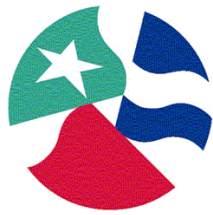


# WHERE IN THE WORLD?



## Japan

### YFU Information

## Quick Facts:

**Area:** 377,835 sq. km

**Population:**

126,974,628

(July 2002 est.)

**Capital:** Tokyo

**Language:** Japanese

**Religion:** observe both Shinto and Buddhist 84%, other 16% (including Christian 0.7%)

**Currency:** Yen (JPY)

**YFU Japan's web site:** [www.yfu.org/jp](http://www.yfu.org/jp)



## Introduction

Japan is a country steeped in history whose people were strictly governed by social organization and discipline for centuries. After early contact with China and Europe up to the early 1600s, the Japanese were isolated from the world for 240 years during which they created a unique culture. When Japan re-opened its doors in 1853, a wave of modernization hit the country, and the Japanese successfully embraced Western ideas and technology as their own while preserving a basic continuity with past traditions.

Today, Japan is a mixture of contrasts--old and new, East and West. The Japanese seem Westernized, yet still sit on "tatami" straw mats and wear "yukata" robes when they are at home.

Japanese people you may have heard about include novelist Yukio Mishima, or Akira Kurosawa, famous for his films like "Shogun". You probably have also heard of typical Japanese things such as sumo wrestling, sushi rice cakes, haiku poetry and, of course such brands as Hitachi, Sony, Honda and many others.

## Short Facts

**Area:** Japan is located in Eastern Asia. It is an island chain between the North Pacific Ocean and the Sea of Japan, east of the Korean peninsula. It is slightly smaller than the State of California in the United States. Japan consists of four main islands: Honshu, Hokkaido, Kyushu

and Shikoku, as well as 4,000 minor islands which stretch across temperate and subtropical weather zones.

**Climate:** The climate varies widely due to Japan's long, narrow shape. There are four distinct seasons, the prettiest of which are spring, with its lush greenery, and fall which brings brilliant colors. Summers are hot and humid, with a rainy season in June. Winters are cold, with snow in the north, especially along the Sea of Japan coast. The weather is dry and clear along the Pacific coast.

**Population:** Most of Japanese are of the same ethnic makeup. Minority groups include the Aina, living in Hokkaido, Chinese, Koreans, and recently, Vietnamese "boat people" and other South Asian people. The population density is high.

**Language:** Linguists are not sure about the exact origins of the Japanese language. It is believed to be linked to the Altaic language family (Turkish, Mongolian, etc.) but also shows similarities to Austronesian languages like Polynesian. The Japanese writing system consists of three different character sets: Kanji (several thousands of Chinese characters) and Hiragana and Katakana (two syllabaries of 46 characters each; together called Kana). Japanese texts can be written in two ways: In the same way as Western texts are written in, i.e. horizontally from top to bottom, or in the traditional Japanese way, vertically from right to left. Both writing styles exist side by side. Accents do exist in the Japanese language but to a lower extent than in the Chinese language. In addition,

there are many words that are pronounced the same, but have different meanings.

The way of speaking depends strongly on the person one is talking to. Other words are used when talking to an elderly person or a superior in the company than when talking to a child or a close friend.

Women speak a different Japanese than men do. There are many words only used by either women or men.

**Religion:** Shinto was the native religion of Japan, but in the early 6<sup>th</sup> century Buddhism was introduced. Now most Japanese follow both traditions. There are numerous ceremonies but they are usually more a reflection of social traditions than religious convictions. Less than one percent of the population is Christian.

**Government:** Since the end of World War II, Japan has had a constitutional monarchy, with the Emperor as a symbol of the state. The elected democratic government, the Diet, has two chambers, which enact laws: the House of Representatives and the House of Councilors. The Civil Service has considerable administrative power.

**History:** Japan is characterized by 10,000 years of cultural continuity, but its early history is shrouded in mythology. The line of emperors, dating from the 660 B.C., has continued to the present. However, the 12th century saw a shift in power from the Imperial court to warrior classes, when a feudal system developed which continued to the mid



# WHERE IN THE WORLD?

## Japan



19th century. The arrival of U.S. Naval Commodore Perry in 1853 and the subsequent rise of the merchant classes brought about the fall of the feudal Shogunate and, in 1868, an imperial restoration under the Emperor Meiji.

The Meiji government implemented a wide range of reforms-social, economic and political-modeled on European examples. Japan soon underwent a phenomenal modernization.

Japan's loss in World War II in 1945 provided an impetus for building a new nation emphasizing peace and freedom.

**Economy:** After WW II a recovery program enabled the economy to expand rapidly and Japan became the most successful export economy in the world and the second most technologically powerful economy. The industry is the economically most important sector, but it is heavily dependent on raw materials and fuels. The agricultural sector is highly subsidized and protected but it is self-sufficient in rice. Japan also has the world's largest fishing fleet.

**Education:** Education is compulsory for the first nine years. More than ninety percent of all students go to senior high school and thirty percent of those go on to university. Schools are large, with about 1,000 students, and students study a wide range of compulsory subjects. Most schools require uniforms. The school year begins in April.

Exchange students are placed in the first or second year of senior high school.

Getting to the right university is the key to future success, so third year high school students are busy studying for the tough university entrance exams.

After-school clubs are an important part of school life, and range from calligraphy and music to karate and basketball.

**Family life:** It used to be common for three generations to live under one roof, but now the average family has only three or four members. Values and practices are constantly evolving and more women are working outside the home than ever before. Because parents often spend a lot of time at work, the family rarely does things together, but is a close-knit unit.

**Meals:** *Sushi* is the best known Japanese food, but the Japanese also eat other foods than fish. *Sukiyaki* is thinly sliced beef, vegetables and tofu cooked in broth. *Shabu-shabu* is beef and vegetables in broth and dipped in sauces. *Nabemono* is a soup where each diner dips ingredients from trays of prepared raw foods. Most Japanese restaurants specialize in one type of cuisine.

**Recreation:** A lot of the national parks in Japan have hiking trails. Other western sports like basketball, soccer, skiing and baseball are enjoyed but the traditional Japanese sports like sumo wrestling, kendo and karate are also very popular. The mountains are popular for going skiing in the winter and for mountain climbing in the summer. Both TV and movies are widely enjoyed side by side with traditional art such as drama, puppet theater and flower arranging. The Japanese also celebrate the seasons and have many colorful festivals.

### YFU Japan

The first Japanese students were sent to the USA in 1958, but YFU Japan wasn't founded until 1977 and in 1993 YFU Japan was approved by the Japanese government as a foundation.

**YFU Host Families:** Families are carefully screened before being chosen as YFU host families. They receive written materials and attend a pre-arrival orientation for guidance.

**Exchanges with:** Australia, Belgium, Canada, Finland, Germany, Korea, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Philippines, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom and the USA

### Common Phrases

| English         | Japanese             |
|-----------------|----------------------|
| Good morning... | Ohay gozaimasy       |
| Hello...        | Konnichiwa           |
| My name is...   | Watashi no namae wa. |
| Thank you...    | Arigat gozaimasu     |
| Goodbye...      | Say nara             |

### Exchange activities for Inbound students:

Summer students arrive in June. Year students arrive in the second week of March, which allows time for a one-week orientation course and settling-in period with the host family before starting school in April.

A few months before arriving in Japan all year students receive some self-study language materials to get a head start on Japanese. Exchange students may live with a host family in an apartment in the center of a bustling, cosmopolitan city or in a typical Japanese house in a more traditional rural area.

Each student and host family has an Area Representative and an Area coordinator assigned to them. Additional orientations are held regionally every 3 months for students and host families, giving them a chance for evaluation and discussion. Some YFU activities, such as cultural visits or trips to factories, are held regionally during the summer holidays.

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