

Location:

Japan consists of several thousands of islands, of which Honshu, **Hokkaido**, **Kyushu** and **Shikoku** are the four largest. Japan's closest neighbors are Korea, Russia and China. The Sea of Japan separates the Asian continent from the Japanese archipelago.

Area:

Japan's area is comparable to that of Germany or California. Japan's northernmost islands are located on a similar geographical latitude as Milan or Portland, while her southernmost islands are on a similar latitude as the Bahamas. More than 50% of the country is mountainous and covered by forests. Japan is politically structured into 8 **regions** and 47 **prefectures**.

Population:

The population of Japan is about 125,000,000, including approximately two million foreign residents. More than half of the non Japanese population is of Korean descent.

Earthquakes and Volcanos:

Because Japan is located in a region, where several continental plates meet, the country experiences frequent earthquakes. Please visit the special page about **earthquakes**. For the same reason, there are many volcanos in Japan. Japan's most famous volcano and highest mountain is **Mt.Fuji**.

Climate:

Due to the large North South extension of the country, the climate varies strongly in different regions. The climate in most of the major cities, including Tokyo, is temperate to subtropic and consists of four seasons. The winter is mild and the summer is hot and humid. There is a **rainy season** in early summer, and **typhoons** hit parts of the country every year during late summer. The climate of the northern island of Hokkaido and the Sea of Japan coast is colder, and **snow** falls in large amounts. In Okinawa, on the other hand, the mean temperature of January is a warm 17 degrees Celsius.

Mt. Fuji

Mount Fuji (富士山, Fujisan) is with 3776 meters Japan's highest mountain. It is not surprising that the nearly perfectly shaped volcano has been worshiped as a sacred mountain and experienced big popularity among **artists** and common people throughout the centuries.

Mount Fuji is an active volcano, which most recently erupted in 1708. It stands on the border between **Yamanashi** and **Shizuoka** Prefectures and **can be seen** from **Tokyo** and **Yokohama** on clear days.

Another easy way to **view Mount Fuji** is from the **train** on a trip between Tokyo and Osaka. If you take the **shinkansen** from **Tokyo** in direction of **Nagoya**, **Kyoto** and **Osaka**, the best view of the mountain can be enjoyed from around Shin-Fuji Station on the right hand side of the train, about 40-45 minutes into the journey.

Note however, that clouds and poor visibility often block the view of Mount Fuji, and you have to consider yourself lucky if you get a clear view of the mountain. Visibility tends to be better during the colder seasons of the year than in summer, and in the early morning and late evening hours than during the middle of the day.

If you want to enjoy Mount Fuji at a more leisurely pace and from a nice natural surrounding, you should head to the **Fuji Five Lake** (Fujigoko) region at the northern foot of the mountain, or to **Hakone**, a nearby **hot spring** resort. Mount Fuji is officially open for **climbing** during July and August via several routes.

Rainy Season

In early summer, most parts of Japan get visited by a rainy season, the so called **tsuyu** (or baiyu), literally meaning "plum rain", because it coincides with the season of **plums** ripening.

The rainy season is caused by the collision of cold northerly and warm southerly air masses, which results in a relatively stable bad weather front over the Japanese archipelago for several weeks.

In most of Japan, the rainy season lasts from the beginning of June to mid July, while it affects the islands of **Okinawa** about one month earlier. Only Japan's northern most main island of **Hokkaido** gets barely affected by the rainy season.

The following table shows the average starting and ending dates of the rainy season for selected **regions of Japan**, according to the Japan Meteorological Agency:

Region	Start	End
Okinawa	May 8	June 23
Southern Kyushu	May 29	July 13
Shikoku	June 4	July 17
Kinki (incl. Osaka, Kyoto)	June 6	July 19
Kanto (incl. Tokyo)	June 8	July 20
Northern Tohoku	June 12	July 27

During the rainy season it does not rain every day. In fact, **Tokyo** registers only an average of 12 rainy days in June, while 120 hours of sunshine are recorded. As for the amount of rainfall, it varies from days with intensive downpours to other days with occasional sprinkles.

Nevertheless, the rainy season is not the most suitable **season for visiting Japan**, even though it can have its advantages. For example, travel activity is rather low during June, which clears many popular outdoor **attractions** from the many visitors that are usually present.

Furthermore, some sights can be very attractive in rain, especially some **temples**, **gardens** and **hot springs**. All you need to enjoy traveling in the rain, is the right attitude and rain protection.