



CULTURAL TIPS

Okinawa is a tropical paradise with an intricate web of traditions. The following information can help newcomers become better guests and ambassadors.

- Tipping is not expected in taxis, restaurants or anywhere else off base.
- It is not customary to bargain when shopping on Okinawa.
- Wearing shoes inside an Okinawan or Japanese person's home is a definite no-no. Shoes should also be removed when entering certain public buildings and restaurants—check the entrance for rows of shoes or a *kutsu-bako*, a cabinet specifically designed to hold shoes.
- Some Japanese toilets are built into the floor. Don't panic—simply face the flushing handle, squat without touching any porcelain and proceed. Maintaining a limber torso and hamstrings can pay dividends.
- The many turtleback and square-shaped concrete structures are tombs where the spirits of family members and ancestors are honored. It is highly inappropriate to trespass on or pass too near these tombs.
- Show respect for Okinawa's sacred natural places (*utaki*) and family altars (*butsudan*) inside an Okinawan home. Sacred places can be distinguished by incense, three upright stones, white garlands made of paper or people that appear to be praying. Refrain from laughing, loud talking or taking pictures from the inside of shrines and temples. Taking pictures of the outside of most temples and shrines and their surroundings is usually permitted.
- Many Okinawan businesses located near a base or camp will take U.S. dollars, but at their own exchange rate. Asking the current rate before making a purchase is a good idea.
- Wear proper clothing when visiting places of worship, such as shrines and temples. Short shorts or skirts, for instance, are considered inappropriate. Going shirtless in public is considered inappropriate, except at the beach. People with extensive tattoos may be prohibited from some off-base beaches and pools because members of organized crime syndicates wear special tattoos called *irezumi*.
- Only take pictures of people after gaining their permission. Being a foreigner does have advantages; permission is usually granted. However, people worshipping or praying at a grave, temple or shrine should be left alone.
- Try to learn some Japanese phrases of friendship and courtesy. A smile goes a long way even when you don't know the language.



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JAPANESE PHRASES

ENGLISH JAPANESE

Yes.	<i>Hai</i>
No.	<i>Iie.</i>
Please.	<i>Onegaishimasu.</i>
Thank you very much.	<i>Dômoarigatô (gozaimasu).</i>
You are very welcome.	<i>Dôitashimashite.</i>
One moment, please.	<i>Chotto matte kudasai.</i>
Excuse me.	<i>Sumimasen.</i>
I am sorry.	<i>Gomen nasai.</i>
Good morning.	<i>Ohayô gozaimasu.</i>
Good afternoon.	<i>Konnichiwa.</i>
Good evening.	<i>Konbanwa.</i>
Good night.	<i>Oyasuminasai.</i>
Goodbye.	<i>Sayonara.</i>
Okay (It's alright).	<i>Daijyobu desu.</i>
Is this alright?	<i>Kore de iidesu ka? (Daijyobu desu ka?)</i>
Where is it?	<i>(Sore wa) Doko ni arimasu ka?</i>
When?	<i>Itsu desu ka?</i>
Why?	<i>Naze desu ka?</i>
Who?	<i>Dare desu ka?</i>
How?	<i>Dono yô ni (shite)?</i>
How far away?	<i>Dono gurai tôi desu ka?</i>
How long?	<i>Dono gurai nagai desu ka?</i>
How much?	<i>Ikura desu ka?</i>
How many?	<i>Ikutsu desu ka?</i>
Which one?	<i>Docchi desu ka?</i>
I am an American.	<i>Watashi wa America-jin desu.</i>
My name is Bob.	<i>Watashi no namae wa Bob desu.</i>
I don't understand.	<i>Imi ga wakarimasen.</i>
Do you speak English?	<i>Eigo wo hanasemasu ka?</i>
How are you?	<i>Ogenki desu ka?</i>
Nice to meet you.	<i>Domo hajimemashite.</i>
Mr. (Ms., Mrs., Miss) Smith	<i>Smith-san.</i>
This is an emergency.	<i>Hijyôji desu.</i>
Call the police.	<i>Keisatsu wo yonde kudasai.</i>
Call an ambulance.	<i>Kyûkyûsha wo yonde kudasai.</i>
Please help me.	<i>Tasukete kudasai.</i>
I would like to use the phone.	<i>Denwa wo kashite kudasai.</i>

WORDS TO KNOW

NUMBERS

FOR COUNTING THINGS

One	<i>hitotsu</i>
Two	<i>futatsu</i>
Three	<i>mittsu</i>
Four	<i>yottsu</i>
Five	<i>itsutsu</i>
Six	<i>muttsu</i>
Seven	<i>nanatsu</i>
Eight	<i>yattsu</i>
Nine	<i>kokonotsu</i>
Ten	<i>tôu</i>

ABSTRACT NUMBERS

One	<i>ichi</i>
Two	<i>ni</i>
Three	<i>san</i>
Four	<i>shi/yon</i>
Five	<i>go</i>
Six	<i>roku</i>
Seven	<i>shichi/nana</i>
Eight	<i>hachi</i>
Nine	<i>ku</i>
Ten	<i>jû</i>


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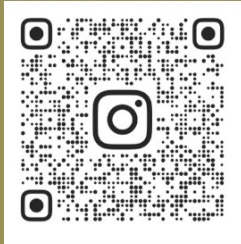
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HOLIDAYS

NEW YEAR'S HOLIDAYS (OSHOGATSU)

JANUARY 1–3

The New Year's holidays are the most important celebrations in Japan. While local customs can vary from prefecture to prefecture, they are almost always elaborate.

COMING OF AGE DAY (SEIJIN-NO-HI)

SECOND MONDAY IN JANUARY

On this day, all 18-year-old men and women attain legal maturity, and municipal governments celebrate these young people as they attain majority (although alcohol and tobacco consumption must wait until they're 20). Coming of Age ceremonies (*Seijin Shiki*), attended by traditionally garbed new adults, are held at public offices.

LAST DAY OF WINTER (SETSUBUN-NO-HI)

EARLY FEBRUARY

According to the lunar calendar, *Setsubun* is the last day of winter. Many shrines and temples hold the traditional *mame-maki*, a ceremony in which participants (usually children) throw beans to drive away evil spirits.

FOUNDATION DAY (KENKOKU KINENBI)

FEBRUARY 11

Called *Kenkoku Kinenbi*, this day was first celebrated as an official national holiday in 1967. Commemorating Emperor Jimmu's rising to the throne in 660 BC, it is also thought of as the date the nation was "founded," i.e., Japan's birthday.

THE EMPEROR'S BIRTHDAY

FEBRUARY 23

Emperor Naruhito, who rose to the throne in the spring of 2019, celebrates his birthday on February 23. This is a national holiday in Japan.



Both the Okinawan and Japanese people hold several festivals each year. See the latest issue of *Okinawa Living Magazine* for more up-to-date information.

FESTIVALS & HOLIDAYS

CHERRY BLOSSOM FESTIVALS

The blooming of the cherry blossoms (usually in late January/early February) is considered one of the most beautiful times on the island mostly because of its brevity. Festivals are held throughout the island including a large one in Nago City.

GOLDEN WEEK

APRIL 29–MAY 5

A series of Japanese national holidays takes place during this period collectively known as Golden Week. The festivities begin on April 29 with *Shōwa-no-Hi*, which commemorates the birthday of the late Emperor Shōwa (Hirohito). May 3 is *Kenpō Kinen-Bi* (Constitution Day), which marks the anniversary of the establishment of the post-war constitution and May 4 is Greenery Day. *Kodomo-no-Hi* (Children's Day) takes place May 5, marking the end of Golden Week. Families with young boys celebrate this holiday to wish for their sons' good fortune. Carp streamers (*koinobori*) are hoisted on tall flagpoles outside the home.

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DOLL FESTIVAL (HINA MATSURI)

MARCH 3

The Doll Festival (also called Girls' Day) celebrates health, beauty and happiness for girls. Households with unmarried daughters set up displays of ceremonial dolls on a *hina-dan*, a seven-tiered structure covered in red. A complete set consists of 15 dolls fashioned in the costumes of the ancient court: the emperor and empress, two ministers, three ladies-in-waiting, five musicians and three guards. The dolls are said to protect daughters from sickness and misfortune.

VERNAL EQUINOX (SHUNBUN-NO-HI)

MARCH 20

This day, celebrated as a national holiday, marks the end of winter and the transition to spring. On Okinawa it is known as *higan*, and many visit temples and family tombs offering prayers for the spirits of departed ancestors (a practice known as *Shīmi*).

MARINE DAY (UMI-NO-HI)

THIRD MONDAY IN JULY

Formally known as the "Day for Marine Commemoration" to remember all of the Japanese people who lived (and lost) their lives associated with the sea. The day was officially renamed *Umi-no-Hi* (Marine Day) in 1996 and converted into a full-fledged national holiday to raise awareness of the importance of the ocean as a resource and the prevention of pollution.

MOUNTAIN DAY (YAMA-NO-HI)

AUGUST 11

Established in 2014, this holiday was celebrated nationally for the first time in 2016. It is a day set aside to honor the mountains of Japan.



NAHA DRAGON BOAT RACE

MAY 5

Hāri, or dragon boat races, have been held annually in fishing villages all over the island. One of the most popular is the Naha *Hāri* held on May 5 in Aja Port, where teams representing the military services are typically invited to take part. The festival originated as a means to pray to the gods of the sea for bountiful fishing harvests and the safety of fishermen.

OBON FESTIVAL

MID-TO-LATE SUMMER DEPENDING
ON THE LUNAR CALENDAR

This is a Buddhist-inspired celebration. Many of the older generation believe that deceased ancestors return to their living families' homes during this three-day festival. On Okinawa, *Obon* is also the time for *eisa* dancing, one of the most popular symbols of the Ryukyu Islands.



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SILVER WEEK

SEPTEMBER

This refers to a string of holidays in September—*Keirou-no-Hi* (Respect for the Aged Day) on the third Monday, *Shūbun-no-Hi* (Autumnal Equinox) on September 23 with *Kokumin-no-Kyūjitsu* (Peoples' Holiday) in between.

HEALTH AND SPORTS DAY (TAIKU-NO-HI)

SECOND MONDAY
IN OCTOBER

Established in 1966, this holiday celebrates sports as well as a healthy mind and body. Originally celebrated on October 10 (the anniversary of the opening ceremony of the 1964 Tokyo Olympics) it is now held on the second Monday in October.

CULTURE DAY (BUNKA-NO-HI)

NOVEMBER 3

Bunka-no-Hi is a holiday geared towards the promotion of culture and the love of freedom and peace. Because the holiday involved the promotion of culture and studies, many institutions and schools in Japan began holding exhibitions displaying works of art and research projects.

LABOR THANKSGIVING DAY (KINRŌ KANSHA-NO-HI)

NOVEMBER 23

Originally a harvest festival, *Kinrō Kansha-no-Hi* is also set aside for people in Japan to express gratitude to one another for work well done throughout the year. It honors those who serve in the country's workforce and celebrates bountiful harvests at the same time—basically a cross between Labor Day and Thanksgiving in the U.S.



NAHA TUG-OF-WAR

OCTOBER

The Naha Tug-of-War is part of the *Naha Matsuri*, one of 15 festivals that comprise the *Dai Ryukyu Matsuri Okoku* (Great Festival of the Ryukyu Kingdom). Traditionally, the purpose of the festival was to thank the gods for the harvest, pray for rain and ward off disease. The Naha Tug-of-War was listed in the *Guinness Book of World Records* as the biggest rope-pull event in the world.

7-5-3 FESTIVAL (SHICHI-GO-SAN)

NOVEMBER 15

Shichi-Go-San is an annual celebration of youth and one of the most important festivals for Japanese children. On November 15, families who have girls ages three and seven or boys ages three and five head to the Shinto shrines. These children dress in traditional colorful kimono or their best finery. At the shrine, a priest blesses the children, while the families give thanks for good health and pray for future health and happiness.

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NOODLES

There are a variety of noodle dishes on Okinawa and in Japan. Common examples include *soba*, made with buckwheat and yam flour, *udon* (thick white noodles made of flour and water) and ramen, thin wheat or egg noodles. *Somen*, a very fine white wheat noodle, is also popular.

Somen is often used as garnish for soups and served cold as a refreshing summer meal on ice with a chilled dipping sauce.



TEMPURA

Tempura—crispy, deep-fried seafood and/or vegetables—is a common Japanese dish. Shrimp, sweet potato, squash, Asian eggplant and onions are popular ingredients. *Tempura* is often served with a savory broth-like dipping sauce into which you stir grated radish and ginger to taste.



YAKITORI

This Japanese dish is a perfect example of the “less is more” philosophy of Japanese cooking. The skewered chicken is grilled over coals and is dipped into a sweet, soy-based teriyaki sauce several times as it is grilled, giving diners quite a treat.



SASHIMI

Sashimi is a Japanese dish consisting of various raw slices of fresh fish and other seafood. The slices are usually served on a bed of thinly-sliced white radish and various edible greens as well as a small scoop of *wasabi*. It is traditional to mix a bit of wasabi with soy sauce and dip the sashimi before you sink your teeth into the cool and flavorful morsel.

DINING OFF BASE | JAPANESE CUISINE

SUSHI

Spending time in the Far East offers a perfect opportunity to enjoy some of the world’s best. Sushi usually takes the form of cool, lightly vinegared sticky rice shaped into an oval, and then topped with a thin layer of *wasabi* (Japanese horseradish) and the freshest slices of prime raw fish, shellfish or cooked egg-cake. Sushi may be eaten with hands or chopsticks, dipping the seafood side of the sushi into soy sauce and eating the whole delicacy in one bite. Sushi rolls are similarly prepared, but rather than forming the rice, it is flattened onto a sheet of *nori* (seaweed). Seafood, vegetables and wasabi (or a sweet miso paste) are then placed in the center, and the entire preparation is rolled up and sliced. Pickled ginger or *daikon* (radish) is added as a garnish.

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OKINAWAN CUISINE

PORK

Pork is an essential part of many Okinawans' diets, and although almost the entire pig is enjoyed, visitors to the island shouldn't leave without trying *rafute*, *san-mai-niku* or *sōki*. *Rafute* is made from pork belly, which is popularly referred to as the side of the hog. Although this cut is often shunned because of its high fat content, on Okinawa it is prized. *Rafute* is prepared by taking pork belly cut into cubes without removing the skin and simmering it for hours in a sauce made from *dashi* (a soup stock made from dried bonito flakes), soy sauce, sugar, garlic, ginger and *awamori* rice wine. *Rafute* was once reserved for royalty and visiting dignitaries. Today everyone on Okinawa enjoys this dish. *San-mai-niku*, which translates into "meat with three layers," is a stewed cut of pork belly—sort of a smaller, thinner version of *rafute*. *San-mai-niku* is similar to a thick (between 50–150mm) slice of bacon flavored with the same sweet soy sauce glaze as *rafute*. Modern-day Okinawa soba is often topped with a few slices of *san-mai-niku*, and many homes feature it as a part of *gochisō*—or "festive meal"—served during New Year's, Obon and Higan grave visits. *Sōki* are short pork ribs, usually marinated in soy

sauce and sugar and simmered until extremely tender and likely to be seen topping a healthy serving of Okinawan *sōki* soba (pictured left). Many families boil *sōki* without soy sauce and use the stock to make the accompanying soup or *dashi* for their soba as well.

While *rafute*, *san-mai-niku* and *sōki* may seem quite orthodox to most, many on Okinawa enjoy more uncommon cuts of pork, such as *ashitebichi*, *nakami*, *mimigā* and *chiragā*. *Ashitebichi*, which is commonly known as *tebichi*, is known as *tonsoku* in mainland Japan. Unlike pickled pig's feet, *tebichi* is prepared similarly to Irish crubeens—simmered for hours until the meat is almost falling off the bone. *Nakami*, which translates into the somewhat ambiguous term "inner meat," consists of hog maw and chitlins (i.e., pigs' stomachs and intestines). Few Okinawans eat *nakami* on a daily basis. However, many families prepare *nakami jiru*, or soup, during the New Year's holiday.

Mimigā are cured thin shavings of pigs' listening apparatus—literally, the ear of the sow. It is often served with a sauce made of peanut butter, vinegar, miso and a bit of mayonnaise. *Mimigā* is considered by most as something usually enjoyed at an *izakaya*, and most prefer their *mimigā* washed down with an ice-cold Orion beer.

Finally, almost a tourist attraction in itself, the grotesque *chiragā* may remind some of a character in "*The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*." *Chiragā* is literally "the face of the pig." *Chiragā* is often sold smoked and can be enjoyed like beef jerky or cut into strips and served in a soup—much like *nakami*. Whether or not it is eaten, *chiragā* makes a great conversation piece and has become one of the representative icons of the Makishi Public Market, which is one of the most famous covered markets in Naha City.

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EATING ETIQUETTE

Visiting a new country can offer many opportunities for running into social *faux pas*. In many cases, proper table etiquette and manners are universal; however, some differences, which are based on the extreme importance most Japanese place on harmony and the showing of mutual respect, can be more challenging to identify.

Before they begin to eat and after they end their meal, most Japanese people say the phrases *itadakimasu* at the beginning and *gochisosama deshita* at the end.

These phrases translate to “humbly receive” and “thank you for the food.” Although these phrases usually do not have any religious connotations, the Western equivalent would be saying grace for the food. Some other major points of etiquette to remember are to never stick chopsticks upright into your food and never pass food person-to-person using chopsticks—both of these are done only at funerals. Never be afraid to ask the host if he or she has any personal dislikes about table manners. Simply asking is considered good etiquette.

If invited out, thanking the host by bringing a gift is also an excellent idea. However, the monetary value of the gift should not be so high to create excess obligation. And although gift-giving applies more if someone was invited to a host's home, bringing a small gift will leave a good impression. A thank-you note or card is also a great addition.

One final detail: Many traditional restaurants serve their food in rooms equipped with Japanese *tatami* mats, which means shoes must be removed before entering the restaurant. It may be a good idea to wear good socks, for the lack of visible digits or aromatic feet can go a long way in making a good impression.



SEAWEED

Okinawa is, of course, surrounded by the sea, and the people of the island enjoy several types of oceanic vegetables alongside those of the land-grown variety.

Among the more popular are *konbu*, or kelp that is used in several traditional Ryukyu dishes and popular in mainland Japan for creating soup stock, and *mozuku*, a stringy, crunchy seaweed often enjoyed in a vinegary salad.

Other common seaweeds are *āsa*, a very fine, almost transparent seaweed used in soups; *moi*, seaweed that is dried, then used to create a gelatin that is also used in pork-based soups; and *umibudō*, affectionately known as the sea grape or “green caviar.”

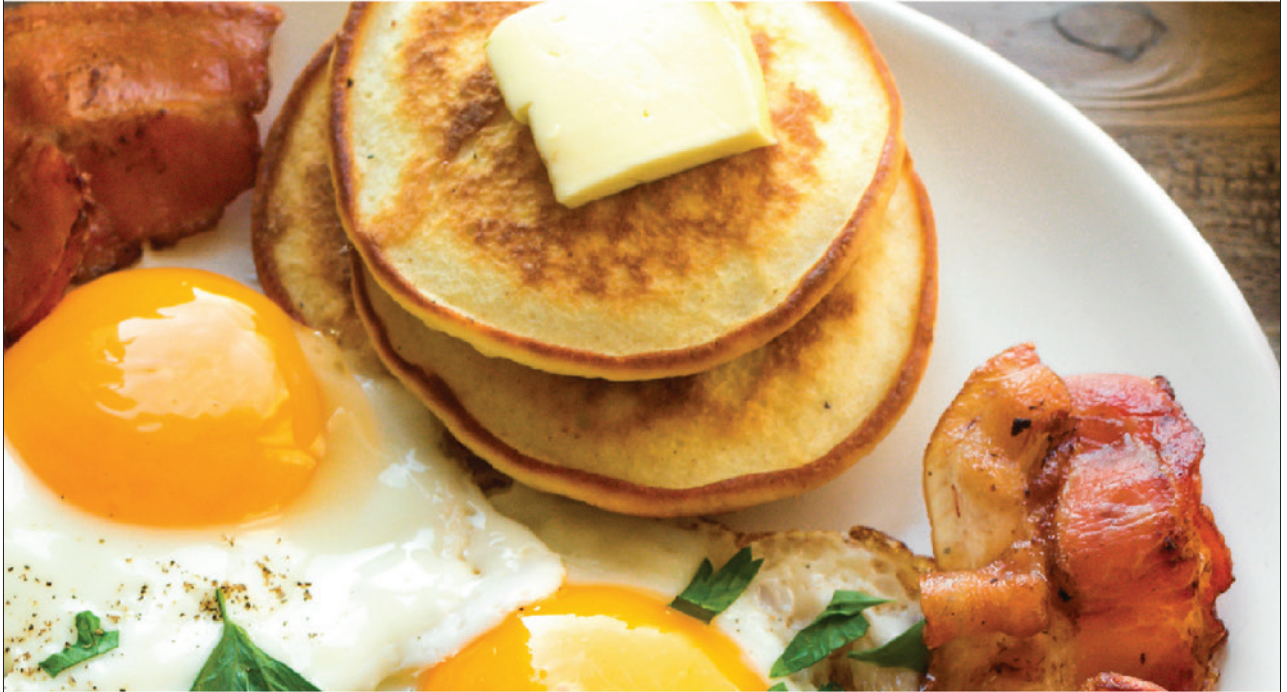
GÖYĀ CHAMPURU

The *gōyā* is known as *nigauri* in mainland Japan and as the Chinese bitter melon or melon in the West. The most popular *gōyā* dish on Okinawa is *gōyā champuru*, a summertime staple. *Champuru* is an Okinawan term that translates into “a mixture of various things thrown together to form a whole,” and *gōyā champuru* is just that—a mixture of *gōyā* with other ingredients stir-fried to perfection. Although the ingredients vary from cook to cook like chili recipes, the central theme of any good *champuru* recipe is balance. Because the bitter taste of *gōyā* can be overpowering when eaten by itself, most recipes temper it with scrambled eggs, tofu, pork and other ingredients.

GOCHISŌ

Many families in the U.S. look forward to dining on roast turkey with all the fixings on Thanksgiving. On Okinawa, during certain holidays such as New Year's and *Shimi*, special meals are also prepared in homes. Although the components of *gochisō* can vary from family to family, staples usually consist of pork, fried tofu, *kamaboko* (fish cakes), *konbu*, various tempura and other special foods. *Gochisō* is served in compartmentalized, stackable boxes that are often used only during special occasions.

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(CAMP HANSEN)



FRUITS

Okinawa has always been blessed when it comes to agriculture. Although the island is small, and vast acreage necessary for producing a commodity such as rice in bulk is hard to come by, the island's climate—an average 77° F throughout the year with subtropical precipitation—make it possible to grow almost anything. Barring a few outliers, fruit is almost always synonymous with the word “sweet.”

With colors across almost the entire visible spectrum, and tastes from the mildly tart to a veritable explosion of sweetness assaulting your taste buds, Okinawa offers something for everyone.

SHĪQUĀSĀ (HIRAMI LEMON)

Shīquāsā is a small, green citrus fruit native to Taiwan and various islands in the Ryukyu Archipelago. Incredibly sour, the *shīquāsā* is often used much like a lemon or lime to garnish dishes, make refreshing salad dressings and to flavor fish before broiling. This fruit is also used to make a juice which is usually thinned and sweetened before being served.

PITAYA (DRAGON FRUIT)

Although it is known primarily as “dragon fruit,” this strange looking but delicious morsel is also called a *pitaya* or strawberry pear. One of the most exotically colored fruits around, this hot-pink produce grows on a variety of cactus.

PASSION FRUIT & ACEROLA

The flavor of a passion fruit is guava-like, slightly acidic and musky. The fruit is often grown for its juice, which is often added to other fruit juices to enhance aroma. On Okinawa, it is made into a wine in Itoman. The acerola, which is also called the Barbados or Indian cherry, looks like a large, wrinkled cherry but has a tart, crabapple taste. The acerola is well-known for packing as much as 40 times more vitamin C than a lemon.

MANGO

The mangos grown on Okinawa and the surrounding islands are very sweet and the flesh is quite firm—approximately peach-like. These morsels of goodness are known for their juiciness, sweet taste and high juice content.

BANANA

The bananas found on Okinawa, affectionately called the *shimabanana* (island banana), are smaller, sweeter and thinner-skinned than the Cavendish popular in the United States. A single Okinawan banana stalk carries anywhere from 50 to 100 fruits and these bunches can weigh up to 20 to 30 kilograms.

PINEAPPLE

Pineapples were first imported to Okinawa from the late 1800s to the early 1900s. During the turn of the century, pineapples were exported to mainland Japan in very large quantities. However, the price of pineapples dropped when imports from other Southeast Asian countries flooded the market. Pineapples are still grown on Okinawa, primarily in Nago, Motobu and the Yaeyama Islands.

Japanese Culture

Awareness and Adaptation



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ZAKIMI CASTLE

In the early 15th century, Lord Gosamaru built this gusuku. An arched gate made by hewn rocks still remains. The surrounding area is maintained as a park from which people can enjoy a panoramic view of the East China Sea.



CASTLES

On Okinawa, the 12th through the 15th centuries is known as the Gusuku Era, a time of castle building. During the preceding centuries, the people of the Ryukyu Islands moved from a hunter-gatherer society to one based on an agrarian lifestyle. As part of this process, villages evolved and feudal leaders known as the *aji* emerged. As the *aji* began to hunger for power, land and trade dominance, rivalries erupted among them and the need arose to build fortifications for defense.

SHURI CASTLE

The main palace is recognized as the most significant building, where the kings administered their state affairs and ceremonies. Although Shuri Castle was completely reconstructed according to its original style after being destroyed during WWII, it was heavily damaged during a fire on October 31, 2019 and is currently being rebuilt again with a scheduled reopening date of autumn 2026.

NAKAGUSUKU CASTLE

In the mid-15th century, Gosamaru, well known as a great warrior during the feudal period in three kingdoms, constructed Nakagusuku. Its construction filled Commodore Matthew C. Perry with great admiration during his expedition to the Ryukyu Kingdom in 1853.

NAKIJIN CASTLE

Built in the 14th century, Lord Hokuzan resided here. Nakijin Castle is famous for being the largest of the Okinawan castles, as well as an outstanding, impregnable fortress. This is also the site of a cherry blossom festival every January.

KATSUREN CASTLE

Constructed during the 11th and 12th centuries, this castle prospered during the 15th century. Lord Amawari, who was a rival lord to the Zakimi and Nakagusuku castles, lived here. The stone walls are all that remain of this once prosperous castle, which offers an unrivaled view of both Kin and Nakagusuku Bays.

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KARATE

After the invasion and subsequent defeat of the Ryukyu Kingdom at the hands of the Satsuma clan of southern Japan, the use of weapons and the open practice of martial arts was forbidden to commoners.

Atrocities against the rural populace occurred on a regular basis. Because the people of Okinawa couldn't carry edged weapons such as swords or knives, they used their bodies, minds and spirits to resist, supplemented by a secret martial art, which was first known as the "Chinese hand," and subsequently known as the "empty hand." Over the years, this martial art, now known as "karate," has developed into more than a true Okinawan icon; it is a form of personal protection against violence for millions throughout the world. It is also used as a tool by these millions to master themselves.

Although many modern misconceptions of karate measure a practitioner's worth with the number of bricks or boards the person can break or by the color of their belt, karate is more about control than anything else. Mastery of oneself enables karate practitioners to harness immense power, blinding speed and an almost inhuman resilience. And although even the foremost of masters never quite attain total mastery over themselves, their daily training keeps them strong in body and spirit, many well into their 90s.



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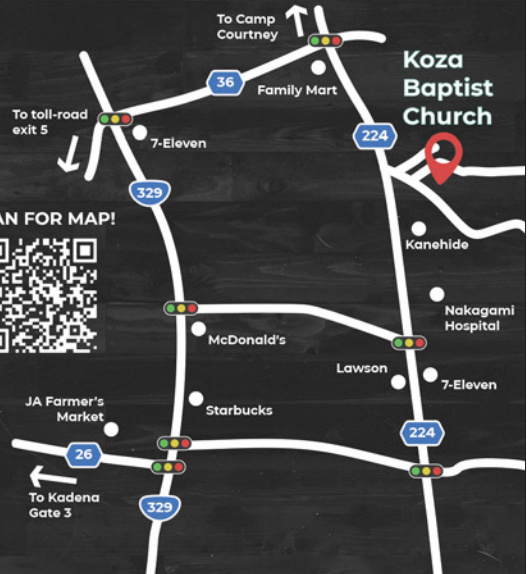
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RELIGION

Okinawa's original religion is understood to be both animistic and shamanistic, characterized by the belief that animate and inanimate objects possess an innate soul and that both good and evil spirits that pervade the world can be summoned through inspired mediums.

It is believed that Okinawa's animism and shamanism have been influenced by Shintoism, Buddhism and Taoism brought to the island from Japan and China. Today's Okinawan animism includes a number of *kami*, or spirits, who dwell in the world (e.g., spring, tree, rock and house spirits) and countless ancestral spirits. According to the Okinawan Prefectural Government, these supernatural spirits are sacred to the island's people. Okinawans believe that by gratifying and indulging the spirits through religious rituals, misfortunes are warded off and blessings are received.

Many religious rituals are performed throughout the year. Before and after a harvest, for example, observances are made to give thanks for the year's crops. The *utaki* (or sacred grove) and *uganju* (honorable praying place) located in the hills and forest are the most hallowed sites of worship for Okinawan animism.

The basic principle of ancestor worship alleges that ancestral spirits are forever nearby observing the lives of their descendants. Families, then, are compelled to perform religious rituals to be in good stead with their ancestors. On the other hand, it is believed that neglecting to perform rituals brings forth the ancestral spirits' wrath and results in bad fortune.

The ancestral shrine, which is called the *butsudan*, is located in one of the main rooms of the home and is the center of religious activity in ancestral worship. On certain days throughout the year as well as on festivals such as *Obon* (a festival of the dead), ancestral shrines island-wide are decorated with flowers, food and drink. Family members also gather to burn incense and offer prayers to their ancestors. The ancestral shrine shares its prominence equally with the family tomb, which is also a place for worshipping ancestral spirits. The ancestral shrine is the focus of continual worship throughout the year, while the family tomb is where families go on special occasions to offer prayers.



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MUSIC OF OKINAWA

One special type of local melody can be found in the heart of almost all Okinawans regardless of age—music called *shimauta*, or “island music.” Shimauta has offered comfort to the people of Okinawa during excruciatingly difficult times, augmented joyous occasions such as weddings and festivals, and provided amusement to accompany long summer evenings for countless generations.

It is said that the Okinawan song was first put into writing between the mid-15th to 16th centuries in a compilation called the *Omorososhi*. The original collection consisted of more than 1,000 folk and court songs that were very diverse in content. It was written under court supervision and the content was originally only intended for use during formal occasions and rituals.

Modern times have brought many changes to Okinawan music. The most obvious evolution is the increased use of the Japanese language in verse, as opposed to the use of Okinawan dialect.

However, the original songs of the *Omorososhi* are kept pure. Among the most popular *Omorososhi* pieces heard today are the *Gujinfu*, which consist of five famous traditional Ryukyu songs that were exclusively played for the king and visiting dignitaries. The first and most popular of the five is known as *Kagiyadefu*. *Kagiyadefu* was always the first song performed when *Gujinfu* was played. The songs are still performed at traditional Okinawan weddings and celebrations.



MUSIC & DANCE

Physically separated from mainland Japan by approximately 300 miles of ocean, Okinawa enjoyed its own unique history and culture long before it was formally admitted into Japan’s administrative structure in 1879. After the establishment of formal diplomatic relations with Ryukyu in 1404, the Chinese emperor, as a gesture of authorization and goodwill, sent investiture envoys to the island kingdom to verify the accession of each new king. As the host nation, the Ryukyu royal court was responsible for hosting and entertaining the visiting Chinese ambassadors. As a result, the Ryukyu royal court based in Shuri made patronage of the performing arts a high priority. Soon, affluent male members of the nobility were commissioned and formally trained in the ways of what has now come to be known as *Ryukyu buyo*.

Ryukyu dance is divided into two fairly general categories. The first is referred to as “classical dance” and today embodies the heart of the Ryukyu performing arts during the time of the Chinese investiture envoys. Rigid and structured, classical dance seeks to preserve the time-honored art of precise movements, unvarying scripts, and skilled, subdued expression of emotion as the ancient masters of the royal Shuri court once did long ago.

With the Ryukyu Islands’ incorporation into Japan as the Okinawa Prefecture, the traditional social hierarchy that had existed for centuries in Ryukyu culture vanished and the members of the Shuri nobility—once accomplished authors, producers and actors within the performing arts—found themselves stripped of their positions. Court dancers began to gravitate to the first commercial theaters on Okinawa, where they performed classical dance for the common class. Having never been exposed to Ryukyu court culture before, the commoners had at best limited appreciation for the refined, aristocratic style of court dance and soon began to express a desire for entertainment that more closely related to their everyday lives. In response, dancers and musicians created *zo odori*, or popular dance, which incorporated freedom of movement, open expression and the simplistic happiness of the agricultural and marine communities. *Zo odori* remains one of the favorite genres of dance among the Okinawan people.



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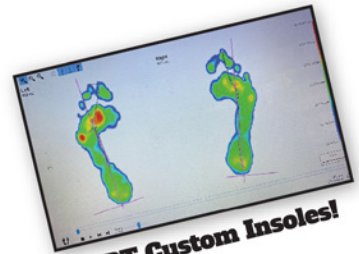


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EISA

Eisa is a dynamic, spirited dance that is not only a vital part of *Obon* (Festival for Honoring Ancestors) but is also considered a symbol of the Ryukyu Islands. On the third night of *Obon*, while the ancestral spirits are retiring to the world of the dead, the village's *eisa* dancers gather in the courtyard of the *kami ashagi* (the local place of worship) and begin. After offering the first dance to the village gods, the dancers make the rounds of homes in the village, dancing for the spirits of individual residences that have requested performances beforehand. Dances are also performed for people who gather at roadsides while the troupe is moving from venue to venue.

An *eisa* performance on village street corners and at homes can be compared to performing memorial services for village ancestors. *Eisa* often lasts throughout the evening of the third day and into the morning hours of the next day.

The principal musical instruments used in *eisa* include the *sanshin* (a three-stringed lute-like instrument), large barrel drums called *odaiko*, medium-sized laced drums called *shimedaiko*, and small hand-drums called *paranku*.

Other accessories may include small cymbals, fans,

castanets, hand towels and handkerchiefs. In many dances, men play the *sanshin* and beat vigorously on drums while jumping and spinning, as the young women dance to the rhythms, incorporating fans, towels, kerchiefs and other accessories into routines. *Eisa* “formations” vary from place to place, ranging from circular, square and starshaped to columns of young men and women broken into different categories determined by their part of the dance.

Traditionally, sedate colors were used for *eisa* costumes. Young men wore robes of banana fiber cloth, or *bashōufu*, with straw sashes and kerchiefs. Women also wore somber garb, consisting of *bashōufu* robes or dark blue kimono with white kerchiefs. However, the costumes of today are usually a riot of colors, including reds, yellows and blues. Probably the most festively dressed of the troupe are the *nakawawachi* or *chondara*—the accompanying clowns and jesters complete with special face makeup.

Modern *eisa* is considered an Okinawan art form, and different municipalities often compete at an island-wide tournament held on the last day of August.



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SHĪSĀ & ISHIGANTO

On Okinawa, talismans to combat evil spirits abound, and most have been born of ancient legends and used for several hundred years. If you have been off base, chances are you have seen at least one, or both, of the two most popular bodyguards against malevolence—the *shīsā* and *ishiganto*.

Statues of the lion-dog known as the *shīsā* can be found almost everywhere in the Ryukyu Archipelago. They come in all shapes and sizes, and although many have humorous facial expressions and designs, most traditional examples are quite fierce and intimidating.

Traditionally, *shīsā* are thought to contain magical power to dispel bad luck and evil spirits—many older Okinawans still recount folktales about the origin of the lion-dog figurines. Even though these tales aren't believed by many in the 21st century, they're still passed on from generation to generation.

Modern-day Okinawan *shīsā* are made of many different materials, and their construction has become something of an art form. Ceramic roof *shīsā* began to be produced in a district of Naha City called Tsuboya (an area of Okinawa famous for its potters) in 1889. During this period, all ceramic *shīsā* were of the unglazed variety (called *arayachi*). Glazed *shīsā* (known as *jōyachi*) didn't begin appearing until after WWII and were favorite souvenirs for visiting U.S. military personnel.

Of all the different types of Okinawan mementos, ceramic *shīsā* are probably the most popular among tourists, and many of them are still crafted using a technique called *tebineriseikei* (building a figure by hand). Each component of the medium- to large-sized *shīsā* (consisting of the head, body, legs and tail) is made separately on a potter's wheel before being combined to complete the figure before firing. Regardless of legend, superstition or price tag, *shīsā* make superb souvenirs from Okinawa to take back home and give as gifts to family and friends.

Ishiganto are also used as wards against evil spirits, negative energy or bad luck, and the use of these talismans spread from China during the 14th and 15th centuries. In China, Okinawa and many other Asian societies, it is believed that evil travels only in a straight line. Because of this belief, *ishiganto* are situated at the gates of houses located at crossroads or at a T or Y intersection to deflect these spirits. Many legends exist regarding the origins of this magical, devil-deflecting stone.



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For last-minute or late-night purchases, head to one of Okinawa's many convenience stores. Some of the most common convenience stores are Lawson, 7-Eleven and Family Mart, all of which are open 24 hours a day.

FARMERS MARKETS

On Okinawa, many vegetable (and flower) growers are members of a farmer support group called the Japanese Agricultural Cooperatives (JA). JA organizes several farmers markets throughout the island, offering fresh, organic produce often at prices lower than the local grocery store. A good market to check out is JA Chanpuru Ichiba, located near the intersection of Route 26 and Highway 329 in Uruma City.

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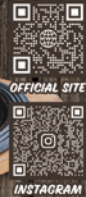
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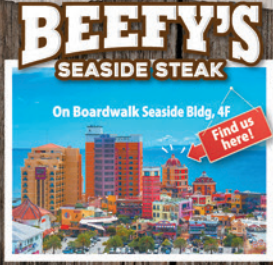
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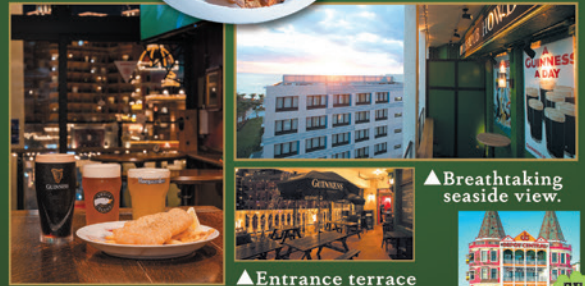
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