

SHIBA INU



Wild Spirits From Bariva

The Shiba Inu is a fascinating breed, known for its spirited nature, confidence, and remarkable intelligence. This breed is incredibly loyal to its owners but also possesses a strong independent streak...

– Megan Shuttlewood

The Shiba Inu, renowned for its spirited personality and fox-like appearance, has a rich history as a hunting dog in Japan. Bred for agility and keenness of senses, these dogs excelled at hunting and flushing small game such as birds and rabbits in the mountainous terrain. Their strong prey drive, combined with a loyal yet independent nature, not only made them effective hunters but also contributed to their lasting popularity as cherished companions today.

ORIGINS

Japan, consisting of four main islands and numerous smaller ones, is a mountainous archipelago where approximately 75% of the land is rugged terrain. The original inhabitants of Japan immigrated around 7000 to 8000 BC. Archaeological findings suggest that ancestors of these early people had small dogs ranging from 14.5 to 19.5 inches in height. These ancient canines are believed to be distant ancestors of the modern Shiba Inu, hinting at a long-standing relationship between the Japanese people and their dogs.

As the 20th century approached, a growing awareness emerged among the Japanese populace regarding the loss of their native dog breeds. Influential ethnologists and zoologists, such as Dr Hiroyoshi Saito, spearheaded efforts to document and preserve these breeds. Dr Saito travelled extensively across Japan to study and gather native dogs, emphasising the importance of cultural heritage in the face of modernisation.

In 1928, Dr Saito and a group of enthusiasts founded a club dedicated to preserving Japanese dog breeds. This effort culminated in the establishment of the Nihon Ken Hozonkai (NIPPO) in 1932, the 'Association for the Preservation of the Japanese Dog.' NIPPO (pronounced 'knee-poe' for short) formed a standards committee, resulting in the publication of a comprehensive breed standard in 1934. This NIPPO breed standard collectively described the native Japanese breeds before providing judging resolutions that outlined distinguishing features for each of the six breeds.

Initially, the Shiba Inu was categorised into three distinct strains – Shinshu, Mino, and Sanin – named after the regions where they were found. However,

as the population of these small dogs dwindled, the term "Shiba" became a collective designation for small native breeds in Japan. The name "Shiba" (柴) translates to "brushwood," highlighting the dog's small stature and the rugged terrains where it was traditionally used for hunting. "Inu" (犬) means "dog." Therefore, "Shiba Inu" can be interpreted as "small dog."

With the help of NIPPO, the Shiba Inu was designated a national monument in Japan in 1936. This recognition highlights the breed's cultural and historical significance, as it has been cherished in Japanese society for centuries. The designation aims to protect and preserve the Shiba Inu, promoting awareness of its unique qualities and encouraging responsible breeding practices. This status not only honours the breed's legacy but also reinforces its role as a beloved companion and symbol of loyalty in Japanese culture.

The start of World War II in 1942 significantly disrupted NIPPO activities. The war caused a



Prettyz A Picture



devastating loss of dogs, with many succumbing to a widespread outbreak of distemper in the years following. Despite these challenges, dedicated breeders worked tirelessly to salvage the remaining native dogs. These breed saviours travelled across the countryside, collecting and transporting dogs to cities, where they established breeding programmes aimed at preserving and revitalising the Shiba Inu and other native breeds.

From ancient hunting dogs to modern-day companions, the Shiba Inu stands as a testament to Japan's rich heritage and the ongoing effort to preserve it.

GENERAL APPEARANCE AND HALLMARKS

The Shiba Inu is a small-sized dog that is a picture of balance and natural beauty, characterised by a compact yet agile appearance. Its movements are quick, free, and deliberate, reflecting the breed's origins as a hunting dog. The Shiba Inu should be sound and well-conditioned, leaving no doubt about its ability to perform the breed's intended purpose, hunting and flushing small game, in the vast mountainous regions of Japan.

The Shiba's compact build maintains a ratio of height at the withers to body length of 10:11. Standard heights are 39.5cm for males and 36.5cm for females (with a permissible variance of 1.5cm). A Shiba should be neither short and stout nor tall and weedy, with a 50:50 depth of body to length of leg ratio considered correct according to the

founding club, NIPPO.

It has a wedge-shaped head featuring a moderately thick muzzle with tight lips, a strong underjaw, and full cheeks. The eyes must be triangular, not too small, and slightly upturned, dark brown in colour – the eyes are a key hallmark in achieving the Shiba expression most fanciers adore.

The Shiba has a thick and full tail (think bottlebrush) reaching almost to the hock, carried curled or curved like a sickle. It boasts a vibrantly coloured 'prickly' double coat, which comes in various colours – red, sesame red/black, black and tan, and cream. The most distinctive hallmark is 'Urajiro' (pronounced Oo-ra-gee-roh) – whitish markings located on the sides of the muzzle and cheeks, on the underside of the jaw and neck, on the chest, stomach, underside of the tail, and inside of the legs.

All of these breed features and hallmarks enhance its fox-like appearance, making the Shiba Inu both striking and instantly recognisable. Its proud posture and calm yet strong expression reflect a spirit of confidence and loyalty, admired by its people and strangers alike.

TEMPERAMENT

The Shiba Inu is a fascinating breed, known for its spirited nature, confidence, and remarkable intelligence. This breed is incredibly loyal to its owners but also possesses a strong independent



Colson Photography

streak that can sometimes be mistaken for stubbornness. Shibas require consistent training and socialisation from an early age, along with dedicated owners who possess great perseverance (and a sense of humour) to ensure their development into well-rounded adults.

One of the most notable traits of the Shiba Inu is its keen attentiveness. Nothing seems to escape it, making this breed excellent watchdogs – alert but not generally nuisance barkers. Their natural hunting instincts are still very much alive, which can lead to some entertaining (if not slightly mischievous) behaviour.

When it comes to social interactions, Shibas are generally friendly with familiar people. However, they often display a casual indifference toward strangers, preferring to observe (read: judge) from a distance rather than rush right in for attention. This combination of loyalty, independent thinking, and alertness makes the Shiba Inu a unique companion.

Arguably, the most endearing of the Shiba traits, one usually reserved for only the most important people in its life, is the Shiba Smile. Nothing will turn a crummy day around faster than being greeted at the door by this expression. With ears pinned back like a fighter jet's wings, squinting its eyes so tight it can barely see, and curling its lips into a smile – sometimes smiling so hard that the tips of its upper canine teeth appear, resembling a flying fox.

TRAINING – A SHIBA CAN, TOO!

Training a Shiba Inu is all about embracing the mantra: “A Shiba can too!” While these spirited little dogs often get labelled as stubborn, their high intelligence and independent thinking mean they’ll decide which of your requests are worth their effort – and whether they find you exciting or interesting enough to engage with.

Early socialisation and consistent training are essential in raising a well-rounded adult. Shibas thrive on routine, so establishing clear commands and expectations early will make everyday life easier. While seemingly bold and independent, this breed can be sensitive to harsh training methods. Negative experiences can harm the relationship and lead to long-term issues, so it’s vital to approach training with patience and awareness. Positive training methods are best.

To keep a Shiba engaged, keep training short, interesting, and varied. With consistent effort from dedicated owners, they can excel in various activities and roles. In fact, at the time of this article, Shibas have earned titles and qualifications in a range of fields around the world, including Obedience, Agility, Rally, Scent Work, Tracking, Trick Dog, Endurance, Lure Coursing, Fastcat (USA equivalent of Sprint Dog), Barn Hunt, Flyball, Weight Pull, AKC Therapy Dog, and even a Dock Diving Title!

So, if the decision is made and a Shiba is ‘the one,’



embrace the challenge, stay patient, have a sense of humour, and remember: “A Shiba Can Too.”

Reference name: fb group “A Shiba Can, Too”

SUITABILITY

When considering whether a Shiba Inu is the right fit for you or your family, it's important to take a close look at your lifestyle and experience with dogs. Prospective owners should be prepared to engage with a dog that likes to think for itself and may selectively choose when to follow commands.

Shibas require dedicated owners who are willing and able to invest considerable time in consistent training and early socialisation. If you enjoy a challenge and can bring a sense of humour to the training process, you'll likely find a Shiba to be a rewarding companion.

While Shibas can be friendly with familiar faces,

they often show casual indifference toward strangers, preferring to observe rather than engage. This may not make them the best choice for first-time dog owners or families looking for an overly social pet. Their natural hunting instincts also mean they may not be suitable for off-leash adventures in busy areas or in households where young children may allow an escape through an open door. You'll need to ensure they're always safely contained.

Shiba Inus can adapt well to both apartments and homes with yards, but there are some critical considerations for each living situation. In an apartment, Shibas can thrive if they receive enough exercise and mental stimulation. Daily walks and playtime are essential to keep them happy, healthy and avoiding unwanted behaviours due to boredom. Their relatively small size makes them suitable for apartment living, as is commonly seen in their native Japan, but you must have the time



to ensure they're receiving adequate mental and physical exercise every day.

When it comes to homes with yards, Shibas enjoy having a secure outdoor space to play and explore. However, it's important to have a well-fenced yard, as their strong hunting instincts may lead them astray. Yards can provide them with the opportunity to burn off energy, but they still require regular walks and socialisation outside of the yard.

Ultimately, a Shiba Inu can be a fantastic addition to the right home. If you're committed to creating a strong bond through positive training methods and are ready for the unique challenges that come with this intelligent breed, you'll likely find immense joy in the companionship of a Shiba.

HEALTH

The Shiba Inu is largely a healthy and sturdy breed, especially when sourced from a reputable



breeder. They typically live around 12 to 15 years, with individuals reaching 16 or even 17 years not uncommon.

While Shibas are generally healthy, they can experience some conditions like luxating patellas, glaucoma, and hip dysplasia, though these are seen much less frequently in well-bred dogs from reputable breeders. Another condition to be aware of is gangliosidosis (a fatal genetic disorder affecting the nervous system). Thankfully this is increasingly rare and can be easily avoided through DNA testing of the parents. Allergies are sometimes seen and seem to stem from various environmental and dietary sources when present.

Most Shiba clubs across the Americas, Europe, and the UK suggest or require minimum health testing, including hip scoring, patella exams, and eye exams (preferably with gonioscopy) prior to breeding.



GROOMING/GENERAL CARE

Caring for a Shiba Inu is generally a straightforward task, particularly when it comes to grooming. Shibas are fastidiously clean, often seen grooming themselves like a cat. Although they are a double-coated breed, Shibas are relatively low maintenance for much of the year. They typically only need baths if they get dirty or at 4–6-week intervals, as their coat has natural dirt-repelling qualities and they do not typically carry a doggy smell. Brushing them every few days with a slicker brush, keeps their coat healthy and looking its best.

Shibas shed (moult) twice a year. During this time, they will require more frequent baths and brushing to help remove the dead undercoat. Bathing and blow-drying every 3–4 days can expedite the shedding process and encourage the growth of the new coat.

Shibas are almost universally programmed with an aversion to having their legs and feet handled. It is imperative to establish regular, quick nail sessions with your puppy when they're young and weekly sessions thereafter. Often, young puppies will accept a quiet nail grinder more easily than nail cutters. Puppies who are not taught to accept nail sessions (and to a lesser degree, bathing and blow-drying) when young will almost certainly prove an epic challenge at maturity.

In terms of nutrition, Shibas do not typically have special dietary requirements. Surveyed breeders/owners largely tended towards fish and/or lamb-based diets for the fat content/omega fatty acids to promote healthy skin and coat.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Shiba Inu represents a unique blend of its history as a hunting dog and its role as a beloved companion. After nearly facing extinction, this breed has rebounded and found a place in many hearts and homes around the world. Intelligent, loyal, independent, challenging, and rewarding, Shibas require dedicated owners who appreciate and embrace their spirited nature. Ultimately, the Shiba Inu continues to thrive as both a symbol of Japan's rich heritage and a cherished member of the modern household.

More information on the Shiba Inu can be found on the Dogs Queensland website: [SHIBA INU](#)