

HAWAI‘I’S TIES WITH JAPAN

Quick Facts:

- 40% of Hawai‘i’s population are of Japanese ancestry (either full or part) according to the 2000 U.S. Census.
- Sister-states in Japan: Fukuoka, Okinawa, Hi-
- 2009 Japanese Visitor Arrivals: 1.17 million (largest international group).
- University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa has the largest Japanese Studies program in the country with over 2500 students enrolled annually in Japanese courses, and with over 500 titles on Japan offered by the UH Press.

Economic Ties

Hawai‘i’s economy depends on Japanese tourism, businesses and investments. Tourism is the state’s number one industry; tourists from Japan comprise almost 20% of the total, and bring in annual revenues of \$2 billion. Japan is the state’s largest market. In 2010, merchandise exports to Japan amounted to \$148 million or 22% of the state’s \$685 million in total merchandise exports.

Historical Ties

A reason for the close ties is the large population of Japanese-Americans in the Islands. While Japanese were in Hawai‘i as early as 1806 as survivors of ship wrecks, efforts to bring in Japanese immigrants were not undertaken until King David Kalākaua visited Japan in 1881 to initiate treaty discussions. He sought a closer relationship with Japan, in part, to offset the growing influence of the U.S., when he proposed a marriage alliance between his niece, Princess Ka‘iulani, and the Emperor’s nephew, Komatsu. While the marriage proposal was declined, King Kalakaua persuaded the Japanese government to send men and women to Hawai‘i. When the first group of contract laborers arrived in 1885, they received a warm reception. Honolulu policemen acted as their tour guides; the music of the Royal Hawaiian Band welcomed them; and, they were given food, shelter, and medical care. Immigrants came from all over Japan; however, the largest *ken* (prefectural) groupings came from Hiroshima, Yamaguchi, Kumamoto, Okinawa and Fukuoka. By 1930 close to 140,000 people of Japanese descent lived in the Islands, comprising approximately 40% of the total population.



Father of Governor George Ariyoshi, Ryozo Ariyoshi came from Fukuoka to Hawai‘i, worked as a stevedore and made a name for himself as an amateur sumotori.

Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor dramatically changed Hawai‘i and its people. World War II ravaged Japan, exhausted the U.S., and brought untold suffering to all communities in Hawai‘i. In spite of the war, after the Occupation the two countries became staunch allies. Japanese-Americans in Hawai‘i played a role in this relationship; one example was the efforts of the Hawaiian Okinawan community which raised \$47,000 to purchase 550 pigs from Oregon. Families were left homeless and starving after the Battle of Okinawa. The seven men who led the fundraising campaign helped transport the pigs on a U.S. military transport ship from the Pacific Northwest to Okinawa in 1948. The pigs helped to stave off starvation and were raised to ensure a continuous food supply.

Japanese Customs and Traditions

The influence of Japanese culture is easy to detect. Local Buddhist temples come alive in the summer for *obon* season, setting up *yagura* towers, lining up musicians, and preparing the food booths for the crowds of people. Dancers and onlookers come from a spectrum of ethnic groups. *Obon* religious rites are to honor the spirit of those departed. In the Islands, *obon* season signifies *odori* or traditional and new folk dances, a season that lasts throughout the summer months and into the Labor Day weekend in Hawai‘i. During the holiday season, family and friends pool their manpower to pound *mochi*; families display traditional Japanese New Year’s decorations, *kagami-mochi* and *kadomatsu*, alongside their week-old Christmas trees. Values have also been embraced. When George A. Ariyoshi campaigned for Lt. Governor in 1970, he carried a banner with the saying *Okagesama de* [I am what I am because of you] and this became a major theme of his political career. As the first Asian American Governor in the U.S., he served three terms during 1974-1986. This campaign motto was successful because it resonated with people in Hawai‘i.