

Country Guide for

JAPAN



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Section	1	Contact Addresses
	2	General
	3	Passport
	4	Money
	5	Duty Free
	6	Public Holidays
	7	Health
	8	Accommodation
	9	Sport & Activities
	10	Social Profile
	11	Business Profile
	12	Climate
	13	History and Government
	14	Overview

1 CONTACT ADDRESSES

Location: Far East.

Japan National Tourist Organisation (JNTO)
Overseas Promotion Department, 2-10-1, Yuraku-cho, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 100-0006, Japan
Tel: (3) 32 16 19 02. **Fax:** (3) 32 16 18 46. **Web site:** <http://www.jnto.go.jp>

Tourist Information Centre
B1F, Tokyo International Forum, 3-5-1 Marunouchi, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 100-0005, Japan
Tel: (3) 32 01 33 31. **Fax:** (3) 32 01 33 47
Office also in: Kyoto (tel: (75) 371 5649).

Embassy of Japan
101-104 Piccadilly, London W1V 9FN
Tel: (020) 7465 6500. **Fax:** (020) 7491 9348.
E-mail: jicc@jicc.demon.co.uk
Web site: <http://www.embjapan.org.uk>
Opening hours: 0930-1300 and 1430-1630 Monday to Friday.
Consulate in: Edinburgh (tel: (0131) 225 4777; fax: (0131) 225 4828).

Japan National Tourist Organisation (JNTO)
Heathcoat House, 20 Saville Row, London W1S 3PR
Tel: (020) 7734 9638. **Fax:** (020) 7734 4290.
E-mail: jntolon@dircon.co.uk

Japan External Trade Organisation (JETRO)
Leconfield House, Curzon Street, London W1Y 8LQ
Tel: (020) 7470 4700. **Fax:** (020) 7491 7570.
Web site: <http://www.jetro.co.uk> or <http://www.jetro.go.jp>

British Embassy
No 1 Ichiban-cho, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 102-8381, Japan
Tel: (3) 52 11 11 00. **Fax:** (3) 52 75 03 46.
E-mail: consular@tokyo.mail.fco.gov.uk or visa@tokyo.mail.fco.gov.uk
Web site: <http://www.uknow.or.jp/>
Consulates in: Osaka, and Nagoya. Honorary Consulates in: Hiroshima, Fukuoka and Sapporo.

Embassy of Japan
2520 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20008
Tel: (202) 238 6700. **Fax:** (202) 328 2187.
Web site: <http://www.embjapan.org>
Consulates in: Anchorage, Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Denver, Detroit, Guam, Honolulu, Houston, Kansas City, Los Angeles, Miami, New Orleans, New York, Portland, San Francisco and Seattle.

Japan Information and Culture Center
Lafayette Center III, 1155 21st Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036
Tel: (202) 238 6949. **Fax:** (202) 822 6524. **E-mail:** ejjicc@erols.com
Web site: <http://www.embjapan.org/jicc.html>

Provides general information to the public in the Washington DC area. Enquiries from those living elsewhere should be directed to their local Japanese consulate.

Japan National Tourist Organisation (JNTO)
1 Rockefeller Plaza, Suite 1250, New York, NY 10020
Tel: (212) 757 5640. Fax: (212) 307 6754. E-mail: visitjapan@jntonyc.org
Offices also in: Chicago, Los Angeles and San Francisco.

Embassy of the United States of America
10-5, Akasaka 1-Chome, Minato-ku, Tokyo 107-8420, Japan
Tel: (3) 32 24 50 00. Fax: (3) 35 05 18 62.
Web site: <http://www.usembassy.state.gov>
Consulates in: Fukuoka, Nagoya, Sapporo, Osaka, Naha.

Embassy of Japan
255 Sussex Drive, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 9E6
Tel: (613) 241 8541. Fax: (613) 241 7415.
E-mail: infocul@embassyjapancanada.org
Web site: <http://www.embassyjapancanada.org>
Consulates in: Edmonton, Montréal, Toronto and Vancouver.

Japan National Tourist Organisation
165 University Avenue, Toronto, Ontario M5H 3B8
Tel: (416) 366 7140. Fax: (416) 366 4530. E-mail: jnto@interlog.com

Canadian Embassy
3-38 Akasaka 7-chome, Minato-ku, Tokyo 107-8503, Japan
Tel: (3) 54 12 62 00. Fax: (3) 54 12 62 89.
Consulates in: Fukuoka, Hiroshima, Nagoya, Osaka, Sendai and Sapporo.

Country dialling code: 81.

2 GENERAL

Area: 377,829 sq km (145,877 sq miles).

Population: 126,413,000 (1998).

Population Density: 334.6 per sq km.

Capital: Tokyo. Population: 7,967,614 (1995).

Geography: Japan is separated from the Asian mainland by 160km (100 miles) of sea. About 70% of the country is covered by hills and mountains, a number of which are active or dormant volcanoes. A series of mountain ranges run from northern Hokkaido to southern Kyushu. The Japanese Alps (the most prominent range) run in a north-south direction through central Honshu. The highest mountain is Mount Fuji at 3776m (12,388ft). Lowlands and plains are small and scattered, mostly lying along the coast and composed of alluvial lowlands and diluvial uplands. The coastline is very long in relation to the land area, and has very varied features. The deeply indented bays with good natural harbours tend to be adjacent to mountainous terrain.

Government: Constitutional monarchy. Head of State: Emperor Akihito since 1989. Head of Government: Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori since 2000.

Language: Japanese is the official language. Some English is spoken in major cities.

Religion: Shintoist and Buddhist (most Japanese follow both religions) with a Christian minority. In Okinawa, however, people believe in Niraikanai, the realm of the dead beyond the sea.

Time: GMT + 9.

Electricity: 100 volts AC, 60Hz in the west (Osaka). 100 volts AC, 50Hz in eastern Japan and Tokyo. Plugs are flat 2-pin and light bulbs are screw-type.

Communications:

Telephone: Full IDD service. Country code: 81. Outgoing international code: 001. KDD produces phonecards for international calls which can be bought at convenience stores for Y1000, Y3000 and Y5000.

Mobile telephone: The Japanese mobile network uses PDC (Personal Digital Cellular System) technology, which is not compatible with GSM or other mobile services. Visitors to Tokyo can hire handsets under NTT's 'Do Co Mo' agreement. For more information contact NTT Mover Rental Centre, 2-2-1 Marunouchi, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo; (tel: (0120) 680 200 (toll free; Japan only) or (03) 32 82 01 00; fax: (03) 32 01 04 00). Handsets can also be hired from a number of other companies in Japan, including Sony (tel: (3) 34 75 27 24 or (0120) 11 63 23 (toll free; Japan only); web site: <http://www.sonyfinance.co.jp>) and Japan Handy Phone (tel: (3) 52 97 73 73; fax: (3) 52 97 73 74; web site: <http://www.japanphone.com>).

Fax: Sending and receiving can be arranged at any hour at major hotels. KDD (Kokusai Denshin Denwa Co Ltd) offers facilities in Tokyo, Osaka, Yokohama and Nagoya.

Internet/E-mail: There are many cybercafés in Tokyo and in the main cities in Japan. The main ISPs include ASCII (web site: <http://www.ascii.co.jp>), Starnet and Jeton. Some hotel telephones and the new grey telephones have modular sockets for computer network access.

Telegram: These can be sent from the main hotels and from the above company, also from larger post offices in major cities. Two rates are available. Overseas telegrams can also be sent from the Central Post Office in Tokyo until midnight.

Post: Letters can be taken to the Central Post Office in front of Tokyo Station or the International Post Office, near exit A-2 Otemachi subway station, which provide English-speaking personnel. Airmail to Europe takes four to six days to arrive. All main post offices have Poste Restante facilities and will hold mail for up to ten days. Post office hours: 0900-1700 Monday to Friday, 0900-1200 Saturday. The International Post Office and Central Post Office are open weekdays until 1900 and Saturday until 1700.

Press: The English-language daily newspapers in Tokyo include The Asahi Evening News, The Daily Yomiuri, The Japan Times and The Mainichi Daily News.

BBC World Service and Voice of America frequencies: From time to time these change.

BBC:

MHz 21.66 15.28 11.95 5.965

Voice of America:

MHz 15.43 11.705 9.760 5.985

3 PASSPORT

	<i>Passport Required?</i>	<i>Visa Required?</i>	<i>Return Ticket Required?</i>
British	Yes	1	Yes
Australian	Yes	3	Yes
Canadian	Yes	3	Yes
USA	Yes	3	Yes
OtherEU	Yes	1/2	Yes
Japanese			

PASSPORTS: Passport valid for the duration of intended stay in Japan required by all.

Note: Whether or not they hold a visa, visitors who do not possess visible means of support for their stay, onward or return tickets and other documents for their next destination may be refused entry.

VISAS: Required by all except the following:

- (a) 1. nationals of Austria, Germany, Ireland, UK (UK citizens), Liechtenstein, Mexico and Switzerland for a stay of up to 6 months*;
- (b) 2. nationals of all other EU countries not mentioned under (a) 1. for a stay of up to 3 months (except persons whose passport was originally issued in present or former Portuguese colonial territories who do require a visa);
- (c) 3. nationals of Andorra, Argentina, Australia, Bahamas, Barbados, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Estonia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Guatemala, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, Israel, Lesotho, Malta, Mauritius, Monaco, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, San Marino, Singapore, Slovenia, Surinam, Tunisia, Turkey, Uruguay and the USA for a stay of up to 3 months;
- (d) nationals of Brunei for a touristic stay of up to 14 days.

Note*: Nationals who are permitted to stay for 6 months will initially be granted a stay of up to 3 months and may then apply, while in Japan, to the local Immigration Department for an extension of a further 3 months. Such extensions are at the discretion of the immigration authorities in Japan and may not be granted. For further information contact the Consulate (or Consular Section at Embassy).

Types of visa and cost: Temporary Visitor, Employment/Working, General/Student and Transit. Most visas cost £17.50, but prices depend on nationality and nature of intended visit. Most Transit visas cost £4.00. Contact the Consulate (or Consular section at Embassy) for further details.

Validity: Depends on a variety of conditions, including nationality and purpose of visit. Temporary Visitor visas for touristic purposes are normally valid for a stay of up to 3 months (extensions for another 3 months granted at the discretion of Immigration Department in Japan),

and Employment/Working visas (including intra-company transfer visas) for a period of up to 3 years. Enquire at the Consulate (or Consular section at Embassy) for further details.

Application to: Consulate (or Consular section at Embassy); see address section. Applications for all visas must be made in person.

Application requirements: Temporary Visitor Visas: (a) Passport. (b) Completed application form. (c) 1 passport-size photograph. (d) Return air/sea ticket or copy. (e) Fee. (f) Proof of sufficient funds for stay (eg recent bank statement). (g) Itinerary for proposed trip. (h) Proof of accommodation or name and address of contact in Japan. (i) Confirmation of residence status in UK (if applicable).

Employment/Working Visas: (a)-(e) and, (f) Certificate of Eligibility (original and a photocopy). The applicant's future employer must apply for this to the Ministry of Justice prior to application for the visa itself.

For information regarding General/Student Visas, contact the Embassy (or Consular section at Embassy) for more details.

Application requirements vary and some applicants (such as nationals of the former Soviet states and Middle Eastern countries) must submit 2 completed visa application forms and 2 photos. Check with the Consulate (or Consular section at Embassy) for details.

Working days required: 3 for applications accompanied by a Certificate of Eligibility. Visa applications from passport holders of Azerbaijan, Belarus, Cambodia*, China (PR), Cuba, Georgia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Laos*, Lebanon, Libya, Moldova, Mongolia*, Morocco, Russian Federation, Sudan, Syria, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Vietnam*, Yemen, and applications from stateless persons, need to be referred to Tokyo where processing can take up to 2 months.

Note*: Referral is not necessary for these nationals if travelling on business on in a professional capacity.

4 MONEY

Currency: Japanese Yen (¥). Notes are in denominations of ¥10,000, 5000 2000 and 1000. Coins are in denominations of ¥2000, 500, 100, 50, 10, 5 and 1.

Currency exchange: All money must be exchanged at an authorised bank or money changer.

Credit cards: Visa, Diners Club, American Express, MasterCard and other major credit cards are widely used. Check with your credit card company for merchant acceptability.

Travellers cheques: These can be exchanged at most major banks, larger hotels and some duty-free shops. To avoid additional exchange rate charges, travellers are advised to take travellers cheques in Japanese Yen.

Currency restrictions: The import and export of local and foreign currency is unrestricted, subject to declaration of amounts equivalent to ¥1,000,000 or above.

Banking hours: 0900-1500 Monday to Friday.

5 DUTY FREE

The following goods may be imported into Japan without incurring customs duty:
200 cigarettes or 50 cigars or 250g of tobacco; 3 bottles (approximately 0.760ml each) of spirits;
57ml of perfume; gifts up to the value of ¥200,000.

Note: Tobacco and alcohol allowances are for those aged 20 or over. Oral declaration is necessary on arrival at customs.

Prohibited items: Articles which infringe upon rights in patents, utility-models, designs, trademarks, copyright or neighbouring right; counterfeit, altered or imitated coins, paper money, banknotes or securities; all plants with soil, most meats, animals without health certificates, firearms and ammunition, narcotics, obscene articles and publications.

6 PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

Jan 1 2001 New Year's Day. Jan 8 Coming of Age Day. Feb 11 National Foundation Day. Mar 19 Vernal Equinox Day. Apr 29 Greenery Day. May 3 Constitution Memorial Day. May 5 Children's Day. Jul 20 Day of the Sea. Sep 15 Respect for the Aged Day. Sep 23 Autumnal Equinox Day. Oct 8 Sports Day. Nov 3 Culture Day. Nov 23 Labour Thanksgiving Day. Dec 23 Birthday of the Emperor. Jan 1 2002 New Year's Day. Jan 14 Coming of Age Day. Feb 11 National Foundation Day. Mar 20 Vernal Equinox Day. Apr 29 Greenery Day. May 3 Constitution Memorial Day. May 6 Children's Day. Jul 20 Day of the Sea. Sep 16 Respect for the Aged Day. Sep 23 Autumnal Equinox Day. Oct 14 Sports Day. Nov 4 Culture Day. Nov 23 Labour Thanksgiving Day. Dec 23 Birthday of the Emperor.

Note: (a) If a holiday falls on a Sunday, the following day is treated as a holiday. (b) When there is a single day between two national holidays, it is also taken as a holiday. (c) Between December 29 and January 3 government offices and many shops and offices are closed.

7 HEALTH

	<i>Special Precautions</i>	<i>Certificate Required</i>
Yellow Fever	No	No
Cholera	No	No
Typhoid and Polio	No	-
Malaria	No	-
Food and Drink	1	-

1.: Food and drink are generally considered safe but there is risk of parasitic infection and toxins from raw seafood.

Typhus occurs in some river valleys. Japanese encephalitis may occur and paragonimiasis has been reported.

Health care: Health insurance is strongly recommended, owing to the high cost of treatment. The International Association for Medical Assistance to Travellers provides English-speaking doctors. There are hospitals in all major cities.

Travel - International

AIR: Japan's largest international airline is Japan Airlines (JL).

Approximate flight times: From Hong Kong to Osaka is 3 hours. From London to Tokyo is 11 hours 30 minutes on a direct flight (stopovers can add a further 5 or 6 hours) and to Osaka is 12 hours. From New York to Tokyo is 14 hours. From Los Angeles to Tokyo is 11 hours. From Singapore to Tokyo is 7 hours. From Sydney to Tokyo is 9 hours 30 minutes.

INTERNATIONAL AIRPORTS: New Tokyo International Airport (TYO) (Narita City) (web site: <http://www.narita-airport.or.jp>) is 65km (40 miles) northeast of Tokyo (travel time - 1 hour 10 minutes). Airport facilities include an outgoing duty-free shop, bank/bureau de change (0900-2300), car hire, restaurants and a tourist information centre with multilingual staff located in Terminal 2 (tel: (476) 346 251). Luxury coaches depart regularly from the airport to city centre hotels. There is also a bus to the Tokyo City Air Terminal (TCAT). A shuttle bus links the airport with major hotels in the city centre. Tickets for all services can be bought in the terminals. Japan Railways Narita Express line runs from Narita station terminal located beneath the airport to Tokyo station (travel time - 60 minutes), Shinjuku (travel time - 90 minutes) and Yokohama (travel time - 105 minutes) every hour and every half-hour at busy periods from 0745-2145. First class- and private compartments are available. JR Passes can be used on these trains; see under RAIL below for more information. Keisei 'Skyliner Train' also runs from the airport terminal to Keisei Ueno Station in Tokyo (travel time - 60 minutes) from 0920-2200. There are taxis to the city, with a surcharge after 2200 (travel time - 60-70 minutes). Travellers should note that these are 5 times as expensive as the trains.

A second terminal opened in 1992, with its own Japan Railways and Keisei Line station in the basement. There is also a free shuttle bus connecting both terminals every 10-15 minutes (travel time - 10 minutes).

Kansai International (KIX) (Kansai) (web site: <http://www.kansai-airport.or.jp>) is 50km (31 miles) southwest of Osaka. Airport facilities include duty-free shops, car hire, banks/bureaux de change, tourist information (0900-2100) and bar/restaurant. There is a bus to the city every 30 minutes from 0800-2120 (travel time - 60 minutes). The Nankai RR service goes to Namba station every 30 minutes (travel time - 29 minutes). The West Japan JR service goes to JR Osaka station (travel time - 70 minutes). Taxis are available to the city (travel time - 60 minutes) although a surcharge may be imposed after 2200. It is also possible to take the jet foil from Kansai Airport to Kobe's Port Island (travel time - 32 minutes).

Fukuoka International (FUK) is 20 minutes travel time from Fukuoka City. Airport facilities include an outgoing duty-free shop, car hire, bank/bureau de change and bar/restaurant.

Nagoya International (NGO) is 10km (6 miles) north of the city and has flights to 29 international **destinations including:** Hong Kong, Seoul, Bangkok, Singapore, Honolulu, Taipei, Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney, Frankfurt/M and Paris.

DEPARTURE TAX: ¥2040 at New Tokyo International Airport, ¥2650 at Kansai Airport and ¥945 from Fukuoka Airport. Children under 12 are charged half price, children under two are exempt. There is no departure tax from other airports.

SEA: Japan is easily accessible by sea, and passenger ships include the major ports on their schedules. The Royal Viking Line world cruise puts in at Kobe and there are also cruises between the Japanese islands en route to Shanghai and Hong Kong. The Pearl of Scandinavia leaves from Kobe on a cruise along the coast of China. There is a ferry service which sails from Vladivostok to

Niigata, but travellers are advised that this service is unreliable. Alternatively, there is a twice weekly service to Wakkanai in Hokkaido from Korsakov in Russia.

RAIL: The Trans-Siberian route to Japan is an interesting and very well-organised, if lengthy, trip. Connections can be made daily from London (Liverpool Street) via Harwich or London (Victoria) via Dover through Europe to Moscow. There are sleeping cars four times a week from Hook of Holland to Moscow, and twice a week from Ostend to Moscow. The Trans-Siberian railway departs regularly from Moscow (see Russian Federation section).

Travel - Internal

AIR: Japan Airlines (JL), All Nippon Airways, Japan Air System and several other airlines maintain an extensive network covering Japan proper and its islands. Tokyo's domestic airport is Haneda (HND). A monorail service runs from Hamamatsu-cho to Haneda. One international airline, China Airlines, serves Haneda. Other international flights to and from Haneda are made via Tokyo, Osaka, Fukuoka or Nagoya, Main routes are Tokyo-Sapporo; Tokyo-Fukuoka; Tokyo-Osaka; and Tokyo-Naha.

Tickets can be purchased at automatic machines at Tokyo International Airport's domestic departure counter and at Osaka International Airport.

SEA: There are frequent services by high-speed boat, ferry or hydrofoil to Japan's islands. Major sea routes include Awaji Island: Akashi-Iwaya; Shodo Island: Himeji-Fukuda, Okayama-Tonosho and Takamatsu-Tonosho; Shiraishijima and Manabejima Islands: Kasaoka-Shiraishijima-Manabejima; Ikuchijima and Omishama Islands: Mihara-Setoda. Bullet train services travel frequently to ports.

RAIL: Japan's rail network is one of the best in the world, and is widely used for both business and pleasure. Very frequent services run on the main routes. Shinkansen, the 'Bullet Trains', are the fastest, with compartments for wheelchair passengers, diners and buffet facilities. Supplements are payable on the three classes of express train and in 'Green' (first-class) cars of principal trains, for which reservations must be made.

DISCOUNT FARES: The Japan Rail Pass, an economical pass for foreign tourists, which must be purchased before arrival in Japan, can be obtained from Japan Airlines (JL users only) or authorised travel agents and agencies. It can be used on all trains except the new 'Nozomi' super express trains, and also on Japan Rail buses and Japan Rail ferries. A Japan Rail Pass brochure is available from the Japan National Tourist Organisation (see address section). A 7-day pass currently costs ¥28,300. For travellers without a Japan Rail Pass, there are various other discount schemes in operation. 'Discount Round Trip' tickets offer a 20% discount to destinations at least 600km (372 miles) away, and the 'Seishun 18 Kippu' ticket offers unlimited travel for 5 days on selected trains. For details of other discount fares, contact the Japan National Tourist Organisation (see address section). Express and 'limited express' trains are best for intercity travel.

ROAD: Driving in Japan is complicated for those who cannot read the language as it will be a problem to understand the road signs. Traffic in cities is often congested. Traffic drives on the left. The Keiyo Highway, Tohoku Expressway, Tomei Expressway and the Meishin Expressway link Japan's major Pacific coastal cities, passing through excellent scenery. Documentation: An International Driving Permit is required.

URBAN: Public transport is well-developed, efficient and crowded. The underground systems and privately-run suburban rail services, which serve all the main cities, are very convenient, but best avoided in rush hours. Bus: These can be confusing and are best used with someone who

knows the system. Otherwise visitors should get exact details of their destination from the hotel. Fares systems are highly automated, particularly rail and underground, but passes may be available. On buses, payment may be made on leaving. Tokyo has a very large public transport network of buses, tramways, two underground systems and half a dozen private railways. The underground, tramway and bus services, run by the Tokyo Transportation Bureau, have a flat central area fare and stage fares elsewhere. Books of tickets can be bought. The Eidan underground is a bigger 7-line system. Taxi: There is a minimum charge for the first 2km (1.2 miles) and there is a time charge in slow traffic. It is advisable for visitors to have prepared in advance the name and address of their destination in Japanese writing, together with the name of some nearby landmark; a map may also help. Hotels can provide this service.

JOURNEY TIMES: The following chart gives approximate journey times (in hours and minutes) from Tokyo to other major cities/towns in Japan.

	Air	Road	Rail	Sea
Nagoya	4.00	2.00	-	-
Kagoshima	1.50	26.00	10.00	48.00
Fukuoka	1.45	13.00	6.30	-
Nagasaki	1.40	18.00	9.00	-
Okinawa	2.30	-	-	60.00
Osaka	1.00	6.00	3.15	-
Sapporo	1.25	-	-	14.00

8 ACCOMMODATION

HOTELS: Hotels are 'Western' or 'Japanese' style. Western-style accommodation (ranging from deluxe hotels to pensions) are much like any modern American or European hotel. Japanese-style hotels (ryokan) provide exciting new experiences; guests receive kimonos and wooden clogs and rooms come equipped with Japanese bathtubs and paper sliding doors. Many non-obligatory extras are available. Service charges of 10-20% are added to the bill. Grading: No accommodation grading system operates in Japan. For further information contact the Japan Hotel Association, Shin Otemachi Building, 2-2-1 Otemachi, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 100-0004 (tel: (3) 32 79 27 06; fax: (3) 32 74 53 75); or The Japan Tourist Hotel Association, Kokusai Kanko Kaikan, 1-8-3 Marunouchi, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 100-0004 (tel: (3) 32 31 18 57; fax: (3) 32 01 55 68); web site: <http://www.j-hotel.or.jp> or The Japan National Tourist Organisation (see address section). For specifically Tokyo Hotels, contact the Tokyo Hotel Chain Co, Ltd, 10-3 Nagata-Cho, 2-Chome, Chiyoda-Ku, Tokyo 100-0014, Japan (tel: (3) 35 81 86 19; fax: (3) 32 64 02 25).

GUEST-HOUSES: Minshuku, often found in resorts and vacation spots, are the Japanese equivalent of guest home-type lodging. Rates are moderate, and visitors should expect considerably fewer amenities than ryokan or western-style hotels. Visitors are expected to fold up their bedding in the morning and stow it away in a closet, and towels are usually not provided. No shoes are worn in the house as slippers are provided. Small gifts or 5% may be given with the bill.

Youth Hostels: There are roughly 400 youth hostels throughout Japan. Contact Japan Youth Hostels Inc, 2-20-7 Misaki-Cho, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 101-0061 (tel: (3) 32 88 02 60; fax: (3) 32 88 14 90 or 32 88 12 48; e-mail: info@jyh.jp; web site: <http://www.jyh.or.jp>).

9 SPORT & ACTIVITIES

Martial arts: Martial arts: Japanese ceremonial wrestling, sumo, and judo are Japan's national sports, both drawing huge crowds. There are six sumo tournaments a year, each of which lasts for 15 days. Three of them are held in Tokyo, and the others take place in Osaka, Nagoya and Fukuoka. Matches by senior wrestlers begin at 1500. Sumo training sessions can be observed between 0500 and 1030 at Kasungo Stable in Tokyo (tel: (3) 36 31 18 71). Judo enthusiasts can visit the Kodokan Judo Hall, 1-16-30, Kasuga, Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo (tel: (3) 38 18 41 72), where there is a spectators' gallery. There are opportunities for the visitor to purchase a costume and learn some of the techniques. There are separate classes for men and women and in most large schools English is spoken. Karate, the art of self-defence, is taught at schools in Japan and has become a very popular sport since it was introduced into the country in 1922. For further information contact the Japan Karatedo Federation, 6th Floor, 2 Sempaku Shinkokai Building, 1-11-2, Toranomon, Minato-ku, Tokyo (tel: (3) 35 03 66 40). Kendo, Japanese fencing, is practised in numerous clubs and college halls. In December, the All-Japan Championships are held in Tokyo. Kyudo, Japanese archery, is one of the oldest martial arts. It is closely associated with Zen Buddhism. Unlike many martial arts, it is pursued by almost as many female students as males. Yabusame, or archery on horseback, which was originally performed by courtiers or Imperial guards in the 7th century, is today a Shinto rite for ensuring peace and good harvests. It is staged by horsemen in colourful costumes who gallop down a narrow 250-metre course shooting at small wooden targets set up at 80-metre intervals. The best-known events are at Tsurugaoka Hachmagu shrine in Kamakura on the third Sunday in April and on September 16 and at the Shimogano Shrine in Kyoto on May 3rd.

Skiing: Skiing: This is very popular and there are over 50 major ski resorts, especially in the Japanese Alps and on the northern island of Hokkaido. One of the great attractions is the prevalence of hot springs in the skiing areas. Various resorts at Nagana in Central Honshu offer facilities for night skiing. The southernmost natural ski slope in Japan is the Gokase Highland Ski, in the north Miyazaki prefecture, which offers grass skiing out of season between late April and late November. Transport connections are very good, and there are sometimes railway stations within a few minutes walk of the slopes. During the ski season, it is necessary to reserve seats on trains and buses. Although equipment is easy to hire, it can sometimes be a problem to obtain ski boots in larger sizes; skiers should telephone the resort in advance in order to check on availability.

Diving: Diving and snorkelling are popular around the Kerama Islands near Okinawa which is one of the world's clearest sea areas. Between January and March it is also an area for whale watching.

Fishing: Fishing: All kinds of fishing are practised, and there are many keen anglers in Japan. Freshwater fish include trout, funa (silver carp) and ayu (sweetfish). Given the shape of the country, fishing locations are never far away. Travellers might like to try ukai or cormorant fishing, a type of fishing where cormorants are used to catch fish. The cormorants and the crew do the work while the passengers watch. Food and drink are provided. Expeditions go out at night and can be arranged through hotels and tourist boards in the Kyoto area.

Cycling: Cycling is popular in April and May during the cherry blossom season and also in October and November when autumn colours adorn Japan. Owing to snow and ice, cycling in Hokkaido and in the northern area of the main island, Honshu, is not recommended between December and March. Cyclists must keep to the left and should be careful at all times because of heavy traffic, especially on the national highways. There are a number of interesting paths routed

through Toyko. For further information contact the Bicycle Culture Center, 9-3 Akasaka 1-chome, Minato-ku, Tokyo 107 (tel: (3) 35 84 45 30)

Football: Football: In the year 2002, Japan will co-host the World Cup with South Korea. Football has taken off in a big way in Japan in recent years with the introduction of the Japanese soccer J-League and the participation of the Japanese national team in the World Cup of 1998.

Golf: Golf: Golf courses in and around Tokyo are considered by some to be among the most challenging in the world. However, membership or an invitation is sometimes required. Some courses have the additional attraction of hot spring baths and mahjong rooms. For further information, contact the Japan Golf Association, 606 Palace Building, 1-1-1 Marunouchi, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 100 (tel: (3) 32 15 00 03; fax: (3) 32 14 28 31).

Cultural activities: Cultural activities: Among the traditional entertainments on offer is bunraku, a unique form of puppet theatre. This can be seen in major towns, as can noh drama and kabuki, traditional Japanese drama forms, with participants attired in medieval costumes. The most fascinating and colourful of Japan's religious festivals take place in Kyoto, the old imperial capital. The Gion Festival reaches its climax on 16-17 July. A street parade takes place with the participants dressed in fine costumes and carrying portable shrines. The large floats depict ancient themes. The Aoi (or hollyhock) Festival on 15 May dates back to the 6th century. The procession, consisting of imperial messengers in oxcarts followed by a retinue of 600 people dressed in traditional costume, leaves at around 10am from the imperial palace and heads for Shimogamo-jinja shrine where ceremonies take place. It then proceeds to Kamigamo-jinja shrine. The Jidai Festival (festival of the ages) is of more recent origin, though still splendid to watch. More than 2000 people parade through the town dressed in costumes dating from different periods. For dates of other festivals, see Special Events in the Social Profile section. Those wishing to see the Japanese tea ceremony can arrange to do so through the tourist information centres in Tokyo and Kyoto (see address section). If visitors are interested in eastern religions they can arrange to stay at a shukubo (or temple lodging). The tourist office will have a full list of temples offering this service. Sometimes it is possible to participate in meditation sessions.

10 SOCIAL PROFILE

Food & Drink: Japanese cuisine, now popular in the West, involves very sensitive flavours, fresh crisp vegetables and an absence of richness. Specialities include teriyaki (marinated beef/chicken/fish seared on a hot plate), sukiyaki (thin slices of beef, bean curd and vegetables cooked in soy sauce and then dipped in egg), tempura (deep fried seafood and vegetables), sushi (slices of raw seafood placed on lightly-vinegared rice balls - very tasty and refreshing), and sashimi (slices of raw seafood dipped in soy sauce). The best place to try sushi is a Kaiten Sushi Bar, where many varieties pass the customer on a conveyor belt allowing complete choice over which delicacies to try, at more reasonable prices than a traditional Sushi Bar. Fine Oriental food (Korean - very hot - and Chinese) is served in restaurants. An amazing number and variety of international restaurants are also available, which cater for every possible taste and budget, from French and Italian to Chinese, Indian and Thai. Western dishes in expensive places are good, but cheaper restaurants may be disappointing. Restaurants have table service and in some places it is customary to remove footwear. Drink: Sake, hot rice wine, is strong and distinctively fresh-tasting. Shochu, a strong aquavit, is an acquired taste. Japanese wines are worth trying once, and beer - similar to lager - is recommended. Popular brands are Kirin, Sapporo, Suntory and Asahi. Waiter service is common in bars. The Japanese are very fond of original Scotch whisky, but this is both very expensive and highly sought after; therefore Japanese versions of this drink

are often served. There are no licensing hours. Drinking is subject to long-standing rituals of politeness. The hostess will pour a drink for the visitor, and will insist on the visitor's glass being full. It is also appreciated if the visitor pours drinks for the host, but it is bad manners for a visitor to pour one for himself.

Nightlife: Tokyo has an abundance of cinemas, theatres, bars, coffee shops, discotheques and nightclubs. A wide range of bars is available, from the posh and stylish to cheap street stalls. In the summer, rooftop beer gardens are popular. Some clubs have hostesses who expect to be bought drinks and snacks. In bigger nightclubs and bars, a basic hostess charge is levied. However, there are thousands of other bars and clubs. In Tokyo there are concerts of all styles of music almost every night. Foreign opera companies, ballet companies, orchestras and rock/pop stars visit Japan all year round. Some live jazz houses are also available. For those who would like to try the traditional Japanese performing arts, there is Kabuki and Noh theatre in Tokyo. Play Guide ticket offices are situated in major department stores. It is advisable to purchase the tickets in advance because shows are quickly sold out. Karaoke bars are a very popular form of entertainment in Japan.

Shopping: A blend of Oriental goods and Western sales techniques confronts the shopper, particularly at the big department stores, which are more like exhibitions than shops. Playgrounds for children are available. Special purchases include kimonos, mingei (local crafts including kites and folk toys); Kyoto silks, fans, screens, dolls; religious articles such as Shinto and Buddhist artefacts; paper lanterns; lacquerware; hi-fi equipment, cameras, televisions and other electronic equipment. Tax exemptions are available on presentation of passport. Bargaining is not usual. Shopping hours: 1000-1900 every day of the week and on public holidays.

Special Events: A large number of festivals are held in Japan throughout the year in different parts of the country. Some are hugely spectacular, some are religious in orientation. For full details of events and festivals in 2001, contact the Japan National Tourist Organisation (see address section). The following is a selection of annual events and festivals held in Japan (dates are subject to variation):

Jan Toka Ebisu, Festival of Imamiya Ebisu Shrine, Osaka; Grass Fire Ceremony, Mt. Wakakusayama, Nara. Feb Snow Festival, Sapporo; Lantern Festival of Kasuga Shrine, Nara. Mar Hinamatsuri or Doll Festival, all Japan. Apr Kamakura Matsuri of Tsurugaoka Hachimangu Shrine, Kamakura. May Grand Festival of Toshogu Shrine, Tochigi. Jul Tanabata (Star Festival), throughout Japan. Jul 17 Gion Matsuri of Yasaka Shrine, Kyoto. Aug Nebuta Matsuri, Aomori; Neputa Matsuri, Hirosaki; Peace Ceremony, Hiroshima; Awa Odori, Tokushima. Oct Okunchi Festival of Suwa Shrine, Nagasaki; Takayama Matsuri of Hachiman Shrine, Takayama; Jidai Matsuri (Festival of Eras), Heian Shrine, Kyoto. Nov Shichi-go-san (Children's Shrine Visiting Day), throughout Japan. Dec Chichibu Yo-matsuri (All-night Festival), Chichibu City, Saitama; Hagoita Ichi (Battledore Fair), Asakusa, Tokyo.

Social Conventions: Japanese manners and customs are vastly different from those of Western people. A strict code of behaviour and politeness is recognised and followed by almost all Japanese. However, they are aware of the difference between themselves and the West and therefore do not expect visitors to be familiar with all their customs but expect them to behave formally and politely. A straightforward refusal does not form part of Japanese etiquette. A vague 'yes' does not really mean 'yes' but the visitor may be comforted to know that confusion caused by non-committal replies occurs between the Japanese themselves. Entertaining guests at home is not as customary as in the West, as it is an enterprise not taken lightly and the full red-carpet treatment is given. Japanese men are also sensitive lest their wives be embarrassed and feel that their hospitality is inadequate by Western standards; for instance, by the inconvenience to a foreign guest of the custom of sitting on the floor. Bowing is the customary greeting but handshaking is becoming more common for business meetings with Westerners. The suffix san

should be used when addressing all men and women; for instance Mr Yamada would be addressed as Yamada-san. When entering a Japanese home or restaurant it is customary to remove shoes. Table manners are very important, although the Japanese host will be very tolerant towards a visitor. However, it is best if visitors familiarise themselves with basic table etiquette and use chopsticks. It is customary for a guest to bring a small gift when visiting someone's home. Exchange of gifts is also a common business practice and may take the form of souvenir items such as company pens, ties or high-quality spirits. Smoking is only restricted where notified. Tipping: Tips are never expected since a 10-20% service charge is added to the bill at hotels, ryokan and restaurants; where a visitor wishes to show particular appreciation of a service, money should not be given in the form of loose change but rather as a small financial gift. Special printed envelopes can be bought for financial gifts of this type.

11 BUSINESS PROFILE

Economy: After suffering massive destruction during World War II, Japan has been the economic phenomenon of the late 20th century. The country's GDP ranks second in the world after the USA. This has been achieved through judicious application of import controls and consistently high domestic investment, coupled with an aggressive export drive orchestrated by the powerful Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI). Moreover, the structure of the Japanese domestic economy revolves around a series of large multi-product corporations (which have since become household names in the world economy) serviced with components and raw materials by a plethora of small firms with low overheads and labour costs (a function increasingly met by the 'tiger economies' of the Pacific Basin). They are further assisted by a distribution system which foreign companies complain is highly restrictive. The result is a US\$6000 billion Gross Domestic Product and an annual trade surplus of around US\$100 billion. The corporations are further linked in loose alliances (known as keiretsu) with banks and finance houses. While these have contributed much to Japan's economic advancement, their sometimes incestuous nature has amplified the difficulties which the economy has experienced during the 1990s. Manufactured goods are the strongest sector, particularly vehicles and electronic goods, although traditional industries such as coal mining, shipbuilding and steel are also sizeable and, unlike many of their Western counterparts, profitable. Overall, industry contributes over one-third of economic output - a larger proportion than the world's other leading economies. The only sector which does not measure up to Western standards at present is agriculture, which is relatively inefficient and heavily protected by the Government, partly as a result of the nature of the Japanese electoral system. Rice, potatoes, sugar and citrus fruits are the main crops. The newest and generally the fastest growing sector of the Japanese economy is financial services. The USA has a 20% share of Japan's import market, followed by South Korea and Indonesia (5.5%), Australia, China, Taiwan and Saudi Arabia (5%). The emphasis in Japanese trade has switched from manufactured goods to export of services and 'invisibles' (such as finance and insurance). The early stages of this process saw frantic investment in property in metropolitan Japan and prime locations overseas (such as Australia's Gold Coast). With government encouragement - a green light given the close institutional relationship between politics and finance in Japan - Japanese banks were more than willing to provide capital. Many of the loans were bad, as became apparent after the 1991 property crash. But despite that warning, the process continued largely unabated over the next five years. It was not until the 1997 Asian financial crisis - triggered by another cycle of bad debt, this time on a regional basis - that the true extent of the rot in the Japanese financial system became fully apparent. In the first quarter of 1998, Japan suffered an unprecedented 2% contraction in output. Since then the economy has been largely stagnant: current annual growth is around 1%. The sclerotic nature of Japanese politics, moreover, has meant that such attempts as have been made to address the underlying causes of the country's financial problems have made very slow progress. In the international

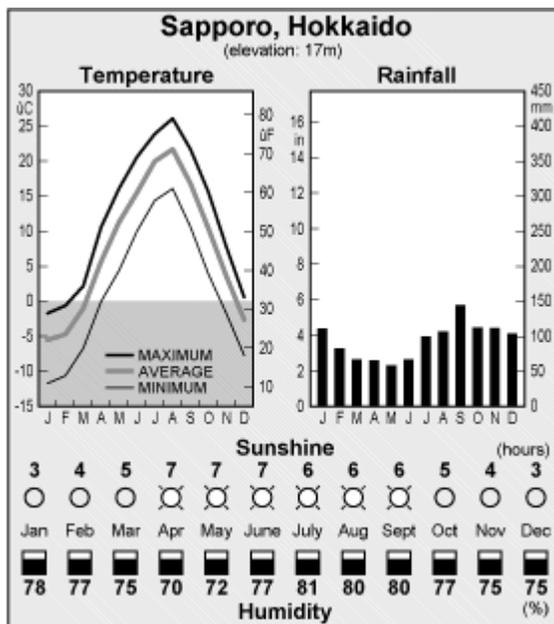
arena, Japan is a leading member of the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC) forum.

Business: A large supply of visiting cards printed in English and Japanese is essential. Cards can be quickly printed on arrival with Japanese translation on the reverse side. Appointments should be made in advance, and, because of the formality, visits should consist of more than a few days. Punctuality is important. Business discussions are often preceded by tea and are usually very formal. Office hours: 0900-1700 Monday to Friday.

Commercial Information: The following organisations can offer advice: Japanese Chamber of Commerce, 2nd Floor, Salisbury House, 29 Finsbury Circus, London EC2M 5QQ (tel: (020) 7628 0069; fax: (020) 7628 0248); or Nippon Shoko Kaigi-sho (Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry), 2-2 Marunouchi 3 Chome, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 100-0005 (tel: (3) 32 83 76 01; fax: (3) 32 16 64 97; web site: <http://www.jcci.or.jp/>); or JETRO (Japan External Trade Organisation), Internationalisation Centre, 2-2-5 Toranomon, Minato-ku, Tokyo 105-8466 (tel: (3) 35 82 55 11; fax: (3) 35 82 56 70; web site: <http://www.jetro.go.jp>).

Conferences/Conventions: The Japan Convention Bureau is a division of the Japan National Tourist Organisation (see address section); its Convention Planner's Guide to Japan lists 35 cities with conference facilities including Tokyo, Kyoto, Osaka, Yokohama, Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Kyoto has proved to be one of the most popular locations for international meetings over the last few years. For further information, contact the Japan Convention Bureau, 2-10-1 Yuraku-cho, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 100-0006 (tel: (3) 32 16 29 05; fax: (3) 32 16 19 78; e-mail: convention@jnto.go.jp; web site: <http://www.jnto.go.jp>).

12 CLIMATE



Except for the Hokkaido area and the subtropical Okinawa region, the weather is mostly temperate, with four seasons. Winters are cool and sunny in the south, cold and sunny around Tokyo (which occasionally has snow), and very cold around Hokkaido, which is covered in snow for up to four months a year. Summer, between June and September, ranges from warm to very

hot, while spring and autumn are generally mild throughout the country. Rain falls throughout the year but June and early July is the main rainy season. Hokkaido, however, is much drier than the Tokyo area. Rainfall is intermittent with sunshine. Typhoons are only likely to occur in September or October but rarely last more than a day.

Required clothing: Lightweight cottons and linens are required throughout summer in most areas. There is much less rainfall than in Western Europe. Light- to mediumweights during spring and autumn; medium- to heavyweights for winter months, according to region. Much warmer clothes will be needed in the mountains all year round.

13 HISTORY AND GOVERNMENT

History: Until the late 16th century Japan was governed by a group of feudal barons, most of whose energies were devoted to warring amongst themselves. External threats, such as attempted Mongol invasions in the late 13th century, nonetheless served to unite the various factions against the common enemy and create a latent national consciousness which emerged gradually over the next 300 years. The actual unification of Japan began during the Tokugawa period 1600-1868, during which a national administrative hierarchy was forged from the family structures of the ruling class. During this period the shogun, a powerful warlord, retained supreme executive power. One of the hallmarks of this period from an outsider's perspective was Japan's unyielding resistance to foreign influence; and despite its powerful position in the region, which brought it into contact with the European imperial powers, Japan conducted a kind of anti-foreign policy. In the late 19th century, as the Tokugawa regime eventually declined into inertia and profligacy, a new breed of rulers took control and embarked on a programme of rapid industrialisation, establishing a Western-style system of administration in the process. Executive power reverted to the emperor. Japan's imperial ambitions in the Far East developed during this period, exemplified by the occupation of Korea in 1905 after the defeat of its main imperial rival, Russia, in a war which had begun the previous year. The Japanese took little active part in the First World War, despite a formal declaration of war on Germany, but Japanese factories produced munitions and supplies for the allies throughout. In the 1920s and 1930s, Japan resumed its expansionist regional policies, with China as the main target. Coming up against the British, who had substantial political and economic interests in China, it contributed to the subsequent alliance with Germany in the Second World War. Between 1938 and 1941 Japan's forces occupied China and South-East Asia, expelling the British from Singapore, Malaysia and Hong Kong. The American entry into the war in response to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor turned the balance against the Japanese, who were slowly pushed back over the following four years, finally surrendering after the nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Japan was occupied by American troops, and in 1946, the Americans imposed the constitution that governs Japan today. The main political party, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), was formed in 1955 from a coalition of centre-right groups and held power until 1993, taking slightly under 50% of the vote at successive elections. The LDP's monopoly of power was first shaken in 1989 by a succession of financial and other scandals which threatened to undermine the Japanese political system. The main opposition, the Socialist Party, led by Japan's leading woman politician Takako Doi, made some inroads into the overwhelming LDP majority but did not yet pose a serious threat. Japan acquired a new Emperor in 1989 when Akihito succeeded his father, Hirohito. The role and status of the Emperor is a sensitive issue in modern Japan. Despite the Americans' best efforts, Hirohito was never fully rehabilitated because of his knowledge of Japanese war crimes; Akihito represents a new generation of Emperor whom observers of royalty expect to adopt the style of European monarchs rather than the inaccessible demi-god status of his predecessors. As for his country, Akihito's 'descent to mortality' should coincide with Japan's assumption of a profile in the international community more consistent with its economic muscle, although several

instances during the early 1990s suggest that this may be some time in coming. The Japanese contribution to the anti-Iraqi coalition was exclusively financial: the sum proffered, totalling US\$4 billion, was provided, or so it appeared in some Western capitals, somewhat reluctantly. The American-drafted constitution imposed upon Japan after 1945 forbade the deployment of Japanese military personnel outside the country (but see below). Nor has Tokyo's foreign policy been outstandingly successful elsewhere: Japan proved to be the exception to the Soviet Union's trail-blazing diplomacy from the mid-1980s onwards. The reason is a territorial dispute over ownership of the Northern Territories (as the Japanese refer to them), known as the Kurile Islands by the Russian Federation, under whose jurisdiction the islands now fall. The islands lie off the northern coast of Hokkaido amid rich fishing grounds and perhaps large mineral deposits. To the West, the development of Japanese relations with the European Union are broadly governed by a declaration of intent on future political and economic cooperation made at a mini-summit between representatives of the two in 1991. Trade imbalance and access to markets are the main issues of contention between the two, but the divisions are not yet as pronounced as those between the USA and Japan. The area where Japan has made most progress is in its own backyard of the Far East, where memories of Japan's brutal occupation are gradually fading (though they are still an important political consideration). Awkward bilateral relations, such as those with the Koreans - both North and South - have undergone notable improvement, partially overcoming a legacy of bitterness that dates back to the Japanese wartime occupation. In the autumn of 1995, Japan supplied several hundred thousand tonnes of rice to alleviate North Korea's desperate food shortage. Japan now invests more in the Pacific Basin region than in the United States and, under the new world order, Japan is assuming the principal role in guaranteeing regional security. In June 1992, after nearly two years of fractious debate, the Diet passed a law permitting Japanese troops to be stationed overseas. Rigorous conditions upon their deployment essentially limit them to peace-keeping functions. Relations with China continue to be particularly sensitive, a legacy of the Japanese occupation during the 1930s and 1940s, despite formal normalisation in 1972. Back at home, Toshiki Kaifu was unceremoniously dumped in mid-1991, to be replaced by Kiichi Miyazawa, a former Finance Ministry official and deputy premier who, at 72, was taking his last shot at the top job. Miyazawa was also one of the leaders of the three main LDP factions - powerful parties within a party which decide policies and divide up Cabinet jobs between them. Miyazawa lasted barely a year before losing in a vote of no confidence in June 1993 (after falling out with another faction). At the general election which followed in July, the Liberal Democratic Party lost its overall majority in the Diet for the first time since 1955 and found itself in opposition. Facing it was a 7-party coalition composed of the Social Democrats (who lost as much if not more electoral ground than the LDP), Socialists, centrists and LDP defectors. The latter included Shinseito (Japan Renewal), Sakigake (Harbinger) and Nihon Shinto (Japan New Party) whose leader, Morihiro Hosokawa, assumed the premiership. This unwieldy alliance lasted just under a year before collapsing. In the realignment that followed, the Social Democrats teamed up with the LDP and some of its defectors to form a unique left-right coalition government. The Social Democrat leader, Tomiichi Murayama, took over as Prime Minister. Inside the LDP, a new personality was coming to the fore: Ryutaro Hashimoto, who became trade minister in the new government and quickly established a name for himself as a tough negotiator in the bruising session with the Americans over the disputed trade in cars, electronics and other advanced technology, and intellectual property rights. During 1995, Hashimoto consolidated his position within the government by taking over the leadership of the LDP. On 5 January 1996 Murayama resigned His Social Democratic Party seemed to be suffering the political equivalent of an identity crisis, reinventing themselves as the Democratic League - purportedly a new party but without any change in personnel or policies. Hashimoto was elected Prime Minister on 11 January, with 288 votes to his nearest rival's 167. A coalition cabinet dominated by the LDP was duly formed, and its first draft budget approved in May 1996. In March, the New Socialist Party (NSP) was formed by left-wing defectors from the SDPJ. Hatoyama also left the New Party Sakigake and founded the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), which also mopped up members of the SDPJ and the NFP. The LDP won the October general

election. Hashimoto was re-elected Prime Minister for a second term, and formed the first single party Cabinet since 1993. In early 1997, the Government unveiled a programme aimed at sweeping economic and administrative reforms, including a reduction in public expenditure and government bureaucracy. But their implementation was stalled by the economic crisis which took hold that summer. The collapse, in November, of Yamaichi Securities and subsequently several other major financial institutions only served to illustrate the weakness of the country's financial regulatory and supervisory systems, and the Government was forced to take emergency deregulation and stimulus measures. The poor economic situation, another series of corruption scandals and an associated political crisis, and finally a major defeat for the LDP in elections to the Upper House finally undermined the position of premier Hosokawa who was forced out of office. After the customary semi-clandestine horse-trading, Foreign Minister Keizo Obuchi was selected to take over the premiership. After an inauspicious start, Obuchi gradually grew into the job: his term of office was generally perceived as fairly successful and effective until he was suddenly incapacitated by a stroke in April 2000 (he died the following month - coincidentally, his principal backer among the LDP faction leaders, Noburu Takeshita, is also suffering serious illness). Yoshiro Mori, leader of another LDP faction, took over the helm (albeit with Takeshita's approval). The LDP faces the electorate in October 2000, and should retain its parliamentary control. At that point, a major struggle is expected among the party factions as a new generation of leaders emerge to challenge the old stalwarts, such as Takeshita, whose reign is now ending.

Government: The Japanese parliament is the bicameral Kokkai (or Diet). The upper house (Sangi-in) has 252 members directly elected from constituencies for six-year terms (half of which are renewed every three years). The lower house (Shugi-in) has 500 members elected four-year terms partly by single-seat constituencies, partly by proportional representation. The Diet approves the appointment of a prime minister who holds executive power with the assistance of a cabinet of ministers. The appointment of the prime minister is formally entrusted to the emperor who is head of state but has negligible constitutional powers.

14 OVERVIEW

Country Overview: The Japanese archipelago has long been a favourite of more adventurous travellers, and with high-tech Tokyo and vibrant Osaka increasingly popular choices for long-haul stopovers, and Japanese culture more fashionable than ever, there has never been a better time to explore this multifaceted country.

While the bustling cities won't fail to impress those in search of the clichés of the Japanese success story - skyscrapers, bullet trains, trendy nightlife and rampant consumerism - beneath the brash modernity beats an ancient heart. This is the realm of emperors and shoguns, the exquisite art of the geisha and the skill of the sumo wrestler. A land of great natural beauty where ancient festivals are celebrated according to the seasons and food is elevated to an art form.

And from the snow festivals and lavender farms of the northern isle of Hokkaido, via Kyoto's shrines and temples, to the sun-drenched beaches of the sub-tropical south, superb public transport means everywhere is easily accessible. Japan is one of the safest countries in the world, and there's no need to worry about the language barrier - the Japanese are unfailingly friendly so help is always at hand. Whether you choose to climb Mount Fuji or relax at volcanic hot spring resorts, delight in traditional performing arts or lose yourself in high-tech wonderland, Japan is a truly unforgettable destination.