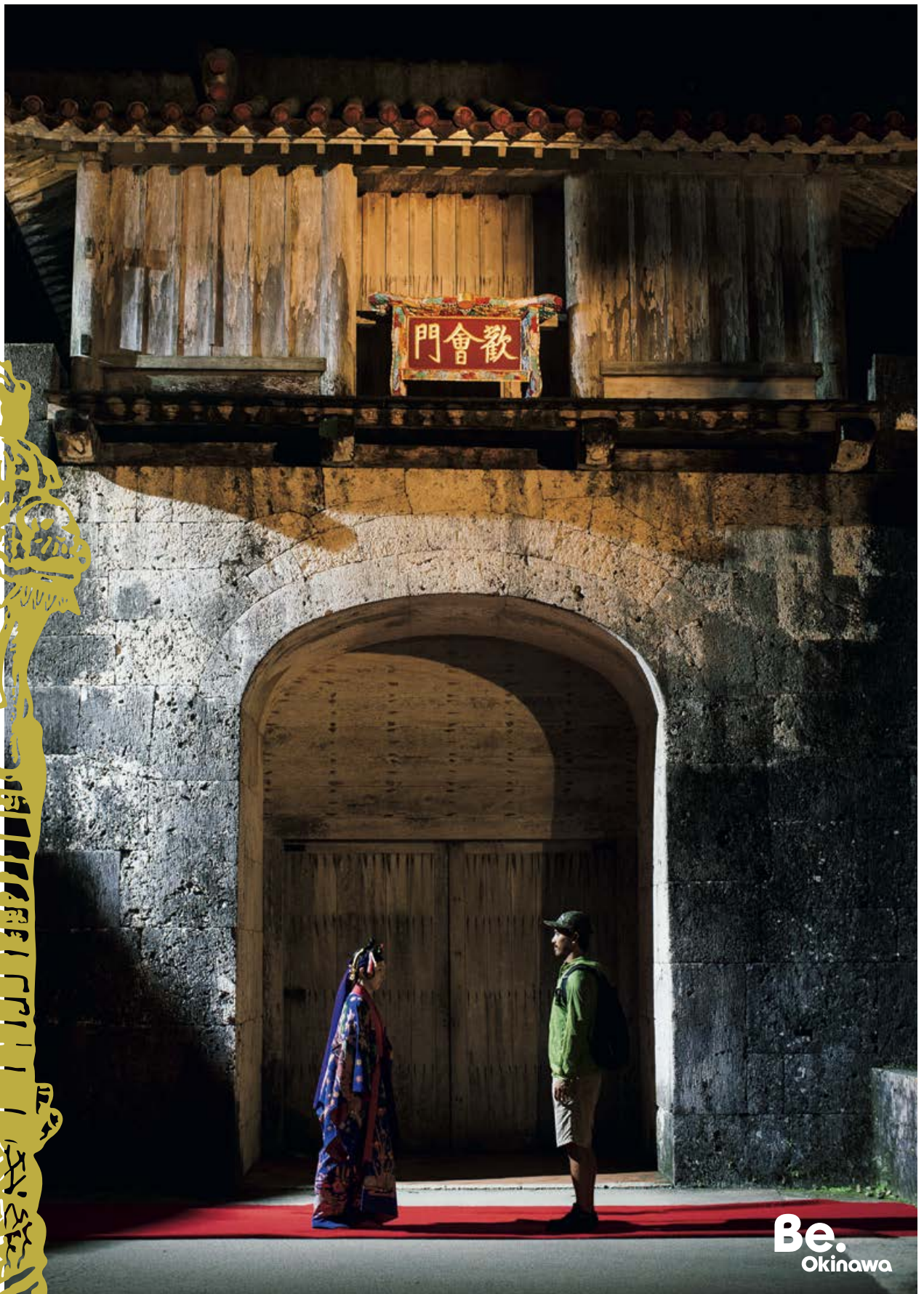


# DISCOVER OKINAWA





Okinawa is a place of beautiful nature and warm-hearted people, where you can be your true self. The Be. Okinawa symbol embodies these facets of Okinawa. "Be." is a warm expression of welcome, and an invitation from Okinawans for guests to partake in an experience unlike any other.

# Be. Okinawa

## Be. Okinawa

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# TIMELESS OKINAWA AWAITS

These islands, jewels spread across a deep blue sea. Once the Ryukyu Kingdom, today home to a proud, unique and beautiful culture. A fascinating, often turbulent history. Jungled hills, mangrove-lined inlets, sandy beaches and rocky islets above the coral-filled crystalline waters.

It all awaits: often unchanged, always alive: Okinawa.



#1

## History of Ryukyu

For 450 years, Okinawa was an independent Ryukyu Kingdom (1429–1879) that prospered greatly from trade with China and other Asian countries. Through trading, the kingdom imported technical skills and new ideas and skillfully fused what it learned into a unique Ryukyu culture. At Shuri Castle, the hub of politics and diplomacy and the residence of the king, entertainment and music flourished. The royal court spawned a culture of great hospitality and high-class entertainment, such as “kumiodori” musical plays,

classical Ryukyu dance and music, Eisa, a vibrant traditional Okinawan folk dance performed during the Bon festival season, and unique court cuisine. Handicrafts, such as bingata cloth weaving and pottery, flourished, along with Karate, a Ryukyu martial art, which now has over 100 million practitioners throughout the world. In 2000, Shuri Castle and eight other sites were registered as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Other unique sites on Okinawa include “Utaki” worship sanctuaries, royal gardens, and the tombs of Ryukyuan kings.





#2

## Amazing Nature

The Okinawa Prefecture covers the Nansei Islands chain, an area of about 400 km north to south and 1,000 km from east to west. The islands are surrounded by seas and coral reefs teeming with marine life from small tropical fish to mantas, dolphins, and humpback whales. The exceptional beauty of the seas has inspired expressions like “Yaeyama Blue” and “Kerama Blue.” The Kerama Islands National Park boasts one of the best diving and snorkeling spots in the world. On land in the northern part of the main island, the Yanbaru National

Park became a registered Natural World Heritage sites in 2021. Almost the entire island of Iriomote in the southwestern Yeyama Islands group is also a National Park covered in subtropical jungle, and about 90% of the whole island is untouched nature. Both national parks boast unmatched biodiversity with many endemic species. Okinawa is called the Galapagos of the orient for a good reason.

#3

## Alluring Culture

The Okinawan culture evolved with Chinese and Japanese influences into unique customs and traditions that mark life on the islands to this day. The center of Okinawan spiritual life is “Utaki,” places of worship, where people worship nature. On annual milestones, like Obon Festival and New Year, people honor their ancestors. Add to that Okinawan people’s “ichariba choday” (meet once, and we are a family) attitude and positively curious view about outsiders and foreigners, so it’s no wonder that Okinawa has turned into a

favorite tourist destination for Japanese and foreign visitors alike. In addition, its rich culinary traditions range from traditional pork dishes to taco rice and hamburgers. And sipping some good Awamori, the oldest distilled spirit in Japan, while listening to the sounds of Sanshin and the powerful sounds of Eisa drums on a warm summer night after a day’s work is as Okinawan as it gets.





# EXPERIENCE

Okinawa's unique culture is attractive to visitors. One of the real pleasures of travel is the welcoming interaction with the locals, who have accepted people from foreign countries throughout their history and are famous for their hospitality. Why not enjoy your journey to Okinawa for the sights, customs, and people you have never experienced before, listen to the sounds of Okinawan sanshin relaxing your mind and body and enjoy the beautiful nature? Let us introduce some ultimate Okinawa experiences of travelers who came to visit Okinawa and became so attracted that they emigrated to this island.



# Spirit of Okinawan Bullfighting: The Experience of a Karateka

*“It was very interesting to visit the stable and meet the owner. It is always a pleasure to visit rural Okinawa that, in my mind, is the real Okinawa.”*

From the times of the Ryukyu Kingdom through the Battle of Okinawa, and then under the occupation of the U.S. and the tumultuous times that followed, the people of Okinawa have held their traditional culture very close to their hearts. This feature focuses on Okinawa’s bullfighting, a popular entertainment among the local people since the pre-war days. We’ll introduce the experience of Kevin Chaplin, a Karateka hailing from England and an eight-year resident of Okinawa.

Kevin recently had an opportunity to meet a family of bullfighting devotees and witness an exciting bullfighting tournament. As a result, he found something that connects the two seemingly very different traditions of bullfighting and karate; the exceptional spirit of the people, a spirit that’s unmistakably Okinawan.

Okinawan bullfighting used to be extremely popular in the rural areas and tournaments were held throughout the island. Local bullfighting ceased for a while during the war, but postwar the tournaments soon resumed, and a great number of “star” bulls were introduced to the scene. During those times, Uruma City was home to six bullfighting arenas, but the changing times brought new entertainment and the popularity of bullfighting waned. Still, with the only all-weather bullfighting arena in Okinawa, Uruma City frequently holds all-island bullfighting tournaments to the delight of many locals and visitors.

Okinawa’s bullfighting is unique in that it’s a match between two bulls who lock their horns and engage in a great test of strength, not a match pitting a man against a bull.

The rules are simple. The bull that runs away or doesn’t engage in the match loses. In the matches, the bulls display their diverse characters and that’s what makes bullfighting exciting to watch. A bull may seem initially unengaged, but suddenly it will charge with great force, and win. Other bulls will endure the attacks, waiting patiently for the opponent to tire, and in the end, win the match in a turnaround.

Kevin began learning combat karate in England when he was only 12 years old and enjoyed it as a sport. After moving to Japan, he learned that karate originated in Okinawa. Later, he learned about the World Oshukai Federation and became an instructor, which led to his relocation to Okinawa in 2011.

*“As a Karate practitioner and instructor, I was keen*

*to learn more about how the bulls fight.”*

On a typically hot Okinawan day, we visited the Kochi family, who has raised bulls in Uruma City for generations. We also visited their bull shed that was built in the ‘70s on the family property. The Kochis are passionate about bullfighting and have raised three Okinawa champions.

The Kochis are determined to prevent bullfighting from becoming extinct. Already, their seven-year-old son, Takuma, is determined to be the 3rd generation bullfighter of the family and takes their huge bull on daily walks. He tends to the bull every day, cleaning the shed, gathering feed, bathing, and doing all the other required tasks. It costs about 40,000 yen a month to feed a bull and there are no days off. It takes about five to six years for a bull to debut as a fighting bull.

Kevin’s conclusion: bullfighting and karate, two seemingly unconnected things actually have a common denominator; the spirit of Budo or martial arts.

*“Seeing the bulls up close was very impressive. Then one caught my eye. He was huge and not at all bothered by our presence. I learned that this bull was a veteran and champion several times over.*

*“Talking with the owner was fascinating. For him and other bull owners this is their hobby and passion. They typically have other jobs and are not farmers by trade, nor can they earn enough from competing to sustain the bulls.”*

The owners have deep dedication and passion for raising the bulls. Any of them is ready to speak in detail of how they are fed, cleaned, and trained.

*“Overall, I think it’s an event and a part of culture, which would merit greater exposure to the outside world, and would leave visitors with a very memorable experience.”*

On the day of the tournament, the owners transport the bulls to the arena in trucks. The temporary sheds at the venue are decorated with knots called “san” made of Susuki, Japanese pampas grass. The grass knots are believed to chase away bad spirits and bring good luck.

Since the domed arena opened, more families have showed up in the audience than before. On the tournament day, the energy was fantastic with large crowds of people of all ages, and even some foreign visitors. The

entertainment ranged from Shishimai lion dance to Eisa. A raffle was held midway with prizes ranging from rice to a TV and even a small truck!

When a bull wins a match, the owners who have spent years caring for the bulls celebrate. The bulls seem to share the joy too, as they happily carry children on their backs and people around the winning bull break into happy Okinawan Kachashii dance.

Kevin shared the excitement of the scene, saying,

*“What I saw today completely erased the common conception of bullfighting I had before. Seeing the children riding the winning bull in joy and excitement was such a pleasant surprise.*

*“I was intrigued by the body language of the bulls. In Karate, the more training and experience you accumulate, the calmer and more composed your fighting becomes. It seems to be the same with the bulls. When talking to the bull’s owner, he very much agreed. He also pointed out that the young bull’s character largely decides his future fighting ability.*

*“In Karate, I am constantly reminded how important character is in martial arts and in fact, the goal of our training is to improve our character. It was very satisfying to see that the same holds true for these magnificent beasts.”*

## Uruma called bullfighting kingdom

More than 30 bullfighting tournaments throughout the year take place at Ishikawa Multipurpose Dome, the prefecture’s first indoor bullring located in Uruma City. The highlight of the bullfights are the three annual all-island tournaments in the spring, summer, and fall, which are big events attracting about 4,500 spectators each. In addition to bullfighting, audiences enjoy traditional Okinawan performing arts like Lion Dance (Shishimai) and Eisa and appearances by bullfighting character “Bullfighter Wido.” <https://www.city.uruma.lg.jp/iina/2394>

### Curator Profile

#### Kevin Chaplin

Karate instructor

Originally from England, Kevin is a black-belt karateka who has been residing in Okinawa for eight years. He is a dedicated instructor of Okinawan karate at dojos through Okinawa Traditional Karatedo and Kobudo International Study Center and World Oshukai Federation. <https://oshukaijapan.jimdofree.com/>





# Feel the Spirit of Fishermen of Ages Past

*“Sailing on a Sabani allows the mind to rest while connecting with nature.”*

Boats have always been a necessity for the people of the islands of Okinawa. Okinawa prospered as a maritime state in the past as the Kingdom of the Ryukyus, and its people traveled the seas and engaged in trade with China and various Southeast Asian countries.

When supplies were scarce before and after the Battle of Okinawa, fishermen used natural materials such as wood, stones, and bamboo to create necessary fishing tools. They made innovative adjustments to things in their daily lives. One of them was the invention of the original “mikagan” or underwater goggles, which much helped them in their trade. Regarding their fishing nets, Okinawan fishermen coated the nets with pigs’ blood, as the fish would not go near white cotton nets. That also prevented them from decomposing in the saltwater. The Sabani boat-building techniques, fishing methods, and other landmark inventions of the seafaring forefathers paved the way to a maritime culture that is genuinely unique to Okinawa.

The Sabani was commonly used for fishing and transporting daily goods to various locations, and a necessity for the fishermen on Okinawa. Not a single iron nail is used in the building of Sabani, but they are sturdy and reliable, held together by wooden and bamboo pins. The highly functional features are also remarkable; the thick bottoms and the thinner side planks allow the crew to pull the fishing nets on the boats with ease. Improvements have been made over the history, such as applying shark liver oil on the bottoms to prevent decay. On the Sabani boats, the Okinawan fishermen set out to the high seas and traveled between the islands.

Daniel López is a filmmaker charmed by the spirit of Okinawa. He sees himself working as a bridge inviting the world to learn and understand the culture and traditions of the islands through his art. In his first full-length documentary, “Katabui – In the Heart of Okinawa” that was released in 2016, Daniel captures the spiritual strength in the ordinary, everyday life on Okinawa, as people live deeply connected to the distinctive traditions of the islands.

*“I wanted to tell people around the world about the way of life of the Okinawans – so connected to nature.”*

As he worked in the tourism industry in Switzerland, he was able to travel wherever his heart took him, always with his camera at hand.

He left his work and home and set out on a real journey at the age of 30.

*“As soon as I arrived on Okinawa, I thought, ‘I could live here.’ I went to so many places, across Europe, America, and Asia, and met so many people, but I’d never felt that way before.”*

He followed his inspiration and relocated to Okinawa a year later.

On a beautiful beach along the Nago Bay in northern Okinawa, Daniel met with the Yanbaru Haruser Team and joined them on his first Sabani sailboat experience. Although the Sabani is a traditional fishing boat that supported the lives of the Okinawan people for generations after the Second World War, boat engines became readily available, and the number of Sabani quickly dwindled.

In seeing the Sabani boat-building and navigating skills becoming lost, people got together to find ways to bring back the Sabani. In the year 2000, the first Sabani Sail & Paddle Race took place, racing a distance of approximately 35 kilometers from Zamami Island to Naha. The launch of the annual race, in part, brought about the succession of techniques from a handful of remaining Sabani builders to the next generation, and the Sabani culture is now on track for revival.

Men of the seas who are the driving force behind the revival of the Sabani navigate the Sabani sailboat experience tours and each authentic trip offers different excitement depending on the day’s weather and sea conditions.

The Sabani uses wind power to sail just like a yacht but is also propelled with paddles called Ueku. With six to eight people on the boat, the captain skillfully reads the winds and tides to steer. From his position at the rear, he calls out directions for all onboard to row in unison.

The Sabani seemed to glide on the waters at high speed when the wind began to blow and filled the sail. When the wind was sufficient, it allowed those on board to sit back and enjoy the sailing, and when the winds calmed down, the Ueku paddles pushed the boat forward. Surrounded only by the sounds of the wind and waves and no rumbling of engine, it was an extraordinary experience to feel the courage and spirit of the fishermen from the bygone era and becoming one with the vast open sea.

Daniel reflects, *“I felt my heart embraced by this experience. Okinawa is like a magnetic field. It isn’t*

*easy to put into words. It’s the sense of gratitude to the seas, to nature, animals, and all life forms. It’s also the heart of the island people. They have embraced and treasured the traditions passed on from their ancestors. While traveling around the island, I’ve come across various festivals that are held according to the lunar calendar. The locals have often invited me to join their celebrations. Of course, approaching the people and culture with respect goes without saying. The generosity of the people of the island is something exceptional, and is really what makes Okinawa such a unique place.”*

Although sabani are no longer a necessity to put food on the table, many new ones are built to take part in races and offer unique experience rides to guests at resorts. The recent popularity of the traditional boat hopefully ensures that the skills of building and sailing of these unique wooden vessels will not disappear in the mists of history.

Take a ride on a Sabani to experience a unique maritime culture. Feel the history and tradition that links the past to the future of Okinawa.

## Yanbaru Haruser Project Yanbaru Wild Diary-Sabani Version

A team made up of local experts in various fields offer their knowledge and expertise for adults to enjoy outdoors. With their suggestions and ideas, you can customize a unique experience you won’t soon forget. The exuberant Sabani experience on the waters of Nago takes about 1.5 hours when you can experience a unique marine activity that’s deeply rooted in the local history and culture. Their love for this region inspires other fantastic experiences besides Sabani sailing, like beach picnics and much more. Enjoy Okinawa and the Yanbaru area with all your five senses and make memories that you’ll cherish forever.

**Yanbaru Diary**  
<http://wilddiary.haruser.jp/tourplan/ct01/>

**Curator Profile**  
**Daniel López**  
Filmmaker & Photographer

Daniel López is a Spanish-Swiss filmmaker and photographer who moved to Okinawa in 2003. He made his filmmaking debut with a full-length documentary, “Katabui -In the Heart of Okinawa.” The documentary was highly acclaimed in Germany and Taiwan and was a long-running film in Switzerland and Okinawa.







# Two-day ‘Treat For The Soul’ is a Magical Experience in Yanbaru

*“I felt completely refreshed and rejuvenated in this truly wonderful and unique reserve of nature.”*

The Okinawa main island is about 110 km long from Cape Kyan, its southernmost point, to Cape Hedo in the north. Although the island is quite small, its scenery and environment change drastically from one area to another. A drive of just under 3 hours from Naha Airport can take you to places with creatures and plants living only on the main island of Okinawa. Miltos Beratlis, a nature-lover from Greece, took a two-day retreat in the northern region known as Yanbaru.

*“It was wonderful to find myself immersed in the deep forests in Yanbaru and be soothed by the calming sounds of the creeks and rivers,” says Miltos.*

Yanbaru National Park spreads over three villages, Kunigami, Higashi, and Ogimi, which together form the northernmost region of the island. The Hidden Jungle Tour started the first day of the Yanbaru 2-day Retreat Trip from Higashi Village that is 70% covered with Yanbaru’s subtropical forest. As we approach Yanbaru, old houses with tiled roofs and traditional small shops in small villages blend in the natural scenery of the forest and sea. It’s far different from the areas in the middle and south of the island. Its deep forests are also home to many animals and plants that live only there. After a briefing by our veteran guide, Higa-san, we boarded the kayaks and headed for the hidden forest while listening to Higa-san’s explanation about the Fukuchi Dam, the largest water reservoir in the prefecture. Intruding deeper into the jungle, the waterway became narrower and subtropical plants arched over the surface. We paddled for about 30 minutes and set foot into the unexplored forest, where the untouched nature was waiting.

*“The further we paddled and the deeper we walked into the jungle, the more adventure I felt. I was forgetting my sense of time while enjoying the beauty of the water surface reflecting the blue sky and surrounding forests.”*

The tours started in 2018, allowing visitors to access the jungle only by kayak with a guide approved by the local council. Even in the scorching summer heat, the woods are cool, and the sounds of a mountain stream, the breeze blowing through, and the chirping of birds are pleasant in the clear air. As I was careful not to slip on a moss-covered rocky terrain.

*“One of the attractions of Okinawa is that you can escape from the hectic pace of modern life and enjoy nature in an environment far from your everyday surroundings.”*

On our trek, we admired a giant 100-year-old Quercus Miyagii-tree (Okinawa urashirogashi) with big plate roots that can hide a full-grown man. The tour ended with a smooth kayak ride back across the dam with the sun glittering on the surface, a different experience from the morning.

Going north to Kunigami Village, feeling comfortable but tired after the hiking tour, we stopped on the way at the Kunigami Port Shokudo run by Kunigami fishermen. We enjoyed fresh sashimi and a butter grilled local fish set. “I used my fingers to eat the fish’s head and cheeks, just like in my home country,” Miltos delighted while talking with local patrons as if they were old friends. “I felt very much at home!” Kunigami Village at the northernmost tip of Okinawa faces the East China Sea to the west and the Pacific Ocean to the east. It’s the fifth-largest village on the island by area while about 90% of it is forest. Four forest therapy roads are open throughout the year, leading to Yasuzu Mountain, a holy place for local villagers, Mt. Yonaha, the highest peak of the main island, Hiji Falls in the Kunigami Village Forest Park, and Yanbaru Learning Forest. Visitors can find information and make tour bookings at the Village Office.

We stayed at “Ada Garden Hotel Okinawa” in the northernmost part of the main island on the east side of Kunigami Village. It takes about 30 minutes by car from the west coast where Cape Hedo and Okuma Beach are located on the east coast. Locals rarely visit the region, where the Yanbaru Kuina, a flightless bird and designated natural monument, inhabits the forests.

*“I fully enjoyed the forest as all my senses opened up as my soul delighted at the opportunity to enjoy its mysteries and refresh.”*

The Ada Garden Hotel Okinawa is in the subtropical jungle. When I was taking a break on the hotel terrace, Ichiro Kikuta, an artist who was to accompany me as a nature guide the next morning, stopped by. Kikuta is an artist who draws Yanbaru scenery on hand-made Japanese paper. He is a wild bird enthusiast and also a member of a team that, about 15 years ago, took part in a successful artificial breeding program to

protect Yanbaru Kuina from extinction. On the second day in Yanbaru, in response to Miltos’ request, Kikuta took us to Ada Beach that offers a dynamic view of the hills of Yanbaru along the coast, and later, he guided us through various nature spots that are subjects of his sumi-e paintings. On our several-hour tour, we found edible wild grass growing on limestone cliffs and listened to the drumming of ‘Noguchigera’, which is a threatened woodpecker species living only in Yanbaru.

## Hidden Jungle Tour in Yanbaru

In addition to this tour, the seasonal “Ucor Mountain Course” tour takes you on a trek through the subtropical forest to observe and immerse yourself in nature. The destination is a hidden forest in the national park accessible only by kayak. The tour takes about 5 hours. A small group of up to 6 people can fully enjoy nature on this tour.

**Hidden Jungle Tour in Yanbaru**  
<https://higashi-kanko.jp/hikyoku/>

## YANBARU Birdwatching Tour

Ichiro Kikuta moved to Ada in 2006 after becoming infatuated with the nature around Ada Village in Kunigami. His “Yanbaru Kafu” works depict Yanbaru’s nature in monochrome sumi-e drawings on handmade Japanese paper. His subjects feature a deep green forest, the bright red beaks and feet of Yanbaru Kuina and expressions of nature. Reservations for guided wild bird and nature tours can be made at Kikuta’s website.

**YANBARU Birdwatching Tour**  
<http://kikutaichiro.com/>

## Ada Garden Hotel Okinawa

The long-established hotel, located in the northernmost part of Okinawa Main Island, was built in 2000 with construction materials and furniture imported from Vietnam as a show of friendship between Okinawa and Vietnam. Many bird lovers from Japan and abroad visit the hotel during the bird watching season from November through March.

**Ada Garden Hotel Okinawa**  
<https://ada-hotel.net/>

## Curator Profile

### Miltos Beratlis

English teacher and nature lover

“Born in Greece. I have lived in Okinawa for 5 years. With its unique culture, wonderful nature, and world-class entertainment, the island fills me with excitement and curiosity. I have enjoyed such activities as Okinawa karate, tea ceremony, surfing and street dancing.”





# Trek to the Most Spectacular Sight on Iriomote Island

*“It’s a magical place, an amazing creation of nature. It wasn’t easy to reach the waterfall, but it certainly was worth it.”*

The breathtaking beauty of Okinawa’s ocean cleanses our spirits and makes us feel one with nature. The brilliant colors painted on these transparent waters are often referred to as Okinawa Blue, describing the gradation of colors from clear blue to emerald-blue and deep blue. Visitors and locals enjoy the many marine activities available here, from diving and snorkeling to fishing, surfing, and more.

Okinawa’s seas and nature are what inspired Hayato Maki, a professional surfer, to relocate to Okinawa in 2011. Maki has traveled across the globe to ride the waves and has lived in Tokyo, Hawaii, and Chiba, a prefecture known for the best surfing spots in Japan. Although he has yet to visit Africa and South America, his passion for surfing took him to places in America, Mexico, Papua New Guinea, and many other countries. Out of all the places he’s visited in the world, he says that Okinawa’s ocean is the best.

Maki runs a business that offers custom-made tours that take full advantage of the weather, sea conditions, and other local factors in Okinawa. He says,

*“Since coming to Okinawa, I feel closer to nature. I feel the turn of the tides and the direction of the winds. Throughout my days, I enjoy a lifestyle that’s in sync with the rhythm of nature.”*

On this occasion, he will be on an adventure through the jungles of Iriomote Island, a place still off the beaten track. We will trek to the Mayagusuku Falls hidden deep in the forests.

Approximately 400 kilometers north to south, and 1,000 kilometers east to west, the Ryukyu Archipelago consists of 160 islands, small and large, floating on the crystal clear waters. Forty-seven of the islands are inhabited with Okinawa Island being the largest and the main island of the Okinawa Prefecture.

Iriomote is in the Yaeyama Island group and the second largest island in the prefecture. Close to 40 rivers flow through the island, bringing life to subtropical jungles, which cover 90% of the land. Near the mouths of the rivers are thick mangrove forests, making up about 25% of the mangroves in all of Japan.

The whole island is a national park and remains mostly untouched. It has no major roads that would allow people to travel around the entire island in vehicles. The only way to get on the island is through two ports at the southeastern and northern points of the island. Iriomote

is home to about 2,000 residents who live in villages that dot the island’s shores. Our destination, the Mayagusuku Falls, is deep in the lush jungle that covers the interior of the island.

Mayagusuku Falls was only known to boar hunters and a few other locals until a short time ago. The route there is a little challenging. The tour is for those who are confident of their physical fitness.

Our guide nicknamed Naga is an expert in outdoor activities and the owner of Sima Mari Asibi. As a student, he was in a mountaineering club and focused his studies on fieldwork. He also introduced the canoeing and caving activities to Iriomote, which are now major activities for visitors to the island. Over the two decades he’s lived there, he has learned much about boar hunting, harvesting edible plants in the forests, and fishing from the local elders. He wants to show the visitors all the natural beauty of the island. It was his love for Iriomote Island that inspired him to start the business he runs alone, offering tours for small groups.

Upon meeting up at Uehara Port at 8:00 in the northern part of the island, Maki and Naga boarded an excursion boat to the upper reaches of Urauchi River, the longest river in Okinawa Prefecture. After about a 30-minute ride, the boat arrived at the start of the 25-kilometer trekking course, which would take the group through the thickest part of the island’s jungles.

After a 30-minute trek, the group arrived at the observation point for Mariyudu Falls, a popular sightseeing spot on the island. Further along the well-traveled trekking course is Kanbire Falls, and beyond the waterfall, the trail becomes steeper and more challenging. The trek continues through the dense growth. The sounds of animals in the jungle are all around.

The terrain is challenging with fallen trees and other obstacles along the way. Just before the destination is the final obstacle, the Itakichi River, a tributary to Urauchi River, which you have to cross on unsteady footing. Then finally, our eyes meet the magnificent sight of Mayagusuku Falls, with water flowing down the steps that fan out to the sides. As Naga says,

*“This is the reward for the hard work to get here.”*

Upon completing the adventure, Maki wrapped up, *“People often say, ‘to nurture the seas, we have to nurture the mountains.’ On this trip, I felt that the mountains and the seas are indeed connected. The*

*hills and seas of Iriomote Island are ideal, with the natural cycles turning the way it’s supposed to. It was my first visit to Iriomote Island, but I felt so much energy from this extraordinary place where nature remains untouched. The people on the island were warm and kind. The wild boar meat was too delicious, and I recommend everyone to try it. Next time I come, I hope to enjoy the seas off Iriomote also.”*

This trip was Maki’s first time on Iriomote. Before setting off on the adventure of trekking through the dense subtropical jungle to reach the mystical waterfall, he had these words in mind: “Nature always has lessons for us. Actively enjoying nature involves risks, but by understanding, being prepared, and experiencing these risks, they make us grow.”

The best months to visit Mayagusuku Falls are from November to March when the volume of the water increases, and the waterfall is dynamic. Take a break from your busy life and experience something extraordinary in the mangroves, the trails, and at the waterfall. Immerse yourself in the abundant nature, and feel your body and spirit detox from everyday stress.

## Sima Mari Ashibi

The business is specializing in guided trekking tours on Iriomote Island for small groups of five to eight people. The more challenging tours are conducted from mid-September to May to avoid the summertime high humidity and temperatures. The guide carries a satellite phone for safety. For people who are less physically fit, with children, or just looking to enjoy a leisurely time, the company offers more relaxed tours to enjoy the fantastic nature of Iriomote Island. **Iriomote Island Jungle Trekking Day Tours** <http://www.simamariasibi.com>

## Curator Profile

### Hayato Maki

CEO, Simple Life Adventures  
Patagonia Ambassador

A professional surfer, spearfisherman, and founder of Simple Life Adventures, a company that offers various activities on Okinawa like surfing, SUP, and snorkeling. Maki relocated to Chatan, Okinawa in 2011. <https://simplelife-adventures.com>



# Discover Okinawa’s Food Culture at its Vibrant Markets

*“A walk around a food market is a wonderful experience that taught me a lot about Okinawa.”*

The Culinary Tour helps to discover the true spirit of Okinawa through food, to know how local people feel and think about food and how they cook their everyday meals. The food experience of the “longevity island” makes one feel the vitality. The island has always been energetic even during difficult times, in the spirit of “This is nothing yet.”

American Pamela Ann who took the Naha Food Walking Tour is a chef residing on Okinawa and specializing in Greek cooking, specifically in making Greek cheese. The tour is a two-and-a-half-hour food experience.

*“As a chef, I have a desire to learn more about the history and ingredients of Okinawan food.”*

One of the attractions of Okinawa is its ‘cham-puru’ or ‘mix culture’ that also applies to food. Okinawa has developed a unique food culture that has been influenced both by the trade with Asian countries during the Ryukyu Kingdom era that lasted for 450 years and by 27 years of American rule after WWII.

In the Ryukyu Kingdom era, the court cuisine was born to accommodate the envoys from China, with which Okinawa had extensive trading ties. About 400 delegates from China stayed in Okinawa for about half a year at a time, and it was said that all the pigs in the kingdom were eaten up every time. Each item in the meal was delicately prepared, like, for example, the ‘flower squid’, which is squid cut into the shape of a flower and served on a red Ryukyu lacquerware plate, and ‘minudaru’, which is a thinly sliced pork loin marinated in black sesame and soy sauce and sugar, and steamed. The court meal prepared over a long time was regarded as the essence of hospitality.

On the other hand, the common cuisine was built with the wisdom to nourish even the poor, such as combining sweet potatoes, a staple at the time, with seasonal vegetables, seasonal small fish and seaweed.

In a hot and humid island environment where food easily spoils, creative ideas were born, such as adding vinegar to fish when eating it raw and stir-frying vegetables. That is one of the reasons for Okinawan people’s famed longevity.

A local dish that represents Okinawa the most is called “Cham-puru” that is simply a combination of ingredients fried together. Other popular foods include pork and egg rice

balls made using canned pork luncheon meat, smoked, dried, and ground sea snake mixed with rice, and Okinawa soba noodles in bonito tuna broth that is regarded as Okinawan soul food.

As the participants stroll around, they can choose 5 to 6 food items from the market to sample.

*“Atmosphere at Naha’s Shitamachi-Dori was exotic and exciting. It was precious to discover the relationship with various Asian countries and the lifestyle of the island,”* Pamela said.

Pamela moved to mainland Japan in the latter half of 1980 and lived there for nearly 15 years, then for about six years in Greece, which she had admired since childhood before moving to Okinawa. “Healthy and laid-back lifestyle in the blue zone by the beautiful sea, open-minded and friendly locals make Okinawa and Greece very similar,” she says. She believes she can live here using only ingredients grown on the island like in Greece. With help from local dairy farmers, she has succeeded in making fresh cheese using Okinawan goat milk and keeping the traditional manufacturing method without using any additives.

Pamela’s experience of the Hidden Naha Food Walking Tour, on which participants can enjoy sampling food while walking around the market, began with the entry to an alley from Kokusai Street, the main street of Naha. Hirofumi Ozawa, also known as Hiro, is a chef and hosted the tour.

The two chefs, Hiro and Pamela, made plans for our tour discussing what foods were of interest. The tour features local dishes such as ‘goat soup’ related to Greek cheese, which is Pamela’s life work, and ‘Jimami tofu,’ which is made of peanuts and was used in court dishes, and various other foods.

The area around the market exudes a genuine Okinawan atmosphere, exotic and downtown-like. It satisfies both your stomach and heart.

*“A walk around the market was full of surprises, discoveries, and local encounters. This is a recommended spot every traveler should visit once,”* Pamela recommends.

The Makishi and Tsuboya areas are lined with traditional markets and shops. After the war, black market shops mainly selling U.S. military

surplus goods, sprung up in the Makishi area, and Naha City opened a public market to regulate them. (As of 2019, the rebuilding of the market is underway, and it’s scheduled to re-open in April 2022 at the same location). Beyond the arcade, there are clothes stores, shops selling side dishes, dried foods like kelp and sea snake alongside souvenir shops. The narrow back alleys that can only be reached by bike or on foot create a nostalgic atmosphere where the time has stood still.

Pamela was most interested in the goat dishes. After the war, the goat milk and meat were common local dishes eaten as a precious protein source for nourishment, but nowadays goat sashimi and other goat organs are available only at specialty stores. This time we tried goat soup, in which goat bones are cooked whole for a long time and seasoned with just a little salt.

In the fish shop, she was impressed by Gurukun, the red Okinawan prefectural fish that looks blue when in the sea. Okinawa is the top consumer of the fish in the country and it’s an indispensable part of local cuisine.

*“Okinawa is an island where you can have fun interacting with local people. Especially in this area of Naha, it was a lot of fun to meet people as I walked around,”* Pamela said.

In other words, enjoy the Culinary Tour with your all five senses, from interacting with local people to getting to know the local food.

## Hidden Naha Food Walking Tour

An experience tour by Hirofumi Ozawa, an Airbnb host who has worked as a chef in New Zealand, Australia, and Canada. The popular tour takes participants on a walk around the streets for about two and a half hours following the guests’ requests. During the tour, participants can sample 5-6 dishes and sweets. The participation fee includes the price of the dishes.

### Curator Profile

#### Pamela Ann

Greek restaurant chef-owner

Born in San Francisco, USA. 7 years in Okinawa. Chef-owner of “Little Greek Kitchen,” a Greek restaurant. In 2018, “Little Greek Tilly” made of raw goat milk following the traditional Greek recipe, won the Silver Prize at the “Japan Cheese Awards.” She has also won awards and attracted attention in various trade shows.  
<https://www.littlegreekkitchen.com>





# Yanbaru Dining Is an Unforgettable Okinawan Experience

*“Okinawa has allowed me to be a healthier, happier version of myself”*

The northern region of Okinawa Island is known as Yanbaru. Lush green forests cover most of the area where streams and springs flow through the untouched landscape full of unique and precious wildlife. The region has numerous tourist destinations, resort hotels, the world-famous Churaumi Aquarium, and quaint little villages.

It attracts many visitors to take part in guided walks on nature trails, birdwatching, and canoe tours to places like the Mt. Yonahadake, the tallest peak, and Gesashi River, the largest mangrove forest on Okinawa. From organic vegetables, fruits, spices, honey, seafood to stock farm produce, the gifts of nature from Yanbaru are sure to nourish your mind and body.

Coral reefs surrounding Okinawa make its soil fertile with minerals and vitamins. Vegetables on Okinawa grow under the intense UV rays of the sun that heightens their antioxidant potency making them very healthy and often regarded as ‘superfoods’. In Ogimi, a village up in the Yanbaru region and known the world over for the longevity of its residents, grandmothers over the age of 90 live in their old Okinawan-style homes and lead simple, yet healthy lives working on their fields daily and enthusiastically taking part in various community activities.

When “The Okinawa Program,” a book featuring the longevity of Okinawans, was published, it drew the world’s attention to the healthy local centenarians and their diets. Researchers from around the world continue to come to Okinawa in search of the secrets to longevity. Like the long-living people who reside in the ‘Blue Zones’ around the world, the Okinawans who enjoy long lives, eat healthily. Their diets are well-balanced and include plenty of vegetables. They live an active lifestyle that is stress-free and also full of purpose and motivation.

Christal Jade Burnette came to Japan from Florida to study. While attending university and living in Tokyo, she saw Okinawa as “an island of longevity, surrounded by the beautiful ocean.” She eventually relocated to Okinawa and has embraced the healthy way of life here.

*“My lifestyle here is more relaxed and has less pressure. There’s no need to rush, dress in the fanciest clothes, or worry about things I used to. I enjoy being more myself, in nature, the ocean. I feel healthier, physically, and mentally.”*

In the far northern area of the Yanbaru region, the land is bursting with nature. There are no convenience stores or other familiar sights of the city. At night, the moon and stars take center stage, accompanied by the sounds of nature of the forests and seas. The lush green subtropical forests, crystal-clear, emerald-blue waters, and the warm and genuine people of the area welcome the visitors. On this occasion, local Yanbaru experts joined Christal for a unique experience harvesting various products and enjoying a delightful picnic. The love and knowledge of this region inspired the experts to plan the activities for the day.

As Christal arrived at a coffee farm, the sounds of the breeze in the trees and the chirping of birds were the day’s soundtrack. On the farm, ferns were growing alongside coffee plants, which carried on their branches plenty of berries that contained the coffee beans. Okinawa’s coffee harvest begins in December, and on that day, Christal harvested coffee and honey from beehives Yanbaru beekeepers had placed in the forest. An expert in each field guided the harvesting and drying and roasting of the coffee beans. That was a great fun experience.

*“It was rejuvenating to breathe the fresh air and feel the natural energy of the forests cleanse my spirits,”* Christal stated afterward.

Soon, the picnic table was ready and full of colorful, inviting dishes prepared using fresh local ingredients. The chef took great care to bring out the natural taste of the ingredients for our fantastic picnic lunch. The meal consisted of a delicious hot grilled Agu pork sandwich and whole milk cheese, together with sautéed zucchini, tomatoes, and mushrooms. The roasted sweet potatoes were served with a drizzle of fresh honey, and a cup of fresh coffee brewed from the beans Christal herself had harvested and helped to roast topped the meal.

For a delightful surprise, the Yanbaru Picnic Team prepared ‘blue herb water,’ a tea extracted from the flowers of wild butterfly peas. Needless to say, the meal was beautiful, and the care and thoughtfulness of the team made the day perfect. The picnic lunch had an abundance of dishes, all made with ingredients nurtured and grown in this area. All Christal had to do was to enjoy this wonderful experience.

A word in the Okinawan language, “Nuchigusui,” literally translates “medicine

for life.” This piece of wisdom from the past remains regarding the healthy Okinawan foods made with plenty of vegetables and soy products, as they are genuinely Nuchigusui. The older Okinawan people often say, “Thank you for the Nuchigusui,” when they enjoy a healthy and delicious meal or marvel a beautiful scenery or any other experience that they feel has enriched their hearts and bodies. Upon enjoying a day of Yanbaru and the picnic, Christal says,

*“Picking and roasting my own coffee beans, and eating real and natural honey made it all taste even better. A picnic lunch made with the freshest seasonal ingredients packed with delicious tastes of Yanbaru. What could be more perfect on a nice day? Thank you for the Nuchigusui.”*

## Yanbaru Harusen Project Yanbaru Wild Diary – Coffee Version

The harvesting and picnic experience in the forest of Nago takes about 5 hours. A “dream team” of farmers and master chefs who reside in Yanbaru and truly cherish the region bring their knowledge, expertise, and love of the area for visitors to experience all that it has to offer. It’s a chance to connect with the land with all five senses. They’re happy to make suggestions and provide delightful ideas for grownups to enjoy the great outdoors, on the beach or in the forest.

### Yanbaru Diary

<http://wilddiary.haruser.jp/tourplan/ct04/>

\*The contents of harvesting experience tours vary according to season.

### Curator Profile

#### Christal Jade Burnette

CEO/Founder of Kenko Leaf

Originally from Florida, USA, Christal came to Japan to study and attend university. The concepts in Japanese food culture and a healthy lifestyle influenced her, and she eventually relocated to Okinawa in 2016. She earned her master’s degree at the Graduate School of Agriculture at the University of the Ryukyus. She is the founder and operator of the English language e-commerce site, Kenko Leaf, which specializes in introducing and selling specialty products from Okinawa. Christal selects all the products available on Kenko Leaf carefully. She emphasizes personally meeting the people who actually grow and make the products. <https://shop.kenkoleaf.com>





# NATURE & OUTDOOR


Although small in size, Okinawa is blessed with a great variety of nature, from the stunning ocean with its reefs and exotic life in the ocean to jungle-covered hills in the north with a plethora of extremely rare species of flora and fauna. Iriomote Island in the south is often called the last true wilderness in Japan. White sandy beaches that are kilometers long make the islands a marine leisure paradise. Scuba diving and snorkeling are next to none in the world. Finally, the warm climate year-round makes it possible to engage in any outdoor activity at any time anywhere on the islands.

## Relaxing trip across the water in a water buffalo pulled cart

Yubu Island is a small island with a circumference of 2.15 km, next to Iriomote Island. A shallow ocean shoal separates the islands, and to reach Yubu, visitors cross the shoal on water buffalo pulled carts. The entire island is one large botanical garden, where visitors can enjoy the fantastic natural beauty of Japan's southern islands all year round. The island has various facilities, including restaurants, shops, a butterfly garden, and a bougainvillea garden, and visitors can take a stroll on foot around the island to visit them all.

Yubu Island  
[www.yubujima.com/english](http://www.yubujima.com/english)





## Superb sandy beach surrounded by stunning Kerama Blue

A trip to Tokashiki, one of the Kerama Islands, takes 70 minutes from Naha by ferry or 35 minutes by a high-speed passenger boat. Aharen Beach on the southeastern part of the island impresses visitors with its stunning white sand and super-clear ocean waters stretching as far as the eye can see. The beach offers a full range of activities, including glass-bottom boat rides and day-long tours to the uninhabited island of Hanari. It's a convenient destination because of the numerous minshuku boarding houses and restaurants nearby.

**Aharen Beach**  
<http://www.vill.tokashiki.okinawa.jp/>





## Unforgettable time with horses on Kume Island

Horseback riding on Kume Island is an activity everyone who likes to spend time with horses should experience. A ride on the beach, along one of the many trails through the forest or the village, is unforgettable. And there's nothing better than getting into the water and splashing around with the horses. Trying island life with a farm stay and helping take care of the horses is also something no one experiences in a city.

**Kumejima Horse Farm**  
<http://kumejimauma.jimdo.com/>



## Yoga at a majestic Katsuren Castle World Heritage Site

A yoga event held under the morning sun at the Katsuren Castle World Heritage Site is a special occasion. A professional yoga teacher leads the event, and beginners are welcome. Yoga mats are available for rent, or participants can bring their own. The historical surroundings make the experience fantastic, as participants balance their body and mind and let their fatigue and stress float away.

**Castle Yoga at the Katsuren Castle World Heritage Site**  
<http://uruma-ru.jp>



Stand Up Paddling on  
Kerama Blue waters off Aka Island

The Kerama Islands consist of 20 islands of varying sizes. Aka Island is a paradise a mere hour's trip from Naha. The crystal-clear waters around the island are known as "Kerama Blue," and from April to October, the area is a mecca for SUP boarders. Activities also include irregular SUP yoga sessions at the Meenu Yoga Retreat.

Akajima SUP  
[www.h-enterprise.jp/marine](http://www.h-enterprise.jp/marine)



The ultimate holiday on a  
catamaran off Iriomote Island

Most visitors agree that boarding a catamaran yacht and sailing the deep blue waters off Iriomote Island or exploring surrounding coral reefs is the ultimate relaxing holiday. They can choose from various plans, from leisurely half-day tours to day-long charter cruises for a private group. The uninhabited western area of Iriomote Island is excellent for snorkeling and diving, and a deserted beach ashore is just waiting for the curious.

Nilaina Holidays  
[www.nilaina-holidays.com/](http://www.nilaina-holidays.com/)





The wonders of Kabira Bay undersea world

Kabira Marine Service operates glass-bottom boats on Kabira Bay, one of the most picturesque and scenic areas on Ishigaki Island. As passengers gaze down through the glass-paneled bottom of the boat, they watch the colorful undersea world of tropical fish swim and play among the corals. The ships’ captains are very knowledgeable about the bay, and it’s fun to listen to their unique commentary. The rides that last around 30 minutes have earned the coveted 3-star rating of the Michelin Green Guide Japan.

**Kabira Bay**  
[www.kabiramarine.jp](http://www.kabiramarine.jp)



A historic pier offers Yaeyama’s best sunsets

The West Pier on the western side of the central settlement on Taketomi Island is a perfect place to enjoy the sunset, and many people visit the site to marvel at the gorgeous view. The pier was built in 1938, when people from Taketomi Island, which had no arable land of its own, used it on their way to rice paddies on other islands, like Iriomote and Yubu. It was used as an actual working pier until around 1970 but has become a tourist spot today.

**West Pier** (Nishi Sanbashi)  
[www.painusima.com/en-taketomijima](http://www.painusima.com/en-taketomijima)



The beaches of Miyako island take the breath away

On Miyako Island, a pure white beach stretches seven kilometers and is as beautiful as a picture postcard. The beauty of the waters and the shades of blue are unmatched and takes your breath away. The expansive beach has all the amenities a traveler could desire, including a diner, bathrooms, and showers, not to mention activities, such as jet skiing and parasailing.

**Yonaha Maehama beach**  
[www.miyako-guide.net](http://www.miyako-guide.net)

Beautiful beach on Okinawa’s northernmost island

Iheya Island is the northernmost inhabited island of Okinawa Prefecture. Boasting untouched natural beauty, Yonezaki Beach, the natural beach spreading around the island’s southern tip, offers dazzling pure white sands and is surrounded with shallow shoals and coral reefs. The landscape on the coast changes from area to area, and visitors can enjoy a full range of marine sports. A camping ground adjacent to the beach is fully equipped with showers and washrooms, making it convenient and enjoyable to stay.

**Yonezaki Beach** (Yonezaki Coast)  
<http://www.vill.iheya.okinawa.jp>



A stunning beach, tropical fish and sea turtles

Furuzamami Beach on Zamami Island in the Keramas is, without a doubt, one of the most beautiful beaches in Okinawa. The bright white sand and clear blue waters make swimming just a few meters offshore an unforgettable experience. The many colorful tropical fish make the beach a popular snorkeling point. Ama Beach in the village is a famous sea turtle egg-laying ground, and lucky visitors may even encounter a sea turtle while snorkeling.

**Furuzamami Beach** (Old Zamami Beach)  
<http://www.vill.zamami.okinawa.jp/guidemap/detail/154/>



Hiji Waterfall highlights Yanbaru’s great outdoors

At 25.7 meters, Hiji Waterfall in northern Okinawa is the highest on Okinawa’s main island. Hiji River that leads to the waterfall is blessed with a high volume of water and is home to a diverse variety of plant and animal life. A casual trek through a man-made walking trail leads up to the waterfall as visitors marvel at the lush subtropical surroundings. The campsite at the beginning of the trail requires campers to bring and pitch their own tents, but it’s fully equipped with communal restrooms, pay showers, and kitchen facilities for cooking.

**Hiji Waterfall**  
<http://hiji.yuiyui-k.jp>





# CUISINE

Okinawan traditional cuisine is believed to play a big part in the famed Okinawan longevity. The cuisine consists of a reasonable amount of protein, mostly in the form of pork, and plenty of fresh vegetables and seaweeds. Fish, mostly from coastal waters, is also essential. Even the common folk in Okinawa have always understood the importance of a healthy cuisine as expressed in the saying “Nuchi Gusui” meaning roughly “food is medicine.” To this day, foods such as “Tofu Champuru,” stir-fried mix of vegetables and everything else, and “Okinawa Soba” are the staples of Okinawans’ everyday diet.

## New Okinawan cuisine “Ryukyu Gastronomy”

Only eight buildings comprise this luxurious villa on a large site on Irabu Island just off Miyako Island. Chefs trained at prestigious restaurants and hotels in Tokyo and France ensure the restaurant on the premises serves authentic cuisine. When the restaurant first opened, the menu was French, but the plans for the future call for developing Okinawan food culture-based “Ryukyu gastronomy”.

Konpeki The Villa All Suite  
<https://www.konpeki.okinawa/restaurant/>







## A Taste of Modern Vegetarian Cuisine at Ukishima Garden

Ukishima Garden is a restaurant in an old house where you can enjoy meals made of fresh island vegetables grown without chemicals and specialty organic wine. Their surprising vegan meals, imitating the flavors of meat, fish, eggs, and dairy products with grains, are well received even by non-vegans. The food is also Kosher and Halal, and non-allergenic. You should try the sommelier-selected organic wine together with the food.

**Ukishima Garden**  
<https://ukishima-garden.com>



## Enjoy the delicious taste of fresh Okinawan vegetables in style

Shokudo Faidama is an Okinawan restaurant near to Makishi Public Market, also known as “Naha’s Kitchen,” and Ukishima Street that has rows of stylish shops selling a wide range of fashionable items. The most popular dishes on the menu are “Teishoku” set meals, which make extensive use of ingredients from Ishigaki Island, which is the original home of the restaurant’s proprietress, and other parts of Okinawa Prefecture. The restaurant has gained a following of numerous repeat customers who regularly visit to enjoy its authentic Okinawan cuisine, which changes on a fortnightly basis. The food, with its generous helpings of vegetables, arranged beautifully on traditional Yachimun (Okinawan pottery) bowls and plates, is also very attractive, making for fantastic snapshots.

**Shokudo Faidama**





**Fresh ingredients with an emphasis on the homemade fare**

Be Natural is a café restaurant that serves dishes based on Italian and French cuisine and prepared using seasonal local ingredients. The restaurant takes care to display the names of the producers of its vegetables wherever possible and purchases fresh fish and seafood caught in the Okinawan waters directly from the port. The menu consists of a single course, and diners can enjoy the excellent and uncompromising flavor of homemade bread and sauces, chosen specially by the olive oil sommelier-certified chef to match the dishes served.

**Be Natural**  
<http://natural-blog.benatural.sunnyday.jp/>



**Fine confectionery from the days of the Ryukyu Kingdom**

Jahana Kippan makes the renowned Ryukyuan confectionery kippan (mandarin cake) and toganzuke (winter melon pickle) using recipes passed down through generations since 300 years ago when they were brought to Okinawa from China. Kippan is made of Okinawan citrus fruits such as kaabuchii, and has a sophisticated, well-balanced sour taste. A great deal of time and effort goes into the finished confectionery, and Jahana Kippan is the only store in Okinawa to make and sell these delicacies.

**Jahana Kippan**  
[www.jahanakippan.com/en](http://www.jahanakippan.com/en)



# The perfect marriage of awamori and island cuisine

Awanami to Shimanoaji Hateruma is a highly specialized restaurant operating in an old traditional-style house on Iriomote Island. The restaurant uses mostly ingredients grown or procured on the island, including homegrown vegetables and fish caught by the owner himself. The popular dinners make excellent use of the flavor of the fresh ingredients, and the restaurant enjoys an endless stream of reservations from diners enchanted by their delicious and exquisite taste. The rare “Awanami” brand awamori, produced on Hateruma Island, will delight visiting Awamori lovers.

Awanami to Shimanoaji Hateruma



# Traditional kaiseki cuisine with a taste of the contemporary

Yaeyamaryori Tantei is a restaurant in the Shuri district in Naha, where diners enjoy luxurious multi-course meals featuring arrangements of traditional Yaeyama Islands cuisine. The creative meals use mostly Okinawa-produced ingredients and include such dishes as saihan (vegetables on rice, a recipe dating back to the Ryukyu Kingdom era) and vegetarian options made using wild greens. Many of the dishes served are only available here. The restaurant also pays particular attention to serving its food in Ryukyuan lacquerware, ensuring that its guests have a luxurious and extravagant dining experience.

**Yaeyamaryori Tantei**  
<http://www.yaeyamaryourintantei.jp/>



# Yaeyama with all your five senses but a focus on food

Funakura no Sato restaurant serves local Okinawan cuisine based on the concept of wanting guests to experience the culture of Okinawa and the Yaeyama Islands. By relocating and rebuilding old houses of various sizes on the spacious premises (approximately 9,917 square meters), the owners have recreated a landscape similar to that of the “good old days” of the Yaeyama Islands. The restaurant’s food is prepared mainly with local ingredients, and on traditional Ryukyu pottery (yachimun) and glass tableware. At dinnertime, guests can enjoy Okinawan folk songs and dance performances while enjoying their meals.

**Funakura no Sato**  
<http://www.funakuranosato.com/>

# Savor the flavor of craft beer as you watch the sunset

Enjoy Chatan Beer, a craft beer brewed on site while watching the sunset overlooking the Chatan Harbor. The restaurant offers seafood and meat dishes based on American cuisine. Cruising on catamarans or having a party on a boat is also available.

**Chatan Harbor Brewery & Restaurant**  
[www.chatanharbor.jp/en/](http://www.chatanharbor.jp/en/)



# Communicating the culinary culture of Okinawa to the world

Taste of Okinawa offers cooking experience programs in English for foreign visitors. The first stop is the “Ingredients Tour,” where participants take a tour around the various butchers, fishmongers, and food sellers’ stalls at Makishi Public Market. A hands-on food preparation demonstration under the direction of the program instructor follows. The programs enable participants to learn about the ingredients and dishes that underpin the long-life culture of Okinawa. The night-time restaurant also offers an extensive lineup of local alcoholic beverages and a variety of Okinawan craft beers for diners to enjoy an authentic island drink with their meals.

**Taste of Okinawa**  
<https://tasteof.okinawa>



# Meticulous makers of specialty chocolate from beans to bar

Specialty chocolate makers at Timeless Chocolate control every process in the making of their fine chocolate, from cocoa beans to a chocolate bar. They procure cocoa beans from countries around the world, including Madagascar and Cuba, through their proprietary channels before roasting and blending them with shimazaram ( “island raw sugar”) or dark brown sugar from sugar cane grown in Okinawa and Kagoshima. Visitors definitely want to spend some time in the café, tasting the difference between chocolates from various origins.

**Timeless Chocolate**  
<http://timelesschocolate.com>



# RELAXATION & LUXURY

Recently, Okinawa receives about 10 million tourists every year, and officials expect the number to grow even further. This influx of visitors has spawned a boom in developing resorts, hotels, and other tourist facilities throughout the prefecture. Almost all major world-wide resort hotels have facilities on Okinawa. They offer spas, beaches with every imaginable marine leisure activity, and superior dining facilities. Hotels and resorts are also going up on smaller islands as operators compete, trying always to find new destinations to offer to increasing numbers of vacationers who want to have their share of paradise.



Uza Terrace has private villas in a beautiful, natural setting

The Uza Terrace Beach Club Villas opened in March 2016. All of its 48 luxurious guestrooms have their own private pool for a thoroughly satisfying stay. Relax and soak up Okinawa's natural beauty as the unspoiled beach stretches out before you. Facilities also include restaurants and spa.

**The Uza Terrace Beach Club Villas**  
[www.terrace.co.jp/en/uza](http://www.terrace.co.jp/en/uza)





## An international resort hotel complex in Onna Village

Located in Onna Village, the Hyatt Regency Seragaki Island is a resort that has transformed the entire Seragaki Island into a hotel complex. All guest rooms have an open-air balcony that offers a magnificent close-up view of the Okinawan ocean. Guests can enjoy facilities such as the hotel's pool, spa and restaurants, and a full range of activities. The Hyatt Regency Seragaki offers a broad lineup of features befitting of a destination hotel dedicated to energizing the bodies and minds of its guests.

**Hyatt Regency Seragaki Island, Okinawa**  
[www.hyattregencyseragaki.com](http://www.hyattregencyseragaki.com)





**Halekulani Hotel represents  
Hawaiian-born Luxury**

The first overseas expansion of Halekulani, a Hawaiian luxury hotel with over 100 years of history, opened in Okinawa in 2019. From each of the guest rooms, all with an ocean view, guests can enjoy views of the lush nature of Onna Village and the magnificent East China Sea. Halekulani's world-famous hospitality ensures your high-quality stay. The up-to-date facilities include the innovative SHIROUX restaurant with a Michelin two-star chef as a consultant, other restaurants and bars, and five pools.

Halekulani Okinawa  
<https://www.okinawa.halekulani.com/en/>





### Spa resort for a healthy body and a healthy mind

The Terrace Club at Busena is a wellness resort built in an outstanding location. The resort's thalasso pool is filled with seawater, warmed to a comfortable bathing temperature, and its various flowing water zones and massage jets enable guests to reinvigorate and reenergize their bodily functions. The resort also offers a full range of programs to suit the purposes of its guests, from active programs in which guests move their bodies to those where they can relax both their minds and bodies. Enjoy a delicious meal in the dining room which offers a full lineup of healthy dishes, before retiring to your room to relax.

**The Terrace Club at Busena**  
<https://www.terrace.co.jp/en/clubatbusena/>



### Transform from a traveler to an islander

When the Hoshinoya Taketomi Island was designed, the aim was more to create a hotel like an Okinawan village melding into the island landscape than an accommodation facility. Every guestroom is a detached bungalow with a Ryukyuan red-tile roof and private garden where a guest can feel just like an islander. The acclaimed, original dishes in the restaurant are prepared with a touch of French flair but using ingredients familiar in Okinawa.

**Hoshinoya Taketomi Island**  
<https://hoshinoya.com/taketomijima/en/>





Gourmet meals and private luxury

The Hiramatsu Hotels & Resorts Ginoza is proud of its gourmet cuisine. It also offers fully furnished rooms, a pool, jacuzzi hot tub, and other facilities. Guests can enjoy dining on light and delicate French cuisine, prepared using the freshest hand-picked seasonal ingredients produced locally in Okinawa and other locations in Japan. The luxury guest rooms are designed in a stand-alone villa style with an emphasis on privacy. Each room has its own ocean view, ensuring the guests enjoy a relaxing, stress-free stay.

**The Hiramatsu Hotels & Resorts Ginoza**  
<http://www.hiramatsuhotels.com/eng/ginoza/>



Premium hotel – Luxurious suites

Shigira Bayside Suite Allamanda on the southern coast of Miyako Island features a golf course and emerald green sea stretching out right in front of the hotel. All guestrooms are suites and the hotel boasts 86 guestrooms with a private pool, the largest number in Japan. The Jacuzzi Suites, featuring a jacuzzi, kitchen, and washing machine opened in spring 2015 to accommodate travelers staying for an extended period.

**Shigira Bayside Suite Allamanda**  
<https://www.nanseirakuen.com/en/allamanda>



A fantastic resort to savor the luxury of utter relaxation

Cypress Resort Kumejima offers luxurious stays for guests simply to relax and enjoy doing nothing in the peaceful environment of Kume Island. From each of the hotel’s guest rooms, all of which have ocean views, guests can enjoy one of the best and most beautiful sunsets in all of Okinawa. The hotel’s dining area also has a complete ocean view, and it serves creative cuisine that enables guests to savor the delicious fusion of fresh Kume Island ingredients, compliments to the hotel chef’s culinary skills. The hotel also has an infinity pool that seems to flow seamlessly into the beautiful Kume Island ocean, and a large communal hot bath filled with carbonated spring water.

**Cypress Resort Kumejima**  
<https://www.cypresshotels.jp/kumejima/en/>

Okinawa-style city life experience in the middle of Naha

Novotel Okinawa Naha is a modern hotel overlooking the city of Naha from an elevated hilltop location in Shuri. In addition to enjoying the resort lifestyle at the hotel’s infinity pool or BBQ terrace, guests can take advantage of a full range of other facilities that include a gourmet bar serving hamburgers made with Okinawan Agu pork (popular with visitors), a Japanese-style restaurant with teppanyaki hot-plate cuisine dining, suite rooms, and a premiere lounge reserved exclusively for premiere floor guests.

**Novotel Okinawa Naha**  
<https://novotelokinawanaha.com/>



The first authentic Japanese-style hotel in Okinawa

Umi no Ryotei Okinawa Nakamasō is Okinawa’s first Japanese-style hotel. It stands at the foot of a hill overlooking the East China Sea. The hotel pays particular attention to the food, giving guests a chance to savor and enjoy traditional Japanese washoku cuisine, including lunchtime meals served in a three-tier stacked bento lunchbox. All 25 guest rooms have ocean views, and the hotel is fully equipped with a large communal bathhouse with a stunning view of the surrounding areas. It is one of a handful of places where guests can enjoy an authentic Japanese environment in Okinawa.

**Umi no Ryotei Okinawa Nakamasō**  
<http://www.okinawa-ryotei.jp/en/>



Getaway for adults focuses on privacy

Built to blend harmoniously in the surrounding natural landscape, this Japanese-Ryukyuan style inn makes use of Okinawan materials, such as red tiles and Ryukyuan limestone. All rooms look out over the sea and offer sweeping views of Kudaka Island, the sacred island of Okinawa. Another attraction, Japanese-Ryukyuan banquets, are prepared with select local ingredients and complemented by panoramic views. Guests can reserve an open-air bath on the top floor for their private use and relax while soaking in the ocean view.

**Hyakuna Garan**  
<http://www.hyakunagaran.com/English/>



# TRADITION

Okinawan culture is the result of hundreds of years of contacts and influences from East-Asian countries that have mixed here with the indigenous beliefs and customs evolving into traditions that are in practice to this day. Performing arts were often born in the royal court and later absorbed into everyday life. Need for self-preservation resulted in karate and its philosophy, while indigenous religious beliefs spawned such customs as Eisa. Most recently, as a result of American occupation, rock music invaded the islands. All this combined has resulted in the most genuine Okinawan tradition of all, champuru (mix).

## National Theatre Okinawa carries on Ryukyuan culture

The National Theatre Okinawa presents the many faces of traditional Okinawan performing arts. Its programs include Ryukyu dance, sanshin music, Okinawan plays, folk performing arts, and the traditional narrative dance, Kumi Odori, which the National Government has designated an Important Intangible Cultural Property. The Theatre also houses a free exhibit on the history of traditional performing arts in Okinawa. The up-to-date performance schedule and ticketing information is on the theater website.

National Theatre Okinawa  
[www.nt-okinawa.or.jp/english](http://www.nt-okinawa.or.jp/english)







Karate is a genuinely  
Okinawan martial art

Okinawa, famous as the birthplace of karate, every year attracts an increasing number of visitors to study and practice the sport. Yagi Karate Dojo trains students in traditional martial arts and offers instruction on healthy lifestyles and diets. The dojo tailors all training according to individual aims and age and keeps its intensity at a comfortable level. As the headquarters of a karate association with over 70 training centers in 20 countries worldwide, the dojo welcomes overseas visitors, including beginners, to learn about or try karate.

Yagi Karate Dojo,  
International Meibukan Goju-Ryu Karate-Do  
Association Headquarters  
[www.okinawakarate.site](http://www.okinawakarate.site)





# Tenbusu Hall presents culture and performing arts

Naha Bunka Tenbusu Hall on Kokusai Street is a facility where visitors can experience the culture and performing arts of Okinawa. It regularly runs numerous reservation-type programs that invite visitors to learn about traditional culture. For example, the sanshin demonstration class teaches participants to play a piece of sanshin music after 90 minutes of practice. Every Thursday the hall runs a diverse array of other art performances, including traditional Ryukyu dance. The same building also houses the Naha City Tourist Information Center and various souvenir shops.

**Naha Bunka Tenbusu Hall**  
[www.tenbusu.jp](http://www.tenbusu.jp)

# Okinawa's art, culture, and history under one roof

Okinawa Prefectural Museum and Art Museum is something of a rarity in Japan, as it combines both a museum and art gallery into a single combined facility. The Prefectural Museum displays approximately 3,000 artifacts in its permanent exhibits, which seek to communicate the history, culture, and natural beauty of Okinawa. The Art Museum's collection gallery presents the progression of modern and contemporary Okinawan art up to the present day. It holds special exhibits and workshops from time to time. The facility also has shops and cafes where visitors can relax, either before or after viewing the displays.

**Okinawa Prefectural Museum and Art Museum**  
<https://okimu.jp/en/>







## Okinawan music and cuisine at a beachside dinner theater

Since 1977, Okinawan artist Rinken Teruya has successfully fused traditional Okinawan music and instruments, such as sanshin and shima taiko, with modern music creating a music style called Okinawan Pop. The Rinken Band has a show every Saturday at Kalahai, a theater restaurant right next to the Sunset Beach in Mihama, Chatan. “Tink Tink,” an all-female quartet produced by Rinken, plays at Kalahai on weekdays. The shows entertain men and women of all ages with the traditional sounds and unique rhythms of eisa, taiko-drums, and sanshin.

**Dinner Theater Kalahaai**  
<http://www.rinken.gr.jp/kalahaai/>



## This new hot spot banks on the appeal of Eisa

The Eisa Museum is a cultural experience center in Okinawa City, created to enable people to learn more about Eisa, a traditional Okinawan Bon dance performed by youth groups. In addition to the Eisa of Okinawa City, an area with a vibrant Eisa culture, the museum houses a collection of materials relating to Eisa in other parts of Okinawa, Japan, and even overseas. Visitors can view rare and valuable movie footage, try on costumes and try dancing for themselves, making the museum an enjoyable destination for both adults and children alike.

**Eisa Museum**  
<https://eisa-museum.jp/>



Sefa Utaki is the Ryukyu Kingdom’s most sacred place

“Utaki” is a collective name for sacred places scattered throughout the Ryukyu Islands. Sefa-utaki was one of the most sacred places in the Ryukyu Kingdom, and many worshippers and other visitors still journey to this World Heritage Site today as part of the “Agariumai” pilgrimage, which echoes the ritual pilgrimages of the Ryukyu kings and “Kikoe Okimi” priestess of the past. There are six sanctuaries within Sefa-utaki, three of which share the same names as rooms in Shurijo Castle, pointing to the deep connection between Sefa-utaki and the castle itself.

Sefa-utaki  
<http://okinawa-nanjo.jp/sefa/en/>







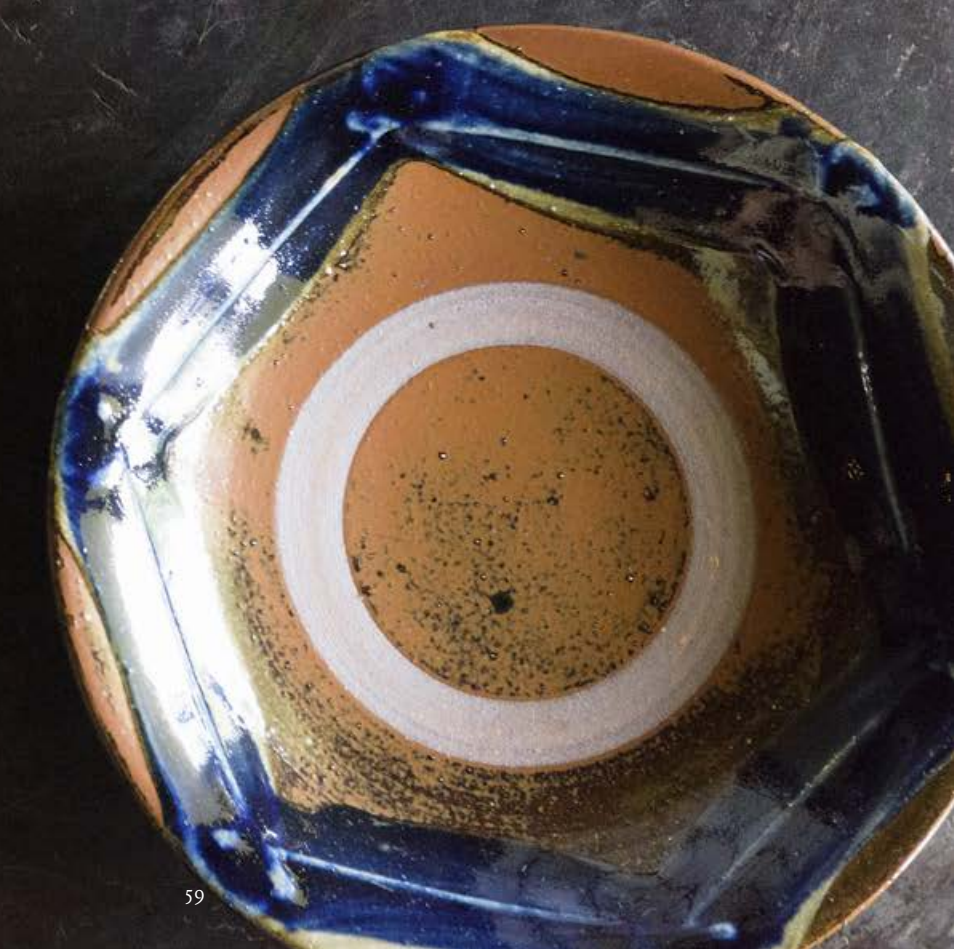
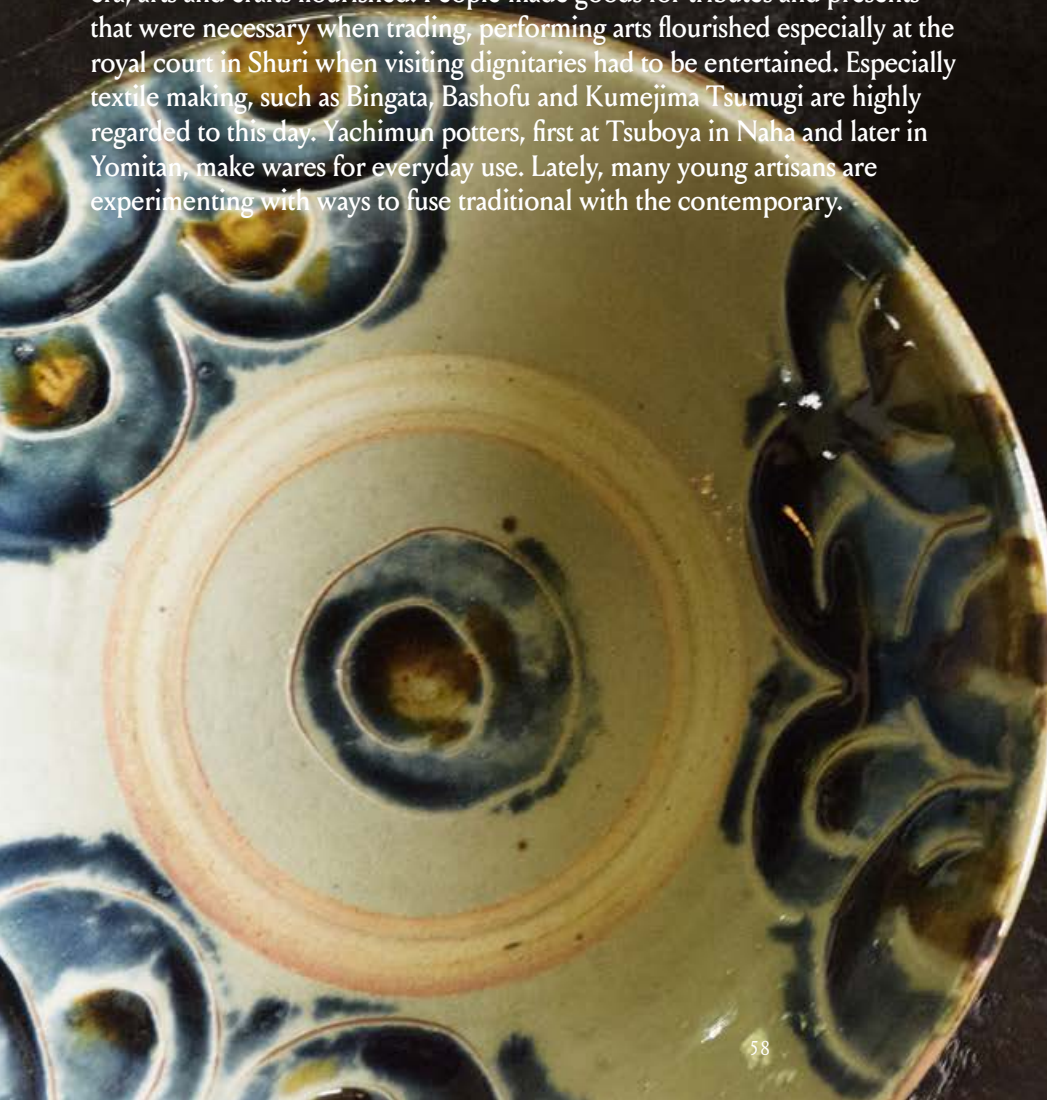
## Find your favorite pottery in Yomitan

Yachimun is traditional Okinawan pottery. Not to be missed at Yachimun no Sato in the village of Yomitan are the ascending kilns with beautiful red-tile roofs unique to Okinawa. Be sure to check out the joint stores, Yomitanzanyaki Yuntanzangama and Yomitanzanyaki Kitagama as you stroll amid the lush green setting. Discover the variety of Yachimun and its history as you visit the various studio galleries, and find Yachimun for you.

Yachimun no Sato  
[www.yomitan-kankou.jp](http://www.yomitan-kankou.jp)

# ART & CRAFT

Because of its status as a maritime trading nation during the Ryukyu Kingdom era, arts and crafts flourished. People made goods for tributes and presents that were necessary when trading, performing arts flourished especially at the royal court in Shuri when visiting dignitaries had to be entertained. Especially textile making, such as Bingata, Bashofu and Kumejima Tsumugi are highly regarded to this day. Yachimun potters, first at Tsuboya in Naha and later in Yomitan, make wares for everyday use. Lately, many young artisans are experimenting with ways to fuse traditional with the contemporary.





## A souvenir shop introduces visitors to the new Okinawa



Garb Domingo is a shop that features a wide selection of artworks and wares for home, especially craftworks made by Okinawan makers. A range of pottery, lacquerware, Bingata (a uniquely Okinawan dyeing technique), woven goods, Ryukyu glass, and plenty of other items made with Okinawan traditions at heart and new sensibility are for sale. Garb Domingo is a unique shop where visitors can get Okinawan souvenirs that are both simple and highly functional and available nowhere else.

**Garb Domingo**  
www.garbdomingo.com



## Original dresses combine traditional techniques with novel designs

Yokang Fashion brand offers a boutique collection that incorporates the traditional Okinawan Bingata dyeing techniques with modern fashion design. The collection ranging from casual to formal styles focuses on dresses, all designed with the concept of "clothes to be proud of." The bridal gowns made with original coral fabrics that stand out in a resort environment are a highlight of the collection.

**Yokang**  
www.yokang.jp





### A new style of lacquerware expresses traditional beauty

KAKUMAN LACQUERWARE is the oldest, longest-standing Ryukyu lacquerware shop in Okinawa. The shop continues the skills and traditions of its founder, a lacquer craftsman in the royal court of the Ryukyu Kingdom, while at the same time, incorporating the latest techniques and contemporary sensibilities. Recently, KAKUMAN launched its own accessory brand named Nui Mun that is drawing acclaims with its modern designs born out of the concept of “wearing lacquerware” daily. The accessories make use of the unique glossy beauty of lacquer, and uniquely Okinawan “tsuikin” lacquering techniques.

**Kakuman Lacquerware**  
[www.kakuman.jp/en](http://www.kakuman.jp/en)



### The oldest weaving craft in Okinawa

Bashofu weaving is a textile-making craft with the longest history in Okinawa. It's made from threads from the fiber of banana plants. Kijoka in Ogimi Village has long been renowned for making Bashofu cloth. It's nationally designated as an Important Intangible Cultural Property and its weaver Toshiko Taira is recognized as a Living National Treasure. Visitors can follow the process of making Bashofu in a gallery in Ogimi where Bashofu items are also available for purchase.

**Ogimi Village Bashofu Workshop**  
[www.Bashofu.jp](http://www.Bashofu.jp)





## Local goods from central Okinawa at Gallery Haraiso

Gallery Haraiso is a shop displaying and selling products designed to fit modern lifestyles, with the primary focus on Okinawan arts and crafts produced in and around the city of Uruma, in the central part of Okinawa Island. It offers a diverse range of items, from traditional Okinawan wares (such as Yachimun pottery, Ryukyu glass, Bingata stencil-dyed cloth and dyed woven items), to new creations, such as Green Turban shell jewelry. The gallery staff also provide tourist information to visitors, making it well worth a visit for those in the Uruma area.

**Gallery Haraiso**  
<http://haraiso.gallery>



## Hands-on pottery making at Tsuboya Yachimun-dori

Tsuboya Yachimun-dori (street) has a history spanning more than 330 years. Numerous workshops and potteries line the street where visitors look for Okinawan Yachimun (pottery) treasures. Tableware and Shisa (lion-dog statues) guardian deities unique to Okinawa, are popular souvenirs. At Ikutoen, a renowned pottery with a long history, visitors can participate in one-hour long, hands-on pottery making workshop to make themselves a great memento of their travel.

**Ikutoen Yachimun Dojo** (ceramic workshop)  
<http://www.ikutoen.com/english>

## The world of Kumejima Tsumugi traditional fabrics

Kumejima Tsumugi is a silk woven fabric that local weavers create passionately from thread dyed using natural dyes made from vegetation that grows indigenously on Kume Island. Kumejima Tsumugi's distinctive feature is its smooth, flexible texture. The Japanese government has designated it an Item of Important Intangible Cultural Heritage. A shop at the Yuimaru-kan Center exhibits and sells various items made of Kumejima Tsumugi. It also houses booths where visitors can observe the history and production processes involved in creating the cloth. Hands-on demonstration classes where visitors can try their hand at dyeing and weaving are also available.

**Kumejima Tsumugi no Sato Yuimaru-kan**  
[www.kume-tsumugi.com](http://www.kume-tsumugi.com)



## Wear the world's best hemp cloth from Miyako Island

Known as the world's highest quality hemp cloth, Miyakojofo is designated a National Important Intangible Cultural Property. Visitors can take a workshop tour that showcases everything from thread making to weaving and try dyeing a shawl with indigo or other plant dyes. They can also take a photo wearing a vintage kimono made of Miyakojofo for a lasting memento.

**Miyakojofo and Indigo Dye Experience**  
[www.plannet4.co.jp/hitotokisampo/](http://www.plannet4.co.jp/hitotokisampo/)



# Okinawan Crafts

## Dyes and Textiles Communicate Ryukyuan Aesthetic Sense

Ms. Ichiko Yonamine has worked as a curator at the Okinawa Prefectural Museum & Art Museum for many years and has organized many exhibitions of Okinawan dyes and textiles. She says that even from a global perspective, it is rare that there are so many variations to these crafts in such a limited geographical area. We sat down and interviewed her about many things, including the charm of cloth from Okinawa, dubbed the “Dye and Textile Kingdom,” the connoisseur’s ways to enjoy crafts in general, and advice to travelers. Join us in the journey to follow craftwork under the keyword, “The Aesthetic Sense of the Ryukyuan people.”

*It’s extraordinary that there are so many variations of dyed textiles in this tiny island country, Ryukyu.*

**Yonamine:** Just on Okinawa Island itself, there are various types of dyed textiles, including the Bashofu (banana fiber) textile, Yuntanza Hanaui (Hana-ori (float weaving) in Japanese and Hanaui in the Okinawan language) and Chibana Hana-ori. There are also the Ryukyu Kasuri (made with cotton and hemp threads in the past, but now with silk) produced in Haeburu (a town in the Shimajiri District of Okinawa Main Island) and the Shuri-ori (produced mainly in the Shuri area in Naha City). At the same time, on the remote islands there are Kumejima Tsumugi, Miyakojoфу, Yaeyama-joфу, and the thick Minsa-ori for obi (sashes). Yonaguni Island also has a form of float weaving. Even on a global scale, it’s rare to be able to travel through production sites with such a rich and wide variety in such a short amount of time.

*Visiting these sites feels like it would be a journey that will give you a whiff of Ryukyuan culture.*

**Yonamine:** Nowadays, there are production sites throughout the prefecture. You can learn about the production process and observe actual weaving at places like the Bashofu Hall in Ogimi Village and Yuimaru-kan on Kumejima. Some of these places also have programs where you can experience parts of the production process. I encourage you to give them a try!

*That sounds like fun!*

**Yonamine:** Most of these places also sell small items made with the original textiles. We would love you to use them daily to feel how wonderful Okinawan textiles are. At the Fureai Taiken (Touch-and-Experience) Room in the Okinawa Prefectural Museum & Art Museum, you can try on a real kimono (traditional dress). Entering the room is free. There are also

swatches of the textiles from all over the prefecture. We would love you to come to take a look at them. In a permanent exhibit, there are lacquerware and ceramics from the Ryukyu Kingdom era to modern times. It’s certainly a place that would delight you if you like crafts.

*Okinawa has many crafts that have a unique style of their own. When you include the performing arts like Ryukyuan Dance, you see that Ryukyu was a country that regarded “beauty” as essential.*

**Yonamine:** Speaking of “beauty,” when you look at the patterns on the clothing and lacquerware, the ones from the Ryukyu Kingdom era are often asymmetrical. In fact, the same can be said about Sanshin (traditional three-stringed instrument) and ceramics. The gifts given to the Chinese emperor and shogun of the Edo shogunate were exceptional items that utilized the most sophisticated techniques of the time. Looking at those, it’s unlikely that Okinawan craftsmen were technically incapable of making symmetric designs. Yet, many of the clothes left from the royal family show slight misalignments of the patterns in the backs and the sleeves.

*So, you are saying that they were technically capable of aligning them, but they purposely didn’t?*

**Yonamine:** My hypothesis is that they felt like symmetrical things felt too constrained. I think that the Ryukyuan sense of aesthetics required to have a little looseness in the things they used.

*So, not “Yuru-kawa” (short for “loose (yurui) and cute (kawaii)”), but “Yuru-bi” (“loose” and “beautiful”) (laugh)? That’s innovative!*

**Yonamine:** If you look at the artwork, architecture, dyes, and textiles with that in mind, your enjoyment will deepen too.



**Profile**  
**Ichiko Yonamine**  
Ichiko Yonamine was born on Yonaguni Island and graduated with a major in Okinawan textiles from the Department of Fine Arts and Craftworks, Faculty of Education, University of the Ryukyus. As the Chief Curator of the Okinawa Prefectural Museum & Art Museum, she has planned and organized multiple exhibitions centering on Okinawan textiles.

### What to Look for in Okinawan Crafts With Yonamine’s notes



**Bingata-zome**  
“The vibrant colors that shine in Okinawa’s bright sun leave a strong impression. It is a color sensibility unique to a subtropical zone.” During the Ryukyu Kingdom era, only people of a specific class were able to wear these.



**Bashofu**  
This is woven from threads made from the stalks of a type of banana tree known as itobasho. “Now it’s considered a luxury item, but up until a couple of decades ago, every household had some Bashofu ‘belonging to grandma’ tucked away somewhere.”



**Kumejima Tsumugi**  
Kumejima Tsumugi is a splash-patterned fabric woven with silk threads and dyed with natural ingredients. The classic color combination is deep black and a color ranging from brown to yellow.



**Miyakojoфу**  
This is a fabric dyed almost black and very intense indigo made by weaving a thread called vu made from Ramie that is dyed with indigo several times. Another unique point is that the whole cloth is given luster and a firm texture.



**Yaeyamajofu**  
Linen specialized in the Kasuri pattern of plant-based dyes on a white background, made with Ramie thread. “In terms of both the ingredients for the dyes and style of exposure, it strongly evokes a lifestyle that was integrated with nature.”







# Yachimun

## The Love for Traditional “Yachimun” Continues Over Generations

The Okinawan dialect word “Yachimun” means pottery. The Tsuboya district in Naha is the Yachimun area where potters traditionally lived and worked. The Shimabukuro family is one of the potter families from Tsuboya and the father, Joei, still operates the Shimabukuro Ceramics Studio there. His son, Katsushi, founded his own studio on Miyagi Island in Uruma City in 2009. We talked with the Tsuboya-native potter father and son duo about their love for Yachimun, thoughts about pottery techniques, and how they would like to see their art to develop in the future.

*Joei, you were certified as a traditional craftsman because the Shisa you make completely in the traditional way are held in very high esteem. Is that correct?*

**Joei:** My devotion to the traditional technique is based on the influence of my teacher and father, Jokei Shimabukuro. In my father’s days, the Shimabukuro Ceramics Studio made both dishes and Shisa. I successfully mastered the techniques of the Shisa making and concentrated on the Shisa division of the business. I also recommended my son, Katsushi, to go into making pottery.

**Katsushi:** Making pottery was the natural choice for me, having grown up watching my father. I make both dishes and artwork. The attraction of dishes to me is that using them daily enriches the user’s life. When I want to express myself more, I create artwork. I choose what I want to make in a natural way. I think people say that my dishes are modern because of the coloring, but I use traditional techniques like pouring and the two-color method and don’t really do anything new. I just think that my style has developed the way it did because of the times we live in and my sensibilities.

*Katsushi, you say that you originally liked white and black, but that you started changing in 2009 when you opened your own studio on Miyagi Island.*

**Katsushi:** When I came to Miyagi Island, I started seeing the colors of nature. The green of the sugar cane fields, the color of the sky, and the color of the ocean. The rain hits the glass windows of the studio and pours down and the sun comes out and everything shines. It’s just for a moment, but it’s pretty. I started expressing the beauty of those colors of nature.

*I heard that Katsushi proposed the idea to create something together, like Katsushi pouring the glaze over the Shisa, which you, Joei, made and fired.*

**Joei:** That’s correct. It resulted in a completely different kind of style from the Shisa that I make, but I think that turned out okay.

**Katsushi:** The face of the Shisa my father makes is powerful. Another thing that’s interesting is that the color is different every time even if I use the same glaze.

**Joei:** The reason you don’t get the same color each time is because of “discoloration” meaning unpredictable color changes that happen when firing

pottery because of the nature of the fire or minerals in the glaze.

**Katsushi:** The coloring can change not just because of temperature, but also because of the amount of oxygen in the kiln. There are times I purposely change the flow of air in the kiln to create some change.

**Joei:** Kilns each have their own peculiarities, so even if I give advice to him, it wouldn’t matter because our kilns are different. You just have to figure out each kiln’s characteristics on your own. I just fire it from the beginning in an old-fashioned way. I fire it for about 5 hours at around 300 Celsius and then I gradually raise the temperature. My son fires in his own way. There will never be two Shisa with the same color.

**Katsushi:** Depending on the level of concentration of the oxygen, the celadon (ceramics with a blue-green colored glaze) will change to purple, to a kind of fuchsia pink, to then whitish, and then to red.

**Joei:** Gas kilns are like that too, but kilns that cause most discoloration are what we call noborigama (connected pottery kilns built on a slope). In those, you use wood for firing, so you have no idea what the results look like until you take the pottery out of the kiln and look at it.

**Katsushi:** As my father says, it might be more interesting to use the noborigama for the Shisa. Eventually, I would like to have a noborigama, too.

*I think there are many tourists who would be interested in Shisa as a typical artifact of Okinawan culture.*

**Joei:** In Naha, there is a “Big (ufu) Shisa” that stands more than three meters tall in two places – one in front of the Makishi monorail station and the second one in Tsuboya. We planned to make them when I was the board chairman of the Tsuboya Ceramics Business Cooperative. When I see tourists taking photos in front of them, I’m really proud of it. It’s said that the face of the Shisa starts looking like the Shisa-chukuya, the craftsman who makes the Shisa, so if someone says to you, “Yankai, kunu Shisa ya nichossa (This Shisa looks like you),” then you know you’ve become a full-fledged craftsman. I’m in my 70s now, but I’m hoping I can still be a Shisa-chukuya for another 10 years or so.

**Katsushi:** I think my father is doing good work. He makes Shisa, the guardian deity that protects the family’s peace, and that’s a part of Okinawan culture. There are all sorts of potteries in Okinawa now. There are now more people who are aware of expressing themselves while protecting tradition. If all kinds of people from all over the world come to Okinawa and become interested in Shisa and Okinawan pottery in general, we can then start delivering messages to the world from Okinawa. I want the tradition that was born here to continue and keep getting passed on to new generations of craftsmen. I hope for all of us, including myself, that even more artists come out who can deliver from and express themselves from Okinawa.



Profile  
**Joei Shimabukuro**

Joei Shimabukuro started studying under his father, Jokei (Shimabukuro Pottery Studio), in 1970. He specializes in creating Shisa using traditional pottery techniques and creates all kinds of Shisa, from small to large and including Men-Shisa, which can be hung on the wall. He is a certified traditional craftsman.



Profile  
**Katsushi Shimabukuro**

Katsushi Shimabukuro earned the Master’s degree in Ceramics at the Okinawa Prefectural University of Arts in 2001 and founded a studio on Miyagi Island in 2009. Opened Tobo Gallery Shimairo (“Pottery Studio Gallery Island Color”) on Miyagi Island in 2011. Currently, he is also a lecturer at Okinawa Prefectural University of Arts.



# HISTORY

The recorded history of the Ryukyus began with the start of trade with China that brought writing and other administrative and cultural skills to the islands. It was united in 1429 under one government in Shuri, and for the next 200 years, the Ryukyu Kingdom prospered. In 1609 Satsuma clan from Kyushu conquered the kingdom, and the Meiji government in Japan made the islands a prefecture in 1879. After WWII, Okinawa came under the administration of the U.S. that ended in 1972. Through the centuries, Shuri Castle stood at the center of the Ryukyus. It was restored after a 30-year effort, but a fire burned main parts of it down in October 2019, and only some facilities remain currently open at the Shuri Castle Park.







# Shurijo Castle tells History of Ryukyu Kingdom

There are many castle ruins called gusuku throughout Okinawa, many of which were seats of the political power of regional leaders called aji, who competed intensively to expand their sphere of influence. The five castle ruins registered as UNESCO World Heritage sites—Nakijin, Zakimi, Katsuren, Nakagusuku, and Shuri—are representing all gusuku.

In 1429, the forces of the Shurijo Castle (Shuri gusuku) unified Okinawa, giving birth to the Ryukyu Kingdom, ruled by a single king. While governing the Ryukyu Kingdom and the islands from Amami to the Miyako and Yaeyama Islands, the kingdom prospered as a maritime trader that promoted active diplomacy and trade with China, Japan, Korea, and Southeast Asian countries.

In the spring of 1609, the Satsuma forces from the Japanese island of Kyushu invaded Ryukyu and, with their overwhelming military power, soon defeated the defenders. The kingdom continued but was under control of the Satsuma Domain and, by extension, the Tokugawa Shogunate. The new rulers separated the Amami Islands from the kingdom and put them under the direct control of the Satsuma Domain.

The Ryukyus tried to create a unique position for the kingdom planning for a complete renewal of the politics and administration and, at the same time, promoted industry and projects that increased cultural sophistication. The royal Shuri government managed the projects. For example, they prepared a special stage on the square (una) of Shurijo Castle to display the Ryukyu performing arts in the most significant annual diplomatic event held for the delegates dispatched by the Chinese emperor. The Ryukyu Mission sent to the Tokugawa Shogunate also exhibited the

Ryukyuan performing arts at the Edojo Castle. The bureaucrats of the royal Shuri government participated in these performances, seeking to show their cultural sophistication.

Japan, however, racing to become a modern nation-state after the Meiji Restoration (1868), abolished the Ryukyu Kingdom, turned it into Okinawa Prefecture, and implemented policies making the area a Japanese territory.

In spring 1879, the Meiji government mobilized the military and police to pressure the last Ryukyu king to surrender the Shurijo Castle. The king did not resist and left the castle with his court officials. This incident marked the end of the 450-year history of the Ryukyu Kingdom.

After Okinawa Prefecture was instated, the Shurijo Castle was sometimes used as military barracks, sometimes as a school, and for some other purposes, but the building continued to age. During the Pacific War, the Japanese garrison forces dug a tunnel under the castle and built their headquarters there. Because of it, Shurijo Castle was heavily bombed, resulting in its destruction. After the end of World War II, the castle ruins became the University of the Ryukyus campus.

When the University of the Ryukyus moved to a new campus, the project to rebuild the Shurijo Castle on the ruins began. The reconstruction was completed in February 2019 after more than 30 years of sustained effort.

A fire burned the main parts of the castle down to the ground on October 31, 2019. As a result, only parts of the Shurijo Castle Park are open to the public.

## Shurijo Castle Park Management Center announcement

Due to the fire on October 31, 2019 at Shurijo Seiden, only some facilities are open at the Shurijo Castle Park. For information on future openings, etc., check Shurijo Castle Park's official website <http://oki-park.jp/shurijo/en/>.



**Profile**  
**Kurayoshi Takara**  
Professor Emeritus, University of the Ryukyus  
Ph.D. in Literature, History of the Ryukyus

A historian specializing in the history of the Ryukyus, Dr. Takara has mainly devoted his research to the internal structure of the Ryukyu Kingdom and the history of its exchanges with Asia. After successive service in positions at various institutions, he served as a vice governor from 2013 in the prefectural government under former Governor Hirokazu Nakaima. Dr. Takara has also published many books related to the Ryukyus.

## Golden Age of Maritime Trade with Asia

The Ryukyu Kingdom actively interacted with other Asian countries from the late 14th century through the mid-16th century. Its ships sailed throughout Asia, including China, Japan, Korea, and countries in Southeast Asia (present-day Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Vietnam). That time is frequently called the “Ryukyuan Golden Age of Maritime Trade.”

The population of Ryukyu at the time is estimated to have been around 80,000 people—a small kingdom, but why was such a small country able to trade with its Asian neighbors actively? The main reason was the policies of the new Chinese Ming Dynasty, established in 1368. The Ming Dynasty only allowed interaction with foreign countries that accepted the authority of the Chinese emperor and swore loyalty to him. The only partners officially acknowledged as trade partners were the kings who sent delegates to the emperor and offered tributes. Kings of many Asian countries accepted this demand and chose to become vassals to the emperor because they wanted to promote trade with the powerful China.

However, the Ming Dynasty did not allow free trade and added restrictions to every country. For instance, Vietnam and Indonesia were allowed trading only once every three years. To obtain Chinese products, other countries had to find ways to get Chinese trade ships to come to their ports. That was difficult, however, because the Ming Dynasty had a strict policy forbidding the Chinese people going abroad. As a result, the supply of Chinese products to Asia decreased drastically.

There was one country that the Ming Dynasty favored; the emerging Ryukyu Kingdom, which was allowed to go to China frequently and gained an opportunity to obtain large volumes of Chinese products.

The Ryukyuan ships sailed to Fuzhou in China every year and brought Chinese products to Naha. They then took them to Japan, Korea, and Southeast Asia. After selling the goods, they purchased regional specialties, brought them back to Naha, and then shipped them to China. Ryukyu acted as the intermediary trading point between China and the Asian countries.

The King residing in Shurijo Castle managed the business. His officials would board the ships and sail to their destinations carrying the King’s message, tributes, and presents. Those ships also carried Chinese people who lived in Ryukyu, who had left their homeland and acquired licenses to participate in businesses the Ryukyu King was operating. The Ryukyu King thus used the Chinese who had great shipbuilding and sailing skills as the indispensable talent pool.

In 1458, a sentence, “We, the Ryukyu, use boats to act as the bridge for Asia,” was posted in Shurijo Castle to announce its importance proudly.

The interaction with the Asian countries was not limited to diplomacy or commercial trade. Various customs and ideas were brought to Ryukyu, greatly enriching the culture. Awamori, the drink widely consumed in Okinawa to this day, is made using brewing techniques from Thailand and refined by the Okinawan climate. Sanshin, a three-stringed instrument indispensable to Okinawan music, originally came from China and then evolved here.

By the late 16th century, the Ming Dynasty’s declining power allowed the Chinese to start sailing abroad again. Portugal and Spain began entering Asia, and Ryukyu’s golden age of maritime trade came to a close. Since then, the Ryukyuan ships sailed only to China and Japan.

## Culture of Prayer is the Foundation of the Ryukyus

According to a myth, the son of Tentei, the Emperor of Heaven, looked down on the earth from heaven and saw a small island in the sea. “It’s a blessed place; I will go down and bring prosperity to that island,” he said to his father and began creating the island of Okinawa. First, he built a sacred site called utaki.

Another version tells that a pot washed ashore on a beach on Kudakajima Island. An islander opened the pot and found that it contained seeds necessary for farming. It was a gift from gods living in Niraikanai\*.

Although Mother Nature sometimes brought disasters like typhoons, she also provided seas with vibrant coral reefs around the islands of Okinawa. The bounties of the sea, like fish, shells, and seaweed, and crops growing on land, have supported the lives of Okinawan people through history. To express gratitude to the gods, they never forgot to pray at utakis and join their hands together in prayer toward Niraikanai.

Eventually, leaders called aji appeared, built gusuku (castles) and engaged in battles to vie for becoming the ruler of the whole island of Okinawa. The forces at Shurijo Castle emerged victorious, leading to the establishment of the Ryukyu Kingdom in 1429, and Shurijo Castle becoming the seat of the king.

However, the Ryukyu Kingdom did not confine itself to the small coral reef islands. The Ryukyuan people built ships and conducted diplomacy and trade with China, Japan, the Korean Peninsula, and countries of Southeast Asia (present-day Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Vietnam). Displayed in Shurijo Castle, which was the headquarters of the exchange

business, was the following message: “We are using ships to play the role of a bridge across Asia.”

While Ryukyuan men traveled beyond the seas, their wives and mothers prayed at the holy utaki for a safe voyage. In those days, people believed that women were more spiritual than men and capable of protecting them.

In 2000, nine cultural properties that convey the history of the Ryukyu Kingdom era to the present day were registered as World Heritage sites. They are five gusuku, including Shurijo Castle, and four tombs and second residences, places of worship, and utaki. They are valuable cultural assets, showing how the Ryukyu Kingdom formed and developed. Many spots at those sites are dedicated to praying.

For example, within the ruins of Nakijinjo Castle (gusuku), which lost the competition to the forces of Shurijo Castle, there is a sacred place to pray for the gods. Sefa-utaki, from where you can get a distant view of Kudakajima Island from where the gods of Niraikanai delivered the grain seeds, has many utaki. Shurijo Castle has several sacred places, but it was the women, not the king, who prayed there. The prayers expressing gratitude to the gods is the foundation of the Okinawan culture.

However, there are no idols that represent gods in sacred places. Nature itself in the form of forests, rocks, and beaches is the place for praying, where women created images of the power of the gods in their minds.

\* Niraikanai is a paradise that exists beyond the ocean from where gods bring abundance and happiness. It also refers to the belief that worshipping ancestors will lead to peace and prosperity.





# Okinawa's UNESCO World Heritage Sites

## A small island with abundant history and heritage

From the mid-15th century for approximately 450 years, Okinawa was a kingdom centered on Shurijo Castle. As an independent island nation with influences from Southeast Asian countries and Japan, the kingdom developed its own culture and beliefs. By observing castle ruins and architectural style, you can learn about the historical background of the Ryukyu Kingdom and the wisdom of the Ryukyuan people. “Gusuku Sites and Related Properties of the Kingdom of Ryukyu” were registered as UNESCO World Heritage Sites in 2000.



### Zakimi-jo Castle site

Zakimi Castle was built around 1420 during a period of a civil war to track forces hostile to the king. The castle itself is small, but its stone walls and beautifully detailed gates – said to be among the finest of all Okinawa's castles – are a rare historical benchmark for the high technical skills of the period's stoneworkers.

**Address:** 708-6 Zakimi, Yomitan-son, Okinawa

### Shurijo Castle site (Shurijo Castle Park)

The Shurijo Castle, once the royal residence and the seat of the Ryukyuan government, was also the site of the main administrative organs of the kingdom and the center for religious rites that were frequently accompanied by entertainment and musical performances for the public. The Seiden hall of the castle was painted in stunning lacquer, like a huge Ryukyuan lacquer vessel.

In the Battle of Okinawa during WWII, Shurijo Castle was heavily bombed and destroyed. After the end of the war, the castle ruins became the University of the Ryukyus campus. After the university moved to Nishihara, the restoration work at the castle began in 1989 and was completed 30 years later in 2019.

On October 31, 2019, a fire burned Shurijo Seiden down and only some facilities are open at the Shurijo Castle Park. For information on future openings, etc., please check Shurijo Castle Park's official website.

**Address:** 1-2 Shurikinjo-cho, Naha-shi, Okinawa

#### ● Shurijo Castle Festival

Early November

A traditional entertainment, parade, and ceremony take place at Shurijo Castle Park and Kokusai Street in Naha City.



### Nakijin-jo Castle site

From the Nakijin Castle Ruins, dim outlines of Izena and Iheya islands said to be the birthplaces of Ryukyu kings, and Yoron Island can be seen on a sunny day. The castle features 1500 meters of undulating walls built on a gentle slope that gives the structure a beautiful and graceful appearance, reminiscent of the Great Wall of China.

**Address:** 5101 Imadomari, Nakijin-son, Okinawa



### Katsuren-jo Castle site

A place of scenic beauty and varied angles, this castle has a view of the northern mountainous area surrounding Kin Bay, outlying islands of Uruma City to the north, and Chinen Peninsula, Kudaka island and the Nakagusuku Castle ruins (Gosamaru's Castle) to the south. The castle is positioned 60 to 98 meters above sea level and its limestone walls are seamlessly built into the geographical features surrounding the site.

**Address:** 3908 Katsurenhaebaru, Uruma-shi, Okinawa



### Nakagusuku-jo Castle site

The Nakagusuku Castle Ruins are located on a hill 167 meters above Nakagusuku Bay to the south and the East China Sea to the west. The castle was ingeniously designed to fit naturally into the surrounding landscape and boasts beautiful curved walls, incorporating three distinct styles of stone piling work: “Nozura-zumi” “Nuno-zumi” and “Aikata-zumi.”

**Address:** 503 Oogusuku, Kitanakagusuku-son, Okinawa



### Sonohyan-utaki (Sacred site)

The Stone Gate of Sonohyan Utaki was constructed in 1519. It was used as a place of worship for the royal family. When the king was away, prayers for his safe journey were offered at the gate. The highest noro priestess, Kikoe-okimi, is said to have visited this sacred spot after her enthronement. It was also the first utaki visited on royal pilgrimages.

**Address:** near 1-7 Shurimawashi, Naha-shi, Okinawa



### Shikinaen (Royal Garden)

The site features a hybrid of Japanese and Chinese architectural styles with an Okinawan twist. The garden covers 12,726 tsubo (about 41,997 square meters) on a hill.

**Address:** 421-7 Maji, Naha-shi, Okinawa



### Sefa-utaki (Sacred site)

Within the utaki is yohai-jo, which people from far and wide visited to honor village ancestors and pay homage to Niraikanai, the mythical land of the gods beyond the sea. Unlike a traditional shrine, no artificial structures were built at the utaki's ibe (center), only objects from nature, such as stones or trees were used. Women played a key role in much of the Ryukyuan spirituality and men were not allowed to enter this sacred site.

**Address:** 539 Chinen-kudeken, Nanjo-shi, Okinawa



### Tamaudun (Royal Mausoleum)

Tamaudun is a mausoleum of the Second Sho Dynasty of the Ryukyu Kingdom. Carved out of natural bedrock, the tomb consists of three chambers, middle, west and east. The middle chamber was where the bones of the king and queen were kept before ritually cleansed and laid to rest in the west chamber. The east chamber was reserved for other members of the royal family. The site is carpeted with pieces of branch coral, which was believed to purify the grounds.

**Address:** 1-3 Shurikinjo-cho, Naha-shi, Okinawa



# Basics about Okinawa

Okinawa Prefecture is one of the premier resort destinations and the southernmost prefecture of Japan. It consists of 160 small and large islands and the main island of Okinawa is the largest of the Ryukyu Islands. Okinawa is the only Prefecture in Japan located in the subtropics where southeasterly winds in the summer and northeasterly winds in the winter prevail.



## 1 Okinawa Main Island

### Central Area

The central area includes Yomitan Village that is famous for its pottery. Koza in Okinawa City and Mihama American Village in Chatan have a strong American influence. Central Okinawa is the most culturally diverse area in the prefecture. Okinawa City is known for having many live houses and being the center of rock music in Japan that has produced several top performers over the years.

Okinawa Churaumi Aquarium  
From Naha Airport  
about 102km 120min

### Northern Area

In the northern part of Okinawa, mountains meet the shoreline. An evergreen forest covers most of the area, which is commonly called Yanbaru. It's famous for its wildlife and rare species. The Okinawa Churaumi Aquarium and several luxury resort hotels are located along the coasts of the area. Ogimi Village in northern Okinawa is known the world over for its residents living the longest healthy lives in all Japan.

- [World Heritage Sites]
- A Shuri-jo Castle site (Shuri-jo Castle Park)
  - B Zakimi-jo Castle site
  - C Nakijin-jo Castle site
  - D Katsuren-jo Castle site
  - E Nakagusuku-jo Castle site
  - F Sonohyan-utaki (Sacred site)
  - G Shikinaen (Royal Garden)
  - H Sefa-utaki (Sacred site)
  - I Tamaudun (Royal Mausoleum)

### Southern Area

Southern Okinawa with its expansive sugarcane fields, was the site of hard-fought battles during the World War II. It now has many historic spots and memorials where a constant stream of visitors travels to pay their respects and pray for peace. Many of the most sacred sites of the Ryukyu Kingdom era, Okinawa World theme park and Gyokusendo Cave, the longest in Southeast Asia, are all located in the southern part of Okinawa.

Naha Airport

⚓ = Port

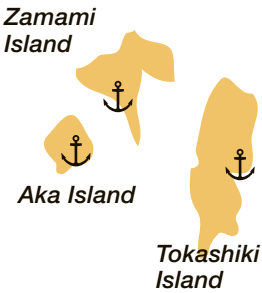


## 2 Kerama Islands

From Naha  
Ferry: 90 min.

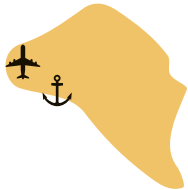
\* Only ferry transportation available.  
4 inhabited Islands,  
32 uninhabited Islands.

The waters surrounding the Kerama Islands are unrivaled anywhere in the world for their amazing translucence. Known for the unrivaled beauty of its sea, the Keramas attract divers from around the world.



## 3 Kume Island

Flight from Naha: 30 min.  
Ferry: 180 min.



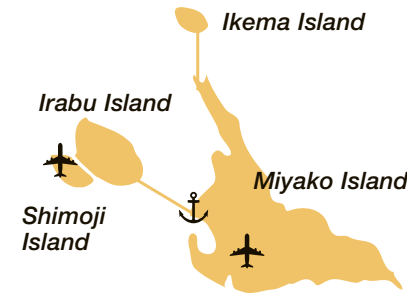
Hatenohama Beach, known as Hate-no-Hama, a 7-kilometer-long sand bar off the coast and Eef Beach, located on the eastern coast, are two popular spots of Kume Island. One of the things to look forward to is seeing the Kumejima Firefly, a species that can only be seen on the island.





④ Miyako Islands

From Naha  
Flight: 50 min.  
\* Only air transportation available.  
8 inhabited islands



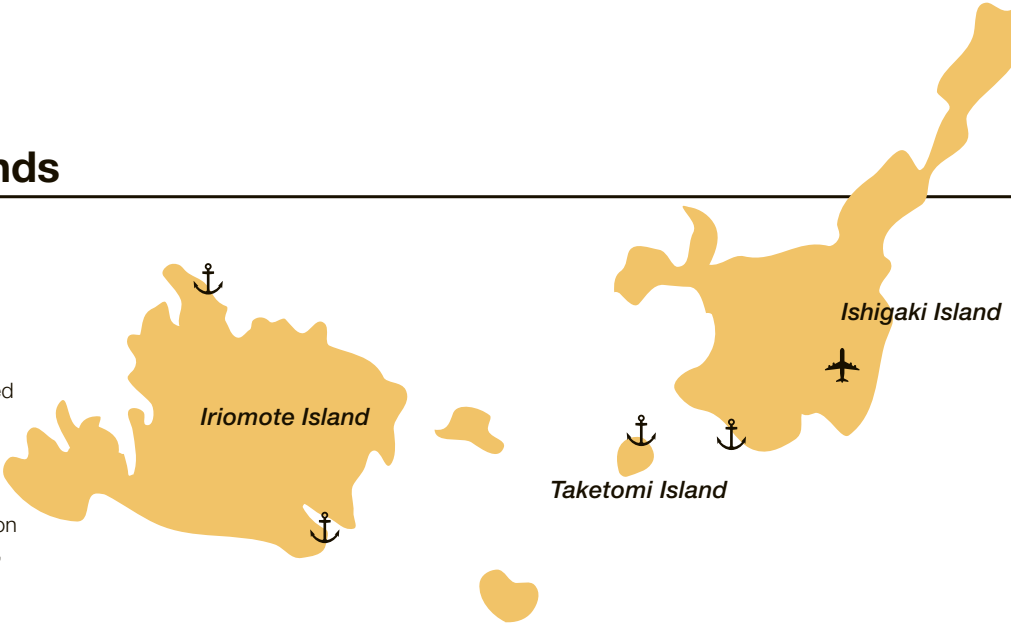
The Miyako Islands offer exquisite sightseeing spots like the Maehama Beach, chosen as the most popular beach in Japan, and several bridges over the cobalt blue ocean connecting the islands.



⑤ Yaeyama Islands

From Naha  
Flight: 60 min.  
\* Only flight transportation available. 12  
inhabited Islands: 20 uninhabited islands

The Yaeyama archipelago is located 400 kilometers southwest of the main island of Okinawa. Ishigaki Island is the gateway to the others like Taketomi and Iriomote. A wide variety of activities include leisure on its beautiful beaches, a jungle trek, star cruises and more.





# Annual Events

January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
<div><div></div><div><b>Shurijo Castle Park New Year's Celebration</b> Jan. 1–2</div><div>The unique New Year celebration at Shurijo Castle Park includes the appearance of the king and queen in front of the audience and performances of Ryukyu court music and dance. We invite everyone to enjoy tea and amazake at this colorful and dignified occasion as the Ryukyu Kingdom starts another year.</div></div>		<div><div></div><div><b>Beach openings</b> Mid-Mar. to early April</div><div>The official opening of beach facilities begins late March from the Yaeyama Islands, the earliest in Japan. All Okinawan beaches are open for swimming by late April and the swimming season continues on most beaches through the end of October.</div></div>		<div><div></div><div><b>Flower Island</b></div><div>The cherry blossoms are not the only flowers that bloom during Okinawan winter. Cosmos flowers are in full bloom from mid-January to mid-February and over a million white Easter lilies along with hundreds of other varieties grace the fields on Iejima in early May. Flowers of all varieties bloom in Okinawa from January through May and flower-themed events are held throughout the prefecture.</div></div>			<div><div></div><div><b>Ocean EXPO Park Summer Festival</b> Mid-July</div><div>The biggest annual fireworks in Okinawa last one hour as magnificent pyrotechnics light the night sky over the Emerald Beach at the Ocean Expo Park in Motobu. As the schedule and contents are subject to change, check the website for details.</div></div>	<div><div></div><div><b>10,000 Eisa Parade</b> 1st Saturday of Aug.</div><div>Held on the Kokusai Street in Naha, thousands of Eisa dancers of all ages fill the street performing in front of tens of thousands of spectators in a four-hour parade. General public is also invited to join in the spectacle.</div></div>		<div><div></div><div><b>Karate Day</b> Oct. 25</div><div>As the birthplace of karate, Okinawa attracts thousands of karate enthusiasts to practice and take part in tournaments all year round. The prefectural assembly has declared October 25th as “Karate Day” with the hope that Okinawan traditional karate will continue to develop and contribute to world peace and the well-being of all people.</div></div>	
<div><div></div><div><b>Sporting events</b></div><div>Numerous sporting events are held in Okinawa from fall through winter months, including many uniquely themed marathons and bicycle races. Many professional sports teams hold their annual training camps in Okinawa taking advantage of the mild weather and excellent training facilities.</div></div>		<div><div></div><div><b>Whale Watching</b> Jan. to end of Mar.</div><div>Every year hundreds of humpback whales migrate to the waters just off Okinawa to breed and nurse their calves. Whales can be observed both from ships and boats that make daily tours to the area and from observation posts on Kerama islands.</div></div>		<div><div></div><div><b>Haarii</b> May–Jun</div><div>Every year, boat races called “haarii” are held throughout Okinawa as teams of fishermen compete either in big dragon boats at Naha Haarii or smaller “sabani” at local fishing ports. The Haarii originally was a festival for praying for the safety of the fishermen and bountiful harvests, and it’s believed that the races were first held roughly 600 years ago.</div></div>		<div><div></div><div><b>Eisa</b></div><div>Dancers of Eisa, a traditional Okinawan performing art, use Taiko drums to beat the rhythm. The dance is a staple at summer festivals and was originally performed at Bon festivals on July 12th to 15th of the lunar calendar. The bold choreography of the dance, beating of the drums, and sounds of sanshin (Okinawan three-stringed instrument) greatly inspire the Okinawan people.</div></div>		<div><div></div><div><b>Harvest Festival</b> Mid-Oct.</div><div>A traditional festival to thank the gods for this year’s harvest of five grains and pray for health and bountiful harvest for the next season. Each island and community have their individual style and time for the festival. More remote islands conduct the event in old traditional style. In the photo, the annual Harvest Festival is held on Kuroshima in Yaeyama Islands, which is famous for having 200 residents and a 2,900-head herd of cattle.</div></div>	<div><div></div><div><b>Shurijo Castle Festival</b> Early Nov.</div><div>Shurijo Castle Festival is an event to appreciate the culture of the Ryukyu Kingdom and watch gorgeous Ryukyu dance performances cultivated in Shuri Castle. On Kokusai Street in Naha, a magnificent picture scroll parade features the king and queen followed by Chinese envoys and traditional performing arts groups. The schedule and contents are subject to change, please check the website for details.</div></div>		
<div><div></div><div><b>Cherry Blossom Festivals</b> Mid-Jan. to mid-Feb.</div><div>Northern Okinawa has long taken pride in having the earliest cherry blossoms in Japan, although the variety on Okinawa produces pink flowers instead of white that people in mainland Japan admire. Yaedake in Motobu, Nago City and Nakijin Castle site all organize festivals to celebrate the blossoms with live music, parades and other entertainment plus plenty of local food and drinks.</div></div>								<div><div></div><div><b>Naha Great Tug-of-War</b> Mid-Oct.</div><div>Started as a celebratory event around 1450, this tug-of-war was reintroduced in 1971 as part of the 50th anniversary celebration of Naha City. In 1995, the event was certified as the largest in the world. The straw rope is 200 meters long and weighs 43 tons. The event is now a marquee event for Okinawa.</div></div>			



# Facts about Okinawa

Okinawa Prefecture consists of 160 islands stretching 400 kilometers north to south and 1,000 kilometers east to west between the Pacific Ocean and the East China Sea. 49 of the islands are inhabited. The chain is known as the Ryukyu Islands.

## Major flight routes connecting Okinawa



## Transportation

Although a rental car is the recommended means of getting around on Okinawa's main island, tourists who don't have a driver's license will find public transportation by bus, taxi, or monorail a useful and safe way to access the sightseeing spots. Guided bus tours are also available. During bus trips to destinations, tour guides entertain passengers with fun activities, local stories, and information. A sightseeing taxi, which will take you anywhere you'd like, is the best way for the first-time or individual visitors. A warmhearted and



### Monorail (Yui Rail)

Starting from the airport, the Yui Rail travels only through Naha and Urasoe, but it's ideal for reaching the Shurijo Castle, Kokusai Street, and Omoromachi areas.  
<https://www.yui-rail.co.jp/en/>



### Taxi

Sightseeing Taxi Reservation or Inquiries

#### Okinawa Prefecture Hire Taxi Association

TEL.098-831-9007 | <http://www.oki-taxi.or.jp>

#### All Japan Kojin Taxi Cooperative Association Okinawa Branch

TEL.098-850-5151 | <http://www.kojin-taxi.or.jp/area/okinawa/>



### Bicycle

Bicycle Share Service Churachari

<https://docomo-cycle.jp/churachari/en.html>

Churachari is a bicycle rental service, from which customers can rent power-assisted bicycles at multiple Churachari stations at designated hotels and post offices in Naha City and return them at the nearest available station. After filling in a membership registration form on the website, bicycles can be rented with a 1-day pass or by the hour.

## Multilingual Contact Center

The Multilingual Contact Center is a public service provided by Okinawa Prefecture for international visitors. This center provides interpretation services, travel information, and other support in case of emergencies. The tourists can obtain assistance via phone, email or Skype in English, Chinese (simplified or traditional), Korean, and Thai.

\*The service is free, but phone charges will apply.

\*The service is only available in Okinawa.

Office Hours: 9:00–21:00

source: Okinawa Inbound Net

English: 0570-077201

Chinese: 0570-077202

Korean: 0570-077203

Thai: 0570-077207

friendly driver with intimate knowledge of the island will show you the very best of Okinawa. The monorail system, Yui Rail, which runs about 17 kilometers between Naha Airport and Tedako-Uranishi Station in about 40 minutes, provides convenient access to popular attractions in Naha. Yui Rail's Shuri Station is a 15 to 20-minute walk from Shurijo Castle while Kokusai Street is serviced by two stops, one at each end of the street.



### Bus

Bus Tour Reservations or Inquiries

#### Okinawa Bus

Tel.098-862-6737 | <http://okinawabus.com/en>

#### Naha Bus

Tel.098-868-3750 | <https://nahabus.com/>

Airport Limousine Bus

<http://okinawabus.com/en/ls/>

Limousine buses provide transport from the airport to hotels while tour buses provide efficient transportation to the main tourist sites. It's best to reserve a seat in advance for limousine and tour buses for a smooth process.

Okinawa Airport Shuttle

<https://www.okinawa-shuttle.co.jp/en/>

A regular bus service that starts from Naha Airport and passes through all the main sightseeing areas in the prefecture, such as Onna Village, Nago City, and Motobu Town. The bus starting from Naha City is called the "Resort Liner," while that starting from Motobu Town is called the "Airport Liner."

Yanbaru Express Bus

<http://yanbaru-expressbus.com/en>

A general transit bus line that starts from the Naha Airport, passes through the Okinawa Churaumi Aquarium and continues to the Unten Port in Nakijin Village from where there is a regular ferry service to Izena and Iheya islands. The bus travels on the Okinawa Expressway from central Okinawa to northern Okinawa.

## Climate of Okinawa

Okinawa's climate is significantly different from mainland Japan. Okinawa's long summer begins in April and ends in November giving visitors almost half a year to enjoy marine leisure activities. The average annual temperature is 22.7°C and even the coldest temperatures are around 15°C in January and February, the chilliest months of the year.

## Seasonal Changes

The annual rainy season starts in May and runs through the second half of June, but once it ends, the weather gets hot and sunny. The peak of summer is in August and September, but it's also the typhoon season. From November, the weather begins to cool down, and January and February sometimes have strong winds before it again gets warmer from March.



# Where to find information

There are several visitor information centers and sightseeing associations providing helpful travel information on accommodations, transportation, sightseeing spots and events on the island. At the Naha City Tourist Information located in central Naha on Kokusai Street, visitors can get free brochures with coupons and purchase a one-day unlimited ticket for Yui Rail (Okinawa Monorail). They also provide a service to temporarily store your luggage and belongings. Tourism associations on all major islands within the prefecture maintain similar visitor information centers. At these local centers, visitors can find ideas on where to stay and the most interesting things to do in specific areas. At Haisai Plaza, located at the Ocean Expo Park, home of the Okinawa Churaumi Aquarium, the visitor information center has a café, where visitors can plan their itinerary in a comfortable atmosphere.

**Okinawa Convention & Visitors Bureau (OCVB)**  
TEL.098-859-6123 | <https://www.visitokinawa.jp/>

**Naha City Tourist Information**  
TEL.098-868-4887 | <https://www.naha-navi.or.jp/en/>

**Ocean Expo Park Visitor Information Center**  
(Haisai Plaza)  
TEL.0980-48-2741 | <https://oki-park.jp/kaiyohaku/en/inst/78/141>  
source: <https://www.okinawastory.jp>

# Be.Okinawa Website



<http://beokinawa.jp/guide>

Be Okinawa website offers new ways to enjoy Okinawa with the travel themes of Trend, Premium and Relax. Be sure to check out the latest useful travel information.



<https://visitokinawa.jp>

Information on everything from sightseeing spots and locations to transportation services is provided in nine languages. Helpful tips on Okinawan history and culture are also available.



## Free Wi-Fi

Free Wi-Fi service provided by Okinawa Prefecture.

### Wi-Fi service general information

**English / Korean:**  
<https://www.okinawastory.jp/documents/wi-fi/english-korea.pdf>  
**Chinese:**  
<https://www.okinawastory.jp/documents/wi-fi/kantai-hantai.pdf>

### Map of Free Wi-Fi Spots

[http://be.okinawa.free.wifi.okinawaclip.com/map\\_wifi/](http://be.okinawa.free.wifi.okinawaclip.com/map_wifi/)  
source: <https://www.okinawastory.jp>

**Naha Airport Visitor Information Center**  
Domestic Terminal 1F, International Terminal  
Tel. 098-857-6884 | Hours: 9:00 – 21:00 | Open 7 days a week  
Tel. 098-859-0742 | Hours: 9:00 – 21:00 | Open 7 days a week

**Okinawa Tourist Information Center**  
Izumizaki 1-20-6, Naha City, Okinawa  
Tel. 098-953-8271 | Hours: 9:00 – 21:00 | Open 7 days a week

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