

EMBASSY OF JAPAN BULLETIN

Children's Edition



Nature and Geography



Japan is an island country forming an arc in the Pacific Ocean to the east of the Asian continent. The land comprises four large islands named (in decreasing order of size) Honshu, Hokkaido, Kyushu, and Shikoku, together with many smaller islands. The Pacific Ocean lies to the east while the Sea of Japan and the East China Sea separate Japan from the Asian continent.

A Land of hot springs and attractive scenery

About three-fourths of Japan's land surface is mountainous. The Chubu Region of central Honshu is known as "the roof of Japan" and has many mountains which are more than 3,000 meters high. Japan's highest mountain is Mt. Fuji (3,776 meters)



Climate

A major feature of Japan's climate is the clear-cut temperature changes between the four seasons: Spring (March, April, May), Summer (June, July, August), Autumn (September, October, November) and Winter (December, January, February).



Food

The word for "meal" in Japanese is gohan. Gohan literally refers to steamed rice, but it has come to mean all sorts of meals. A traditional Japanese meal consists of a serving of plain, white rice, along with a main dish (fish or meat), some kind of side dish (often cooked vegetables), soup (often miso soup), and pickled vegetables. Sushi, tempura and sukiyaki are meals popular both in Japan and abroad.



Clothing

The traditional dress of Japan is the kimono. Kimonos have large sleeves and reach from the shoulders all the way down to the heels. They are tied with a wide belt called an obi. In the summer, a lightweight informal kimono known as a yukata is worn.



Japanese Language

Japanese Characters

Japanese is written with three types of characters: hiragana, katakana, and kanji. They have different functions, and combinations of the three are used to write sentences.

1. Hiragana

Hiragana are used to write words of Japanese origin. Each hiragana letter represents a specific sound and is usually used as a combination of a consonant and a vowel. **Example: Tokyo = とうきょう**

2. Katakana

Katakana are another way of writing the hiragana sounds and are usually used for words of foreign origin. **Example: Kenya = ケニア**

3. Kanji

The Japanese imported kanji from China a long time ago and absorbed it into their language by assigning Japanese meanings. Kanji are different from hiragana and katakana because they have specific meanings. **Example: Tokyo = 東京**

Greetings and Useful Expressions

Ohayō gozaimasu = Good morning

Konnichiwa = Hello or Good Afternoon

Konbanwa = Good evening

Oyasuminasai = Goodnight

Sayōnara = Goodbye

Mata ashita = See you tomorrow

Mata raishū = See you next week

Arigatō = Thank you

Dō itashimashite = You are welcome

Ittekimasu and **itterasshai** are used when someone leaves the house or office. The person who leaves says, ittekimasu and the person who is left behind says itterasshai.

Tadaima and **okaerinasai** are used when returning home or to the office. The person returning says tadaima and the person welcoming him/her back says okaerinasai.

Moshi moshi = Hello. Moshi moshi is only used on the telephone.

Otsukaresama desu = This phrase is used as a sign of recognition for hard work and mutual support. It is usually said after work.

Numbers

0	零 / 〇	れい	rei
1	一	いち	ichi
2	二	に	ni
3	三	さん	san
4	四	し, よん	shi/yon
5	五	ご	go
6	六	ろく	roku
7	七	しち, なな	shichi/nana
8	八	はち	hachi
9	九	く, きゅう	ku/kyū
10	十	じゅう	jū
100	百	ひゃく	hyaku
500	五百	ごひゃく	go-hyaku
800	八百	はっぴゃく	hap-pyaku
1,000	千	せん	sen
10,000	万	まん	man
100,000,000	億	おく	oku

Family (Kazoku)

Ojiisan = grandfather

Oneesan = elder sister

Obāsan = grandmother

Imōto = younger sister

Otōsan = father

Oniisan = elder brother

Okāsan = mother

Otōto = younger brother

Ojisan = uncle

Grandchild(ren) = Mago

Obasan = aunt

I/Me = Watashi

Calligraphy (Shodo)



These days, most Japanese use pencils, ballpoints, or felt-tip pens to write letters and other documents. But the art of shodo (calligraphy), where an ink-dipped brush is used artistically to create kanji and Japanese kana characters, remains a traditional part of Japan's culture. Works of calligraphy are admired for the accurate composition of their characters, of course, but also for the way the brush is handled in their creation, the shading of the ink, and the balanced placement of the characters on the paper.



Shogatsu (New Year)

Japanese families celebrate the start of the new year with special meals and traditional customs to pray for health and happiness.

Seasonal Events

Japan has four well-defined seasons.



New School Year

The Japanese school year begins in April. Most people think spring - when life begins anew - is the perfect time to start new things.

Setsubun

This event is held around February 3rd to drive out evil spirits at the start of spring. One family member wears a red mask representing a demon, or oni, and everyone throws beans at him until he runs from the house.



Children's Day

Families fly a set of koinobori, big fish made out of cloth, in their gardens on May 5th. They represent the carp, which is a strong fish that fights its way upstream, so the streamers symbolize strong and healthy children.



There are many customs and traditions to celebrate each one. The whole family takes part and has a great time.

Hina Matsuri (Doll Festival)

This March 3rd Festival is held to pray for the health of young girls. Families set up a display of dolls dressed in gorgeous robes of ancient court nobles.



Tanabata (Star Festival)

On July 7th, people write their wishes on long strips of coloured paper and hang them from the bamboo poles that decorate the streets in this festival.



Tea Ceremony (Sado)

The tea ceremony is a method of preparing green tea. But there is far more to sado than the ritual making and serving of tea. It is a profound art that requires a wide range of knowledge and a delicate sensitivity.



Flower Arrangement (Ikebana)

Ikebana is distinguished from purely decorative use of flowers by the extreme care taken in choosing every element of each work, including the plant material, the container, where each branch and flower is placed, and how the branches relate to the container and the surrounding space.



Culture

Sumo

The Japanese love all kinds of sports, but the ancient traditional sport of sumo has a special place in their hearts. In sumo, two people who are wearing a mwasahi (loincloth), face each other in a dohyo (circular ring) and push, grapple, and try to throw each other.



Japan has a rich cultural tradition, and many pastimes have been handed down from one generation to the next.

Bonsai

Bonsai are trees and plants grown in containers in such a way so that they look their most beautiful; even prettier than those growing in the wild. Cultivating bonsai is a very artistic hobby. It is a good illustration of the gentle respect Japanese have for living things and an expression of their sense of what is beautiful.



Activities and Games

Fukuwarai



Fukuwarai, or in English, Lucky Laugh, is a Japanese children's game popular at the Lunar New Year. Players play on a table which has a paper drawing of a human face with no features

depicted, and cutouts of several facial features. While blindfolded, the players attempt to place the features onto the face in the correct positions.

How to Play

- The players spread out a piece of paper with the outline of a face on it.
- One player is blindfolded.
- The blindfolded player tries to place the cutouts of the facial features on the face, while the other players shout out instructions like "Higher!" "To the left!" "There!"
- After the player places the pieces, the blindfold is removed.

Darmua san ga Koronda

How to Play

- The person who is "it" faces away from the other players with his/her eyes shut. "It" says "Daruma-san ga koronda" quickly, and then turns around, opening his/her eyes. While "it" is saying the phrase, the other players move closer to him/her. Just before "it" turns around, the players must freeze.
- If "it" sees a player moving, that player must hold hands with "it."
- If a player successfully reaches "it" without getting caught, he or she slaps "it" on the back, then everyone except "it" runs away. However, if "it" is holding hands with one or more captured players, the attacker tries to break their hands apart with the side of his hand. Then everyone except "it" runs away.
- When "it" shouts "Tomare!" ("Stop!"), everybody must freeze.
- If "it" tags one of them by taking no more than three steps, the two switch places.

Can you name the word with the same Spelling?

Japanese Meaning	Word	Swahili Meaning
Deer		To get/Hold
Country/Nation		Firewood
Tick/Mite, Even		Necklace
To Sell		Diamond
To Live/Reside		Poison
Set/Group		Ten
Rose		Continent/Mainland
Quiet Rest		Air, Sky
Flower/Nose		He/She does not have
Partner, Comrade		Destruction, Vengeance
Lie, Falsehood		Face, Front
What		Who
Stone, Intention		To Live/Exist
Forest		Bravery
Tiger		Spear, Order
Hawk/Falcon		To Want/Desire

Tongue Twisters (Hayakuchi Kotoba)

- Nama-mugi nama-gome nama-tamago. (Raw wheat, raw rice, raw egg.)
- Bōzu ga byōbu ni jōzu ni bōzu no e wo kaita. (The monk skillfully drew a picture of a monk on the folding screen.)
- Kaeru pyoko-pyoko mi pyoko-pyoko, awasete pyoko-pyoko mu pyoko-pyoko. (Frogs hopping, three hopping, altogether hopping, six hopping.)
- Kono kugi wa, hikinuki nikui kugi da. (This nail is a nail that is difficult to pull out.)
- Niwa ni wa niwa tori ga iru. (There are two chickens in the yard.)

Henohenomoheji

Henohenomoheji is a face drawn using hiragana characters.

The word breaks down into seven characters he (へ), no (の), he (へ), no (の), mo (も), he (へ) and ji (じ).



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