

## **THE PEOPLE OF JAPAN**

According to the World Bank, Japan's total population in 2014 is 127.1 million. This made Japan the seventh most populous nation in the world. The population has more than doubled since the first national census in 1920, when it was about 56 million. Population growth has slowed in recent years. The annual growth rate averaged 0.3% in the 1990-95 period, considerably lower than the world average of 1.6% - in 2014, their population actually decreased by 0.12%. As of 2014 Japan's population density was 348.7 persons per square kilometer, one of the highest in the world. By comparison, the population density was 1,277.4 persons per square kilometer in Bangladesh, 506.0 in South Korea, 345.1 in Belgium, 263.5 in Britain, 141.7 in China and 34.9 in the United States (2014 figures).

## **LIFE EXPECTANCY**

The average life expectancy at birth for the Japanese was 82 years for males and 87.2 years for females as of 2014, representing increases of about 30 years each over the past six decades. (The figures stood at 47 years for men and 50 years for women in 1935.) As of 2014, life expectancy in the US was 77.4 male/82.2 female. The sharp increase in Japan is attributed to the fact that infant mortality rates and deaths from epidemics, tuberculosis, and other diseases have declined significantly. The average death rate, which stood at 10.9 per 1,000 in 1950, was 9.1 per 1,000 in 2014, up from 8.7 the previous year. In 1950 there were 28.1 births per 1,000 people. The aging of society continues to advance. In 1950 children of up to 14 years accounted for 35% of the total population, adults (15-64 years) for 60% and the elderly (65 years and older) for 5.0%. In 1994 children accounted for 16.3% of the total population – in 2014, that number went down to 13.2, while adults went from 69.6 to 61.0%, and the elderly from 14.1 to 25.8%.

## **LEISURE**

There are certain times in Japan when holidays appear one after another, such as Golden Week, from the end of April to the beginning of May. Other full-scale holidays are at the end of the year (New Year's) and the middle of August (Bon festival).

Vacations are concentrated during these three periods. As a result, 3 times a year, the throng of people on transportation facilities and roads returning home to visit parents and coming back again, unfailingly becomes an issue. Travel abroad during this period reaches a peak at international airports such as New Tokyo International Airport (Narita), which is invariably congested with people.

There are businesses adopting flexible holidays to avoid the crowd. Taking annual vacations has become an accepted company policy, even taking days off has now become easier. An amendment of the labor Standard Law, carried out in April 1997, implemented a 40-hour week. Consequently, the era of a 5-day workweek has finally gained ground.

Based on the activities and polled opinions of those 15 years and older, the shorter the holiday, the more one indulges in pastimes like gambling. When the holiday is 2 to 3 days long, gambling decreases and activities such as driving, enjoying the outdoors and outdoor sports increase. When the holiday stretches to 3 or more days, domestic and international travel show a sharp increase, as well as activities in the areas of self enrichment including family communication, reading, and studying.

Source: US Census International Data Base

<http://www.census.gov/population/international/data/idb/informationGateway.php#WHATIS>

**INVESTIGATIVE QUESTION:** Given Japan’s population and geography, how do you think its people deal with the challenges of producing their food as well as their manners and behavior?

Using the Investigative Question, highlight major facts from the reading, then answer the following questions.

1. How does the current population of Japan compare to other nations?
  
2. Compare the population density of Japan with other countries.
  
3. Why has the life expectancy of Japanese gone up so sharply since 1935?
  
4. Explain each of the following, as they related to leisure:
  - a. “Golden Week”:
  
  - b. Vacations:
  
5. Why did the Japanese government create a 40-hour work week?
  
6. Why do you think gambling is such an important activity for Japanese on shorter vacations than longer ones?
  
7. **Investigative Question** – Write one 7-8 sentence response to the Question listed above.