



# PEOPLE GROUP

## THE JAPANESE OF EAST ASIA

The Japanese are an East Asian people group numbering approximately 124 million, living primarily in Japan. The population is highly urbanized, with most people concentrated in large metropolitan areas such as Tokyo and Osaka, while rural communities continue to exert cultural influence. Japanese society has traditionally emphasized community over the individual, valuing harmony, respect, and social order. Families and social structures have long been hierarchical, with strong expectations of responsibility toward one's family and wider community.

Japan is an ancient civilization with a long-recorded history and a strong sense of cultural continuity. Traditions are preserved primarily through seasonal festivals, rituals, and customary practices rather than through formal religious instruction. Cultural identity is deeply embedded in everyday life, shaping manners, work ethic, and interpersonal relationships.

Most Japanese people participate in Shinto and Buddhism, often simultaneously alongside other

worldviews. Shinto, the indigenous tradition, is applied for blessings in daily life and emphasizes harmony with nature, purification, and respect for spirits associated with places, ancestors, and natural forces. Buddhism, introduced in the sixth century, is given a central role in funerals and memorial rites. Many Japanese identify as “nonreligious;” yet regularly engage in shrine visits, temple rituals, and religious ceremonies.

Ancestor veneration remains culturally and personally important and is widely viewed as a family duty. The concept of one exclusive God is unfamiliar to most.

Christianity was introduced to Japan by Portuguese Catholics in 1549, but remains a small minority, with fewer than one to two per cent of the population identifying as Christian. Although religious freedom is protected and Christian resources are widely available, Christianity is often perceived as a foreign religion that does not naturally align with Japanese identity.

### AT A GLANCE

- Due to overlapping practices of Shinto and Buddhism, religious affiliation percentages exceed 100 per cent.
- Most Japanese have never met a Christian personally or heard a clear explanation of the gospel.
- Becoming a Christ-follower is often seen as a serious step that may disrupt family and social harmony.

### PRAY FOR

- The Holy Spirit to open hearts and minds among the Japanese to understand the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- Boldness, wisdom, and perseverance for Japanese believers as they live out their faith within their communities.
- Churches and ministries to grow in depth, unity, and effective discipleship.

Sources: Joshua Project, Wikipedia, [www.peoplegroups.org](http://www.peoplegroups.org).



**AFRITWENDE:** [afritwende@afriigo.org](mailto:afritwende@afriigo.org) **AFRIGO:** [info@afriigo.org](mailto:info@afriigo.org) **ALLONS-Y!:** [info@afriigo.org](mailto:info@afriigo.org) **AFRÍDE:** [afride@afriigo.org](mailto:afride@afriigo.org)

**SIM East Africa**  
Tel: +251 911 206 530  
[east-africa.office@sim.org](mailto:east-africa.office@sim.org)

**SIM West Africa**  
Tel: +233 30 222 5225  
[wamo.personnel@sim.org](mailto:wamo.personnel@sim.org)

**SIM Southern Africa**  
Tel: +27 21 7153200  
[southafrica.mobilisation@sim.org](mailto:southafrica.mobilisation@sim.org)

**AIM International**  
[amc.io@aimint.org](mailto:amc.io@aimint.org)  
[aimint.org/africanmobilization/](http://aimint.org/africanmobilization/)