Although the Emperor is the ceremonial head of state he has no constitutional powers.

## INTRODUCTION TO JAPAN



In the 17th century, after many decades of civil unrest, the Tokugawa Shogunate (the last feudal Japanese government), established a new military-led dynastic government. This heralded a long period of political peace and stability which lasted until 1868. During this time Japan was not under the influence of foreign powers which facilitated the expansion of the indigenous culture.

Japan began to open up its ports and, on March 31st

1854, signed the Treaty of Kanagawa (Japan-US Treaty of Peace and Amity). This led to establishing diplomatic relations with other western powers and the development and modernisation of Japan's manufacture and industry.

During the latter half of the 19th century and until the early part of the 20th century, **Japan became a formidable power**, crushing the forces of Russia and China. They occupied Korea, Taiwan and the southern island of Sakhalin. In 1931, Japan occupied Manchuria and then, in 1937, launched an invasion on China. Soon they occupied much of East and Southeast Asia.

On 7th December 1941, **Japan attacked the United States naval base at Pearl Harbour** which precipitated the US entry into the Second World War. Following their defeat in the Second World War, Japan developed a strong economic power and became allied to the US. In 1947 the Constitution of Japan was enacted which provided for a parliamentary system of government. The Emperor of Japan, whilst remaining the ceremonial head of state, no longer had Imperial rule.

After thirty years of economic growth, **Japan experienced economic decline which began in the 1990s**, although they remained an economic power.

In March 2011, Japan experienced a **devastating earthquake and attendant tsunami** which destroyed the northeast of Honshu Island killing thousands of people and damaging several nuclear power plants. This catastrophe seriously impacted upon Japan's infrastructure and economy. Shinzo Abe, the longest serving Prime Minister of Japan, has embarked upon an **ambitious programme of economic reform** in order to restore the economy and to maintain international standing.

**LANGUAGE IN JAPAN**



The dominant spoken language is Japanese (Nihongo) which is the sixth most spoken language in the world with more than 99% of the population using it.

Linguistically, Nihongo is related in syntax to the Korean language although in spite of the similarities, both contemporary languages are incomprehensible to one another.

The Meiji reformation in 1868 was followed by significant social and political change which included the establishment of a dominant national language to replace regional dialects. The subsequent dialect, hyōjungo, became the standard language, based upon the linguistic patterns of Tokyo's warrior classes.

Some dialects are still used in certain areas, particularly in Kyoto and Osaka, but standard Japanese, based on the speech of Tokyo, has become more popular through the use of television, radio and movies.

## JAPANESE PEOPLE, SOCIETY AND CULTURE

### Religion & Beliefs:

- **Shinto** and **Buddhism** 84%, other 16% (including **Christian** 0.7%)
- Shinto dates back to ancient times when people believed that the natural world possessed Kami, a Shinto deity or divine spirit.
- Buddhism came from China in the 6th Century and the two religions have co-existed in Japan from that time.

### Major Celebrations/Secular Celebrations:

- 1st January - New Year's Day
- 15th January – Adults Day
- 11th February – National Foundation Day
- 21st March – Spring equinox
- 3rd May - Constitution Day
- 4th May – Greenery Day (originally held on 29th April to commemorate Emperor Showa's birthday. The name was changed to Greenery Day in 1989 when the Emperor died)
- Greenery Day forms part of the 'Golden Week' in Japan due to three successive national holidays when many businesses close for the entire week.
- 5th May – Children's Day (also part of the Golden week)
- 3rd Monday in July - Ocean Day
- 15th September – Respect the Aged Day
- 21st September - Autumnal equinox
- Second Monday in October - Health and Sports Day
- 3rd November – Culture Day
- 23rd November - Labour Thanksgiving Day
- 23rd December – the Emperor's birthday
- Some holidays celebrated in the west have become popular in Japan including Valentine's Day (14th November) and Christmas Day (23rd December).

### **The Family:**

Family patterns have changed over the decades from multi-generational households to the typical ‘nuclear family’ with two parents and their children (particularly in the more urban areas).

- Some families may have an elderly parent or relative residing with them.
- During the second half of the 20th century, new laws were introduced reducing patriarchal authority and awarding greater legal rights for women.
- Marriage is based upon mutual attraction rather than the once traditional ‘arranged marriage’.

### **Social Stratification:**

- During the Meiji era, the government set out to make Japan a democratic state affording equality between social classes.
- Although boundaries were broken down to some extent there are still vestiges that continue to have some influence upon attitudes to social position and entitlement.
- In both rural and urban areas, there are differences in family composition, educational achievement and workforce inclusion.
- Among the urban population there are social differences between the ‘white-collar’ salaried middle class and the ‘blue-collar’ working classes.
- ‘Freeters’, a term describing someone who works as a freelancer, have also become part of this Japanese class system.

### **Gender Roles:**

- Historically, women in Japan were expected to be subordinate to men and were confined to domestic matters only.
- They were excluded from certain sacred areas and were expected to show deference to hierarchal authority in both speech and behaviour.
- In 1947, a new legal framework was established affording equality to both sexes, thus giving women more access to education, job opportunities and career advancement.
- However, the changes in the gender gap, equal pay and educational attainment are slow moving and the concept of total equality remains an ‘ideal’ rather than the norm at present.

### **Socialization:**

- Children are the centre of the family in Japan and child rearing is seen as an extremely important role.
- Strong family bonds are developed early on, particularly between the mother and children.

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- Compulsory education commences from the age of six with six years in elementary school which is followed by three years in middle school.
  - Although compulsory education ends with middle school, many go on to further education.
  - Prior to compulsory school, there are two strands of pre-school education: nursery school from the age of three and kindergarten from five years.

**Food:**

- Whilst Japan has its own identity of traditional cuisine there are early influences from Korea, China and South East Asia.
- White rice is a staple element of almost all meals and other ingredients include soy products, grilled or raw fish, thinly sliced stir-fried pork with bean sprouts and vegetables.
- Miso soup is a popular dish made from miso paste (fermented soya beans and barley) and containing various accoutrements such as tofu and/or vegetables.
- Sushi is also a popular Japanese meal which involves vinegared rice with seafood, raw fish or vegetables.
- A typical Japanese meal usually involves a number of dishes on the table rather than a main course.

**Economy:**

- Japan is a leading player in the global financial market and is a member of G7.
- Prior to the middle of the 20th Century, Japan's economy centred around agriculture, fisheries and forestry but the decline in this sector saw a move towards manufacturing, wholesale retailing and the service industry.
- It is one of the world's largest car manufacturers and electronics goods, exporting globally.
- Japan suffered considerable economic decline in the 1990s although they were able to maintain their economic power internationally. The devastating earth quake in 2011 had a catastrophic impact upon the infrastructure and economy.
- The prime minister, Shinzo Abe, embarked on an ambitious programme of economic reform and in the first quarter of 2017 statistics suggest that Japan's economic growth has increased.

**Arts, Humanities & Popular Culture:**

- The arts are an important part of Japanese life. A number of schools and colleges offer students training and preparation for careers in performance and art.
- The Ministry of Education is protective of Japan's great works of art which include paintings, sculptures and architecture.
- Traditional arts and crafts such as the tea ceremony, flower arranging and dance that express Japan's cultural heritage are greatly valued and designated as 'living national treasures'.

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- Japan's history has been defined too by its literature and poetry. The 'Tale of the Genji' for instance, is a great classic work written by a noblewoman, Murasaki Shikibu at the beginning of the 11th Century.
  - Comic books and animation are a popular form of art which has reached an international audience.
  - Japanese Martial Arts are also a traditional and respected performing art including Jujutsu (a method of close combat) and Kendo (swordsmanship using bamboo swords and protective armour.)

## JAPANESE SOCIAL CUSTOMS & PROTOCOL

### Naming conventions:

- In Japan people have two names, the surname and the given name.
- The surname comes before the given name and is inherited from the father.
- You can read more **here about how to address people in Japan**.

### Meeting & Greeting:

- Greetings in Japan are very formal and ritualized.
- It is important to show the correct amount of respect and deference to someone based upon their status relative to your own.
- Wait to be introduced.
- It is considered impolite to introduce yourself, even in a large gathering.
- While foreigners are expected to **shake hands**, the traditional form of greeting is the bow.
- How far you bow depends upon your relationship to the other person as well as the situation. The deeper you bow, the more respect you show.
- A foreign visitor ('gaijin') may bow the head slightly, since no one expects foreigners to generally understand the subtle nuances of bowing.

### Communication style:

- The Japanese rely on facial expression, tone of voice and posture to tell them what someone feels.
- They often trust non-verbal messages more than the spoken word as words can have several meanings.
- The context in which something is said affects the meaning of the words. Therefore, it is imperative to understand the situation to fully appreciate the response.
- Frowning while someone is speaking is interpreted as a sign of disagreement.
- Most Japanese maintain an impassive expression when speaking.

- Non-verbal communication is so vital that there is a book for 'gaijins' (foreigners) on how to interpret the signs!
- It is considered disrespectful to stare into another person's eyes, particularly those of a person who is senior to you because of age or status.
- In crowded situations the Japanese avoid eye contact to give themselves privacy.
- Saving face is crucial in Japanese society.
- The Japanese believe that turning down someone's request causes embarrassment and loss of face to the other person.
- If the request cannot be agreed to, they will say, 'it's inconvenient' or 'it's under consideration'.
- Face is a mark of personal dignity and means having high status with one's peers.
- Therefore, they do not openly criticize, insult, or put anyone on-the-spot.

#### **Personal Space:**

- The Japanese prefer to have some distance, at least arms-length in their personal space.

#### **Gift Giving:**

- In Japan, gift-giving is highly ritualistic and meaningful.
- The ceremony of presenting the gift and the way in which it is wrapped is as important, and sometimes more important, than the gift itself.
- Gifts are given for many occasions.
- The gift need not be expensive, but take great care to ask someone who understands the culture to help you decide what type of gift to give.
- Good quality chocolates or small cakes are a good idea.
- Do not give lilies, camellias or lotus blossoms as they are associated with funerals and avoid white flowers of any kind as they are associated with funerals.
- Do not give potted plants as they encourage sickness, although a bonsai tree is always acceptable.
- Give items in odd numbers, but not 9 (the numbers 9 and 4 are considered unlucky in Japan)
- If you buy the gift in Japan, have it wrapped. Pastel colours are the best choices for wrapping paper.
- Gifts are not necessarily opened upon receipt.

#### **Dining & Food:**

On the rare occasion you are invited to a Japanese house:



- Remove your shoes before entering and put on the slippers left at the doorway.
- Leave your shoes pointing away from the doorway you are about to walk through.
- Arrive on time or no more than 5 minutes late if invited for dinner.
- If invited to a large social gathering, arriving a little bit later than the invitation is acceptable, although punctuality is always appreciated.
- Unless you have been told the event is casual, dress as if you were going into the office.
- If you use the toilet, put on the available toilet slippers and remove them when you are finished. Do not wear them back out of the bathroom.

#### **Dining Etiquette:**

- Wait to be told where to sit. There is a protocol to be followed.
- The honoured guest or the eldest person will be seated in the centre of the table the furthest from the door.
- The honoured guest or the eldest is the first person to begin eating.
- It will yield tremendous dividends if you learn to use chopsticks.
- Never point your chopsticks.
- Do not pierce your food with chopsticks.
- Chopsticks should be returned to the chopstick rest after every few bites and when you drink or stop to speak.
- Do not cross your chopsticks when putting them on the chopstick rest.
- Place bones on the side of your plate.
- Try a little bit of everything. It is acceptable to ask what something is and even to make a face if you do not like the taste.
- Don't be surprised if your Japanese colleagues slurp their noodles and soup.
- Mixing other food with rice is usually not done. You eat a bit of one and then a bit of the other, but they should never be mixed together as you do in many Western countries.
- If you do not want anything more to drink, do not finish what is in your glass. An empty glass is an invitation for someone to serve you more.
- When you have finished eating, place your chopsticks on the chopstick rest or on the table. Do not place your chopsticks across the top of your bowl.
- If you leave a small amount of rice in your bowl, you will be given more. To signify that you do not want more rice, finish every grain in your bowl.
- It is acceptable to leave a small amount of food on your plate when you have finished eating.
- Conversation at the table is generally subdued. The Japanese like to savour their food.