

Introduction

Whether you end up taking photos of a reproduction Eiffel Tower, surfing an indoor wave, musing in a Zen temple or kipping down in a capsule, you'll do best to come with an open mind and be prepared to be surprised.

Somewhere between the elegant formality of Japanese manners and boisterous off-duty businessmen, between the sanitised shopping malls and the unexpected rural festivals, everyone finds their own vision of Japan.

Destination Facts

Full country name: Japan (Nihon)

Population: 126,900,000

Area: 377,835 sq km

Capital city: Tokyo (pop 11,000,000)

People: Japanese (including indigenous Ainu & Okinawans), Korean

Language: Japanese

Religion: Shinto, Buddhist, Christian

Government: Constitutional monarchy

Emperor: Akihito

For more information, check out Lonely Planet's range of *Japan books* (<http://shop.lonelyplanet.com>).

Activities

Many of Japan's national parks have hiking routes. Around Tokyo, the popular hiking areas are Nikko and Chichibu-Tama National Park. There are good but isolated hikes in Gumma prefecture and in the Kansai region of Nara. To experience a Japan that few foreigners see, head for the mountainous, less populated Central Alps. Skiing is normally possible from December to April. The majority of resorts are on the island of Honshu, but there's also great powder skiing on Hokkaido. Cycling is most popular in the less hilly coastal regions, although intrepid cyclists have been known to ride up Mt Fuji! Golf equals prestige in Japan. If you want to set foot on a green, you'll need a fat wallet. Green fees usually start at around US\$100 a day.



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'I loved my host family. They were very generous and always patient with me. I feel very lucky to have been placed with such lovely people and am very grateful to them. Japan offers many after school club activities which were a great opportunity to meet people and involve myself in traditional Japanese activities.'
(Kirsty Rourke - Japan 2002-2003)