**Introduction to Japan**

From the World Factbook

**BACKGROUND**

In 1603, after decades of civil warfare, the Tokugawa shogunate (a military-led, dynastic government) ushered in a long period of relative political stability and isolation from foreign influence. For more than two centuries this policy enabled Japan to enjoy a flowering of its indigenous culture.

Japan opened its ports after signing the Treaty of Kanagawa with the US in 1854 and began to intensively modernize and industrialize. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Japan became a regional power that was able to defeat the forces of both China and Russia. It occupied Korea, Formosa (Taiwan), and southern Sakhalin Island. In 1931-32 Japan occupied Manchuria, and in 1937 it launched a full-scale invasion of China. Japan attacked US forces in 1941 - triggering America's entry into World War II - and soon occupied much of East and Southeast Asia. After its defeat in World War II, Japan recovered to become an economic power and an ally of the US. While the emperor retains his throne as a symbol of national unity, elected politicians hold actual decision-making power.

Following three decades of unprecedented growth, Japan's economy experienced a major slowdown starting in the 1990s, but the country remains a major economic power. In March 2011, Japan's strongest-ever earthquake, and an accompanying tsunami, devastated the northeast part of Honshu island, killing thousands and damaging several nuclear power plants. The catastrophe hobbled the country's economy and its energy infrastructure, and tested its ability to deal with humanitarian disasters.
GEOGRAPHY

Location: Eastern Asia, island chain between the North Pacific Ocean and the Sea of Japan, east of the Korean Peninsula

Area: total: 377,915 sq km (country comparison to the world: 62)

Coastline: 29,751 km

Climate: varies from tropical in south to cool temperate in north

Terrain: mostly rugged and mountainous

Natural resources: negligible mineral resources, fish
Note: with virtually no energy natural resources, Japan is the world's largest importer of coal and liquefied natural gas, as well as the second largest importer of oil.

Natural hazards: many dormant and some active volcanoes; about 1,500 seismic occurrences (mostly tremors but occasional severe earthquakes) every year; tsunamis; typhoons.

Note: air pollution from power plant emissions results in acid rain; acidification of lakes and reservoirs degrading water quality and threatening aquatic life; Japan is one of the largest consumers of fish and tropical timber, contributing to the depletion of these resources in Asia and elsewhere.

PEOPLE AND SOCIETY

Nationality: Japanese (singular and plural)

Ethnic groups: Japanese 98.5%, Koreans 0.5%, Chinese 0.4%, other 0.6%

Languages: Japanese

Religions: Shintoism 83.9%, Buddhism 71.4%, Christianity 2%, other 7.8%

Note: total adherents exceeds 100% because many people belong to both Shintoism and Buddhism (2005)

Population: 127,103,388 (July 2014 est.) country comparison to the world: 11

Note: estimates for this country take into account the effects of excess mortality due to AIDS; this can result in lower life expectancy, higher infant mortality, higher death rates, lower population growth rates, and changes in the distribution of population by age and sex than would otherwise be expected.

Population growth rate: -0.13% (2014 est.) country comparison to the world: 210

Birth rate: 8.07 births/1,000 population (2014 est.) country comparison to the world: 222

Death rate: 9.38 deaths/1,000 population (2014 est.) country comparison to the world: 58

Urban population: 91.3% of total population (2011)

Rate of urbanization: 0.57% annual rate of change (2010-15 est.)
Major urban areas - population: TOKYO (capital) 37.217 million; Osaka-Kobe 11.494 million; Nagoya 3.328 million; Fukuoka-Kitakyushu 2.868 million; Sapporo 2.742 million; Sendai 2.428 million (2011)

Physicians density: 2.14 physicians/1,000 population (2008)

Education expenditures: 3.8% of GDP (2010) country comparison to the world: 115

Literacy: 99%

School life expectancy (primary to tertiary education): 15 years

GOVERNMENT

Country name:
  conventional long form: none
  conventional short form: Japan
  local long form: Nihon-koku/Nippon-koku
local short form: Nihon/Nippon

Government type: a parliamentary government with a constitutional monarchy

Capital: Tokyo
  geographic coordinates: 35 41 N, 139 45 E
  time difference: UTC+9 (14 hours ahead of Washington, DC during Standard Time)

Independence: 3 May 1947 (current constitution adopted as amendment to Meiji Constitution)

Note: notable earlier dates: 660 B.C. (traditional date of the founding of the nation by Emperor JIMMU); 29 November 1890 (Meiji Constitution provides for constitutional monarchy)

National holiday: Birthday of Emperor AKIHITO, 23 December (1933)

Suffrage: 20 years of age; universal

Chief of state: Emperor AKIHITO (since 7 January 1989)

Head of government: Prime Minister Shinzo ABE (since 26 December 2012); Deputy Prime Minister Taro ASO (since 26 December 2012)

Flag description: white with a large red disk (representing the sun without rays) in the center

National symbol(s): red sun disc; chrysanthemum

National anthem: "Kimigayo" (The Emperor's Reign)

Note: adopted 1999; in use as unofficial national anthem since 1883; oldest anthem lyrics in the world, dating to the 10th century or earlier; there is some opposition to the anthem because of its association with militarism and worship of the emperor