

Market Analysis - Japan

As of April 1, 2009

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Japan Niche Biz

Country / Territory – Japan [Capital: Tokyo - 35°40'N, 139°46'E]

Japan is a country of over three thousand islands extending along the Pacific coast of Asia. The main islands, running from north to south, are Hokkaidō, Honshū (the main island), Shikoku and Kyūshū. The Ryukyu Islands, including Okinawa, are a chain of islands south of Kyushū. About 70% to 80% of the country is forested, mountainous, and unsuitable for agricultural, industrial, or residential use. This is because of the generally steep elevations, climate and risk of landslides caused by earthquakes, soft ground and heavy rain. This has resulted in an extremely high population density in the habitable zones that are mainly located in coastal areas. Japan is one of the most densely populated countries in the world.



General Information about Japan

1. Last year GDP growth rate

The Gross Domestic Product is a comprehensive measure of a Japan 's overall production and consumption of goods and services. GDP serves as one of the primary measures of overall economic well-being. GDP announcements generally conform to expectations as the number comes out after most Japanese production figures that lead to overall GDP have already been released. Although releases that are out of line with expectations are rare, unanticipated GDP growth can move markets simply because of its significance as an economic indicator.

The GDP of Japan 2007 was US\$ 4,383.76 Billion. Japan's GDP growth rate will be maintained at around 2.3% in 2007 after expanding by 2.2% previous year according to a report issued by International Monetary Fund (IMF).

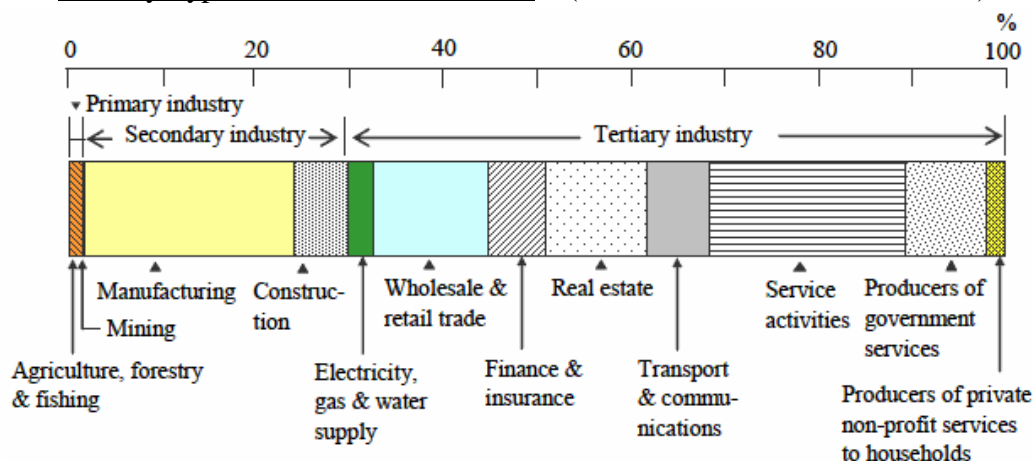
2. Economic sectors & % share

Japan's economic sectors have undergone a major transformation in the half-century since the end of World War II. Looking at changes in the industrial structure in terms of industry share of employed persons and GDP over time, we see those in the primary industry in particular has fallen dramatically since 1970, when Japan experienced a long-standing rapid economic growth. During the 1980s, the secondary industry's share of employed persons and GDP also began to decline gradually. On the other hand, the tertiary industry's shares of both employed persons and GDP have risen consistently.

In 1970, the primary industry (accounted for 19.3 % of employed persons, the secondary industry for 34.0 %, and the tertiary industry for 46.6 %. In 2005, the corresponding shares of these three sectors were 4.8 %, 26.1 % and 67.2 %, respectively.

As for GDP by type of economic activity, in 1970, the primary, secondary and tertiary industries accounted for 5.9 %, 43.1 % and 50.9 %, respectively. In 2005, these figures for the primary, secondary and tertiary industries were 1.4 %, 26.4 %, and 72.2 %, respectively.

GDP by Type of Economic Activities (Source: Cabinet Office in 2006)



3. Currency -- conversion rate to US\$

The yen (sign: ¥; code: JPY) is the currency of Japan. It is the third most-traded currency in the foreign exchange market after the Euro and the United States dollar. It is also widely used as a reserve currency after the U.S. dollar, the Euro and the pound sterling. There are four kinds of bills (10,000 yen, 5,000 yen, 2,000 yen, 1,000 yen) and six kinds of coins (500 yen, 100 yen, 50 yen, 10 yen, 5 yen, 1 yen) used. Japanese currency is designed to facilitate easy use by people with sight impairments. All of the bills and coins are different sizes. For example, the bills descend in size from 10,000 Yen to 1,000 Yen.

Conversion rate to US\$

The yen lost most of its value during and after World War II. After a period of instability, in 1949, the value of the yen was fixed at ¥360 per US\$1 through a United States plan, which was part of the Bretton Woods System, to stabilize prices in the Japanese economy. That exchange rate was maintained until 1971, when the United States abandoned the gold standard, which had been a key element of the Bretton Woods System, and imposed a 10 % surcharge on imports, setting in motion changes that eventually led to floating exchange rates in 1973.

In 1985 a dramatic change began. Finance officials from major nations signed an agreement (the Plaza Accord) affirming that the dollar was overvalued (and, therefore, the yen undervalued). This agreement, and shifting supply and demand pressures in the markets, led to a rapid rise in the value of the yen. From its average of ¥239 per US\$1 in 1985, the yen rose to a peak of ¥128 in 1988,

virtually doubling its value relative to the dollar. After declining somewhat in 1989 and 1990, it reached a new high of ¥123 to US\$1 in December 1992. In April 1995, the yen hit a peak of under 80 yen per dollar, temporarily making Japan's economy nearly the size of the US.

The yen declined during the Japanese asset price bubble and continued to do so afterwards, reaching a low of ¥134 to US\$1 in February 2002. The Bank of Japan's policy of zero interest rates has discouraged yen investments, with the carry trade of investors borrowing yen and investing in better-paying currencies (thus further pushing down the yen) estimated to be as large as \$1 trillion. In February 2007, The Economist estimated that the yen is 15% undervalued against the dollar and as much as 40% undervalued against the Euro.

Chart: Japanese Yen to US Dollar Currency Exchange Rate



Conversion rate - US\$1.00 = JPY 88.865 as of December 19, 2008

4. Import regulations

Any person wishing to import goods must declare them to the Director-General of Customs and obtain an import permit after necessary examination of the goods concerned. The formalities start with the lodging of an import declaration and end with issuance of an import permit after the necessary examination and payment of Customs duty and excise tax. In this way, measures are taken to ensure the fulfillment of the requirements for the control of foreign exchange and other regulations concerning the importation of goods.

Some imported goods may have a negative effect on Japanese industry, economy, and hygiene, or on public safety and morals. Such goods fall under "import restrictions" as provided by various domestic laws and regulations.

In the case of restricted imports for which the importer must have a permit and approval relating to the import of goods under the Customs Law, requirements for inspection or other requisites (hereinafter referred to as a permit and approval) must be met.

Therefore, when goods for import require a permit and approval under laws and regulations other than the Customs Law (called other laws and regulations), a certificate of application for a permit and approval under other laws and regulations must be submitted (Article 70 of the Customs Law).

- (1) Foreign Exchange and Foreign Trade Control Law
- (2) Laws and Regulations Related to Banned Goods
 - Law Concerning Wildlife Protection and Hunting
 - Firearms and Swords Possession Control Law
 - Poisonous and Harmful Substance Control Law
 - Pharmaceutical Affairs Law
 - Fertilizer Control Law
 - Law Concerning Sugar Price Stabilization
 - Explosive Control Law
 - Law Concerning Screening of Chemical Substances and Regulation on their Manufacture, etc.
 - High Pressure Gas Safety Law
- (3) Laws and Regulations Concerning Quarantine
 - Food Sanitation Law
 - Plant Quarantine Law
 - Domestic Animal Infectious Control Law
 - Rabies Prevention Law
- (4) Laws and Regulations Concerning Narcotics
 - Cannabis Control Law
 - Stimulant Drug Control Law
 - Narcotics and Psychotropics Control Law
 - Opium Law

5. Tax policies

Taxation of an individual's income in Japan is progressive. In other words, the higher the income, the higher the rate of tax payable. The tax rate for an individual in 2007 is between 5% - 40%. There are reduced rates of tax for certain income earners.

Japan standard corporate income tax rate is 30% for the central government. In addition, there is a progressive prefectural scale, the so-called enterprise tax, with a standard top rate of 9.6% (deductible from the central government tax as well as from the enterprise tax itself) and the inhabitants tax, which is a surtax on the central government corporate tax levied at the prefectural and municipal levels (at 2006 standard rates of 5.0 and 12.3%, respectively). The all-in typical marginal rate is about 40%, but varies between different municipalities and prefectures: the enterprise tax may be increased by up to a factor of 1.1 and the inhabitants tax may be increased by up to 6.0 and 14.7%, respectively, in prefectures and municipalities. A reduced central rate of 22% applies to companies with a capital of less than 100 million yen (and income below 8 million yen) and reduced local rates also apply to small- and medium-sized enterprises with capital less than 100 million yen.

6. Tourism count and Nationalities

Tourism in Japan comprises both a vibrant domestic sector and over eight million entries each year by foreigners. Today, sites such as Nikko World Historical Site, various attractions in Tokyo and Kyoto, Mount Fuji, world-class ski resorts such as Niseko in Hokkaidō, Okinawa, as well as aspects of tourism including the shinkansen and well-developed hotel and onsen network are enjoyed by natives and foreigners alike.



Statistics of visitors to Japan from overseas (Updated: Dec. 9, 2008)

(Source: Ministry of Justice and Japan National Tourist Organization)

Jan 2008	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	2008 YTD
711,350 +15.1%	696,326 +10.3%	731,619 +6.9%	779,909 +9.2%	736,122 +10.8%	681,563 +7.9%	4,336,889 +10.0%
Jul 2008	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan- Oct2008
825,012 +2.1%	742,022 -2.0%	641,500 -6.9%	739,100 -5.9%			7,284,000 +4.3%

Number of visitors by Country or Region (Updated: Dec. 9, 2008)

(Source: Ministry of Justice and Japan National Tourist Organization)

	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct
Asia						
Korea	229,043 +8.4%	195,700 +2.8%	237,947 -6.4%	248,154 -8.6%	159,500 -20.8%	188,800 -15.2%
Taiwan	134,862 19.7%	130,300 +12.9%	155,231 +10.2%	119,255 +0.6%	102,300 -13.3%	126,300 -3.3%
China	74,637 +6.3%	61,500 -0.5%	101,192 -0.2%	92,976 -6.4%	94,000 +1.0%	86,600 -5.0%
Hong Kong	39,104 +42.2%	52,000 +51.2%	66,038 +25.3%	54,048 +32.6%	39,300 +37.3%	45,600 +42.4%
Thailand	20,309 +52.7%	9,900 +12.9%	12,124 +3.8%	8,379 -12.6%	13,400 -0.1%	22,600 +10.0%
Singapore	15,699 +28.3%	16,600 +19.9%	10,391 +4.3%	7,785 +11.6%	11,000 +18.9%	13,800 +10.1%
Oceania						
Australia	16,412 +11.3%	18,000 +3.0%	20,652 +15.7%	17,231 +21.1%	23,700 +8.3%	18,200 -9.9%
North America						
The entire USA	69,105 -4.5%	76,700 -1.5%	72,992 -4.5%	57,121 -9.2%	57,900 -11.3%	68,000 -14.3%
Canada	13,010 +6.5%	11,900 +17.2%	15,716 +4.9%	13,156 -2.5%	11,500 -5.3%	14,200 -8.4%
Europe						
The entire UK	16,002 -2.6%	14,200 +0.3%	18,618 -9.9%	16,273 -10.8%	16,500 -12.0%	20,800 -8.0%
Germany	10,673 +6.4%	9,100 +14.4%	10,067 -1.6%	9,470 +2.7%	11,200 -3.7%	14,800 -2.6%
France	12,864 +8.7%	10,300 +10.7%	14,616 +13.4%	13,637 +11.0%	11,500 +4.0%	15,800 +6.0%

Tourism today remains a vital part of the Japanese economy and society. Schoolchildren in many middle schools see the highlight of their years as a visit to Tokyo Disneyland or perhaps Tokyo Tower in the city. High school students may visit Okinawa or Hokkaidō. The extensive rail network together with domestic flights sometimes in planes with modifications to favor the relatively short distances involved in intra-Japan travel allows efficient and speedy transport from many points within the country.

7. Weather/seasons/Max &min (temperature & humidity)

Since Japan stretches approximately 20 degrees of latitude, from 25 degN to 45 degN, and approximately 23 degrees of longitude, from 122 degE to 145 degE, the climate varies widely from one region to region. (See Japan maps.) Basically, Japan has four distinct seasons. Spring months are March, April, and May. Summer months are June, July, and August. Autumn months are September, October, and November. Winter months are December, January, and February. Summer is hot and humid in general. During the winter, it snows a lot on the Sea of Japan side, and it is dry on the Pacific Ocean side.

Japan's rainy season lasts about 40 days during the months of June and July. Also, August to October is the typhoon season in Japan. It's important to check the weather often during the typhoon season. Japan Information Network indicates that Japan has an unusually high amount of rainfall, averaging 1,700-1,800 millimeters per year.

Average conditions – Tokyo, Japan

(Source: BBC)

Month	Average Sunlight (hours)	Temperature				Discomfort from heat and humidity	Relative humidity		Average Precipitation (mm)	Wet Days (+0.25 mm)
		Average		Record			am	pm		
		Min	Max	Min	Max					
Jan	6	-2	8	-8	22	-	73	48	48	5
Feb	6	-1	9	-8	25	-	71	48	74	6
March	6	2	12	-6	25	-	75	53	107	10
April	7	8	17	-1	29	-	81	59	135	10
May	6	12	22	2	31	-	85	62	147	10
June	5	17	24	8	34	Moderate	89	68	165	12
July	6	21	28	13	37	Medium	91	69	142	10
Aug	7	22	30	16	38	High	92	66	152	9
Sept	5	19	26	11	36	Medium	91	68	234	12
Oct	4	13	21	2	32	-	88	64	208	11
Nov	5	6	16	-3	27	-	83	58	97	7
Dec	5	1	11	-7	23	-	77	51	56	5

8. Population count

From the eighteenth century through the first half of the nineteenth century, Japan's population remained steady at about 30 million. However, following the Meiji Restoration in 1868, it began expanding in tandem with the drive to build a modern nation-state. In 1926, it reached 60 million, and in 1967, it surpassed the 100 million mark. However, Japan's population growth has slowed in more recent years, with the annual pace of population growth averaging about one percent from the 1960s through the 1970s.

Since the 1980s, it has declined sharply. Japan's total population started declining after peaking at the end of 2004 with 127.82 million. The 2005 Population Census showed the figure by 127,768,000. The 2007 population estimate was 127,771,000. This marked the third year of consecutive natural decrease in the male population, while the female population is continuing to show a natural increase.

9. Av. per Capita Income US\$

Japan's per Capital nominal gross domestic product was US\$35,922 in 2004, making it drop out of the top 10 and was US\$35,675 in 2005 making it the 15th place, and was US\$34,252 in 2006 making it the 18th among members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, according to a government report.

10. Min/max income/salaries in US\$

Averages are calculated by analyzing Japanese major corporate resume bank and job listings over the last 6 months. Figures may incorporate total packages. Salaries are calculated per annum.

In rapidly increasing numbers, Japanese companies are switching to a system of annual salaries with pay scales based on workers' yearly performance. At present the typical annual-salary system in Japan ties less of the employees' salaries to the assessment of their performance than the U.S.-style system; it remains to be seen whether a more full-scale performance-based system will develop in Japan.

Chart below shows mid-career, experienced and bilingual professionals, therefore salaries may vary from national averages.

Average Salary in Japan

Job Classification for mid-career	Avg. Min per annum	Avg. Max per annum
Community & Government	N/A	US\$45,980.56
Administration / Office Support	US\$44,447	US\$78,356
Localization, Interpreting & Translation	US\$44,450	US\$86,872
Tourism, Travel & Hospitality	US\$50,000	US\$90,645
Customer Service & Contact Centre	US\$50,002	US\$96,037
Education	US\$50,005	US\$97,839
Retail & Fashion	US\$50,007	US\$98,650
Manufacturing	US\$55,559	US\$101,228
Media, Arts & Entertainment	US\$55,563	US\$101,803
Construction & Architecture	US\$55,565	US\$132,699
Logistics, Transport & Supply Chain	US\$61,111	US\$107,254
Human Resources & Recruitment	US\$61,113	US\$111,126
Engineering	US\$61,113	US\$117,547
Automotive	US\$61,116	US\$126,991
Marketing, PR, Advertising & Communications	US\$61,117	US\$116,011
IT & Telecommunications	US\$61,117	US\$122,391
Sales	US\$61,117	US\$126,348
Medical, Health & Scientific	US\$61,117	US\$126,653
Legal, Compliance & Paralegal	US\$61,122	US\$125,988
Consulting	US\$66,668	US\$132,433
Accounting	US\$66,668	US\$125,118
Insurance	US\$72,223	US\$149,399
Finance and Banking	US\$72,225	US\$144,601
Property & Real Estate	US\$72,225	US\$159,343

11. % of high income people from total population

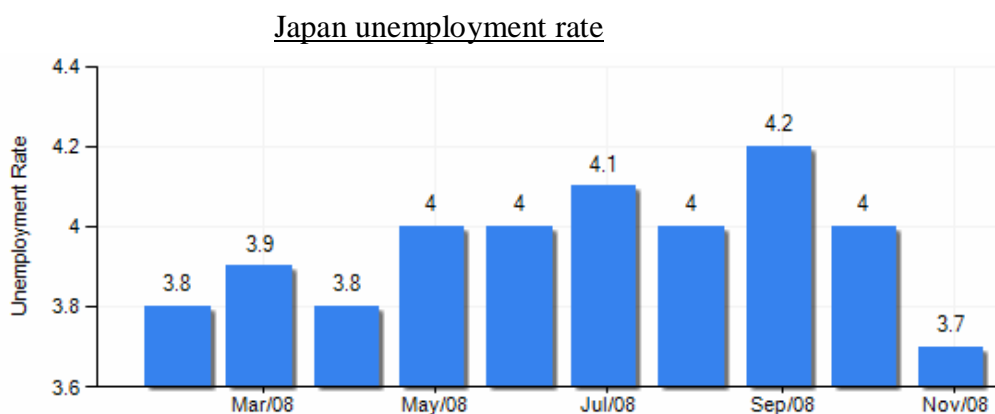
The number of high income and wealthy people who owns 1 million dollars (about 100 million yen) or more of financial assets in Japan reached 1.47 million which is 1.15% from the total population, second largest following only to that of the United States, according to a survey announced on Oct. 18, 2007 by the major securities company Merrill Lynch and other firms. Japan accounted for about 60% of the total wealthy people in Asia.

12. Unemployment rate

Japan's unemployment rate rose slightly in August 2008, adding to growing evidence that the world's second-largest economy is faltering amid a global slowdown. The unemployment rate stood at 4.2% in August, the highest level in more than two years and up from 4.0% in July.

The number of unemployed persons was 2.72 million, a 9.2% increase from the previous year, according to the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The number of employed people totaled 64.05 million, down 0.6% from a year earlier.

Unemployment rate in Japan is defined as the level of unemployment divided by the labour force. The labour force is defined as the number of people employed plus the number unemployed but seeking work. The nonlabour force includes those who are not looking for work, those who are institutionalised and those serving in the military



(Source: Ministry of Internal Affairs)

13. Languages

Japanese society of Yamato people is linguistically homogeneous with small populations of Koreans (0.6 million), Chinese/Taiwanese (0.5 million), Brazilians (300,000, many of whom are ethnically Japanese), and Filipino (245,518 some being Japanese Filipino; children of Japanese and Filipino parentage). Japan has indigenous minority groups such as the Ainu and Ryukyans and social minority groups like the burakumin.

Japanese citizenship is conferred jus sanguinis, and monolingual Japanese speaking minorities often reside in Japan for generations under permanent residency status without acquiring citizenship in their country of birth, although legally they are allowed to do so. Some 10,000 Zainichi Koreans naturalize every year. Approximately 98.6% of the population is pure Japanese and 99% of the population speak Japanese as their first language. The ideology of monoethnic Japan is contradicted by the past and present of non-ethnic Japanese living in the Japanese archipelago.

14. Religions & its share from population

Name of religion	Estimated Population	Its share from population
Shinto	106,000,000	49.30%
Buddhism	96,000,000	44.65%
Christianity	2,000,000	0.93%
Islam	125,000	0.06%
Theravada Buddhism	1,500	0.001%
Judaism	600	0.0003%
Others	10,872,900	5.06%
TOTAL	215,000,000	100%

(Resources: The Agency for Cultural Affairs)

Many people in Japan today consider themselves Shintoist and Buddhist, in spite of alienation from specific Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines associated with their family. According to The Agency for Cultural Affairs, about 202,000,000 Japanese are members of both religions, about 63% more than the total population of Japan. Apparent by these numbers, Shinto and Buddhism are not in conflict with each other but exist peacefully together.

The primary religions in Japan

The primary religions in Japan are Buddhism and Shintō ("the way of the gods"). Most Japanese people do not identify as exclusively belonging to just one religion, but incorporate features of both religions into their daily lives in a process known as syncretism. Shinto and Buddhist teachings are deeply entangled in Japanese everyday life, though the Japanese people themselves may not be aware of it. Generally speaking, it can be difficult for outsiders to disentangle "real"

Japanese religion from everyday superstition and rituals; most Japanese people do not often give the distinction much thought.

One of the main characteristics of Japanese religion is its tendency towards mixing all religions. The same person may have a wedding at a Christian church and have a funeral at a Buddhist temple. Japanese streets are decorated on Tanabata, Obon and Christmas.

Buddhism first came to Japan in the 6th century and for the next 10 centuries exerted profound influence on its intellectual, artistic, social, and political life; 96% of Japan's population is Buddhist. Most funerals are conducted by Buddhist priests, and burial grounds attached to temples are used by Buddhism, Shinto, and other faiths such as Christianity. Confucianism, although not practiced as a religion, has deeply influenced Japanese thought.

Shintoism is one of Japan's largest religions and is the native religion. It originated in and is almost exclusive to Japan. Shinto has no holy book, no founder, and no canon. Shinto began to fall out of fashion after the arrival of Buddhism, but soon, Shinto and Buddhism began to be practiced as one religion. On sites of Shinto shrines, Buddhist temples were built, and people began to adhere to both.

Christianity in Japan

Christianity, in the form of Roman Catholicism, arrived with St Francis Xavier, and was spread by missionaries. However, it was soon persecuted and banned until the Meiji era. Sustained Protestant missionary work began in the late 19th century. Today, there are around 1 million to "overcounted" 3 million Christian adherents of various denominations.

Islam in Japan

There is no reliable estimate of the Muslim population in Japan as the government does not inquire about people's religion on census forms or other official documents. The majority of estimates of the Muslim population have been put at around 115,000 to 125,000 of which about 90% are foreign residents, and 10% are ethnic Japanese. At the present time, Indonesians, Bangladeshis, Pakistanis, and Iranians make up the largest communities of foreign Muslims in Japan.

Judaism in Japan

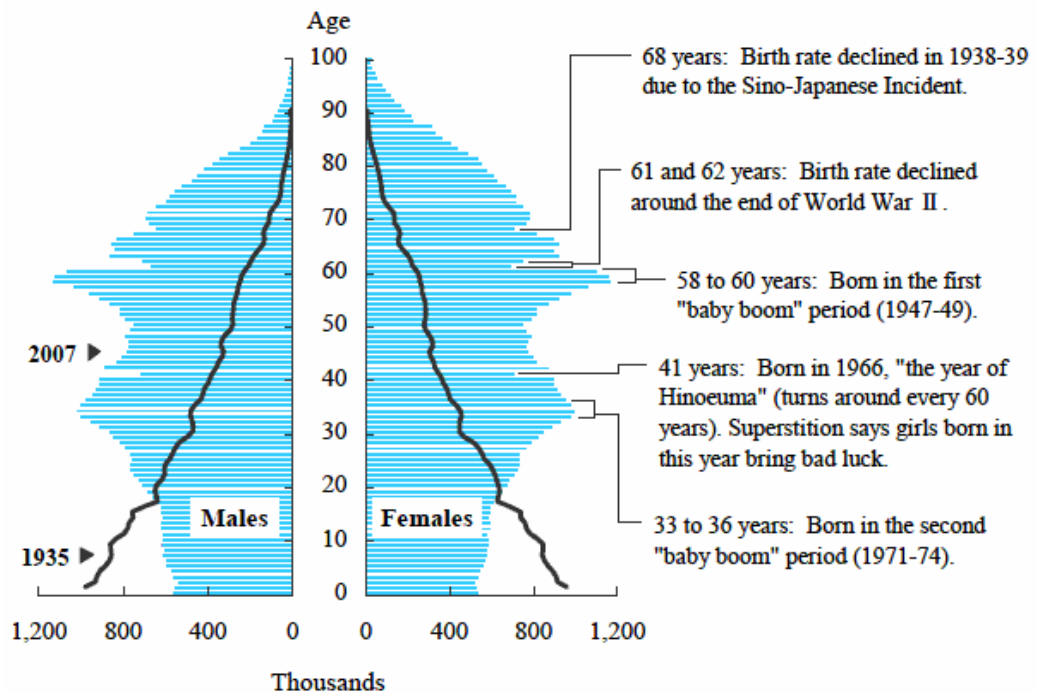
Judaism is practiced by approximately 600 Americans and Europeans residing in Japan, at synagogues located in Tokyo and Kobe. In addition, it is practiced on several US military bases in Japan. There is also a Makuya community of Japanese who claim to be descendants of two of the Lost Tribes of Israel (Dan and Zebulun).

Indian religions and Theravada Buddhism

Hinduism is a small minority religion in Japan. Hinduism and other Indian related beliefs (including Buddhism) spread to Japan from China and Korea during the 6th century. In the 19th century Hindu numbers increased with immigrants seeking to participate in the textile importing and exporting industry. Sikhism is also a very small minority religion in Japan. Sikhs came to Japan from India. Sikhs live mainly in Kobe and Tokyo. Theravada Buddhists in Japan are mostly South Asian immigrants who live in the Tokyo area, but there does exist a Japan Theravada Buddhist Association with roughly 1,500 Japanese members.

15. Females/males % from population

Female was 65,440 thousand (51.2%) and Male was 62,330 thousand (48.8%)



Source: Statistics Bureau, MIC.

16. Yearly events and holidays and its number of days

Yearly events in Japan

The most important holiday in Japan is New Year, which pretty much shuts down the country from December 30 to January 3. Japanese head home to their families, eat festive foods and head out to the neighborhood temple at the stroke of midnight to wish in the New Year. Many Japanese often travel to other countries as well, and prices for airfares are very high.

In February, on Valentine's Day, Japanese women give chocolate to men. Men give gifts to women on March 14th called White Day. This tradition started as a marketing tool for chocolate companies in Japan. Japanese women are encouraged to express love to men by giving chocolate and other gifts on February 14th. Grocery stores, department stores, and convenience stores sell many different kinds of domestic and imported chocolate. More than half of the chocolate sold in a year is sold around Valentine's Day in Japan. Women buy chocolate for their co-workers, bosses, male friends, brothers, father, husband, boyfriends, and so on.

Chocolate given to men whom women don't feel special love are called "giri (obligation)-choco (chocolate)" in Japanese. Chocolate given to co-workers and bosses are usually considered as giri-choco. Many men feel embarrassed if they don't receive any chocolate on Valentine's Day. Women usually make sure to give giri-choco to men around them so that they don't feel left out. The average price range for a giri-choco is from US\$2 to US\$5 each.

Women tend to give special gifts, such as neckties and clothes with chocolate to those men whom they love. Chocolate given to a special man from a woman is called "honmei (prospective winner)-choco." Honmei-choco is more expensive than giri-choco and is sometimes homemade. It's lucky if a man could receive a honmei-choco. Green tea chocolate ball is a choice for Valentine gifts.

In March or April, Japanese head out en masse for hanami ("flower viewing"), a festival of outdoors picnics and drunken revelry in parks, cleverly disguised as cherry blossom (sakura) viewing. The exact timing of the famously fleeting blossoms varies from year to year and Japan's TV channels follow the progress of the cherry blossom front from south to north obsessively.

The longest holiday is Golden Week (April 27 to May 6), when there are four public holidays within a week and everybody goes on extended vacation. Trains are crowded, flight and hotel prices are jacked up to multiples of normal prices, making this a bad time to travel in Japan, but the weeks immediately before or after Golden Week are excellent choices.

Summer brings a spate of festivals designed to distract people from the intolerable heat and humidity (comparable to the US Midwest). There are local festivals (matsuri) and impressive fireworks competitions (hanabi) throughout the country. Tanabata, on July 7th (or early August in some places), commemorates a story of star-crossed lovers who could only meet on this day.

The largest summer festival is Obon, held in mid-July in eastern Japan (Kanto) and mid-August in western Japan (Kansai), which honors departed ancestral spirits. Everybody heads home to visit village graveyards, and transport is packed.

Christmas was initially introduced to Japan with the arrival of the first Europeans in the 16th century. But only in recent decades has the event become widely popular in Japan, and this despite the fact that Christians make up only about two % of the population. While Christmas is not a national holiday in Japan, more and more people are taking up traditions such as decorating their home, giving presents to friends and celebrating the event with a special meal.

In a survey conducted by japan-guide.com among young Japanese people, a majority of 54 % responded that Christmas means something special to them, with women and teenagers showing a particular attraction.

Most enthusiastic about Christmas, however, seem to be retail stores and shopping malls, where Christmas trees, Santa Clauses and other seasonal decorations can be found several weeks in advance. Some public places also feature seasonal illuminations. The traditional Japanese Christmas food is the Christmas cake, usually made of sponge cake, strawberries and whipped cream. In our survey, as many as 73 % responded to celebrate Christmas with a cake.

National holidays

Lunar holidays such as equinoxes may vary by a day or two; the list below is accurate for 2008. Holidays that fall on a weekend may be observed with a bank holiday on the following Monday. Keep in mind that most Japanese people take additional time off around New Year's, during Golden Week, and during Obon.

National holidays of Japan by month

Month	National holidays	Days
January 1	New Year's Day	1
January (2 nd Monday)	Coming-of-Age Day	1
February 11	National Foundation Day	1
March 20	Vernal Equinox Day	1
April 29	Showa Day	1
May 3	Constitution Day	4
May 4	Greenery Day	
May 5	Children's Day	
May 6	Children's Day - Observed	
July 21 (3 rd Monday)	Marine Day	1
September 15 (3 rd Monday)	Respect-for-the-Aged Day	1
September 23	Autumnal Equinox Day	1
October 13 (2 nd Monday)	Sports Day	1
November 3	Culture Day	4
November 23	Labor Thanksgiving Day	
November 24	Labor Thanksgiving Day - Observed	
December 23	The Emperor's Birthday	
Total number of national holidays in 2008		17

On Saturday, Sunday and public holiday, Bank, post office, and company are Closed, but most of the department stores and shops are open. When a national holiday falls on Sunday, the next day (Monday) becomes a holiday.