

# Japan

Japan is an island country that lies off the eastern coast of mainland Asia and is home to approximately 127 million people. It is a fascinating country with a unique culture and customs. In addition to this, Japan is also one of the most technologically sophisticated countries in the world. For example, Japan is the world's third largest manufacturer of automobiles and the largest electronic goods industry. It is commonly regarded as one of the most innovative countries in the world as well as being ranked one of the healthiest countries to live in. So, what makes it so special?



## School Life



Education is central to Japanese culture and Japanese people tend to be highly educated as a result. At school, children study Japanese, English, mathematics, science, social studies, music, crafts, physical education, home economics and ICT. Students also learn traditional Japanese arts and skills such as calligraphy, origami and haikus. Children are required to be in education up until the age of nine, however 98% of students decide to carry on their education into high school.

## Sport in Japan

Sport is a significant part of Japanese culture. Traditional sports, such as sumo and martial arts, are popular as well as sports adopted from western culture such as baseball and football. Sumo wrestling is considered Japan's national sport and originates from a religious ritual from about 1500 years ago. Japan has hosted many international sporting competitions including the 1964 Summer Olympics in Tokyo and the 2019 Rugby World Cup. Tokyo (Japan's capital city) was set to host the 2020 Summer Olympics which have postponed until 2021 due to the Coronavirus pandemic.





The aim in sumo wrestling is to make your opponent touch the ground with any part of the body apart from the feet, or to force him or her out of the ring ('dohyo').

## Food in Japan

When people think about Japanese cuisine, they probably think of sushi. However, sushi is not the only food eaten in Japan. Vegetarian food is very popular, especially 'natto', which is a strong smelling dish made from fermented soybeans. Rice is a common ingredient in most meals as well as a variety of noodles such as thick wheat noodles or buckwheat noodles. Although many Japanese people use forks and knives to eat, chopsticks ('hashi' in Japanese) are still the traditional eating utensil and are an important part of Japanese culture and tradition. Some children are taught how to use chopsticks before they can even walk because it is considered to be an essential skill.

## Tea Ceremony

An ancient and unique ritual in Japan is the Japanese tea ceremony. It is an elaborate event in which green tea is prepared in front of and shared between special guests using special tools and equipment. Tea ceremonies represent harmony, respect purity and tranquillity and can last for several days. Tea ceremonies are traditionally held in a tatami room and the entrance is kept low so that guests have to bend when they enter.

## Children's Day

Children's Day ('Kodomo no hi') is celebrated annually on 5<sup>th</sup> May in Japan. On this day, families celebrate the healthy growth and happiness of children. Households fly large, colourful, carp-shaped streamers called Koinobori outside their houses. The carp was chosen because it symbolizes strength and success as Japanese legend says that a carp swam upstream and turned into a dragon.

## Did You Know...?

The kimono is the traditional Japanese outfit. The kimono varies depending on the occasion at which it is being worn and can be worn by women, men and children.



# Japan

Japan is a mountainous and earthquake-prone country consisting of many different islands. It is located in the continent of Asia, on the edge of the Pacific Ocean. Japan has a population of approximately 126.8 million people. In comparison, Australia has around 25 million, the UK has 66 million and the USA has approximately 326 million people.

## Traditions & Festivals

For many centuries, festivals and traditional ceremonies have been celebrated in Japan. Some examples include:

- **Hanami** – During the spring, under the blossoming cherry trees in picturesque parks across the country, it is usual for people to have a picnic, drink (o) sake and enjoy themselves.
- **Oshogatsu** – On 31<sup>st</sup> December each year, traditionally, most houses are given a deep clean. Also, people usually exchange greetings cards (nengajo) and the children of the family may receive money in a small, beautifully-decorated envelope. Subsequently, after midnight and in the early hours of 1<sup>st</sup> January, many families travel together to their local shrine and may make a wish for the coming New Year. In many areas, the trains and buses may run all night in order to help people return home.
- **Chado/Chanoyu** – This is the ancient Japanese tea ceremony. It involves a step-by-step preparation of a traditional drink made from matcha (powdered green tea). There are strict rules for how the tea must be made and also for how it must be drunk by the guests.

## Japanese Food

Sushi is perhaps Japan's most famous export. However, there are many other examples of Japanese cuisine, such as:

- Tempura, a delicious fried snack made from seafood or vegetables.
- Freshly-cooked eel is a popular delicacy for many Japanese people during the summer.
- Takoyaki (deep-fried balls of octopus pieces) can be eaten as a quick meal at many festivals.



### Did You Know...?

- Japan consists of nearly 7,000 islands! The largest one is called Honshu.
- The majority of land in Japan is either forests or mountains.
- Due to the fact that Japan sits on the Pacific 'Ring of Fire', about 1,500 earthquakes strike Japan each year.

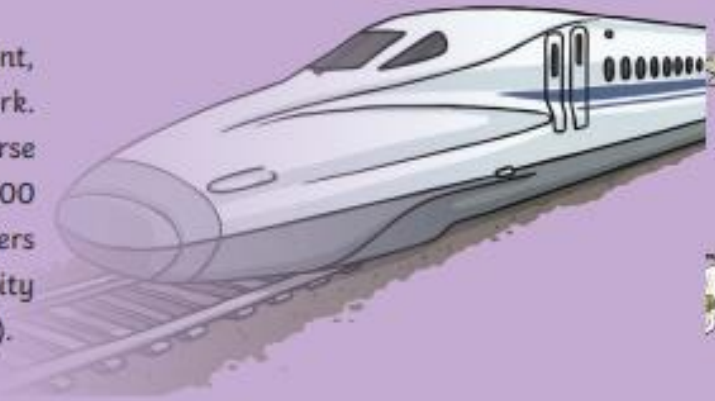


## Japan

One staple of Japanese cuisine is rice which can be served for every meal, including breakfast. Japanese people traditionally use two chopsticks to eat with; young children, however, may be given simplified chopsticks to practise with.

### Transport

Japan is renowned for its efficient, punctual and safe transportation network. The shinkansen ("bullet trains") traverse long distances and can reach speeds of 200 miles per hour! Japanese car manufacturers are also known for their reliability, quality and technology (such as hybrid engines).



### Sport

Passionate about sport, many Japanese children often attend school at the weekend or during school holidays to practise. Many traditional sports are played in addition to western sports, such as football or baseball. Sumo wrestling is considered to be Japan's national sport. Popular martial arts include: judo, karate and kendo.

Japan's popularity as a tourist destination will continue. Soon, it will play host to two major sporting events:

- the 2019 Rugby World Cup,
- the 2020 Summer Olympic Games – to be held in Tokyo, the capital.

### Glossary

**Eel** – A snake-like fish.

**Ring of Fire** – A major area around the edges of the Pacific Ocean where 90% of all earthquakes occur.

**(O) Sake** – A Japanese alcoholic drink made of fermented rice.