

Culture Wise **JAPAN**

The Essential Guide to Culture,
Customs & Business Etiquette

Edited by David Leaper





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& Business Etiquette

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THE AUTHOR

David Leaper is a New Zealander who has been living abroad since 1995, when he went to Japan. He has lived in Japan on and off for a total of eight years, dividing his time between Mie-ken, Chiba and Tokyo. Although he left Japan in 2008, he remains an avid follower of sumo and drinker of nihonshu, when he can find it. Currently, he and his wife are living in Seoul, South Korea, where his work in teacher education leaves him busier than he wishes to be. *Culture Wise Japan* is his first book.

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The Riviera Reporter

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The Recorder

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American Club of Zurich

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A comprehensive guide to all things French, written in a highly readable and amusing style, for anyone planning to live, work or retire in France.

The Times

Covers every conceivable question that might be asked concerning everyday life – I know of no other book that could take the place of this one.

France in Print

A concise, thorough account of the Do’s and DON’T’s for a foreigner in Switzerland – Crammed with useful information and lightened with humorous quips which make the facts more readable.

American Citizens Abroad

‘I found this a wonderful book crammed with facts and figures, with a straightforward approach to the problems and pitfalls you are likely to encounter. The whole laced with humour and a thorough understanding of what’s involved. Gets my vote!’

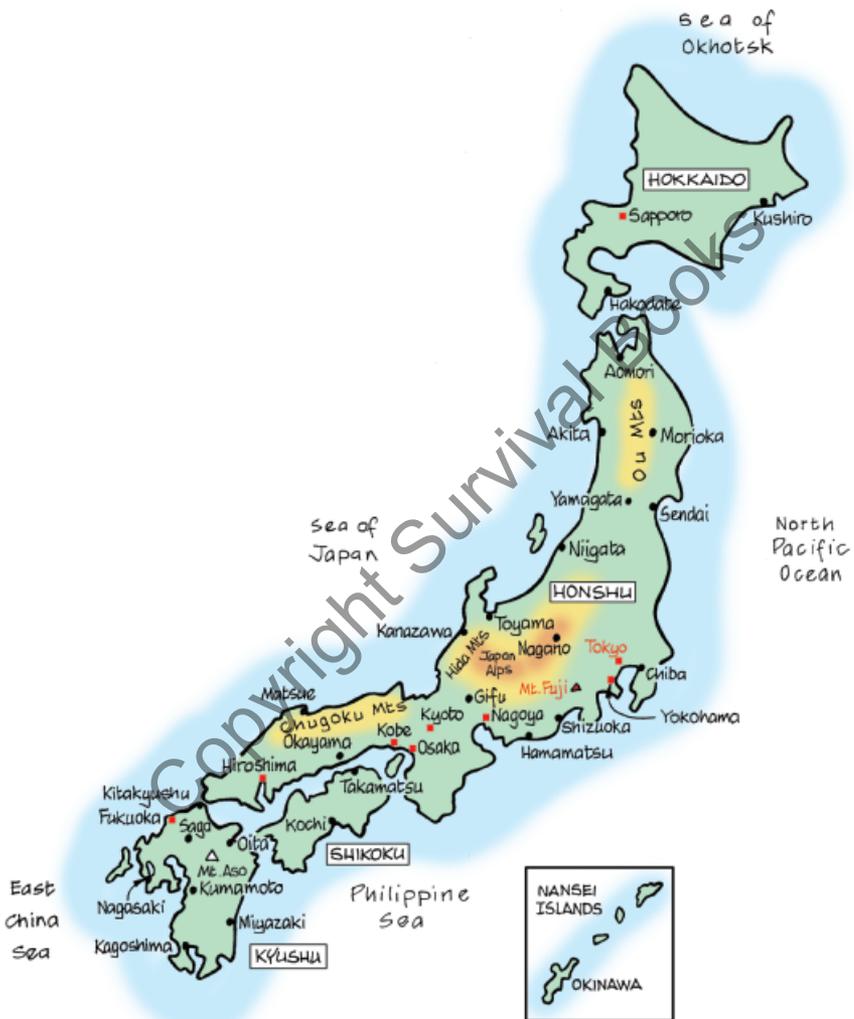
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‘A vital tool in the war against real estate sharks; don’t even think of buying without reading this book first!’

Everything Spain

‘We would like to congratulate you on this work: it is really super! We hand it out to our expatriates and they read it with great interest and pleasure.’

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Mt Fuji

INTRODUCTION

If you're planning a trip to Japan or just want to learn more about the country, you'll find the information contained in *Culture Wise Japan* invaluable. Whether you're travelling on business or pleasure, visiting for a few days or planning to stay for a lifetime, Culture Wise guides enable you to quickly find your feet by removing the anxiety factor when dealing with a foreign culture.

Adjusting to a different environment and culture in any foreign country can be a traumatic and stressful experience, and Japan is no exception. You need to adapt to new customs and traditions, and discover the Japanese way of doing things; whether it's a drinking and *karaoke* session with your colleagues after a hard day at the office, 'playing *Pokémon* with your kids, having a go at *pachinko* or a celebration dinner of Kobe beef or *fugu* with your neighbours.

Japan is a land where almost everything is done differently: where toilets give you a wash and blow dry and may even talk to you; where people live in tiny six-*tatami* rooms with miniature furniture and sit on the floor; where food consists of raw fish and even stranger concoctions, washed down with *sake* or *shochu*; where everything comes in small sizes, from tiny (*kei*) cars to micro homes, *netsuke* to miniature trees (*bonsai*), *sushi* to gardens; and where people bow all the time, talk in riddles and you never know what they are really thinking.

Culture Wise Japan is essential reading for anyone planning to visit Japan, including tourists (particularly travellers planning to stay a number of weeks or months), business people, migrants, retirees, holiday homeowners and transferees. It's designed to help newcomers avoid cultural and social gaffes; make friends and influence people; improve communications (both verbal and non-verbal); and enhance your understanding of Japan and the Japanese people. It explains what to expect, how to behave in most situations, and how to get along with the locals and feel at home – rather than feeling like a *koi* out of water. It isn't, however, simply a monologue of dry facts and figures, but a practical and entertaining look at life in Japan.

A period spent in Japan is a wonderful way to enrich your life, broaden your horizons, and hopefully expand your circle of friends. We trust this book will help you avoid the pitfalls of visiting or living in Japan and smooth your way to a happy and rewarding stay.

Gokouun o inorimasu! (good luck!)

David Leaper

February 2009



detail from 19C woodblock print

1.

A CHANGE OF CULTURE

With almost daily advances in technology, ever-cheaper flights and knowledge about almost anywhere in the world at our fingertips, travelling, living, working and retiring abroad has never been more accessible, and current migration patterns suggest that it has never been more popular. However, although globalisation means the world has in effect ‘shrunk’, every country is still a ‘world’ of its own with a unique culture – and Japan is certainly no exception.

‘There are no foreign lands. It is the traveller only who is foreign.’

Robert Louis Stevenson
(Scottish writer)

Some people find it impossible to adapt to a new life in a different culture – for reasons which are many and varied. According to statistics, partner dissatisfaction is the most common cause, as non-working spouses frequently find themselves without a role in the new country and sometimes with little to do – other than think about what they would be doing if they were at home. Family concerns, which may include the children’s education and worries about loved ones at home, can also deeply affect those living abroad.

Many factors contribute to how well you adapt to a new culture – for example, your personality, education, foreign language skills, mental health, maturity, socio-economic conditions, travel experience, and family and social support systems. How you handle the stress of change and bring balance and meaning to your life is the principal

indicator of how well you’ll adjust to a different country, culture and business environment.

JAPAN IS DIFFERENT

Many people underestimate the cultural isolation that can be experienced in a foreign country, particularly one with a different language. While most foreigners have no problem accepting that Japan will be different from their own countries, they may be surprised at just how different it is. Even if you’ve studied Japanese extensively before arriving, you’ll find that you still have plenty to learn about the nuances and shared understandings that are so important in Japan.

When you move to Japan, you’ll be faced with a host of challenges – possibly including a new job, a new home and a new physical environment

– which can be overwhelming; and all this before you even encounter the local culture. You may have left a job in your home country where you were in senior position, extremely competent and knew everyone. In Japan, you may be virtually a trainee and not know any of your colleagues or the Japanese way of doing things. The sensation that you're starting from scratch can be demoralising.

Japan has many extremes of climate and weather, and you mustn't underestimate the effects that this can have on you. The heat and humidity of summer can lead to a lack of energy, poor sleep and dehydration. In winter, the thermometer may tell you that it isn't that cold, but you'll certainly feel cold. Housing isn't well insulated and typically without central heating. Even if you move to a major city, many things that you're used to and take for granted in your home country may not be available in Japan, e.g. certain kinds of food, opportunities to enjoy your favourite hobby or sport, books and television programmes in your language. This lack of 'home comforts' can wear you down. You'll also need to contend with the lack of a local support network. At home you had a circle of friends, acquaintances, colleagues and possibly relatives you could rely on for help and support. In Japan there's no such network, which can leave you feeling lost.

The degree of isolation you feel usually depends on how long you plan to spend in Japan and what you'll be doing there. If you're simply going on a short holiday you may not even be aware of many of the cultural differences, although if you are, it will enhance your enjoyment and may

save you from a few embarrassing or confusing moments. However, if you're planning a business trip or intend to spend an extended period in Japan – perhaps working, studying or even living there permanently – **it's essential to understand the culture, customs and etiquette at the earliest opportunity.**

'If you reject the food, ignore the customs, fear the religion and avoid the people, you might better stay at home.'

James A. Michener (American writer)

Although Japan does have minorities, it's one of the most monocultural countries in the world. There's a prevailing opinion amongst Japanese that foreigners cannot understand 'Japaneseness' simply because they aren't Japanese, that foreigners, by their nature, are different and will act in strange and unpredictable ways. Even in the main cities, where foreigners are common enough, the locals may cling to negative stereotypes and be unaccustomed to (and intolerant of) non-Japanese ways of thinking.

This prevailing mind-set won't make it easier for you to adapt to life in Japan, but by being open-minded and maintaining a positive and generous attitude, you'll help break down stereotypes and play your part in opening up Japan to the outside world.

CULTURE SHOCK

Culture shock is the term used to describe the psychological and physical state felt by people when arriving in a foreign country or even moving to a



new environment in their home country (where the culture, and in some cases language, may vary considerably by region and social class). Culture shock is a common experience among those who travel, live, work or study abroad, when in addition to adapting to new social rules and values, you may need to adjust to a different climate, food and dress. It manifests itself in a lack of direction and the feeling of not knowing what to do or how to do things, not knowing what's appropriate or inappropriate. You literally feel like a 'fish out of water'.

'When you travel, remember that a foreign country is not designed to make you comfortable. It is designed to make its own people comfortable.'

Clifton Fadiman, (American writer)

Culture shock is precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all

familiar rules of behaviour and cues to social intercourse: when to shake hands and what to say when you meet people; how to buy goods and services; when and how much to tip; how to use an ATM or the telephone; when to accept and refuse invitations; and when to take statements seriously and when not to. These cues, which may be words, gestures or facial expressions, are acquired in the course of a lifetime and are as much a part of our culture and customs as the language we speak and our beliefs. Our peace of mind and social efficiency depend on these cues, most of which are unconsciously learned and recognised.

The symptoms of culture shock are essentially psychological. However, there are also physical symptoms including an increased incidence of minor illnesses (e.g. colds and headaches) and more serious psychosomatic illnesses brought on by depression. Culture shock can even cause physical pain. You shouldn't underestimate the consequences of culture shock, although the effects can be lessened if you accept the condition rather than deny it.

Stages of Culture Shock

Severe culture shock – often experienced when moving to a country with a different language – usually follows a number of stages. The names of these may vary, as may the symptoms and effects, but a typical progression is as follows:

1. **Honeymoon stage** – The first stage, commonly known as the 'honeymoon' stage, usually lasts until a few days or weeks after

arrival (although it can last longer, particularly if you're insulated from the usual pressures of life). This stage is essentially a positive (even euphoric) one, when you find everything is an exciting and interesting novelty. The feeling is similar to being on holiday or a short trip abroad, when you generally experience only the positive effects of a change of culture (although this depends very much on where you're from and the country you're visiting – see box).

Every year, a dozen or so Japanese tourists need to be repatriated from the French capital after falling prey to what has become known as 'Paris Syndrome'. This is what some polite Japanese tourists suffer when they discover that Parisians can be rude, or that the city doesn't meet their expectations. The experience can be so stressful that they suffer a nervous breakdown and need to be hospitalised or repatriated under medical supervision.

2. **Rejection or distress stage** – The second stage is usually completely opposite to the first and is essentially negative and a period of crisis, as the initial excitement and 'holiday' feeling wears off and you start to cope with the real conditions of daily life – except of course that life is nothing like anything you've previously

experienced. This can happen after only a few weeks and is characterised by a general feeling of disorientation, confusion and loneliness. Physical exhaustion, brought on by a change of time zone, extremes of hot or cold, and the strain of having hundreds of settling-in tasks to accomplish, is a symptom of this stage.

You may experience regression, where you spend much of your time speaking your own language, watching television and reading newspapers from your home country, eating food from home and socialising with expatriates who speak your language. You could also spend a lot of time complaining about the host country and its culture. Your home environment suddenly assumes a tremendous importance and is irrationally glorified. All difficulties and problems are forgotten and only



the good things back home are remembered.

- 3. Flight stage** – The third stage is often known as the ‘flight’ stage (because of the overwhelming desire to escape) and is usually the one that lasts the longest and is the most difficult to cope with. During this period you may feel depressed and angry, as well as resentful towards the new country and its people. You may experience impatience and frustration at not being understood and discontentment, sadness and incompetence.

These feelings are inevitable when you’re trying to adapt to a new culture that’s very different from that of your home country, and they’re exacerbated by the fact that you can see nothing positive or good about the new country, but focus exclusively on the negative aspects. You may become hostile and develop an aggressive attitude towards the country. Other people will sense this and in many cases either respond in a confrontational manner or try to avoid you. You may have difficulties with the language, your house, job or children’s school, transportation – even simple tasks like shopping may be fraught with difficulties – and the fact that the local people are largely indifferent to these problems only makes matters worse. Even if they try to help, they may be unable to understand your concerns, and you conclude that they must be insensitive and unsympathetic to you and your problems.

Transition between your old culture and customs and those of your new country is a difficult process and takes time, during which there can be strong feelings of dissatisfaction. The period of adjustment can last as long as six months, although there are expatriates who adjust earlier and (although rare) those who never get over the ‘flight’ stage and are forced to return home.

- 4. Recovery or autonomy stage** –

The fourth stage is where you begin to integrate and adjust to the new culture, and accept the customs of the host country as simply another way of living. The environment doesn’t change – what changes is your attitude towards it. You become more competent with the language, and you also feel more comfortable with local customs and can move around without anxiety. However, you still have problems with some of the social cues and you won’t understand everything people say (particularly colloquialisms and idioms). Nevertheless, you’ve largely adjusted to the new culture and start to feel more at home and familiar with the country and your place in it, realising that it has its good as well as bad points.

- 5. Reverse culture shock stage** –

The fifth stage occurs when you return to your home country. You may find that many things have changed (you’ll also have

changed) and that you feel like a foreigner in your own country. If you've been away for a long time and have become comfortable with the habits and customs of a new lifestyle, you may find that you no longer feel at ease in your homeland. Reverse culture shock can be difficult to deal with and some people find it impossible to re-adapt to their home country after living abroad for a number of years.

The above stages occur at different times depending on the individual and his circumstances, and everyone has his own way of reacting to them, with the result that some stages last longer and are more difficult to cope with than others, while others are shorter and easier to overcome.

Reducing the Effects

Experts agree that almost everyone suffers from culture shock and there's no escaping the phenomenon; however, its negative effects can be reduced considerably and there are a number of things you can do before leaving home and immediately on arrival:

- **Positive attitude:** The key to reducing the negative effects of culture shock is to have a positive attitude towards Japan (whether you're visiting or planning to live there). If you don't look forward to a trip or relocation, you should question why you're going. There's no greater guarantee of unhappiness in a foreign environment than taking your prejudices with you.

It's important when trying to adapt to a new culture to be sensitive to the locals' feelings, and try to put yourself in their shoes wherever possible, which will help you understand why they react as they do. Bear in mind that they have a strong, in-bred cultural code, just as you do, and react in certain ways because they're culturally 'trained' to do so. If you find yourself frustrated by an aspect of the local culture or behaviour, the chances are that your attitudes or behaviour will be equally puzzling to the natives.

- **Research:** Discover as much as possible about Japan before you go, so that your arrival and settling-in period doesn't spring as many



surprises as it might otherwise. Reading up on Japan and its culture before you leave home will help you familiarise yourself with the local customs and make the country and its people seem less strange on arrival. Being aware of many of the differences will make you better prepared to deal with them. You're less likely to be upset by real or imaginary cultural slights, or to offend the locals by making cultural gaffes. Being prepared for a certain amount of disorientation and confusion (or worse) makes it easier to cope with it.

There are literally hundreds of publications about Japan as well as dozens of websites for expatriates (see **Appendices B** and **C**). Many sites provide access to expatriates already living in Japan who can answer questions and provide invaluable advice. There are also 'notice boards' on many websites where you can post messages or questions. Try to find people in your area who have visited Japan and talk to them about it. Some companies organise briefings for families who are about to relocate abroad.

- **Visit Japan first:** If you're planning to live or work in Japan for a number of years, it's important to visit the country before making the leap to see whether you think you would enjoy living there and will be able to cope with the culture.
- **Learn Japanese:** As well as adopting a positive attitude, overcoming the language barrier will be your greatest weapon in combating culture shock and making your time in Japan enjoyable.

The ability to speak Japanese and understand the local vernacular (see Chapter 5) isn't just a useful tool that will allow you to buy what you need, find your way around, etc., but the key to understanding Japan and its culture. If you can speak Japanese, even at a basic level, your scope for making friends is immediately widened. You may not be a natural linguist, and learning Japanese can take time and requires motivation. However, with sufficient perseverance virtually anyone can learn enough to participate in the local culture.

'Americans who travel abroad for the first time are often shocked to discover that, despite all the progress that has been made in the last 30 years, many foreign people still speak in foreign languages.'

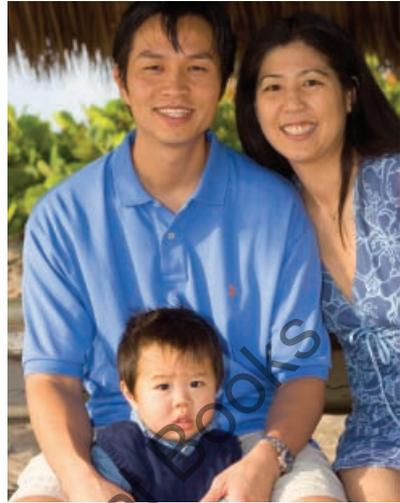
Dave Barry (American writer & humorist)

- **Be proactive:** Join in the activities of the local people, which could be a carnival, a religious festival or some sporting activity. There are often local clubs where you can play sport or keep fit, be artistic, learn to cook local dishes, etc. Not only will this fill some of your spare time, giving you less time to miss home, but you'll also meet new people and make friends. If you feel you cannot join a local club – perhaps because your Japanese isn't good enough – you can always participate in activities for expatriates, of which there are many in the major cities. Look upon a period spent in Japan as an opportunity to acquire new skills, attitudes and perspectives. A change

of culture can help you develop a better understanding of yourself and stimulate your creativity.

- **Talk to other expatriates:** Although they may deny it, many expatriates have been through exactly what you're experiencing, and faced the same feelings of disorientation. Even if they cannot provide you with advice, it helps to know that you aren't alone and that it gets better over time. However, don't make the mistake of mixing only with expatriates, as this will alienate you from the local culture and make it much harder to integrate.
- **Keep in touch with home:** Keeping in touch with your family and friends at home and around the world by telephone, email and letters will help reduce and overcome the effects of culture shock.
- **Be happy:** Don't rely on others to make you happy, or you won't find true and lasting happiness. There are things in life which only you can change. Every day we're affected negatively by things over which we have little or no control, but to moan about them only makes us unhappier. So, be your own best friend and nurture your own capacity for happiness.

Culture shock is an unavoidable part of travelling, living and working abroad, but if you're aware of it and take steps to lessen its effects before you go and while you're abroad, the period of adjustment will be shortened and its negative and depressing consequences reduced.



FAMILIES IN JAPAN

Family life may be completely different in Japan and relationships can become strained under the stress of adapting to culture shock. Your family may find itself in a completely new and possibly alien environment, your new home may scarcely resemble your previous one (it may be significantly smaller or larger and have completely amenities) and the climate may differ dramatically from that of your home country. If possible, you should prepare your family for as many aspects of the new situation as you can, and explain to your children the differences they're likely to encounter, while at the same time dispelling their fears.

'And that's the wonderful thing about family travel: it provides you with experiences that will remain locked forever in the scar tissue of your mind.'

Dave Barry (American writer & humorist)

Culture shock can affect non-working spouses and children more than working spouses. The husband (the breadwinner is usually the husband) has his work to occupy him, and his activities may not differ much from what he had been accustomed to at home. On the other hand, the wife has to operate in an environment that differs considerably from what she's used to. She will find herself alone more often – a solitude intensified by the fact that there are no relatives or friends on hand. However, if you're aware that this may arise beforehand, you can act on it and reduce its effects. Working spouses should pay special attention to the needs and feelings of their non-working partners and children, as the success of a family relocation depends largely on the ability of the wife and children to adapt to the new culture.

Good communication between family members is vital and you should make time to discuss your experiences and feelings, both as a couple and as a family. Questions should always be invited and, if possible, answered, particularly when asked by children. However difficult the situation may appear at the beginning, it helps to bear in mind that it's by no means unique, and that most expatriate families experience exactly the same problems, and manage to triumph over them and thoroughly enjoy their stay abroad

A NEW LIFE

Although you may find some of the information in this chapter a bit daunting, don't be discouraged by the foregoing catalogue of depression and despair; the negative aspects of travelling and living abroad only have

been highlighted in order to help you prepare for and adjust to a new life. The vast majority of people who travel and live abroad naturally experience occasional feelings of discomfort and disorientation, **but most never suffer the most debilitating effects of culture shock.**

As with settling in and making friends anywhere, even in your home country, the most important thing is to be considerate, kind, open, humble and genuine – qualities that are valued the world over. Selfishness, brashness and arrogance will get you nowhere in Japan – or any other country. Treat Japan and its people with respect and they will do likewise.

A period spent in Japan is a wonderful way to enrich your life, broaden your horizons, make new friends and maybe even please your bank manager. We trust that this book will help you avoid the pitfalls of life in Japan and smooth your way to a happy and rewarding future in your new home.

'Twenty years from now you'll be more disappointed by the things you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbour. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.'

Mark Twain (American writer)



2.

WHO ARE THE JAPANESE?

From a militaristic past that includes some of the darkest moments in world history to a present that espouses pacifism and economic development, Japan has undergone perhaps the greatest transformation of any country in the world and remains a land of contrasts and seeming contradictions – especially to Westerners.

‘Before seeing the flower is the best moment’

Japanese Proverb

While the bursting of the economic bubble in the '90s has taken some of the glitter off its success story, Japan remains among the world leaders in many industrial and technological fields, such as shipping, cars, home computers, technology and leisure equipment.

But what lies behind this inscrutable economic monolith? For most Westerners, Japan is a distant, indistinct country that comes to mind only when they're using its efficient products or seeing a clip from a sadistic Japanese television show; their only exposure to its people is when encountering busloads of camera-clicking tourists. Yet those willing to look beyond such restricting adjectives as 'small', 'polite' and 'expensive' will find a Japan markedly different from their expectations. They will find a sophisticated and varied culture, a country with a diverse climate and natural abundance, inhabited by a quietly proud and hospitable people.

To help you become more familiar with Japan and the Japanese, this chapter contains information about its history, the Japanese character and the country's cultural icons.

Demographics

Population: 127.5m (2008)

Population density: 343 inhabitants per km² (879 per mi²). Tokyo has a density of 13,416 inhabitants per km² (34,400/mi²)

Largest cities: Tokyo 8.2m; Yokohama 3.2m; Osaka 2.6m; Nagoya 2.1m; Sapporo 1.7m; Kobe 1.5m; Kyoto 1.5m

Ethnic minorities: Ryukyuan (900,000), Ainu (24,000)

Expatriate groups: Korean (693,100); Brazilian (250,000); Chinese (171,100); Indian (150,000); American (64,000); British (23,000)

State religion: Japan is a secular country – in 1945 state support of Shinto was abandoned

Most followed religions: Shinto and Buddhism, followed distantly by Christianity

TIMELINE

While it doesn't have the eons of documented history of some of its neighbours, Japan's recent past is rich with internal strife and external aggression. The main events are listed below:

The Prehistoric Period

35,000 years ago – First signs of human habitation. Stone tools and dwellings show that these first inhabitants had a hunter-gatherer lifestyle.

13,000-300BC – The Jōmon period, named after the Jōmon people, hunter-gatherers who migrated from northeast Asia.

300BC-300AD – The Yayoi period brings a swift transition to a rice-cultivating civilisation, as migration from the Korean peninsula pushes the Jōmon further and further north on Honshu, Japan's largest island. Parts of the country begin to unite under powerful landowners, and social classes evolve.

The first written reference to Japan (then known as Wa) appears in the *Book of Han* (Chronicles of Chinese History) and tells how, in 57AD, a Japanese messenger brought a tribute to the Chinese emperor Guanwu, who conferred his seal upon him. Remarkably, the seal was found by a farmer in 1784 and is now a national treasure on display in the Fukuoka City Museum.

300-538 – The Kofun or Yamato period develops in the province of Yamato, which is present-day Nara. The area controlled by the province stretches from the island of Kyushu to what is now known as the Kansai region. Ideas from Korea and China, in particular

Confucianism and Taoism, spread and become established.

The Classical Period

538-710 – The Asuka period also has its power base in Nara, regarded as the first capital of Japan, characterised by Buddhism introduced from the Paekche Kingdom in Korea.

710-794 – In the Nara period, the capital is rebuilt based on Chang-an (Xian), the capital of the Tang dynasty in China. In this period, Chinese characters are first used to record Japanese creation myths in the *Kojiki* (Record of Ancient Matters) and the *Nihon Shoki* (Chronicle of Japan).

794-1185 – The Heian period begins with the transfer of the capital to Kyoto. This period is looked upon as a 'golden' era of peace and cultural development. At the same time, the increasing incompetence of the nobility deepens the poverty among the lower classes, and a new 'warrior class', the *samurai*, forms. The later decades are marked by war as different clans fight for supremacy.

The Medieval Period

1185-1333 – The Kamakura period is heralded by the victory of the Minamoto clan at the battle of Dannoura. After seizing control, they shift their seat of power to Kamakura (in Kanto), where Yoritomo Minamoto becomes the first *Shōgun* (military dictator), leaving the emperor as a figurehead in Kyoto. The Minamoto extend their administration to rule over the entire island of Honshu, unifying Japan for the first time, while surviving Jōmon people are forced northwards to Hokkaido, where today they are known as the Ainu.



Giant Buddha, Kamakura

1274 & 1281 – Mongolians make two attempts to invade but are defeated by a combination of stout defence and typhoons, which the fortunate Japanese dub ‘divine winds’ or *kamikaze*.

“The King of the island has a very large palace all covered with fine gold as our churches are covered with lead ... there is a great abundance of pearls, round and large, and of wonderful reddish colour and more valuable than white. There are also many precious stones. For this reason the island, Cyampagu [Japan], is very rich and marvellous.”

Marco Polo (Portuguese explorer). This description in *The Travels of Marco Polo*, written in 1299, was enough to inspire Columbus to set sail on his infamous 1492 voyage to look for a shortcut to the Orient. Instead he stumbled upon the Americas.

1333-1573 – The Muromachi period comes about after a victory by the emperor’s army restores the capital to the Muromachi district of Kyoto. However, two branches of the emperor’s family continue to fight over the succession until 1392, when the southern dynasty surrenders.

1467-77 – The Onin wars, fought between regional warlords and the *Shōgun*, weaken the central government. The period that follows, until 1603, is often called the *Sengoku Jidai* (the era of the country at war), during which various factions battle for control.

1543 – The Portuguese land in Kyushu and begin regular trading. They introduce firearms, which are quickly adapted and improved by the Japanese, and are first used in a major battle in 1548.

1568 – Warlord Oda Nobunaga’s army enters Kyoto and in a series of battles defeats rivals to the military dictatorship (*Shōgunate*).

1573-1603 – The Azuchi-Momoyama period sees Nobunaga’s establishment of rule in his castle at Azuchi, Kyoto. After his assassination in 1582, Hideyoshi takes control from his castle in Momoyama and completes the military unification of Japan.

1592 & 1597 – Unsuccessful invasions of Korea.

1600 – Victory at the Battle of Sekigahara allows the victorious warlord, Ieyasu Tokugawa, to take the *Shōgunate*.

The Early Modern Period

1603-1867 – The Edo period commences with the *Shōgun*’s relocation of the capital to Edo, a small fishing village with a natural harbour (renamed Tokyo in 1868). This period is one of repression and isolation as the