



COUNTRY INTRODUCTION

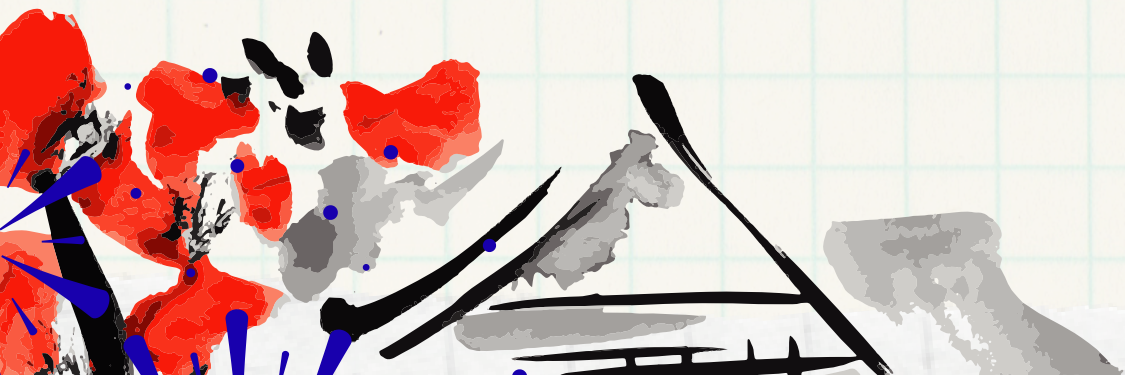
日本



WELCOME TO JAPAN!

Before we dive in, meet Archie and his friends, the Intrepid Explorers. They are five adventurous Australian kids who travel the world on missions to recover stolen artefacts or protect endangered species. This time, they are headed to Japan. Before landing, they have decided to read up on the country's geography, history, and wildlife, and we hope you have fun learning with them!

And the adventure does not stop there. On our website, www.thelittleexplorersjournal.com, under the resources page, we've also shared fun resources from their journey, including landmarks and animal cards, interactive activities linked to the country, and brain-teasing games to keep the whole family learning and having fun every step of the way.



OVERVIEW OF JAPAN

Japan is a country composed of thousands of islands, with over 6,800 of them. It's located in East Asia, in the Pacific Ocean. Even though there are so many islands, most people live on just four main ones: **Honshu, Hokkaido, Kyushu, and Shikoku.**

Japan is famous for its beautiful landscapes. You might have seen pictures of Mount Fuji, a snow-capped volcano that's one of the most famous mountains in the world. In the spring, the country turns pink and white with cherry blossoms, and people love to sit under the trees to take in the view. Japan also boasts warm, steamy hot springs where people (and even monkeys!) enjoy soaking and relaxing.

The capital city, Tokyo, is one of the busiest and most exciting cities on Earth, filled with neon lights, tall buildings, and high-tech everything. Japan is home to around 125 million people, which makes it the 12th most populated country in the world.

From ancient temples and sushi to robots and anime, Japan is a place where old traditions and futuristic inventions coexist.



HISTORY OF JAPAN

Japan's history stretches back thousands of years. People have lived in Japan since at least 30,000 BCE, but what we call the beginning of Japanese civilisation started around 300 BCE, during the Yayoi period, when people began farming rice and making metal tools.

Between 794 and 1185, during the Heian period, Japan's imperial court reached its peak, and art, poetry, and refined customs flourished. Later, Japan entered its feudal era (from approximately 1185 to 1603), during which influential military leaders, known as shoguns, ruled in the emperor's name. This was the age of the samurai, the brave and disciplined warriors who followed a strict code of honour called bushido.



HISTORY OF JAPAN

From 1603 to 1868, during the Edo period, Japan closed itself off from most of the world and enjoyed over 250 years of peace under the Tokugawa shogunate. But in 1868, everything changed with the Meiji Restoration. Japan opened its doors to the world, began modernising fast, building trains, schools, and factories, and transformed into a modern, industrial country.

In the 1930s and 1940s, Japan was involved in World War II, which brought great hardship and destruction. After the war ended in 1945, Japan rebuilt itself and became one of the most advanced and economically powerful countries in the world.

From early rice farmers and samurai warriors to bullet trains and high-tech robots, Japan's history is full of fascinating changes and amazing stories!



THE JAPANESE ECONOMY

Japan has the fourth-largest economy in the world, after the United States, China and Germany.

The country is a global leader in technology and manufacturing. It's especially famous for building cars. In fact, Toyota, based in Japan, has often been ranked the biggest car company in the world!

In the world of electronics, Japan has created some of the most popular products ever, like Sony PlayStation, Nintendo Switch, and super-sharp TVs and cameras. The country is also a pioneer in robotics; Japanese engineers have built robots that can play music, assist in hospitals, and even work in space.

The country is famous for its high-speed trains, too. The Shinkansen, also known as the bullet train, travels at speeds of up to 320 km/h (200 mph) and connects major cities such as Tokyo, Osaka, and Kyoto.

Although Japan is a high-tech country, farming remains important. Around 12% of Japan's land is used for agriculture, and rice is the most important crop. It's eaten in many forms, from sushi to rice balls called onigiri, and is a big part of Japanese culture.



TOURISM IN JAPAN

Japan is one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world, with over 36 million people visiting in 2024! There's so much to see and do, from ancient temples and shrines in Kyoto to the bright lights and skyscrapers of Tokyo.

Many visitors love soaking in traditional hot springs (called onsen), especially in mountain towns. Others come to ride the Shinkansen, Japan's famous bullet train that travels up to 320 km/h!

Japan is also known for its beautiful seasons. In spring, cherry blossoms fill the parks with pink petals, and in autumn, the trees turn brilliant shades of red and gold.



NATURE IN JAPAN

Japan is not just cities and trains, it's also full of amazing natural places! The country has everything from snowy mountains and alpine forests to tropical beaches and rocky coastlines. This mix of landscapes creates the perfect home for many unique animals.

One of the most famous animals is the Japanese macaque, also called the snow monkey. These clever monkeys live in the mountains and love to bathe in warm hot springs during the winter! You can also spot the red-crowned crane, a graceful bird that's a symbol of good luck and long life in Japanese culture.

Japan is also home to the Japanese giant salamander—one of the largest amphibians in the world! It can grow up to 1.5 meters long and lives in cool, clean rivers.

Surrounded by the ocean, Japan is rich in marine life, too. People often spot dolphins, whales, and all kinds of colourful fish in the waters around the islands. It's a fantastic place for diving and snorkelling, especially in places like Okinawa, where coral reefs are teeming with sea creatures.



JAPANESE FESTIVALS AND TRADITIONS



Japan is famous for its vibrant festivals, called matsuri, which celebrate everything from the changing seasons to ancient legends and local traditions. There are hundreds of them every year, and each one is full of colour, music, dancing, and delicious food!

One of the most famous is the Gion Matsuri in Kyoto, which dates back over 1,000 years! Giant wooden floats parade through the streets, and people wear beautiful traditional clothes called yukata. In Tokushima, crowds gather for the Awa Odori, a dance festival where thousands of people perform joyful, rhythmic moves in the streets. And during the Tanabata Star Festival, people write their wishes on colourful paper strips and hang them on bamboo trees to celebrate a legendary love story from the stars.

JAPANESE FESTIVALS AND TRADITIONS

But festivals aren't the only tradition!

Japan is also known for the tea ceremony, a peaceful and elegant practice where people prepare and drink green tea in a very special way.

There's also sumo wrestling, Japan's national sport, where giant wrestlers use strength and skill to push each other out of the ring.

And if you like drama and costumes, you'll love Kabuki theatre, where actors wear painted faces and perform exciting stories with music and dance.



JAPANESE CULTURE

In Japan, people value respect, harmony, and discipline in everyday life.

These ideas help everyone get along and keep things peaceful.

Japan is famous for its beautiful traditional arts. Calligraphy is the art of writing characters with a brush in graceful strokes. Ikebana is flower arranging, where every petal and branch is placed carefully to create a stunning display.

And origami is the fun and creative art of folding paper into animals, flowers, and even tiny cranes!



JAPANESE CUISINE

When it comes to food, Japan is renowned worldwide for its delicious and nutritious dishes.

Sushi—rice with fresh fish or vegetables—is probably the most famous. But there's also ramen, a warm noodle soup; tempura, crispy fried vegetables or seafood; and sashimi, which is just thin slices of raw fish served simply to enjoy its freshness.

The Japanese diet is considered one of the healthiest in the world because it emphasises fresh ingredients, seafood, rice, and a variety of vegetables.



CURIOSITIES ABOUT JAPAN

Did you know Japan has the longest monarchy in the world? The Japanese royal family dates back more than 2,600 years, which is significantly longer than most countries. The current emperor is part of a family tree that stretches back thousands of years.

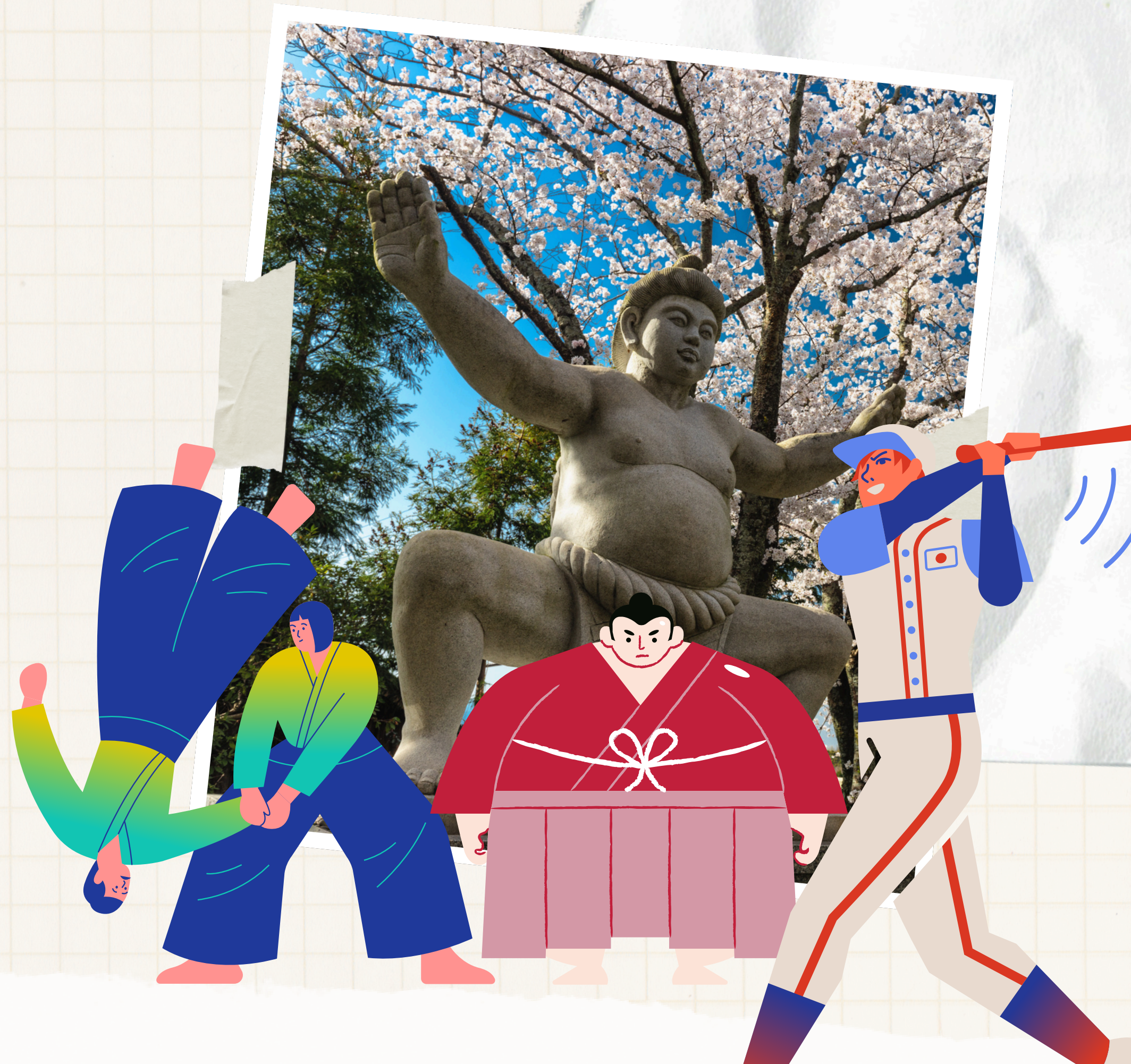
Japan is also famous for its vending machines. But these aren't ordinary machines that only sell drinks! In Japan, you can find vending machines that sell everything from hot meals and fresh fruit to even umbrellas and toys. There are about 5 million vending machines all around the country—that's roughly one for every 23 people!

And here's something different: in Japan, there's a special type of café called a "cat café" where you can drink tea or coffee while playing with friendly cats! There are even cafés with owls, rabbits, and hedgehogs.



SPORTS IN JAPAN

Sumo wrestling is the national sport of Japan, with a history that can be traced back centuries. Baseball is a sport that enjoys immense popularity, with a professional league that attracts large crowds. Japan also has a reputation for excellence in martial arts such as judo, karate and kendo. The country is also home to major sporting organisations.





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THANK YOU!

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Japanese Wildlife



Jigokudani monkeys (Snow Monkey)



📍 Habitat: Mountainous regions, especially in Nagano

These monkeys live in snowy areas and have figured out how to stay warm by relaxing in natural hot springs! They're the only monkeys in the world known to enjoy soaking in hot water (called onsen). They live in groups, use over 30 types of calls to talk, and even make snowballs for fun.

🧠 Fun Fact: According to Japanese folklore, the famous Jigokudani monkeys watched humans soaking in hot springs, decided to try it themselves, and now they're the only monkeys in the world known to enjoy bathing in an onsen. Monkey see, monkey do!

Tanuki (Japanese Raccoon Dog)



📍 Habitat: Forests, rural towns, and countryside

Tanuki may look like raccoons, but they're actually part of the dog family, closely related to foxes and wolves. These fluffy, masked animals are excellent climbers and swimmers, and they're the only canines that hibernate! In Japanese folklore, tanuki are magical shape-shifters and love playing tricks. They're symbols of good luck and are often depicted with large bellies and straw hats outside restaurants.

🧠 Fun Fact: In winter, tanuki cuddle up in their burrows with their partner, slow down their bodies, and sleep most of the season, but they'll wake up for a snack if it gets warm!

Japanese Giant Salamander



📍 Cold, fast-flowing rivers in central and western Japan

This ancient-looking creature can grow up to 1.5 meters (5 feet) long and lives mostly underwater, hiding between rocks. It's the second-largest salamander species in the world. The Japanese Giant Salamander barely makes any noise, but when it does, it sounds like a child crying! In Japan, it's nicknamed Hanzaki, which means "cut in half," because people once believed it could survive being sliced in two, thanks to its amazing ability to regrow parts of its body!

🧠 Fun Fact: It hasn't changed much in 30 million years, like a living fossil!

Japanese Flying Squirrel



 Habitat: Sub-alpine forests in Honshu and Kyushu

These tiny, fluffy creatures glide between trees using stretchy skin from their arms to their legs. They're nocturnal, which means they sleep during the day and come out at night. People love them because they look like real-life anime characters with big eyes and puffy cheeks.

 Fun Fact: They're completely silent and can leap 100 meters in one glide!

Ussuri Brown Bear (Higuma)



📍 Habitat: Forests and mountains of Hokkaido, northern Japan

The Ussuri brown bear is Japan's biggest land animal, sometimes weighing as much as 600 kg! It lives in the wild forests of Hokkaido, eating berries, nuts, fish, and even deer. In Ainu culture (the Indigenous people of Japan), this bear is considered sacred and deeply respected.

🧠 Fun Fact: In Ainu tradition, when a bear died, people held a special ceremony called iomante to thank the bear and send its spirit back to the gods, because they believed it was a gift from the heavens.