

# Japanese cultural profile



## General

Japan is one of the most productive industrialized economies in the world. The culture is group oriented with value placed on age, tradition, loyalty, and cooperation.

## Population

Japan has 124.9 million citizens, and is one of the most densely populated countries on earth. About 80% of the population lives in urban areas, with Tokyo, Osaka, and Nagoya the largest cities. Ethnically, the population is 99% Japanese.

## Language

Japanese is the official language with characters providing the written form. There are also phonetic alphabets, including hiragana and katakana. Nonverbal communication is very important.

## Government

Japan is a constitutional monarchy with the emperor the head of state. The prime minister is the head of government. The Diet is the legislature with a lower house and upper house. An elected governor heads each of the 47 prefectures.

## Religion

Shinto and Buddhism are both practiced by most Japanese. People value their relationship with nature, honor their ancestors, and believe in the existence of many gods. In current day Japan, religious celebrations and practices are now more cultural traditions rather than deeply religious events.

## Geography

Japan is made of four main islands which are quite mountainous: Honshu, Hokkaido, Shikoku, and Kyushu. The country covers 377,835 square kilometers of land with many volcanoes, most of which are dormant.

## Climate

Japan is generally temperate with four distinct seasons: summers are hot and humid while winters are relatively mild except on Hokkaido and northern Honshu, where it gets very cold. In general, the western side of the islands, toward the Sea of Japan, is colder than the eastern side which faces the Pacific Ocean. In the very south the climate is tropical.

## Health

People have a very high standard of health with life expectancy over 77 years. Health care facilities are excellent. Private health insurance is normally provided through employers with the government also sponsoring some.

## Education

Ninety-nine percent of the population is literate with schooling free and mandatory up to age 15. Students go to classes Monday through Saturday and some take evening sessions to prepare for entrance exams to advanced schools. Graduation from one of the best universities assures a well-placed job.

## History

Emperors have ruled Japan since 600 B.C. with the exception of the period from the 12th century until 1860 when Shoguns (feudal lords) controlled the land.

Japan became a regional power in Asia in 1895 defeating China and further in 1905 when it won the Russo-Japanese War.

Its global influence was extended by its involvement in World War I. In between the First and Second World Wars a time of growing prosperity and change in Japan. It invaded Manchuria and some of China. In 1941 it bombed Pearl Harbor in Hawaii, a United States navy base. By 1945 the USA had regrouped and retaliated by dropping two atomic bombs on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This massive devastation led to surrender by Japan.

A coalition led by the United States occupied Japan from 1945 until 1952. During that time a democratic constitution was adopted.

Politically the Liberal Democrats held power from World War 2 until the mid 1990s when various coalitions have been formed.