Region & Orientation: Japan is an archipelago that is located in the region referred to as East Asia with Korea, China and Taiwan; the Pacific Ocean is to its east and the Sea of Japan is to its west.

Islands: An island nation with 4 major islands: Hokkaido (ほっかいどう), Honshu (ほんしゅう), Shikoku (しこく), and Kyushu (きゅうしゅう); Okinawa (おきなわ) is a relatively large island to the south that is part of the Ryukyu island chain that begins just south of Kyushu.

Size: The four major islands span approximately the length of the U.S. east or west coasts. It is 380,000 km² (compared to the U.S.’ 9,380,000 km²), so it is 1/25 or 4% the size of the U.S.

Topography: 75% of Japan is mountainous, so the population centers are generally on the coastal plains.

Climate: Mostly temperate, meaning that there are clear weather-defined seasons in Honshu, Shikoku and Kyushu. Hokkaido falls into the frigid zone with mostly cold weather, and Okinawa is defined as sub-tropical as it has mostly hot weather.

Mountains: There are three major mountain ranges: Hida, Kiso and Akaishi mountain ranges. Many of the mountains in Japan are volcanoes. Mount Fuji is the tallest mountain in Japan at 12,388 feet; it is an active volcano, although it has not erupted since 1707.

Rivers: Due to the mountainous terrain, rivers flow at steeper slopes and much more rapidly than most places in the world. The nation uses this natural resource for hydroelectric power. The Shimano River is the longest river in Japan, at 228 miles long.

Lakes: There are many lakes in Japan as they are formed at the basin of mountains. Lake Biwa is the largest lake in Japan, covering an area of 260 square miles.

Population: There are approximately 126,000,000 people; this is about half that of the U.S. The population centers are concentrated around the big cities, especially Tokyo, Yokohama and Osaka. U.S. population density is about 28 persons per square kilometer, but Japan’s population density is about 337 persons per square kilometer (12 times more crowded than the U.S.)!

Cities: Tokyo is the capital of Japan. More people live in Tokyo (~ 8 million) than its sister city in the U.S., New York City (~ 7.3 million). Yokohama is the second largest city and has the largest commercial port in Japan. Osaka is the third largest city and the center of western Japan. From north to south, the major cities are as follows: Sapporo (Hokkaido), Sendai, Tokyo, Yokohama, Nagoya, Kyoto, Osaka, Kobe, Hiroshima (all on Honshu) and Fukuoka (Kyushu).