

## 《日本为强制“加班族”休假而创建全国性假日》

Around this time each year, millions of Americans are enjoying a three-day weekend heading into Memorial Day.

It's one of just 10 national holidays for a country that prides itself on a world-renowned work ethic.

But in Japan, the country's government just unveiled their 16th national holiday. So, is Japan a holiday happy nation compared to its American counterparts? Not exactly.

Officially beginning on August 11 2016, "Mountain Day" was ostensibly created to recognize Japan's culturally significant mountainous regions. But The Diplomat reports that the holiday was actually most likely created to put a dent in Japan's "overworked" population that largely refuses to use its government protected vacation time. A recent Wall Street Journal claims that the average Japanese worker only uses 8.6 of their paid vacation days each year.

"In Japan, there is of course paid vacation, but people don't take it," Seishiro Eto, a member of Japan's Liberal Democratic Party that led support for the new holiday, told the WSJ. "I hope with Mountain Day, people will be able to take more of their vacation."

By comparison, workers in the US use an average of 10 of their 14 paid vacation days each year. However, a 2013 "Vacation Deprivation Study" from Expedia.com says that still amounts to a staggering 577,212,000 unused annual vacation days in the US.

And the workaholic approach may not even be as effective as some think. After all, French workers have the largest amount of guaranteed time off of any major industrialized nation yet their worker productivity is also amongst the world's highest.

"When you have a longer working day, at some point because you're becoming tired, it decreases your productivity," French economist Renaud Bourlès told BusinessWeek.

Nonetheless, mandatory vacation days may not be a perfect solution. The Diplomat notes that mandatory holidays can create headaches for a workforce all taking the day off together. In theory, when employees voluntarily choose their vacation days the dip in the workforce is more evenly distributed over the year. But when everyone is taking the same national holidays cities are left with congested roads and overbooked flights during what is meant as a window of relaxation.

In the US 77 percent of all private companies offer paid vacation and holidays although federal law does not require them to do so. That's still better than Japan, where most workers are not paid for their mandatory holiday days off.

The concept of being overworked is so prevalent in Japan that the country has its own word for people who die of

heart attacks and other ailments directly attributed to excessive labor – Karoshi. The word literally translates to mean “death from over work.”

In recent years, Karoshi has broadened its meaning to include Japanese “salarymen” who commit suicide as a result of the emotional distress from working too much and under uncertain conditions. A 2012 Pulitzer Center investigation outlined a scenario that might sound unsettlingly familiar to many American workers:

“With the recession of the 1990s, many Japanese companies departed from the tradition of lifetime employment and went through massive layoffs, replacing costly full-time workers with low-paid temporary workers who have no benefits or job security. As a result, salarymen increasingly work longer hours because of a shortage of manpower and the fear of losing jobs.”

Memorial Day

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Seishiro Eto

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Renaud Bourlès

7%

—Karoshi

salarymen 2012

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