

Japan Country and Culture

Population: 126,334,308

Language: Japanese

Capital: Tokyo

Currency: Yen

Geography and History

Japan is located in the North Pacific Ocean, off the coast of Russia and the Korean peninsula. The area of Japan consists of four main islands—Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku, and Kyushu—in addition to more than 4,000 smaller islands. A modern railroad system connects the major islands, with Japan’s high-speed Shinkansen train connecting major urban areas.

The islands of Japan are located in an area known as “The Ring of Fire” in the Pacific Ocean. This is an area with many earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. Japan is seismically active with over 1,500 earthquakes per year. In 1923 the Great Kanto Earthquake killed more than 143,000 people in the Tokyo area. Tsunamis are often generated from these devastating earthquakes. Most recently, in March of 2011, the Tōhoku earthquake was the most powerful ever recorded in Japan, and triggered tsunami waves that reached heights of up to 133 feet.

Japan is mostly mountainous terrain, with less than one-fifth of the land suitable for settlement. Even with such little land suitable for cultivation, Japanese farmers remarkably grow about three-fourths of the country’s food. They use modern farming technologies and have developed improved varieties of rice, the main food crop. Japan’s fishing fleet, one of the largest in the world, provides another staple of the Japanese diet.

The country’s chief resources are its people and a culture that allows for change. Early in its history, Japan borrowed heavily from China, adopting religions such as Buddhism, philosophies such as Confucianism and Taoism, as well as ideas about writing, art, and music. Most Japanese today observe Buddhism along with Shintoism, Japan’s own ancient religion.

Two centuries of isolation under the rule of military governors called *shoguns* ended in the 1860s. Japan sought out Western ideas and technologies in order to modernize the country and establish Japanese industry. The desire for raw materials spurred Japan to conquer countries in the Pacific. Japan emerged from defeat in World War II to become an industrial giant within only a few decades.

Climate

The climate of Japan varies considerably depending on the region and season. Summer is usually very hot and humid, known in Japan as *mushiatsui*. From mid-July to mid-August, there is a rainy season. Winters are usually mild, with the northern areas of Japan receiving snow. Spring and autumn are usually sunny with mild temperatures. Cherry blossom season is widely celebrated in Japan. The beautiful flowering trees indicate the coming of spring, as well as simply being delight to admire!



Map of Japan and the surrounding Pacific region.



The size of Japan compared to the United States of America. Image by www.thetruesize.com



At 12,388 feet, Mt. Fuji (also an active volcano) is the highest mountain in Japan. It is located just west of Tokyo. This photograph also shows the Shinkansen commuter train in the foreground.

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Language

The literacy rate in Japan is nearly 100%. In addition to the Japanese language, many also have some ability in writing and speaking English, as it is a mandatory part of the curriculum in the Japanese educational system. Japanese uses four different writing systems; Kanji (Chinese characters), Hiragana (phonetic alphabet for native words), Katakana (phonetic alphabet for foreign words), and Romaji (western alphabet used to write Japanese). Japanese vocabulary has been strongly influenced by loanwords from other languages, with most loanwords coming from Chinese and English.

Anime

Anime, also sometimes called Japanimation, refers to hand-drawn or computer animated media from Japan, involving many colorful graphics, vibrant characters, and fantastical themes. In Japan, the word *anime* means ‘animation,’ and thus refers to all forms of the art. In English, anime is more often used to describe the distinct style of animation created in Japan. *Dragon Ball Z*, *Pokémon*, and *Cowboy Bebop* are a few examples of popular anime.

Practice Origami

Origami (*oru* meaning “folding”, and *gami* meaning “paper”) is the traditional Japanese art of paper folding and has been practiced since the Edo era (1603-1867). The goal of this art is to create a representation of an object using geometric folds and crease patterns usually using a single, square piece of paper.

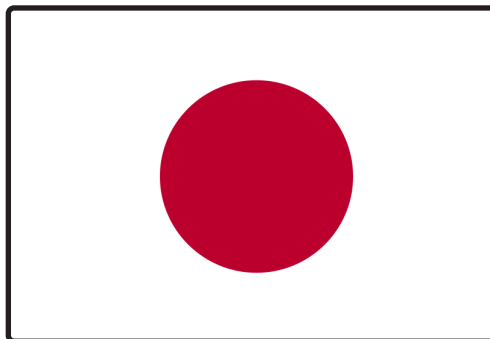
Origami only uses a small number of different folds, but they can be combined in a variety of ways to make intricate designs. The most well known form is probably the Japanese paper crane. Step-by-step instructions for making a paper crane can be found online [here](#).



Anime poster showcasing a variety of series at once. Photo by Kami Sama. CC BY-NC-SA 2.0



Perfectly folded paper cranes in a variety of different papers and sizes.



The Japanese flag is a white background with a red circle in the center that represents the sun. In Japanese, it is called Hinomaru, meaning “circle of the sun.”



The Yin and Yang symbol depicts the intertwined duality of all things in nature, a common theme in Taoism.

Watch

[Children's Introduction to Japan](#)

Additional Resources

[World Factbook: Japan](#)

[About Japan from the Japan National Tourism Center](#)

[Kids Web Japan - Educational and fun facts for students](#)



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