Guide to Japanese Places

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Step 1: Main Islands

Make sure you are on the correct island! Japan has 4 main islands, but GeoLocate often makes most of its suggestions on the wrong one, so always double check to see if it is on the label!



Note: Okinawa is another important island, which is to the south of the main islands.

STEP 2: Regions

If you are on the largest island of Honshu, the label might have a further subdivision into region. The regions of Honshu are on the map below. (Note: Kansai is also sometimes called Kinki.)

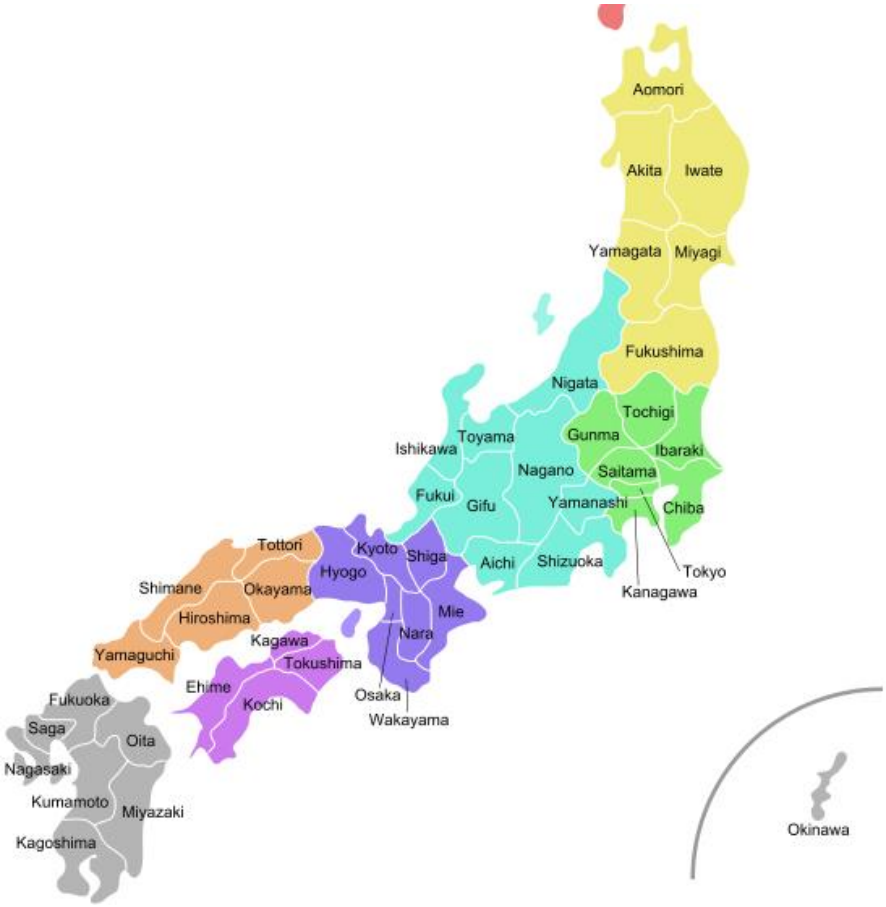


STEP 3: Prefectures

The next way places in Japan are subdivided is by prefecture. This will almost *always* be on the label. If the label doesn't specifically say "prefecture," it might be labeled with the suffix *-ken*. The Japanese way to write *-ken* looks like this:

県

It's good to be familiar with this symbol as well, because often the capitol city of a prefecture will have the same name as the prefecture. Note: Hokkaido & Tokyo prefectures will not have this suffix, and Osaka and Kyoto prefectures will have the suffix *-fu*. Hokkaido is just one large prefecture that takes up the whole island of the same name, which is divided into subprefectures. Below is a map of prefectures for each region (excluding Hokkaido). If you are having trouble finding one, they are also listed alphabetically below with the region and/or island.



Aichi – Chūbu – Honshu

Akita – Tōhoku – Honshu

Aomori – Tōhoku – Honshu

Chiba – Kantō – Honshu

Ehime – Shikoku

Fukui – Chūbu – Honshu

Fukuoka – Kyushu

Fukushima – Tōhoku – Honshu

Gifu – Chūbu – Honshu

Gunma – Kantō – Honshu

Hiroshima – Chūgoku – Honshu

Hokkaido – Hokkaido

Hyōgo – Kansai – Honshu

Ibaraki – Kantō – Honshu

Ishikawa – Chūbu – Honshu

Iwate – Tōhoku – Honshu

Kagawa – Shikoku

Kagoshima – Kyushu

Kanagawa – Kantō – Honshu

Kōchi – Shikoku

Kumamoto – Kyushu

Kyoto – Kansai – Honshu

Mie – Kansai – Honshu

Miyagi – Tōhoku – Honshu

Miyazaki – Kyushu

Nagano – Chūbu – Honshu

Nagasaki – Kyushu

Nara – Kansai – Honshu

Niigata – Chūbu – Honshu

Ōita – Kyushu

Okayama – Chūgoku – Honshu

Osaka – Kansai – Honshu

Saga – Kyushu

Saitama – Kantō – Honshu

Shiga – Kansai – Honshu

Shimane – Chūgoku – Honshu

Shizuoka – Chūbu – Honshu

Tochigi – Kantō – Honshu

Tokushima – Shikoku

Tokyo – Kantō – Honshu

Tottori – Chūgoku – Honshu

Toyama – Chūbu – Honshu

Wakayama – Kansai – Honshu

Yamagata – Tōhoku – Honshu

Yamaguchi – Chūgoku – Honshu

Yamanashi – Chūbu – Honshu

STEP 4: Cities & Districts

Smaller divisions of Japan include cities and districts. Like it was mentioned before, cities and districts often share a name with the prefecture, so it's important to pay attention to suffixes on the label or use other context clues to figure out if the label is referencing a city/district or a whole prefecture.

For cities, you might see the following suffixes:

市 ..... -shi ..... city

町 ..... -machi/-chou ... town

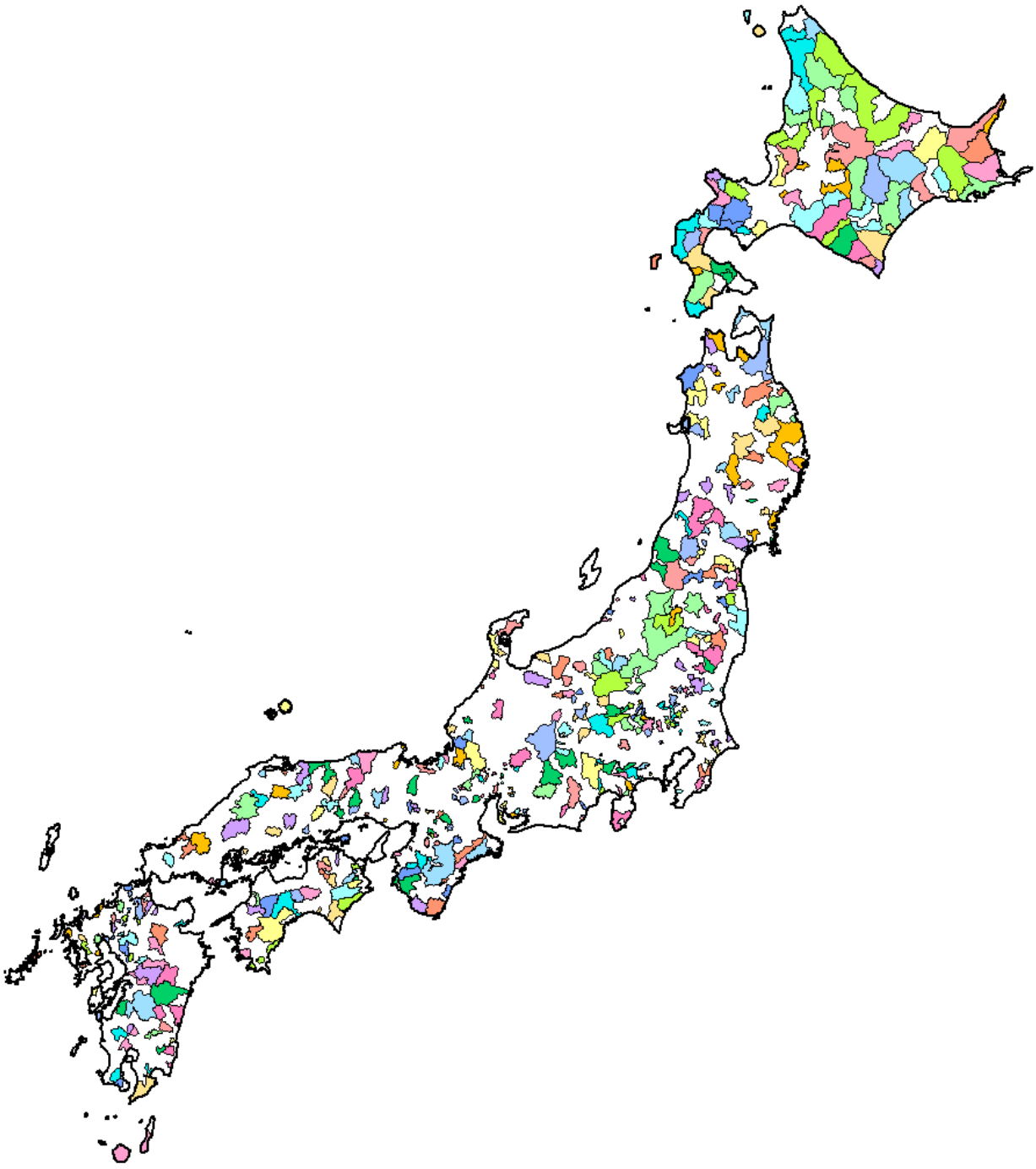
村 ..... -mura/-son ..... village

For districts, you might see the following suffix:

郡 ..... -gun

The next page has a map of all the districts in Japan. In my opinion, it's better not to use the district to find out where you need to be because they are a little complicated. It's just good to know how to identify them on a label so you know what you are looking at.

Here’s a map of districts in Japan. As you can tell, they are kind of weird.



COMMON THEMES ON LABELS:

Here are some more things that I've found might be useful to know when reading labels for specimens collected in Japan.

-shima/jima (島) This is the word for island. If your label includes this at the end of a word and you're having trouble locating it, try googling the word without the -shima/jima part and instead include the word island in your search. It won't work 100% of the time and is sometimes just a part of the name of a place, but I've found it useful!

-yama/san (山) This is the word for mountain. Like with island, this will sometimes just be part of the name of a place, but other times refers to specific mountains. A good way to find out if this is the case is to remove the -yama/san part of the word, replace it with mountain, and then google it along with 'japan' or the prefecture it is in.

-kawa (川) This is the word for river. This works the same as island and mountain above.

<u>Shrines and Temples:</u>

This is the most confusing part about Japanese labels in my experience! And it doesn't help that it seems like a lot of specimens were collected near shines and temples. Smaller ones are difficult to find just by googling the name in English on the label, and when you do find them, it can still be hard to pin down the location. The best advice I have is to know the kanji to look for that is associated with shrines and temples so you can spot them when they show up on the map, as these locations usually are not translated into English.

There are a lot of different ways to name shrines and temples, but here are some common ones to look out for!

寺 –tera/-ji

院 -in

神社 jinja

社 yashiro/-sha/-ja

杜 mori

神庫 hokora/hokura

神宮 jinguu

宮　　miya/-gu

大社　taisha

　　gongen

Common Sites & Tips For Locating Places:

This website is a resource I like to use to find places in Japan!
https://www.citypopulation.de/Japan.html