

# Tokyo: Historical and Demographical Overview

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### Tokyo: Historical and Demographical Overview

With 28 million residents, the Tokyo Bay Area is home to almost one quarter of Japan's population. As Tokyo's population has burgeoned (with 37,000 people per square mile, Tokyo is twice as densely populated as NYC and three times as Bombay), housing costs have soared, crowding is rampant, pollution has taken a toll on health, and some of world's heaviest road traffic exists here. The Tokyo-Yokohama-Kawasaki area, located on Honshu Island's Kanto Plain and at the edge of the Tokyo Bay, is very densely populated and forms a sprawling urban corridor. If taken as a whole, this would be the largest city in the world. To the eastern side of Tokyo Bay, Chiba Prefecture is less industrial, and has beautiful beaches and farms.

Tokyo ("eastern capital"), formerly called Edo ("estuary," because of its location at the point where the Sumida River enters the Tokyo Bay), marks 1457 as its beginning, when warrior Ota Dokan built a castle. For most of Japanese history, the area around Kyoto was the center of activity. The town of Edo became historically significant in the early 1600s with Tokugawa Ieyasu's establishment of his shogunate (military government) there.

Beginning in the 1600s, Japan established *sakoku* (closed country) rule - cutting off contact with other countries. Only ships from Holland and China were allowed, but solely at the port of Nagasaki. Japanese couldn't travel to other countries. In 1853, however, US naval officer Commodore Matthew Perry arrived at Tokyo Bay on a US government mission to open diplomatic and trade relations. Japan signed trading treaties in 1858, and soon began to interact with Western governments and commercial agents.

To the east of Edo marshland was filled in early on in the 1600s. A commercial and industrial area

developed along the river and canals. Merchants and artisans flocked to Edo. The population reached 1 million by 1720, making it the most populous city in the world. The country's capital moved from Kyoto to Edo in 1868, and the city was then renamed Tokyo.

Imagine the original terrain: river deltas, hills, sand dunes surrounding the bay. The present bayshore is highly developed, lined with warehouses, docks, and industrial sites. The town of Makuhari has been designed as a new high technology center. Tokyo transformed into a contemporary metropolis and one of the world's leading economic centers, despite a devastating earthquake in 1923 and WWII air raids in 1944 and 1945 which left much of Tokyo and Yokohama destroyed. As a result of widespread damage, not much of old Japan is left in Tokyo. Moreover, as the economy began to boom and the population exploded, the rebuilding of Tokyo took place rapidly and without little city-wide planning.

With tremendous population growth, housing and pollution problems became widespread. In 1966 the prefecture began a series of plans to solve Tokyo's problems: to improve public housing, clean the air and river water, reduce street noise and traffic jams, and increase sanitation facilities. Suburb towns were encouraged as a means of reducing crowding. Tsukuba (30 mi northwest of Tokyo), for instance, was completed in 1979 as a center for scientific research and teaching, and now has 50 research institutions and two technology studies universities. By the 1990s, air and water quality had improved, but overcrowding continues to be serious.

Tokyo is currently site of the Imperial Palace, home of the Japanese emperor, and is headquarters of the national government. It is Japan's center of business, culture and education. During recovery in the 1950s, large enterprises concentrated their managerial operations in Tokyo. The population increased from 6.3 million in 1950 to 9.7 in 1960. Many of Tokyo's chief business and industrial districts are east of the palace towards the bay, in a lowland area filled-in from the bay, parts of which are now below sea-level. Dikes have been constructed to protect the area from flooding, but the filled-in land sinks incrementally as industry removes large amounts of ground water.

By Adriana Dakin, WorldLink Foundation

Sources: *Japan, An Illustrated Encyclopedia*, v. 2, Kodansha (Tokyo: 1993); *Japan, Lonely Planet* (Hawthorn, Australia: 1994); *World Book*, "Tokyo" (1997); *Encyclopedia Britannica, Macropaedia*, volume 28 (Chicago: 1995).

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