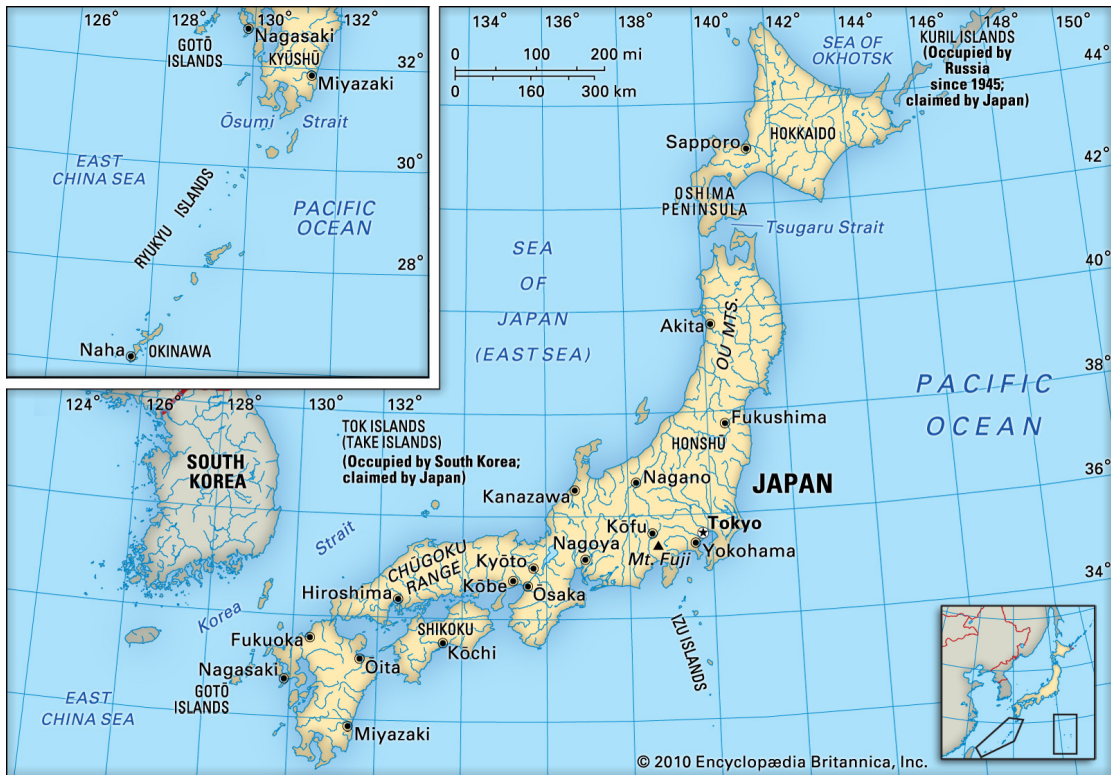


JAPAN



Official name: Nihon, or Nippon (Japan)
Form of gov't: constitutional monarchy with a national Diet consisting of two legislative houses
Symbol of state: Emperor Akihito
Head of government: Prime Minister Abe Shinzo
Capital: Tokyo
Official language: none
Official religion: none

Monetary unit: yen (¥)
Population: 126,915,000
Total area: 145,898
Urban-rural population:
Urban: 93%
Rural: 7%
Life expectancy:
Male: 80.2 years
Female: 86.6 years
Literacy:
Male: 100%
Female: 100%
GNI per capita: (U.S.\$) 36,680

Introduction

Japan is one of the world's most technologically and economically advanced countries. It began its modern period in the late 19th century, but before then, Japan had largely cut itself off from the outside world. Japan suffered a crushing military defeat in World War II, and faced major set backs. But managed to quickly become leader in the worlds economy and finance.



In few other places in the world do the values and traditions of the past continue to flourish so strongly alongside the ideas and practices of the present. The persisting contrast between the new and the old, the modern and the traditional, is one of the most characteristic features of present-day Japan.

Land and Climate

Japan is located off the east coast of Asia. It consists of four large islands and more than 3,900 smaller islands. Seasonal temperatures in Japan generally increase from north to south. Average January temperatures are 15 to 20 °F in the north but 45 °F in the south. Virtually all of Japan except parts of eastern Hokkaido averages more than 40 inches of precipitation annually, one-third of which comes from typhoons.

Japan's has had many volcanoes and earthquakes because of the instability of the rocks underlying the country. This instability is caused by the movement of several of Earth's major crustal plates near the Japanese islands. The country has about 200 volcanoes, 60 of which have been active in recorded history. Mount Fuji (12,388 feet), the famous volcanic cone, is the highest peak in Japan. Mount Fuji has been dormant since 1707.

Japan experiences some 1,000 tremors each year, most of them minor. However, major earthquakes have caused considerable loss of life and widespread destruction. One of the worst was the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923, which, combined with the ensuing fire, wiped out much of Tokyo and Yokohama. More than 140,000 lives were lost. An earthquake in Kobe in 1995 killed about 6,400 people.



Undersea earthquakes in the North Pacific basin stir up unusually large tsunamis. In 1896 a tsunami seven stories high obliterated several villages near Sanriku, drowning roughly 26,000 people. In 2011 a

powerful earthquake and large tsunami devastated Honshu's eastern coast, killing more than 18,000 people.

Plants and Animals

Forests cover a large part of Japan. The country's evergreen trees include pines, cypresses, hemlocks, cedars, firs, and spruces. Numerous broad-leaved trees include oaks, maples, ashes, birches, beeches, and poplars. Bamboo and palms grow in southern and central Japan. Cherry trees are known as symbols of Japan. The Japanese plant them throughout the country.

Many animals live in the forested mountains. Mammals include bears, foxes, deer, wild boars, antelope, hares, and wild monkeys. One monkey, the Japanese , is found as far north as northern Honshu, making it the northernmost monkeys in the world. The seas are home to whales, dolphins, porpoises, and a wide variety of fish. The raising of goldfish and colorful carp (koi) is a Japanese specialty.

People

Japan is the world's tenth most populous country, and most Japanese people share the same ethnic and cultural background. They are closely related to the other peoples of East Asia. One group of Japanese, the burakumin (people of the village), often live in poorer conditions than other Japanese. Their ancestors belonged to the lowest class in traditional

Japanese society. Koreans form the largest minority group. There are also small numbers of Ainu, a native people of northern Japan.



The country's main language is Japanese, but there are dozens of different dialects. More than 1,500 years ago, the Japanese adopted Chinese characters for writing the Japanese language. The Japanese also developed their own characters, standing for a syllable rather

than a separate consonant or vowel. After World War II the Japanese government modified the system of writing, and reduced the many thousands of characters to about a couple thousand basic characters, and their forms were simplified.

Shinto and Buddhism are the major religions, but the majority of people do not practice any formal religion. Most Japanese live in cities, mainly on Honshu.

Economy

Most Japanese work in services, including banking, health care, and communications. Manufacturing and international trade are also strong parts of the economy. Japan is a leading maker of ships, automobiles, watches, and electronics—especially cellular phones and robots. Major companies headquartered there include: Toyota, Honda, Sony, Canon, Panasonic, Toshiba, and Sharp.

Farming and fishing are small parts of the economy. Nevertheless, Japan produces large amounts of food. Its leading crops include rice, potatoes, sugar beets, fruits, vegetables, and tea. Japan also catches more fish than many other countries.

History

People lived in Japan at least 10,000 years ago. According to legend, the emperor Jimmu founded the Japanese state in 660 BC. Historical records,

however, show that Japan was not united as one state until the late 300s or early 400s.

For many centuries the Japanese borrowed heavily from Chinese culture. Besides borrowing the language, they also used some Chinese ideas about government. Japan's culture became more Japanese after the 800s.

Military Government

During the 1100s a class of warriors called samurai rose to power. The samurai developed advanced military skills. Soon they set up a military government, called a shogun. Japan had an emperor, but he held less power than the shogun, or military ruler. Meanwhile Japan was developing trade contacts with the outside world. Trade missions to China began in 1404. In 1543 Portuguese traders arrived in Japan. Spanish, English, and Dutch traders followed.



During the 1600s and 1700s strong shoguns of the Tokugawa family ruled Japan. Japan enjoyed peace, stability, and a growing economy. At the same time, the shoguns began to fear conquest by foreign powers. They banned Christianity (a foreign religion), stopped foreign travel, and cut back on foreign trade.

By the mid-1800s the Tokugawa shogun was unable to keep European and U.S. traders away. The shogun's support among the Japanese people collapsed. In 1868 the shogun was forced to step down.

The Japanese Empire

Japan set up a new government under an emperor who took the name Meiji, meaning "enlightened government." This transfer of power to the Meiji emperor was the start of Japan's modern era. Japan soon started to build an empire and defeated China and Russia in war. It made Korea into a Japanese colony in 1910. During World War I, Japan fought on the side of the Allies. Japan seized additional territory in East Asia during the war.

World War II

In 1931 Japan seized control of Manchuria from China. Japan moved troops into China in 1937 and into Southeast Asia in 1940. The Japanese also formed an alliance with Germany and Italy. The three countries were known as the Axis powers, fighting against the Allies during World War II.

In 1941 Japan attacked U.S. forces at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. The attack pulled the United States into the war. In 1945 the United States dropped atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The bombs destroyed the cities and killed more than 100,000 people. The Japanese then surrendered.

Postwar Japan

After the war Japan had to give up all the territory it had occupied since 1895. It also broke up its military. In addition, U.S. forces occupied Japan until 1952. A new constitution in 1947 took power away from the emperor and made Japan more democratic.

Japan quickly rebuilt its ruined economy with the help of new technology. By 1990 Japan had one of the world's largest economies. Although economic growth slowed in the 1990s, Japan remains one of the richest countries in the world.

FUN FACT: Twenty-one percent of the Japanese population is over the age of 65, the highest proportion in the world. And as the birth rate there is so low, more adult diapers are sold than baby diapers.

FUN FACT: In Japanese, the name "Japan" means "Land of the Rising Sun." It was once believed that Japan was the first country to see the sun rise.

FUN FACT: Japan has more than 3,000 McDonald's restaurants, the largest number in any country outside the U.S

FUN FACT: Japan has around 5.5 million vending machines with one on almost every street corner. There are vending machines that sell beer, comic books, hot dogs, light bulbs, toilet paper, umbrellas and fish bait.