

TIMELINE

Some key dates in Japan's history:

1853 - US fleet forces Japan to open up to foreign influence after over 200 years of self-imposed isolation.

1868 - Empire of Japan proclaimed, and country enters period of rapid industrialisation and imperial expansion.

1910 - Japan annexes Korea, becoming one of the world's leading powers.

1914 - Japan joins First World War on the side of Britain and her allies, gaining some Pacific islands from Germany.

1925 - Universal male suffrage is instituted.

1930s - Seizes Chinese province of Manchuria, Shanghai, Beijing and Nanjing amid atrocities such as the "Rape of Nanjing".

1939-45 - Second World War sees Japan occupying several Asian countries. It is defeated when US drops atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

1945 - US occupation of devastated country; post-war recovery and political reform. Economy recovers, eventually flourishes.