



Japan

PR Country Landscape 2004

Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management

Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management • c/o USI Università della Svizzera Italiana
via Giuseppe Buffi 13 CH-6900 Lugano • Switzerland phone +41 58 666 47 72 • fax +41 58 666 46 47
e-mail info@globalalliancepr.org • website www.globalalliancepr.org

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Country Profile

Introduction

Despite its advanced technology, Japan is still a traditional society with strong social and employment hierarchies - Japanese men have always tended to work for the same employer for their entire life. But this and other traditions are under pressure as a young generation influenced by western culture and ideas enters the work force.

Geography: Japan has a total of 377,835 square kilometers, with a land area of 374,744 square kilometers. It is comprised of mountainous islands with numerous dormant and active volcanoes. Four main islands (Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku, and Kyushu) and numerous smaller islands to the north and south make up the country and all areas are prone to earthquakes. The highest point in Japan is Mount Fuji (3,776 meters). Japan is also home to numerous, rapidly flowing rivers that are largely un-navigable but provide water for irrigation and hydroelectric-power generation.

Climate: The climate changes as the country sweeps from northeast to southwest. In the north warm summers and long cold winters are the norm. Hot humid summers and short winters are common to the center of the country, and long, hot, humid summers, and mild winters are home to the southwest.

Population: Japan has the ninth largest population in the world, with approximately 127 million inhabitants. The population, about half that of the United States, lives on 1/25 as much land, resulting in one of the highest population densities in the world. Because Japan has a mountainous backbone, most of its population lives along the coasts, especially the eastern coast of the main island of Honshû, from Tokyo to Hiroshima.

Capital City: The national capital is Tokyo. However, there are discussions to move the capital by 2011, because Tokyo is overcrowded and close to major geological fault lines.

Ethnic Groups: The majority of the people in Japan are ethnically Japanese. The Ainu are an indigenous population who live in Hokkaidô, the most northern of the main islands of Japan. There are fewer than 20,000 of these people left, and they are becoming culturally absorbed into the rest of the population despite efforts to preserve their culture.

Koreans, who number about 700,000, are the largest minority in Japan, representing about 54 per cent of total foreigners.

The next largest groups of foreigners are Chinese. Numbering about 200,000, the Chinese comprise 15 per cent of total foreigners. Another large group is Brazilians who represent about 11.5 per cent of the country's foreign population.

Westerners and other non-Japanese make up less than one-half of one per cent of the population. Most are in Tokyo and other urban centers. About 100,000 foreigners legally enter Japan to work each year.

Language: Japanese is the main language; however there is a major emphasis on English as second language.

National Holidays: There are three major holiday periods during which it is extremely difficult to conduct business.

- The New Year holiday period, from December 28 through the first few days of January.
- Golden Week, a string of separate but clustered holidays, celebrated from April 29 to May 5 or 7.
- The Obon Festival celebrated in July or August from the 13th to the 15th, depending on region.

Religion: The main religions in Japan are Shintô and Buddhism. Christianity varies from less than one per cent to three per cent of the total population, but the lower figure is more commonly cited.

Currency: the yen.

Economy

Japan is the second largest economy in the world next to the United States. Japan produces nearly 18 per cent of the world's output.

Japan, along with other Western industrialized countries is considered a stable economy. Inflation has historically been low, and Japan has been able to control it better than most countries.

Japan's industrial structure is similar to most industrialized countries in that manufacturing, trade, and services comprise the bulk of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Agriculture, forestry, fishing, and mining are extremely small segments of the GDP.

Japan has a competitive domestic market with demanding customers who insist upon ever-increasing quality. As a result this has helped the country become a strong international competitor, especially in automobiles and consumer electronics.

Japanese companies have large market shares in many of the world's leading industries, as well as in China and Southeast Asia, two of the world's fastest growing markets. Japan has gained leadership positions in such technologies as flat-panel displays, audio and video equipment, various automotive technologies, and supercomputers. Its manufacturing technology is considered world class.

Fiscal Year: April 1-March 31.

Government

The Japanese government is a Constitutional Democracy composed of three branches: legislative, executive, and judicial. Japanese citizens can vote in national and local elections when they reach the age of 20.

The highest level of the legislative branch of the government is the National Diet. It consists of two houses, the House of Representatives and the House of Councilors. Members of the 500-seat House of Representatives serve four-year terms; half of the members of the 252-seat House of Councilors serve six-year terms and another half serve three-year terms.

The executive branch is headed by the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister is a member of the Diet and is chosen by other members of the Diet. The Prime Minister chooses members of the Cabinet, which is made up of 20 Ministers. Each Minister heads a government department, such as Education, Finance, or Labor.

The executive branch is answerable to the Diet, making the Japanese governmental structure more similar to the British parliamentary system than to the three independent branches of the federal government in the United States.

The highest level of the judicial branch is the Supreme Court. Beneath it are the appellate courts, the district courts and courts of more limited jurisdiction. The Japanese legal system is modeled in part on the legal systems of continental Europe and the Anglo-American common law system.

For information on the executive go to the following link:

<http://www.kantei.go.jp/foreign/index-e.html>

Politics

Japan has a number of political parties. They include: the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), the Social Democratic Party (SDP), the Kômeitô Party, and the Japanese Communist Party (JCP).

Until the early 1990s, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) was the leading political party in Japan and had been dominant for over three decades. The LDP lost power to a coalition government in the early 1990s. Since then, Japan has been led by a coalition government, but the coalitions have been constantly shifting.

The Imperial Family

The Imperial Family is regarded by the Japanese to be the longest unbroken imperial line in the world. Though the emperor has no governmental power in modern-day Japan and is no longer regarded as divine, he and the Imperial Family play a ceremonial role in goodwill trips and state functions.

The Imperial Family is generally liked, and the Japanese media - even the tabloid press - are respectful of it.

<http://www.anderson.ucla.edu/research/japan/mainfrm.htm>

http://www.kantei.go.jp/foreign/koizumidaijin/020930/index_e.html

Tips for Conducting Business in Japan

- **Greetings** - The Japanese are very aware of Western habits, and will often greet you with a handshake. The bow is their traditional greeting. If someone bows to greet you, observe carefully. Bow to the same depth as you have been bowed to, because the depth of the bow indicates the status relationship between you. As you bow, lower your eyes. Keep your palms flat against your thighs.
- **Gestures** - Japan is a high-context culture; even the smallest gesture carries great meaning. Therefore, avoid expansive arm and hand movements, unusual facial expressions, or dramatic gestures of any kind.
- **Business Cards** - The business card is extremely important for establishing credentials. The card should be printed in both Japanese and English. Present your card with the Japanese side facing your colleague, in such a manner that it can be read immediately. Once given a card, study it carefully before placing it on the table. Do not put the cards in your pocket or in your wallet if you plan to put it in your back pocket. Never write on a person's business card.
- **Dress** - Men should wear conservative suits, and never appear casual. Slip-on shoes are best, as you will remove them frequently. Women should dress conservatively, keeping jewelry, perfume, and makeup to a minimum. Pants are not appropriate. High heels are to be avoided if you risk towering over your Japanese counterparts. If you wear a kimono, wrap it left over right! Only corpses wear them wrapped right over left.
- **Negotiating** - A Japanese response "I'll consider it" may actually mean "no." Negatively phrased questions will get a "yes" if the Japanese speaker agrees. Negotiations are begun at the executive level and continued at the middle level (working level). (<http://www.getcustoms.com/articles/dba.html>)

Practicing Public Relations in Japan

Public relations is a well-developed profession in Japan, similar to that of North America. There are a large number of firms which practice public relations in Japan. Some are based in Japan while others are international organizations based mainly in the United States. The firms operate in different areas of public relations including: corporate, product, marketing, government, academic related, investor relations, crisis communications, health, IT, and others. Areas of specialization vary between companies, but may include: consultation, press relations, production, research, events and more.

Public Relations firms in Japan

Kyodo Public Relations Company

<http://www.kyodopr.co.uk/>

Kyodo PR is Japan's the largest independent public relations counseling firms in Japan. Established in 1964, Kyodo PR is engaged in all aspects of public relations, including counseling, media relations and promotional support for marketing and consumer sales.

Tokyo Doko

<http://www.tokyodoko.com/>

Kyodo Public Relations is engaged in all aspects of public relations in Japan, including overall counseling, media relations and promotional support for marketing and consumer sales. Kyodo public relations philosophy is based on efficiency and personal contacts with the media.

Voce Communications

<http://www.vocecommunications.com/>

Voce Communications provides communication support to technology companies.

Hoffman Agency

<http://www.hoffmanasia.com/ap/rev2/html/bground/background.htm>

Hoffman Asia Pacific is headquartered in Hong Kong, with regional offices in China, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea and Singapore. It boasts having a strong knowledge of the IT and Internet industries as well as the ability to localize PR on a country-by-country basis.

PRAP Japan, Inc.

<http://www.prap.co.jp>

PRAP Japan is a leading international public relations firm in Japan. The company provides communication services in consumer branding, high-tech communication, corporate financial communication and investor relations, health care and entertainment.

Arex Corporation

<http://www.arex-corp.com/english1/profil.htm>

A public relations consulting firm based in Tokyo, Japan.

IRJ Group

<http://www.irjgroup.co.jp/>

The IRJ Group was established in 1984 as the first Japanese company specializing in investor relations (IR) services.

DENTSU Public Relations

<http://www.dpr.co.jp/english/index.html>

Dentsu Public Relations is one of Japan's largest communications agencies since 1961.

TSUKI Planning

<http://www.tsuki-p.com/e-index.htm>

TSUKI is a public relations firm specializing in consultation, media relations, research and special events.

Focused Communications

http://www.focused.co.jp/index_e.html

Focused Communications is a public relations consultancy providing professional communications services to Japanese and multinational clients in Japan.

International Language & Culture Center

<http://www.ilcc.com/eg/index.html>

ILCC has been providing global communication services in Tokyo, Japan since 1976.

Asahia Agency

<http://www.asahiagency.com/about/index.html>

The Asahi Agency is a marketing communications agency that provides customized assistance to global clients in every aspect of marketing and communications in Japan.

Public Relations / Communications Associations and Societies in Japan

Public Relation Society of Japan

<http://www.prsj.or.jp/english/>

International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) (Asia/Pacific Region)

<http://www.iabc.com/about/leaders1.cfm?vch=CH-11-905>

Role of the Media

Television and Newspapers - Mass media in Japan experiences huge consumption. Japan has the world's highest rate of literacy, and 99 per cent of Japanese households receive a newspaper every day. Television viewing is highly popular in Japan, while just under 99 per cent of Japan's households own a color TV set. Each of the nation's major daily papers is linked to one of the country's five national commercial TV networks (<http://www.anderson.ucla.edu/research/japan/t8/sup4art4.htm>).

Internet - Given that Japan provides the fastest and cheapest broadband services in the world, the Internet is becoming the most widely used news source in the country. The print industry is in a major decline while news consumption online continues to increase. While newspapers still have a daily circulation of 71 million, Web sites are receiving hundreds of millions of hits per month. Newspapers are responding to the situation by creating Web sites – over 79 per cent of newspapers have sites in 2003 (www.ojr.org/topics/index.php?tID=40; June 16, 2003).

Interacting with Media - The biggest issue in Japanese media is the use of kisha-clubs. Kisha-clubs have been in Japan since the first club was established in 1890 to fight for media access to parliament and organize press conferences. Japan officially has about 800 kisha-clubs, though the actual number is thought to be about 1,500. Most are tied to government bodies (such as ministries and provincial governments), large firms, political parties and the Imperial Palace. Their members are more than 12,000 journalists from nearly 160 media affiliated to the Nihon Shimbun Kyokai (Japanese Newspaper Publishers and Editors Association) (http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=4483).

The system of kisha-clubs has more recently evolved into a cartel for the mainstream media and ultimately, the system rewards self-censorship, fosters uniformity and stifles competition. Only the five main daily newspapers, big regional papers and TV news stations have the staff and financial resources to join every club (Watts, 2002).

Within the past two years though, kisha-clubs have been facing protests from the European Union (EU). The EU has demanded that accredited foreign correspondents be given full access to all government press conferences, and that kisha-clubs ultimately be abolished. Foreign journalists are denied access to important media events (Yamamoto, 2002). At the conclusion of 2002, the Japan Newspaper Publishers and Editors Association had responded to the situation by reinstating a subcommittee to rebut criticism against the club system and consider ideas to better manage the clubs.

For a comprehensive list of Japanese media, including television, magazines and radio, you can visit: www.asianmediaguide.com/japanese/jm.htm. Another site that provides general links to media is: www.ouc.bc.ca/arts/mola/jp/links-media.htm. Most of the sites provide information in both Japanese and English.

Listing of Media

Television

Nippon Television (Same group as Yomiuri Shinbun)

<http://www.ntv.co.jp/english/>

Fuji Television (Same group as Sankei Shinbun)

<http://www.fujitv.co.jp/jp/index.html>

TBS (Same Group as Mainichi Shinbun)

<http://www.tbs.co.jp/index.html>

TV Asahi (Same Group as Asahi Shinbun)

<http://www.tv-asahi.co.jp/anb/kokusai/>

Government-managed TV station (Japan Broadcasting Company) NHK

<http://www.nhk.or.jp/englishtop/>

Newspapers

Yomiuri Shinbun (Nippon Television)

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/index-e.htm>

Asahi Shinbun (TV Asahi)

<http://www.asahi.com/english/>

Mainichi Shinbun (TBS)

<http://mdn.mainichi.co.jp/>

Sankei Shinbun (Fuji Television)

<http://www.sankei.co.jp/>

Radio

Inter FM

<http://www.interfm.co.jp/>

J-Wave

<http://www.j-wave.co.jp/>

Tokyo FM

<http://www.tfm.co.jp/index.html>

TBS Radio

<http://www.tbs.co.jp/radio/>

Financial Institutions

Structure - Japan's financial system is unique among large industrialized countries. For instance, large banks are at the center of the financial system and have close links to the keiretsu (powerful industrial groups). However, the Japanese financial system has been undergoing a process of liberalization, or deregulation, which began in the mid-1980s. These changes are making it easier for foreign companies, especially financial services firms, to do business in Japan.

Using Banks - By staying informed of these changes, Western businesses will be better able to perceive new opportunities as they arise. In personal interactions with bankers, it is useful to know whether or not their bank is the result of a merger, even if the merger happened several years ago. Bank mergers are not as final as Westerners might expect. Often the banks are divided into long-running factions consisting of personnel from the former banks.

Bank of Japan - The Bank of Japan (BOJ), the nation's central bank (not a savings or commercial bank), has major influence on interest rates, and Japanese businessmen closely follow the activities closely. It is similar to the Federal Reserve in the United States and the Bank of England in the UK. (<http://www.anderson.ucla.edu/research/japan/mainfrm.htm>)

Listing of Banks

Mizuho Financial Group

<http://www.mizuho-fg.co.jp/english/>

Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corporation

<http://www.smbc.co.jp/global/index.html>

UFJ Bank

<http://www.ufjbank.co.jp/ippan/english/index.html>

Bank of Tokyo-Mitsubishi

<http://www.btm.co.jp/english/index.htm>

Listing of Other Key Resources

Japan Association of Corporate Executives

http://www.doyukai.or.jp/E_index.htm

Japan Association of Translators

<http://www.jat.org/>

Japan Marketing Association

<http://www.jma-jp.org/eng/jheng.htm>

WWW Servers in Japan

http://www.libra.titech.ac.jp/libraries_Japan_e.html

A complete listing of library web sites "in English" maintained by research or academic libraries in Japan (includes some library associations).

Jump to Library

<http://ss.cc.affrc.go.jp/ric/opac/opacE.html>

A list of links featuring the main libraries in Japan

Academia/Education: Libraries and Archives: National and Administrative Libraries

<http://www.jinjapan.org/jd/org/007024122.html#007024122002>

National Institute for Research Advancement

<http://www.nira.go.jp/>

Japan Economic Foundation

<http://www.jef.or.jp/en/index.html>

Economics Departments, Institutes and Research Centers in the World.

<http://edirc.repec.org/ttanks.html>

Japan Centre for International Exchange

<http://www.jcie.or.jp/>

News and feature articles on area economy and business, events, and culture

<http://www.kippo.or.jp/>

Contact information

The Global Alliance is always interested in cooperating with local institutions and associations to provide profiles of the social, economic and media context of member countries, along with details on the local public relations industry, its main activities and tips on successful local practice.

For suggestions and discussion, please contact:

Anne Gregory, Global Alliance Chair, a.gregory@leedsmet.ac.uk

Catherine Arrow, Global Alliance Secretary, catherine.arrow@gmail.com

Dr. Judy VanSlyke Turk, APR, Fellow PRSA, Global Alliance Board Member, jvturk@vcu.edu

Juan Carlos Molleda, Ph.D., Project Coordinator and Professor at the University of Florida, jmolleda@jou.ufl.edu

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c/o USI Università della Svizzera Italiana □ via Giuseppe Buffi 13 □ CH-6900 Lugano □
Switzerland

phone +41 58 666 47 72 □ fax +41 58 666 46 47

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