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JREF Top > **Society** > **Demography & Statistics** > **Foreign criminality in Japan**

Foreign criminality in Japan

Written by Maciamo on 15 June 2004

How bad is foreign crime in Japan ?

Japan's National Police Agency (NPA) reported 40,615 cases of crimes or offences involving foreigners for 2003. This was an increase of 16.9% from the previous year and topping the 40,000 line for the first time in history. But what is hidden behind these figures ? Do foreigners really commit much more crimes than Japanese ?

Foreign crime in Japan is increasing, but so does Japan's foreign population. In 1980, there were 782,910 foreigners registered in Japan. In 1990, it had increased to 1,075,317, then to 1,686,444 in 2000, and around 1,9 million in late 2003. That is an increase of 45% in 10 years, compared with 2,1% growth in the total population.

The 16% increase in criminal cases and 19% increase in number of people arrested from 2002 to 2003 is hardly significant, as number fluctuate a lot from year to year and had even decreased by 11% (cases) from 2000 to 2001. Over the 10 year period between 1993 and 2003, the number of cases has grown by 52%, while arrests have only increased by 38%, compared to the 45% increase in registered foreigners. Contrarily to the myth that Japanese officials want to convey, foreigners are not getting more dangerous than before.

What kind of crimes do foreigners commit ?

20,007 foreign nationals were arrested in 2003. This number however does not include actual condemnations, so we do not know how many of them were culprit. Some of them were charged with more than one crime (esp. thefts and robberies), which explains why there has been twice more cases (40,615) than arrests.

Statistics are classified by type of crimes and offences in the following way :

- **Crimes** includes murder, rape, arson, kidnapping, robbery, thefts (car, purse, wallets...), etc.
- **Offences** are visa overstaying, drug use, illegal weapon possession, speeding, prostitution, etc.

The main difference is that crimes are causing damage, loss or trauma to someone, while offences are just doing something illegal without hurting anyone.

Looking at the [statistics from the NPA \(in Japanese\)](#), we realise that among 20,007 people arrested, 11,282 were for offences, including 9,211 for immigration-related issues like overstaying their visa.

Thefts accounted for over 50% of the overall crimes (4,555 out of 8,725). No more than 477 (0,02%) of the total arrests were for vicious crimes, and they were mostly committed by Chinese (52%) and Brazilians (22%). Of the 477 vicious crimes, there were 61 murders, 34 rapes, 13 arsons and 369 robberies.

Where are foreign criminals from ?

Among the 20,007 people arrested in 2003 :

- 83,3% were from Asia
- 10,9% were from South America
- 1,3% were from North America (0,8% from USA)
- 1,5% were from Europe
- 1,2% were from Russia
- 1,3% were from Africa
- 0,5% were from Oceania

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Considering only the 8,725 crimes (刑法犯), so not the offences such like visa overstaying, however, - 74,5% were from Asia - 17,7% were from South America - 2,2% were from North America (1,4% from USA) - 2% were from Europe - 1,8% were from Russia - 0,9% were from Africa - 0,8% were from Oceania

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The following table gives the number of foreigners by nationality for the main countries represented in Japan. The foreign population is based on the number of residents (stats from the [Japan Statistical Bureau](#) for 2003) and visitors (stats from the [JNTO](#) for 2004) combined as shown below.

We will not take into account some of the main group of foreign residents in Japan due to a lack of information on the number of visitors. The countries affected are Peru, Vietnam, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Iran.

Number of foreign residents and visitors in Japan by nationality

Country or Region	Residents in Japan	Visitors in Japan	Total
Japan	127,435,000	-	127,435,000
Korea	613,000	1,468,000	2,081,000
China	462,000	577,000	1,039,000
USA	48,000	704,000	752,000
Philippines	185,000	141,000	326,000
Brazil	274,000	12,000	286,000
UK	18,000	201,000	219,000
Thailand	34,000	97,000	132,000
Russia	7,000	52,000	59,000
Asia	1,422,000	3,887,000	5,309,000
North America	63,000	854,000	917,000
Europe (except Russia)	50,000	624,000	674,000
South America	344,000	25,000	369,000
Oceania	16,000	210,000	226,000
Africa	10,000	18,000	28,000

Let us now calculate the crime and offence rates based on the total of residents and visitors for the main countries represented in Japan and each continent.

Number of crimes and offences committed in Japan by nationality

Country or Region	Population	People arrested	"for Crimes"	"for Offences"
Japan	127,435,000	433,305	370,877	62,428
Korea	2,081,000	1,793	496	1,297
China	1,039,000	8,996	4,444	4,552
USA	752,000	166	119	47
Philippines	326,000	1,333	329	1,004
Brazil	286,000	1,224	1,005	219
UK	219,000	72	47	25
Thailand	132,000	699	68	631
Russia	59,000	244	160	84
Asia	5,309,000	16,666	6,498	10,168
North America	917,000	262	191	71
Europe (except Russia)	674,000	285	176	109
South America	369,000	2,180	1,542	638
Oceania	226,000	100	75	25
Africa	28,000	267	81	186

Crimes and offences rate in Japan by nationality

Country	Crime/offence rate	Crime rate	Offence rate
Japan	0.340%	0.291%	0.049%
Korea	0.086%	0.024%	0.062%
China	0.860%	0.428%	0.432%
USA	0.022%	0.016%	0.006%
Philippines	0.409%	0.101%	0.308%
Brazil	0.428%	0.351%	0.077%
UK	0.032%	0.021%	0.011%
Thailand	0.530%	0.051%	0.479%
Russia	0.871%	0.271%	0.600%

Asia	0.314%	0.122%	0.192%
North America	0.029%	0.021%	0.008%
Europe (except Russia)	0.042%	0.026%	0.016%
South America	0.590%	0.418%	0.172%
Oceania	0.044%	0.033%	0.011%
Africa	0.954%	0.289%	0.665%

Highest rate of crimes/offences per country

Having a look at the statistics above, the highest rate of criminals and offenders combined by nationality is found respectively among Russians (0.871%), Chinese (0.860%), Thais (0.530%), Brazilians (0.428%) and Philipinos (0.409%). Considering continents, the highest crime and offence rate is however held by the Africans (0.954%).

The Japanese crime rate is 0.340%, which is similar to the Asian average of 0.314%, but about 10 times higher than that of Western countries, with Oceanians at 0.0044%, Europeans at 0.042% and North Americans at 0.029%.

The Koreans have the lowest crime and offence rate (0.086%) of any non-Western country, which is worth mentioning as they are the single largest group of foreigners in Japan, accounting for 1/3 of all foreign residents.

Highest rate of crimes only per country

If we omit the offences, as most of them are visa-related and cannot compare to Japanese rates. Offences include all violations of the law that do not cause any harm to other people, such as getting a parking ticket or consuming alcohol under the legal age.

If we concentrate on real crimes, we find a completely different ranking though. Iranians, Russians or Philipinos have been arrested for a much higher number of offences than crimes, for instance. We also see that Brazilians and Japanese were arrested for proportionally more crimes than offences. Here is the real crime rate :

- Chinese (0.428%)
- Brazilians (0.351%)
- **Japanese (0.291%)**
- Russians (0.271%)
- Philipinos (0.101%)
- Thais (0,051%)
- Koreans (0.024%)
- Britons (0.021%)
- Americans (0.016%)

These numbers are extremely interesting because it shows that combined crimes and offences can be very misleading. Thai and Vietnamese (see NPA stats) have a similar combined number (699 and 718) but 90% of Thai arrested are offenders, while about 80% of Vietnamese arrested are criminals. As a result, the real crime rate of Vietnamese is 11 times higher than that of Thais.

We also see that Japanese themselves are more likely to commit real crimes than anybody except the Chinese and the Brazilians (most of which are *nikkei*, that is Brazilians of Japanese descent). Westerners and Koreans are by far the most peaceful residents in Japan, with an fantastically low crime rate, about 12 to 18 times lower than that of the Japanese.

What these number teach us is not to assimilate neighbouring countries haphazardly. In Japan, the Chinese commit 18x more crimes than the Koreans, and the Russians have 10x higher crime rate than the other Europeans. At the extremes, a Chinese is statistically 26.75 times more likely to commit a crime than an American (USA).

Comparing continents, it is interesting to note the very high crime rate of South Americans (0.418%), actually higher than that of Africans (0.289%) once the offences removed. South Americans in Japan are almost 20x more likely to commit crimes than North Americans. Could this be due to the fact that 93% of South Americans in Japan are residents (as opposed to visitors), while 93% of North Americans are (short-term) visitors ? This wouldn't work for Africa, though, as only 1/3 of the Africans in Japan are residents.

How to interpret these statistics ?

I suspect that less Japanese have been arrested compared to the real number of crimes or offences, because, foreigners (especially those who do not look Japanese) have a higher chance of being suspected and arrested, even if they aren't condemned because they were not the real culprits.

In addition, many problems are never reported to the police by the Japanese, especially

when they can settle the issue between them. So again, once foreigners are involved, the chances are much higher that the police be involved and that it appears in the statistics, which explains why Japanese have such a disproportionately low rate of offences (0.049%) compared to crime (0.291%). The point is that when one of the side does not speak Japanese (or not well enough), the police must be called. That certainly increases considerably the number of "official" foreign crimes and offences.

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