

# Japan

Japan is an island country that lies off the eastern coast of mainland Asia and is home to approximately 127 million people. It is a fascinating country with a unique culture and customs. In addition to this, Japan is also one of the most technologically sophisticated countries in the world. For example, Japan is the world's third largest manufacturer of automobiles and the largest electronic goods industry. It is commonly regarded as one of the most innovative countries in the world as well as being ranked one of the healthiest countries to live in. So, what makes it so special?



## School Life



Education is central to Japanese culture and Japanese people tend to be highly educated as a result. At school, children study Japanese, English, mathematics, science, social studies, music, crafts, physical education, home economics and ICT. Students also learn traditional Japanese arts and skills such as calligraphy, origami and haikus. Children are required to be in education up until the age of nine, however 98% of students decide to carry on their education into high school.

## Sport in Japan

Sport is a significant part of Japanese culture. Traditional sports, such as sumo and martial arts, are popular as well as sports adopted from western culture such as baseball and football. Sumo wrestling is considered Japan's national sport and originates from a religious ritual from about 1500 years ago. Japan has hosted many international sporting competitions including the 1964 Summer Olympics in Tokyo and the 2019 Rugby World Cup. Tokyo (Japan's capital city) will be hosting the 2020 Summer Olympics.





The aim in sumo wrestling is to make your opponent touch the ground with any part of the body apart from the feet, or to force him or her out of the ring ('dohyo').

### Food in Japan

When people think about Japanese cuisine, they probably think of sushi. However, sushi is not the only food eaten in Japan. Vegetarian food is very popular, especially 'natto', which is a very smelly dish made from fermented soybeans. Rice is a common ingredient in most meals as well as a variety of noodles such as thick wheat noodles or buckwheat noodles. Although many Japanese people use forks and knives to eat, chopsticks ('hashi' in Japanese) are still the traditional eating utensil and are an important part of Japanese culture and tradition. Some children are taught how to use chopsticks before they can even walk because it is considered to be an essential skill.

### Tea Ceremony

An ancient and unique ritual in Japan is the Japanese tea ceremony. It is an elaborate event in which green tea is prepared in front of and shared between special guests using special tools and equipment. Tea ceremonies represent harmony, respect purity and tranquillity and can last for several days. Tea ceremonies are traditionally held in a tatami room and the entrance is kept low so that guests have to bend when they enter.

### Children's Day

Children's Day ('Kodomo no hi') is celebrated annually on 5<sup>th</sup> May in Japan. On this day, families celebrate the healthy growth and happiness of children. Households fly large, colourful, carp-shaped streamers called Koinobori outside their houses. The carp was chosen because it symbolizes strength and success as Japanese legend says that a carp swam upstream and turned into a dragon.

### Did You Know...?

The kimono is the traditional Japanese outfit. The kimono varies depending on the occasion at which it is being worn and can be worn by women, men and children.



# Questions

1. **Find and copy** a word in the second paragraph which means **necessary**.

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2. What is calligraphy? Tick **one**.

- ☐ a dance
- ☐ a sport
- ☐ a type of food
- ☐ a special way of writing

3. Explain why it might be useful to be a large, strong person if you want to become a sumo wrestler. Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

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4. What sporting event will be hosted by Japan in 2019? Tick **one**.

- ☐ Football World Cup
- ☐ Summer Olympics
- ☐ Rugby World Cup
- ☐ Tennis Championship

5. **Find and copy** a word that means **food**.

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6. What are the carp-shaped streamers called that people hang outside their houses on Children's Day?

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7. Explain why you think the entrance of a tatami room is kept so low. Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

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# Questions

8. If you could adopt one of the Japanese customs that you have read about, which one would you choose and why? Explain your answer fully.

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