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Japan - Culture Smart!: The Essential Guide To Customs & Culture



Synopsis

Japan is at a crossroads. The postwar economic miracle that brought it unprecedented development and prosperity is over. Since the publication of the first *Culture Smart!* guide, it has been overtaken by China as the world's second-largest economy. The balance of power in Asia has shifted and new players are entering the field. Loss of influence abroad, economic pressure at home, and the problems posed by a rapidly aging population present a real challenge to Japan's orderly and harmonious way of life, and to the very sense the Japanese have of themselves as a nation "apart." Traditional Japanese cultureâ "based on a consensus-driven philosophy and underpinned by many protocolsâ "is threatened by job insecurity, a growing class divide, and disillusionment with political leaders. But all is not lost. Japan is still a major economic power and cultural trendsetter, and the Japanese have a genius for innovation. The younger generation is open to change, women have a new confidence, and the country's technical and scientific research capability is as good as it gets. There is a growing ecological awareness that may well translate into new forms of eco-friendly industries. No one can predict how Japan will rise to the challenge, or what effect the changes will have on how people live, think, and behave. Paul Norbury's revised and updated edition of *Culture Smart! Japan* will guide you through a shifting cultural maze, and help you make your visit to this important, dynamic, and creative society a rich and mutually rewarding experience.

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Customer Reviews

Most books on Japan are written by scholars. As such, they have little utility in our day-to-day lives, being written in the academically sterile style preferred by a large (but thankfully dwindling) portion of the professorial population. This book is not written in the style of practiced academics, and that difference is the foundation of its utility. As an expat (soon to be recovered), I appreciate how this book is written. When you live, visit or otherwise interact in a meaningful way with a group of people who do not share your cultural norms it is of utmost importance to understand exactly how they differ from you, and in what ways you will be able to bend the rules, and in what ways you must conform if you hope to expect a positive reception. The best example of this cultural norms explanation can be found in the extended discussion the book gives over to gift-giving. In Japan, gift-giving is a reciprocal event that essentially begins and supports the maintenance of a relationship. As a Westerner, the expectations of gift-giving are different (one-sided gifts tied to specific events), and to take a Western view would damage, rather than strengthen, the relationship because your one-shot gift would convey a different message than what you intend to the recipient. This is, of course, just one example, and the book delves into many more areas that collectively comprise Japan's culture (food and eating habits, business expectations, role of women, etc.). The strength of the author's voice is also what many might find to be his great weakness: the conversational tone carried throughout the book.

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