

SUBTROPICAL JAPAN OKINAWA



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Okinawa Story



Tourist Information



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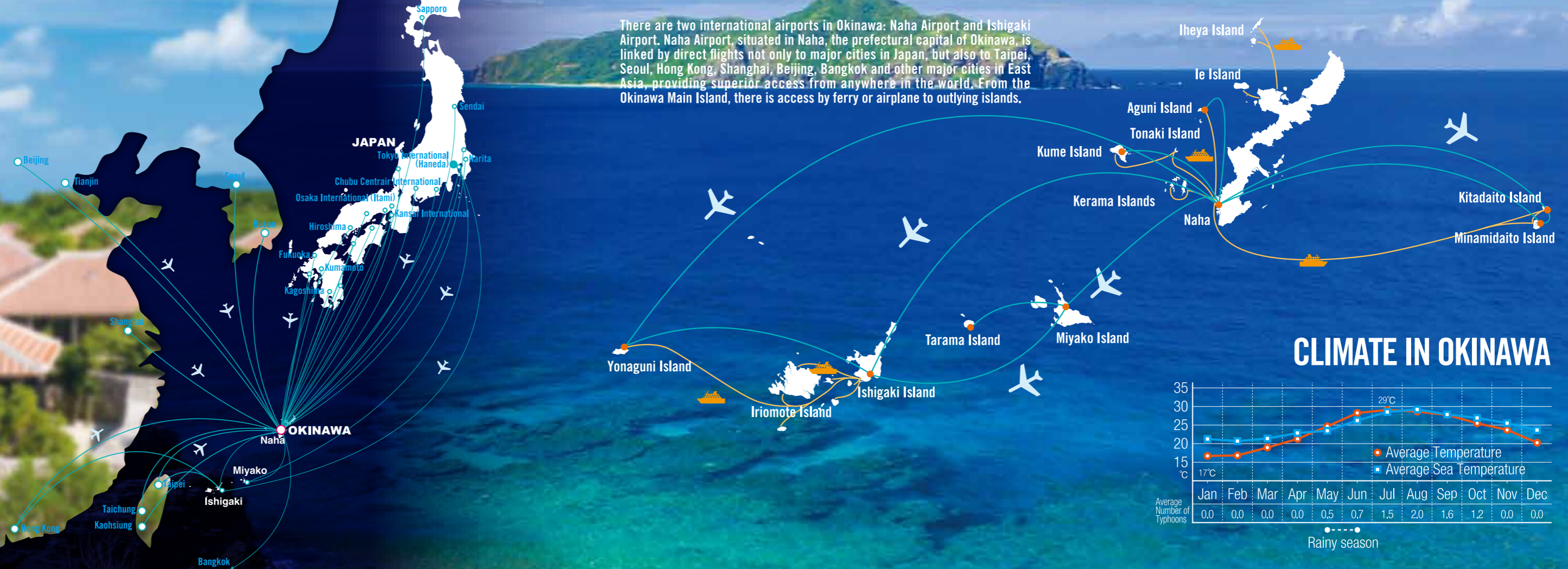


OKINAWA ISLANDS

Okinawa Prefecture forms the southwestern tip of Japan. It is comprised of 160 islands and has a population of approximately 1.4 million. Okinawa is located along the similar latitude as Hawaii, Miami, Cancun and other popular world resort areas. Due to the subtropical oceanic climate, it is warm even in winter, with an annual average temperature of approximately 23°C and water temperature of around 25°C.

ACCESS

There are two international airports in Okinawa: Naha Airport and Ishigaki Airport. Naha Airport, situated in Naha, the prefectural capital of Okinawa, is linked by direct flights not only to major cities in Japan, but also to Taipei, Seoul, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Beijing, Bangkok and other major cities in East Asia, providing superior access from anywhere in the world. From the Okinawa Main Island, there is access by ferry or airplane to outlying islands.



HISTORY

Okinawa was once an independent kingdom maintaining a flourishing trade with various East and Southeast Asian countries and at one time was under the administration of the United States after World War II. Such experiences have given Okinawa a unique history from other regions of Japan. Okinawa has developed its own mixture of diverse culture influenced by China, Japan, and other Asian and Western countries.

RYUKYU KINGDOM

In the 15th century, the Ryukyu Kingdom established its capital at Shuri. Over the ensuing 450 or so years, until 1879 when Japan annexed the Kingdom, the Ryukyu Kingdom actively engaged in trade with surrounding nations extending as far as Beijing in the north and Java in the south. Okinawa prospered as it fulfilled an important role as an intermediary nation for trade in East and Southeast Asia. During the days of the Kingdom, a distinctive Ryukyu culture was established with crafted products, cuisine, performing arts and martial arts such as Karate and Kobudo.



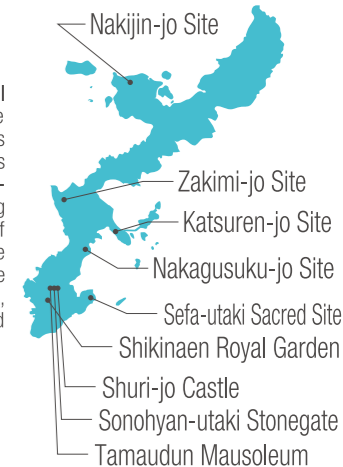
Shuri-jo Castle



Shikinaen Royal Garden

WORLD HERITAGE SITES

There are numerous archaeological sites in Okinawa dating from the Ryukyu Kingdom. Of these, nine sites were inscribed as World Heritage sites in 2000. The castle sites have distinctive beautiful stonewalls gently curving around elevated positions on top of hills. The other related properties are magnificent structures symbolizing the Kingdom's history, including a garden, the royal family's tomb and sacred sites.



WAR MEMORIAL SITES

Okinawa was the site of the largest and most ferocious land battle in Japan during World War II, in which the precious lives of more than 240,000 civilians and soldiers were lost. At the Peace Memorial Park, stone monuments have been erected, which are engraved with the names of all of the people who lost their lives during the Battle of Okinawa. Many visitors come to this park to pray for repose of the souls of war victims and everlasting world peace.



Peace Memorial Park



CULTURE

The Ryukyu Kingdom acquired knowledge and technology through trade and exchange with Japan along with East and Southeast Asian countries, and developed a unique Ryukyuan culture suited to the land and the climate. Traditional performing arts and craft works, which evolved during that time, have been handed down and are still enjoyed today.

TRADITIONAL DANCE & MUSIC

Okinawa is called the island of song and dance. A great variety of performing arts have developed in the different regions and become rooted in people's lives. Ryukyuan dance, passed down since the days of the Ryukyu Kingdom, has been designated an Important Intangible Cultural Asset of Japan, and the traditional music drama Kumiodori has been registered as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage. In addition, folksongs played on the Sanshin, an instrument particular to Okinawa, and Eisa, a valiant dance with drums, are still performed throughout the islands today just as they were long ago.



KARATE

One of the Japan's leading martial arts, Karate, is said to be rooted in the art of self-defense that the samurai of the Ryukyu Kingdom learned as part of their education. Karate, which originated in Okinawa and has today spread throughout the world, was adopted as an official sport of the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020. At the Okinawa Karate Kaikan, visitors can learn and experience the essence of traditional Karate through exhibitions or workshops.

TRADITIONAL CRAFTS

Okinawa has numbers of traditional crafts handed down since the days of the Ryukyu Kingdom, such as pottery, lacquerware, dyed goods, textiles and glass making. There are also more and more works produced by young artists, which combine a new aesthetic sensibility while carrying on the traditions maintained since long ago. Even today, people enjoy using such crafts in everyday life. Visitors can also make these on their own as souvenirs.



NATURE

Okinawa with its subtropical oceanic climate is blessed with beautiful nature such as clear transparent seas of abundant corals, lush forests covering the islands and bright flowers. Thanks to this bountiful natural environment, precious animals and plants which are particular to Okinawa, make their home here. Okinawa has even been called the Galapagos of the East.

NATIONAL PARKS

National parks have been established in three areas of Okinawa Islands. People enjoy trekking, canoeing, watching animals and other aquatic activities in Iriomote-Ishigaki National Park in the Yaeyama Islands and Yambaru National Park in the northern part of the Okinawa Main Island. The latter of the two holds Japan's largest subtropical forest and is home to a great variety of unique flora and fauna as well as rare species. In the Kerama Shoto National Park which has some of the clearest waters anywhere in the world and whose beautiful sea is home to abundant corals and fish populations, visitors may experience scuba diving, snorkeling, whale watching and other outdoor activities.

Gesashi River Mangrove



CORAL

The beautiful coral reefs of Okinawa have been called jewels of the sea. Over 250 species of corals have been identified in Okinawa, whose seas have some of the greatest varieties of corals anywhere in the world. Scenes of colorful tropical fish swimming among the magnificent coral reefs are wondrous. Okinawa is a popular diving destination for divers hailing from around the world.

WILD LIFE

Okinawa is known worldwide as a treasure trove of biological diversity. The Okinawan Islands, which separated from the Eurasian continent over many millennia, are home to indigenous species that evolved in a unique manner that have been designated a protected species. In the northern part of the Okinawa Main Island and Iriomote Island where primeval forest still flourishes, there are numerous precious wild fauna as well as unique insect species in colors and shapes distinctive of these southern islands.



IRIOMOTE WILD CAT



OKINAWA RAIL



RYUKYU SIKA DEER



LOCAL PRODUCTS

Temperate Okinawa surrounded by beautiful seas is a treasure trove of fresh and healthy foods. Vegetables, which have soaked up the bountiful sun in Okinawa and grown in soil with plenty of minerals, have a rich flavor and taste, as well as outstanding nutritional value. Okinawa also has abundant, fresh and exceptional seafood and sweet juicy fruits. Cuisine and sweets made from purple sweet potatoes, salt, and dark brown sugar from Okinawa's ample nature are very popular.

CUISINE

In Okinawa, it is believed that enjoying healthy foods will lead to a healthy life, and its people refer to healthy foods with the local word "Kusuimun" meaning something medicinal. Ingredients particular to Okinawa which are grown among nature's bounty and the healthy balanced cuisine are known worldwide as a source of longevity.

FOOD & DRINK

A typical meal in Okinawa consists of Champuru, which is a stir-fry mix of a variety of ingredients including tofu, meat and lots of vegetables, as well as dishes having plenty of pork, seaweed and fresh fish caught in local waters. Awamori, a traditional distilled liquor which has been produced since the Ryukyu Kingdom period, is still enjoyed by Okinawans today. As it ages, the degree of maturity increases, enhancing its mild taste and distinctive aroma, which go well with any Okinawan meal.



LONGEVITY

Okinawa is well known as one of the four longevity hotspots, or blue zones in the world. It has attracted great interest as a region of health and longevity as demonstrated by the worldwide bestselling book "Okinawa Program" which describes how Okinawa's traditional dietary culture and lifestyle are factors leading to a long life. Why not find out the secrets of longevity in Okinawa?

DIVING & SNORKELING

Okinawa is known as one of the foremost diving destinations in the world where divers can see manta rays, hammerhead sharks, sunken ships and other wonders under the sea. Snorkeling is a popular activity where people can easily enjoy seeing corals and tropical fish.



EXPERIENCE

KARATE EXPERIENCE

Experiencing and learning Karate in Okinawa where the martial art originated is an aspiration of Karate enthusiasts around the world. Even beginners can easily experience Karate to strengthen both their mind and body at a dojo in Okinawa.



CHERRY BLOSSOMS

In Okinawa, cherry blossoms bloom in mid-January well before anywhere else in Japan. The varieties found in Okinawa have deep pink flowers. In January and February, Okinawa is bustling with cherry blossom festivals.



EVENTS

EISA

Eisa is a traditional performing art in which people dance to drums, songs and rallying calls for the repose of ancestors' souls during the lunar Bon Festival in summer. In addition to Eisa performed in local communities, some major Eisa festivals are held in August.



KAYAKING & TREKKING

Popular activities for enjoying Okinawan nature include sea kayaking over the fascinating and beautiful corals, river kayaking to promenade through mangrove forests, and trekking through subtropical old-growth forests to reach waterfalls and other natural sites.



TRADITIONAL CRAFT EXPERIENCE

Anyone can experience making traditional Ryukyu crafts, such as glassblowing, pottery, textile dyeing and weaving. You can make your own original work by combining your own sensibility with traditional techniques.



NAHA GIANT TUG-OF-WAR

The Naha Giant Tug-of-War, which continues to hold the Guinness World Records title for the world's largest straw rope, is 200 meters long and is Okinawa's premier traditional event with more than 15,000 participants. This event offers prayers for an abundant harvest as well as good health and safety in the coming year. It is an annual event held in October and anyone can participate.

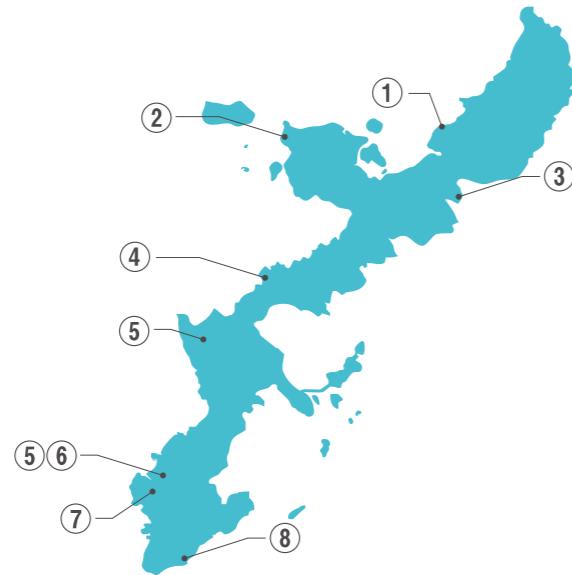


SPORT

Numerous sporting events are held, including cycling competitions, marathons and triathlons all year around. Also, anyone, including visitors, may easily enjoy activities such as jogging, beach yoga and golf while feeling the gentle sea breeze.

OKINAWA MAIN ISLAND

The Okinawa Main Island is the center of politics and economics and home to approximately 90% of the population. The long and narrow island stretching roughly 135 km north to south is divided into three regions, North, Central and South, each with its own unique and distinctive characteristics.



① OGIMI VILLAGE

Ogimi Village, the home of health and longevity, is the focus of well-being research around the world. A traditional textile, Bashofu, woven in Ogimi has been designated as a National Important Intangible Cultural Heritage.



② OCEAN EXPO PARK

Ocean Expo Park has a variety of facilities offering visitors a chance to experience subtropical plants and oceanic culture. The main attraction is the Okinawa Churaumi Aquarium; the world-class aquarium which re-creates the seas around Okinawa.



③ GESASHI RIVER MANGROVE

Visitors may try kayaking or trekking in Higashi Village's Gesashi river and its spreading mangrove forest, which is the largest forest of its kind on the Okinawa Main Island. This area is also designated as a National Park.



④ ONNA VILLAGE RESORT HOTEL AREA

The coast of Onna Village fronts the East China Sea. It is Okinawa's premier resort area with white sand beaches and beautiful blue seas. These magnificent resort hotels offer many marine activities and golf courses.



⑤ YACHIMUN OKINAWA POTTERY

Yomitan Village's Yachimun no Sato and Naha City's Tsuboya Yachimun Dori are known as homes of pottery. Artists in both centers produce traditional and individualistic works of art. There are also workshops, retail shops, galleries and cafés.



⑥ MAKISHI PUBLIC MARKET

At Makishi Public Market nearby Kokusai Street, the main street of Naha city, there is an array of fresh seafood from the Okinawan waters, locally-produced vegetables, fruits and meats. Fresh seafood bought in the market can be prepared at a restaurant on the second floor.



⑦ THE FORMER JAPANESE NAVY UNDERGROUND HEADQUARTERS

This bunker is the site of the Japanese Naval Command Headquarters during the Battle of Okinawa. The bunker where approximately 4,000 soldiers heroically met their fate still remains just as they were at that time.



⑧ PEACE MEMORIAL PARK

Inside Peace Memorial Park on Mabuni Hill in Itoman where many people lost their lives at the end of the Battle of Okinawa, is the Peace Memorial Museum where visitors learn the history. There is also the Cornerstone of Peace on which are engraved the names of all those who died during the battle.



KERAMA ISLANDS

The Kerama Islands are easily accessible by ferry from Naha. The clear and beautiful waters known as Kerama Blue are home to a variety of corals and humpback whales. The area has been designated as a National Park since March 2014.

① TOKASHIKI ISLAND

Tokashiki Island is a short 35-minute ride by ferry from Naha. Tokashiku Beach and Aharen Beach are popular with snorkelers and swimmers. You may also enjoy these beaches as part of a day trip from Naha.



② ZAMAMI ISLAND

Zamami Island can be reached with a quick 50-minute ride by ferry from Naha. Furuzamami Beach has been awarded two stars in the Michelin Green Guide. Ama Beach is a shallow gently shelving beach and well known as a habitat for sea turtles.



③ AKA ISLAND

Aka Island is a quick 50-minute ride by ferry from Naha. Nishibama Beach with its pure white sand and excellent view across the Kerama Blue sea is a popular snorkeling spot. Ryukyu sika deer, a protected species, inhabit the island.



WHALE WATCHING

Every year, humpback whales appear in the waters around the Kerama Islands' Zamami and Aka from January to the end of March. Many tours are available so that spectators can see these dynamic whales up close.





Kabira Bay

YAEYAMA ISLANDS

① ISHIGAKI ISLAND

Ishigaki Island is the gateway to the Yaeyama Islands, and a place where people can enjoy culture, excitement of the city and scenic spots, such as Kabira bay, awarded 3 stars by the Michelin guide. Don't forget to try island hopping around the Yaeyama Islands, leaving by ferry from Ishigaki Island to any of the other outlying islands.

The Yaeyama Islands are a group of islands that form Japan's southwestern tip, about 450 km from the Okinawa Main Island. Bountiful nature and traditional culture still remain on each of these islands distinguished by their own distinctive features. Ishigaki Island can be reached in about an hour by flight from Naha, and there are direct flights from Tokyo, Nagoya, Osaka, Fukuoka, Hong Kong and Taipei.

③ TAKETOMI ISLAND

Taketomi Island is 10 minutes from Ishigaki Island by high-speed ferry. The hamlet with its white-sand paths and red-tiled roof houses, remnants of the original Okinawa landscape, has been designated an Important Historic Building Preservation District. How about taking a leisurely stroll through Taketomi Island on a water buffalo cart while listening to music of the island?



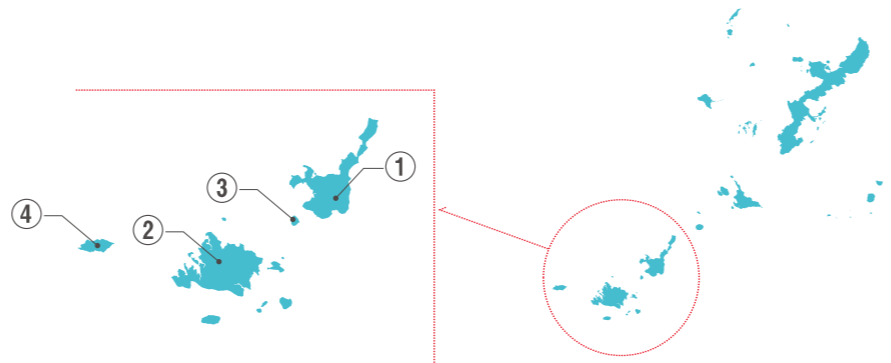
Mariyudu Falls

② IRIOMOTE ISLAND

Iriomote is the second largest island in Okinawa, and accessible from Ishigaki Island with a 45-minute high-speed ferry ride. 90% of the island is covered with subtropical jungle and comprises precious nature. Trekking, kayaking and other outdoor activities are popular.

④ YONAGUNI ISLAND

Yonaguni Island is Japan's westernmost island accessible by plane from both Naha and Ishigaki. It lies a mere 111 km from Taiwan, which can also be seen far in the distance on a clear day. The Underwater Ruins are a popular diving spot where adventurous visitors can see mystical sites along the southern coast of the island. Is the monument a natural formation or is it man-made? Take a look yourself to find out!



Underwater Ruins



MIYAKO ISLANDS

Miyako Island lies approximately 300 km southwest of the Okinawa Main Island. To get to this island by flight, it takes about 50 minutes from Naha, and there are direct flights from Tokyo and Osaka as well. It encompasses much beautiful scenery, including Yonahamaehama Beach, extending a total length of 7 km and said to be the whitest beach in all of the East. Miyako is also rich in culture; the traditional hemp-woven fabric, Miyako Jofu is a notable example.



KUME ISLAND

Kume Island is located in the East China Sea, 100 km to the west of the Okinawa Main Island, and can be accessed by plane or ferry from Naha. It has many natural long sandy white beaches. Kume Island is so blessed with beautiful and bountiful nature that the entire island has been designated a Prefectural Natural Park.

① HATENOHAMA BEACH

Hatenoehama Beach is actually an uninhabited island comprised of only sand that rises out of the sea five kilometers off the east coast of Kume Island. It is a popular spot where people enjoy a 360° view of the pure blue sea, snorkeling, swimming and sunbathing.

① HIGASHI HENNAZAKI CAPE

It offers a panoramic view of the beautiful sea from a cape that jumps approximately 2 km into the cobalt blue sea. The lighthouse on the cape point offers visitors a picturesque scene with an almost 360° view of the East China Sea and the Pacific Ocean in one glance.



③ TORI IKE POND

These two ponds, which lie along the western coast of Shimoji Island, are connected at the bottom with one of the two also opening below ground to the sea. It is a famous national place of scenic beauty and also a diving spot.



② IRABU BRIDGE / IKEMA BRIDGE / KURIMA BRIDGE

These large bridges, which link Miyako Island to the surrounding islands, are popular drive spots where you can enjoy an exhilarating ride over the transparent blue sea. The 3,540 meters long Irabu Bridge, is the longest toll free bridge in Japan.



GOLF

Miyako Island has splendid public golf courses, such as resort courses where players have a view of the sea from every hole and the only one of its kind in Japan, or courses where natural beaches create bunkers along the fairways.



② HIYAJO BANTA CLIFF

Hiyajo Banta Cliff is a picturesque spot at the top of a 200 m high sheer precipice. From the viewing platform, visitors can appreciate the comfortable breeze and enjoy to their hearts content the magnificent panorama.



③ BADE HAUS

Bade Haus Kumejima is a spa that uses 100% deep-sea water, full of minerals, from off the coast of Kume Island. The spa is well known for its pools providing warm bath therapy, but visitors may also enjoy a leisurely stay in the steam sauna, outdoor Jacuzzi or the esthetic treatments.



④ MIFUGA ROCK

Mifuga is a large rock formation with a large hole in the middle. It has been worshiped locally as a sacred place where a female deity dwells. In May, many Easter lilies bloom along the coast in front of Mifuga rock.

