

Religion in Japan

The major religions in Japan are Shintoism and Buddhism, accounting for 85% of the country's religious population. The majority of this population believes in both religions at the same time, since there is a lot of synergy and support between the two belief systems. Christianity is the third most popular religion, although less than 1% of the country believes in it. While about 14% of the country is irreligious, most Japanese still follow customs from some or all of these religions. For example, at New



Years, it's customary for Japanese to visit either a Buddhist temple or Shinto shrine to pay their respects. Whichever one they choose to go to isn't as important of a decision to the majority of Japanese.

Visiting a Buddhist Temple or Shinto Shrine

To accomplish a visit at both Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines, visitors wash their hands at the entrance before entering. Only pure actions can be done at each place of worship, and this is a symbol of that. Afterwards, a small monetary offering is thrown into an offering box. One will then do a deep bow. If you're at a Shinto shrine, you will then clap your hands twice. Then, the hands are clasped together, and a prayer is offered inside one's mind. Finally, one last deep bow is performed.

Once you're finished, you can also have your fortune given to you. This is called an おみくじ (Omikuji). Some believe that if you tie it to a tree, a good fortune will come true and a bad one will go away. You can also write your wishes on a plaque called an 絵馬 (Ema) and hang them up with hopes that they'll come true.



Shintoism and Shrines

Shintoism is native to Japan. It is the belief that everything has a spirit. It doesn't have strict tenets like Buddhism, but it instead focuses on living in a way that doesn't anger deities. Shinto shrines are called 神社 (Jinja). At Shinto shrines, there are large red gates called 鳥居 (Torii) that you enter through. It symbolizes the passing from the mundane to the sacred. Deities in the forms of animal statues can also be found around the shrine.



Buddhism and Temples

Buddhism was introduced to Japan by China and Korea in the 6th century. The religion is more of a lifestyle that teaches believers about the cause and solution to suffering. Buddhist temples in Japan are called お寺 (Otera). They are different from Shinto shrines in that they do not have 鳥居 (Torii) gates at the entrances. At a Buddhist temple, the only statue you will find is of Buddha that serves as a reminder of the religion's tenets.



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