

BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MARKET

Varied climate and topography

Japan is an island archipelago comprising of 6,900 islands including the main islands Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku and Kyushu and with a total surface area of 378,000 sq. kms. Climate-wise Japan belongs to the Temperate Zone and has four distinct seasons. The average annual temperature ranges from 10 to 20 degrees centigrade, while average annual rainfall is anywhere between 1,000 to 2,500 mm depending on the region. The climate can be generally characterized as hot and humid in summer and cold with sparse rain in winter. While the geographical features of the mountain range that traverses Honshu from north to south causes major differences in weather between the side facing the Pacific Ocean and the side facing the Sea of Japan, it can also be said that the presence of a monsoon season is a difference between Japan and European or American locations at the same latitude.

Sixty six percent of Japan's land area is forest, however the arable land area among the plains occupies 13% and the urban land area accounts for only 3.3%.

Population concentration

Japan's regional governmental units are divided into 47 prefectures and the percentage of city dwellers (rate of urbanization) among the total population is 78.7%. Furthermore among the 672 existing cities there are 12 with a population of over 1 million and these account for over 20% of the total population. The big 3 cities of Tokyo, Osaka and Nagoya and the 11 prefectures in their immediate vicinity alone comprise approximately half. Government offices, universities, research institutions as well as private enterprises are also concentrated in these cities with a marked tendency in recent years for companies to move their corporate headquarters to Tokyo.

Characteristics of major regions

Hokkaido : Vast lands and a rich natural environment coexist with growing industries

Tohoku : Serves as supplier of foodstuffs and energy resources

Hokuriku : Abundant water and energy resources with concentrations of local industries

Kanto : Home to Japan's capital city of Tokyo, this region is the center of politics, economy, industry and information in Japan

Chubu : Major distribution crossroads, heavy concentration of transportation equipment and industries, precision instruments industries

Kinki : Diversity of natural forms and industries makes the Kansai region an international crossroad

Chugoku : Small and medium sized cities along the Seto inland seacoast offers a range of urban amenities

Shikoku : Facing the Seto inland sea and the Pacific Ocean, Shikoku is blessed with a

pleasantly warm climate

Kyushu : Japan's historical and geographic gateway to the Asian continent

Okinawa : Okinawa has a tropical climate and also has Japan's only special free trade zone

Religion

Freedom of religion is assured by the constitution. There are a wide variety of religious organizations and activities but traditionally the most widely active are Buddhism and Shinto. Substantial number of Japanese have no religious affiliations but the average Japanese will visit a Shinto shrine or a Buddhist temple for the New Year and in the summer will visit their ancestral graves at a Buddhist temple. When it comes to weddings Christian weddings are popular in addition to the traditional Shinto type. In this way a variety of different religious procedures coexist in people's daily lifestyle.