

LEVELED BOOK • T

Japan



Written by Susan Light

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Japan

The background of the entire page is a photograph of a rugged mountain peak. The foreground is shrouded in thick, grey mist. On the left side, several tall, vertical rock formations stand prominently. The mountain slopes are covered in patches of green vegetation and rocky terrain. The overall atmosphere is mysterious and ethereal.

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Table of Contents

Where Is It?	4
People	6
Land	8
History	10
Celebrations	12
Food	13
Conclusion	14
Glossary	16

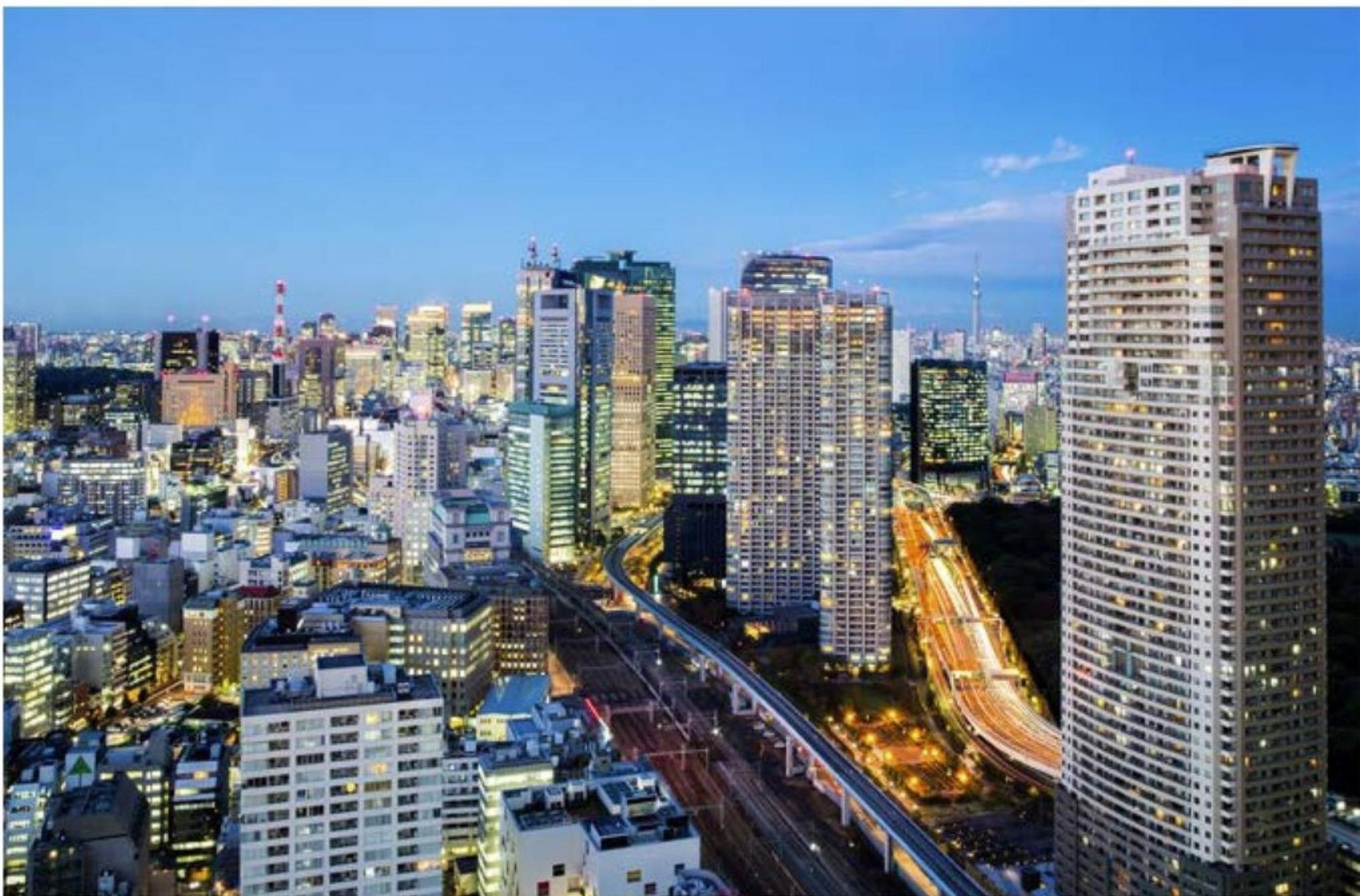
Japan



Where Is It?

Japan is a string of islands just off the east coast of Asia in the Pacific Ocean. It stretches more than 2,400 km (1,500 mi.) in length. Between Japan and Asia lies the Sea of Japan, also known as the East Sea. Japan's neighbors in Asia include China, North and South Korea, and Russia.

Japan includes four main islands and thousands of smaller islands. The largest island is Honshu (HON-shoo), which includes Japan's biggest cities. In fact, more than 80 percent of Japan's population lives on Honshu.



Tokyo is located at the head of Tokyo Bay on the Pacific coast of Japan.

The capital city of Japan, Tokyo (TOH-kee-yoh), is on Honshu. More than thirty-two million people live and work in Tokyo. Despite its modern skyscrapers, Tokyo is over four hundred years old. At first, it was a fishing village. Gradually, it grew to become a major city in Japan. Today, Tokyo is a crowded, bustling center for international trade and business.

At the heart of Tokyo is the **Imperial** Palace, the home of the Japanese emperor. The city is also Japan's major center for culture. It includes all types of museums, beautiful parks and gardens, zoos, and theaters.

People

More than 127 million people live in Japan, with four out of every five people living in urban areas.

Their main language is Japanese. Many people who live in cities work in banks, restaurants, hospitals, and other service industries. Others work in factories, producing high-tech products such as motor vehicles, cell phones, computers, and televisions. In fact, Japan is one of the world's leading producers of **electronics**.

In cities along the coast, people work in huge harbors as part of Japan's large fishing industry. The country runs one of the biggest fleets of fishing ships in the world.

Because Japan's cities are so crowded, many people live in tall apartment buildings. However, people live in houses and smaller apartment buildings in the suburbs.



Japan's high-tech industries grew very quickly in the 1960s and 1970s.



A traditional dining table in Japan is low to the floor so people can sit around it.

In some Japanese homes, the floors are covered with thick rice-straw mats called **tatami** (tah-TAH-mee). It is a Japanese custom to take one's shoes off when entering a home. Many Japanese sit on the tatami mats to eat. Some people sleep on thin beds called **futons** (FOO-tahnz) that are rolled out on top of the floor. The rooms in some homes are divided by paper or bamboo screens instead of walls.

Japan's Landforms



Land

Japan is a rugged country filled with tall mountains and surrounded by water. In fact, most of Japan is covered with mountains. As a result, most of Japan's large cities are near the flat areas of land along the coasts.

The country is located in one of the most geologically unstable areas in the world. People in Japan live in the shadow of more than seventy active volcanoes. The most famous volcano in Japan is Mount Fuji, which has not erupted in many years.

Fast-flowing rivers run through the mountains of Japan. Lakes have formed both near the ocean and in volcanic **craters** in the mountains.

The Japanese also live under the threat of frequent earthquakes, with more than one thousand **tremors** occurring every year. An earthquake along the ocean floor can create a **tsunami** (tsoo-NAH-mee). *Tsunami* means “harbor wave” in Japanese. A tsunami is an enormous ocean wave that may cause great destruction when it hits land. A large tsunami hit Japan in 2011 and it will take years for the country to fully recover.

Japan has four seasons, with a range in temperatures similar to those along the east coast of the United States. The average temperatures may drop as low as -4°C (25°F) in the winter, to a high of 26°C (80°F) in the summer. The climate varies widely, with cooler temperatures in the north and warmer temperatures in the south.



Japanese Kanji

fire

火

mountain

山

rain

雨

Characters borrowed from Chinese writing are called *kanji* (KAHN-jee).

History

The Japanese call their country *Nippon*, which means “sun’s origin.” They once believed that Japan was the first place on which the sun’s rays shone. It is also called the “Land of the Rising Sun.”

The country is thousands of years old and was highly influenced by its neighbors, the Chinese. Some historians think the Japanese learned to grow their staple crop, rice, from the Chinese. Japanese writing has also borrowed many characters from Chinese writing.



The Japanese emperor and his family still live in the Imperial Palace in Tokyo.

Japan's history is full of conflict over land and power. For more than two thousand years, people from the same imperial family have served as emperors for Japan.

In the twelfth century, a Japanese warrior took control of the country after a battle. He was the first **shogun**, or military king. Japan was then ruled by shoguns for more than six hundred years. They allowed the imperial family to serve as emperors, even though they had little power. This was also the time of the samurai (SA-muh-rye), or fierce warriors who followed a strict code of honor. The samurai were known as brave and skilled fighters.

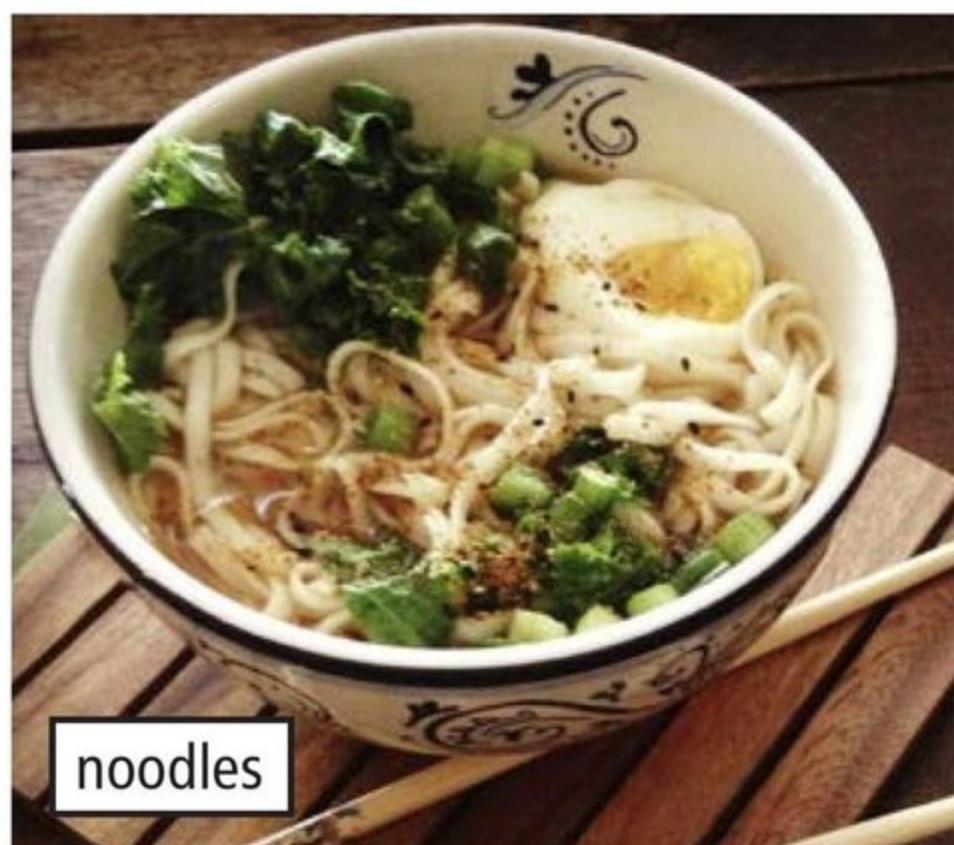
In the nineteenth century, Japan became a democracy, in which people elected leaders to the Japanese parliament. However, Japan still has an emperor.



Traditional kimonos are often worn on holidays in Japan, including New Year's.

Celebrations

One of the most important holidays in Japan is the New Year. During this week-long celebration, it's a common Japanese practice to clean the house and pay any money owed to others. People also send good luck cards to each other. Children receive special toys, such as kites and spinning tops. On New Year's Day, people often dress in traditional **kimonos** and eat special foods prepared only for the New Year, such as pounded rice cakes.



Food

Japan grows most of its own rice, which is a staple of the Japanese diet. It is a main part of most meals. Japanese people also rely on the surrounding ocean for food. They include fish and other seafood in many meals. In cities, a type of fast food called *sushi* (SOO-shee), made with raw fish, is popular.

Many Japanese people believe that food should look as good as it tastes. Meals are typically served as several different small dishes, such as soups, noodles or dumplings.

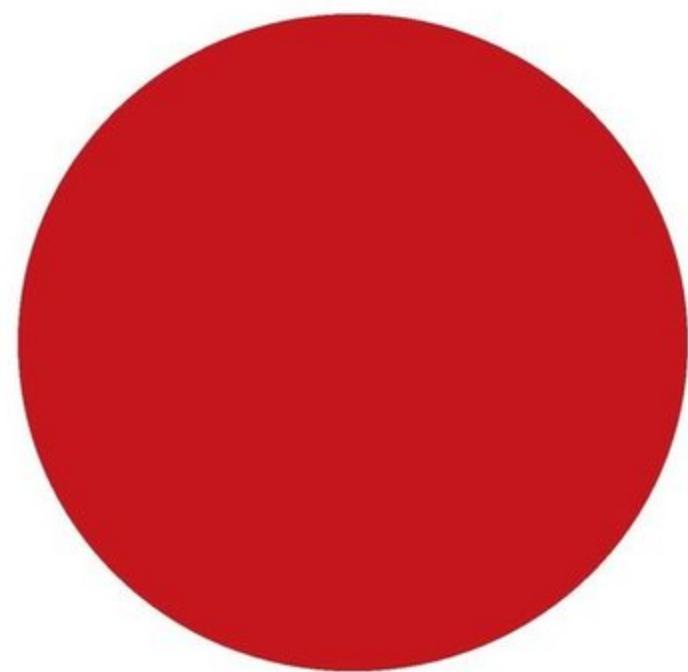


One tradition in Japan is the tea ceremony, in which people follow certain rules for serving tea to guests.

Conclusion

Japan is a small, ancient island country covered with rugged mountains. Yet it includes bustling cities filled with millions of people. Although the land shakes with earthquakes and volcanoes erupt often, Japan's people continue to thrive. They make the most of the land and waters around them.

Over thousands of years, Japan has gained ideas from its neighbors in Asia as well as developed its own traditions. In Japan, respect for ancient traditions and advances in new technology are found side by side.



Population: 127,250,000

Land: 364,485 sq km (226,480 sq. mi.)

Capital City: Tokyo

Primary Language: Japanese

Primary Religions: Shintoism, Buddhism

Currency: Yen



Source: Central Intelligence Agency (July 2014), World Bank

Glossary

craters (<i>n.</i>)	a hole in the ground caused by an explosion or impact (p. 9)
electronics (<i>n.</i>)	devices with many small parts that run on electricity (p. 6)
futons (<i>n.</i>)	thin cushions or mattresses used on the floor or in a bed, couch, or chair (p. 7)
imperial (<i>adj.</i>)	having to do with royalty or an absolute ruler of an empire (p. 5)
kimonos (<i>n.</i>)	Japanese robes or gowns, often worn for formal occasions (p. 12)
shogun (<i>n.</i>)	military ruler in ancient Japan (p. 11)
tremors (<i>n.</i>)	shaking or trembling of the ground, often before or after an earthquake (p. 9)
tatami (<i>n.</i>)	floor covering made from ricestraw (p. 7)
tsunami (<i>n.</i>)	a large, destructive ocean wave caused by an underwater earthquake, landslide, or volcanic eruption (p. 9)

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Front and back cover: In the spring, beautiful cherry trees bloom across Japan.

Title page: Many of Japan's mountains are very steep and rugged. They are covered with rock formations.

Page 3: Shoppers walk through Narita, an old town in Japan.

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Countries Around the World
Level T Leveled Book
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