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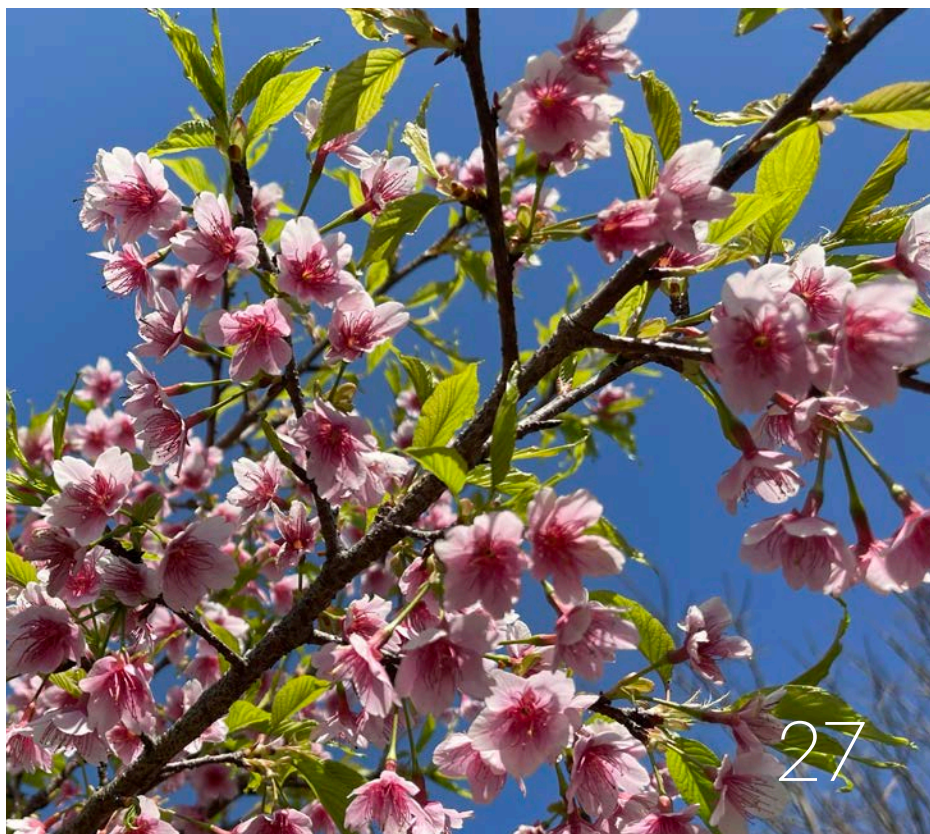
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"Welcome" to Okinawa Living

Serious Horsepower

Did you know that 2026 is the Year of the Horse according to *Eto*, or the Animal Zodiac? Also called *Jikkan Jūnishi*, *Eto* was originally an ancient Chinese method for counting years, months, days and hours as well as determining auspicious and inauspicious days depending on one's birthday. *Eto* is a combination of 5 calendar signs representing the elements wood, fire, earth, metal and water ("*Jikkan*") and 12 animal zodiac ("*Jūnishi*") signs. According to *Eto*, the person's birth year also determined their "totem animal" and this established certain character traits, lucky days and compatibility with others. Even today, many in Japan use the system in a similar manner as the version of the celestial zodiac based on constellations such as Virgo, Pisces or Taurus.

This cycle is based on the Lunar New Year, as opposed to the Gregorian which begins on January 1. According to the Lunar calendar, the New Year—and the Year of the Fire Horse—begins on February 17. Many here on Okinawa, especially members of the elder generation, celebrate New Year's twice. One is during *Oshōgatsu* (January 1), and the other occasion is known as *Kyū-Sogwachi* locally, or *Kyū-Shōgatsu* in Japanese and is celebrated when the new *Eto* cycle begins.

A complete *Eto* cycle consists of 60 years in the following order: *ne* (rat), *ushi* (ox), *tora* (tiger), *u* (hare or rabbit), *tatsu* (dragon), *mi* (snake), *uma* (horse), *hitsuji* (ram or sheep), *saru* (monkey), *tori* (rooster), *inu* (dog) and *i* (boar). The order of 12 animals rotates through 12 years and repeats 5 times (corresponding to the elements) to equal 60 years for a complete cycle. If you were born in 1942, 1954, 1966, 1978, 1990, 2002, 2014 or 2026 then you're filled with some serious horsepower as this is your year!

According to *Eto*, the personality of those born during the Year of the Horse often varies radically. It is believed that some may have the soul of an emperor or revolutionary and others may be meek. However, they all have great capacity to excel. Always traveling, those born during the Year of the Horse often leave home at a young age and remain restless throughout their life. They do well in groups and are never short on conversation. Some notable names born during the Year of the Horse include James Cameron, Kristen Stewart, Emma Watson, Clint Eastwood and Denzel Washington.

As we start a New Year and a fresh, clean, slate; the staff of *Okinawa Living Magazine* hopes 2026 is a year of happiness, peace and light for you and yours. **lol**


Mike Daley
Editor-In-Chief



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feedback

from the ICE Program
and Facebook

The vegan spread for a recent gathering [at the Butler Officers' Club] was off the chain! My wife and friends were blown away with the flavor of each item! Well done, MCCS Chefs.
—via ICE

Camp Foster Tsunami Scuba team, thank you for your assistance in achieving my Deep Dive cert! A MAJOR shout out to Dive Instructor Mr. Tyler Troendle! His expertise and his approach to training are top tier! Can't wait to dive again and complete another course with ya!!!
—via ICE

The Camp Schwab Library is fantastic. It had everything we needed and more. The Innovation Lab was a great addition with the 3D printing and vinyl printing. Well worth the funds allocated.
—via ICE

The Marine Corps Family Team Building Leadership Symposium that was held late last year was nothing short of excellent! This is truly something I hope we can see more of this year. I loved everything about it and sincerely appreciate that it was offered to spouses, civilians and service members; it felt unique, special and incredibly inclusive. As promised, I wanted to share my comment with leadership: your team did an outstanding job, and I am grateful for the opportunity to be part of such a meaningful experience, please keep them coming!
—via ICE

I would like to commend the management and staff at the Taiyo Golf Club for all the work they did for the DoDEA golf match between Kubasaki and Kadena High Schools. The course was in fantastic condition and was made available to our students with no interruptions from other players. Pull carts were made available for the students and golf carts were made available to the coaches and parents. Management and staff even stayed late to assist as our high school players took a bit longer than expected. All of this made for a wonderful event for the students, and we are looking forward to our next match at Taiyo.
—via ICE

Hi! I picked up my [Okinawa Living Magazine Holiday Giveaway] holiday bundle [consisting of a copy of the *Best of Okinawa Living* book inside an exclusive *Okinawa Guide* cover tote bag]. The book is lovely and the tote bag is the cutest! Happy Holidays!"
—via Facebook

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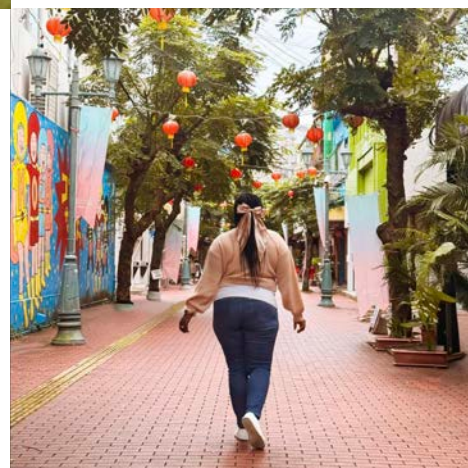


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its hidden charms. 🌿



Domo arigatou gozaimashita and thank you for your posts!
We can't wait to see what else you love about Okinawa!

—The Okinawa Living Staff

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TEXT & PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL DALEY
LAYOUT & DESIGN BY: NINA SON-LAGOS

ENJOY FLOWERS



SAKURA

PLUM BLOSSOMS

COSMOS & SUNFLOWERS

TULIPS

ENJOYING THE FLOWERS OF WINTER

When one thinks of flowers, they usually think of spring months with hillsides blanketed with brilliantly colored blooms after the winter's thaw. On Okinawa, however, flowers can be enjoyed (and photographed) year-round—even during the dead of winter.

During the winter months, the mountains of northern Okinawa turn pink and white with the blooming of *sakura* and plum blossoms, fields that normally produce rice and vegetables are refreshed with sunflowers and cosmos while carefully cultivated tulips can be seen en masse in the gardens of the Tropical Dream Center at Okinawa's Ocean Expo Park.

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SAKURA

PLUM BLOSSOMS COSMOS & SUNFLOWERS TULIPS

SAKURA

Known as Formosan cherry or bellflower cherry in English, and prevalent in Taiwan, the *kanhi-zakura* that bloom on Okinawa have darker, (in some cases almost scarlet) pink bell-shaped blossoms. The trees themselves are smaller than their brethren found in mainland. Blooming usually starts atop Mt. Yae, the Nakijin Castle Ruins and Mt. Nago around mid- to late-January before spreading southward.

Located atop a hill soaring over the city, **Nago Castle Park** is a popular spot for viewing these blossoms—with tourists coming to the island just to witness Japan's earliest cherry blossom displays. There are approximately 20,000 cherry blossom trees planted alongside the stairway leading to the top (643 steps—not for the faint of heart) of Mt. Nago, that explode into shades of pink every year. During this time, the Nago Cherry Blossom Festival takes place at the base of the mountain, visit p. 27 to learn more about this festival.

Nakijin Castle was once a mighty fortress, designed to defend the rulers of Hokuzan. Each year, the many hundreds of cherry blossom trees planted on (and around) the grounds bloom making Nakijin a photographer's paradise—especially in the evenings. In the past few years, Nakijin has been lighting up the ruin's walkways in the evenings during its sakura *matsuri* (festival).

Also known as Yaedake, **Mt. Yae** stands in both Nago City and Motobu Town. It is the tallest peak on the Motobu Peninsula at 1,945 feet and was used as a defensive position by Japanese forces during the Battle of Okinawa. The road that winds up Yaedake is lined with 7,000 cherry blossom trees. And although the road offers several parking areas along the way, the best way to enjoy sakura at Yaedake is by parking at the bottom and slowly working your way upwards on foot. Don't miss the Motobu Yaedake Cherry Blossom Festival at the Yaedake Sakura-no-Mori Park.

Happy New Year

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SAKURA

PLUM BLOSSOMS

COSMOS & SUNFLOWERS

TULIPS

PLUM BLOSSOMS

Known as *ume-no-hana*, these delicate blossoms are much rarer than sakura on Okinawa and bloom in colder weather—usually a week or two before the cherry blossoms. One of the main differences between ume and sakura is the strong, almost overpoweringly sweet fragrance plum flowers produce when fully bloomed.

A small grove of approximately 75 to 100

plum trees can be found in Nago City—situated at a tiny hamlet named Oshittai that is known for having the coldest winter on Okinawa. Oshittai is one of the only places where winter snow has ever touched ground on the island. Villagers in Oshittai care for a small armada of bees in hives located among the plum grove and harvest the sweet-tart honey the bees produce.

OHANAMI

SAKURA

PLUM BLOSSOMS

COSMOS & SUNFLOWERS

TULIPS

COSMOS & SUNFLOWERS

Both cosmos and sunflowers are considered “cover crops”—plants grown for the primary purpose of replenishing the nutrients in the soil. Since ancient times, farmers have used cover crops to prevent erosion, suppress weeds and replenish nutrients by mulching the cover crops.

Fields throughout the island have become more and more famed for their cover crops almost as much as the vegetables and rice they produce during productive seasons.

Many farms in **Kitanakagusuku**, which usually yield leafy lettuce, cabbages, *daikon* (winter radish) and other vegetables, have been attracting a copious amount

of people wielding cameras instead of gardening gear. Why? During off months, farmers have been planting their fields with sunflowers to replenish the soil, turning vast stretches into seas of brilliant yellow.

Although Okinawa is quite small, rice production is growing every year. One of the most popular cover crops for rice paddies are cosmos and three of the best locales to view fields filled with the delicate pink, white, orange, red and purple daisy-like flowers are **Zakimi** in Yomitan Village, **Igei** in Kin Town, the **Haneji** rice fields in the Kawakami district of Nago City in mid- to late-February.



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TULIPS

AND...TULIPS?

Tulips are probably most associated with Holland (i.e. the Netherlands) by most. During the days of the Ottoman Empire (in what is now known as Turkey), the tulip was considered a symbol of abundance and indulgence and in Turkey represents a symbol of paradise to this day. But, tulips on Okinawa? Yes, they seasonally exist!

Every year during the winter months, usually starting in late January depending

on the average temperatures, the Tropical Dream Center located in Motobu's Ocean Expo Park displays over 48 varieties (over 100,000 flowers) of tulips. Bulbs are carefully cultivated and, in some cases, refrigerated in preparation for the display, which usually lasts around two weeks.







New Year's

Sacred Traditions: A Beginner's Guide

Text by: Laura C. Pita
Photography by: Mia Cox
Layout by: James Rieth

While Western countries are known for finishing off the year with a bang (literally and figuratively), the last day of the year is a quieter affair in Japan. Families gather on *Ōmisoka* (New Year's Eve) to feast on soul-nourishing bowls of *toshi-koshi-soba* or "year-crossing-noodles," in the hope that their lives and good fortune will last as long as the noodles they loudly slurp. The dawn of the new year, however, is where the real celebration begins as droves of people make their way to the east coast of Okinawa or to higher ground (mainly the castle ruins throughout the island) to witness *hatsuhi-node*, the first sunrise of the year.



The most important New Year's tradition though is *hatsumode* or the first shrine/temple visit of the year that typically takes place on January 1 or within the first week. During this visit, people express gratitude for the blessings of the previous year, they also pray for good luck, draw their fortune, buy lucky charms and leave their wishes for the year ahead. The best part is that there is no need to practice Shintoism or Buddhism to participate as *hatsumode* is more of a cultural tradition and a social event—that millions of people across Japan participate in—than a strict religious one.

Whether you partake in this major Japanese New Year's tradition (if you missed it, there's always next year) or you plan on visiting Shinto shrines or Buddhist temples around Okinawa and mainland Japan throughout your overseas tour, the following is a beginner's guide to prepare you for what to expect.

Shinto

Shinto is the native religious tradition of Japan, it values purity, honesty and mindfulness, despite having no founder, no dogma or no doctrine. According to Jinja Honchō, the association that oversees 80,000 Shinto shrines across Japan, "It is a way of life, shaped by pure reverence for the myriad *kami* (deities or spirits) and honest gratitude for the blessings we have received." *Kami* can be forces of nature, the spirits of ancestors or divine energies that we can find in anything from natural phenomena to everyday objects. This connection between humans and the power we find in the natural world makes Shinto a very unique religion.





Shrine entrances are marked by *torii* gates, distinguishing a border between the sacred grounds and the mundane human world. It is customary to perform a slight bow before passing through the gate and once again after exiting the shrine, to show respect. Also, avoid walking straight through the center, as this path is reserved for the kami and instead walking through either side is best.

Buddhism

Buddhism is the second main religion of Japan, introduced from China and Korea in the year 552, as a present of goodwill between nations. It has evolved throughout the centuries, separating into branches—with *Jōdo Shinshū* or the Pure Land sect being the most popular—later interconnecting with Shintoism and becoming an influential part of Japanese culture rather than a conventional religion.

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Step-by-step guide:



1. Toss a coin into the offering box.



2. If there is a bell with a rope, ring it to greet the deity.



3. Bow twice.



4. Clap your hands twice (quietly at Buddhist temples).



5. Say a quiet prayer if you wish.



6. Bow one more time.

How to Worship

Once inside the sacred grounds, the first step to worshipping properly is to purify yourself with a ritual cleanse of the hands and mouth at the *temizuya* (water basin). Grab one of the provided ladles, scoop some water with your right hand and rinse your left hand then shift the ladle to your left hand and rinse your right hand. Lastly, cup your preferred hand, pour some water and rinse your mouth, before spitting the water outside of the fountain. Never touch the ladle to your mouth.

Before looking around, head to the altar to pay your respects, making sure you have a coin to toss into the offering box. The five-yen coin or *go-en* is a popular choice as it is considered to be lucky due to the name of the coin sounding like the Japanese word for “good connection.” If you don’t have

one, don’t fret! Any amount is acceptable. Your donation will go towards the operation and maintenance of the shrine or temple, events and even staff salaries.

Many Buddhist temples will have *temizuya* as well, if they don’t head towards the *jokoro* (incense burner) and waft smoke over yourself to purify, bring healing or to bring clarity to your mind. You can also get your own bundle of incense sticks for a small donation. All you have to do is light it with the flame provided, wave your hand to extinguish it (don’t blow on it), carefully place the stick in the burner and join your hands in silent prayer.

The only difference between praying at a Shinto shrine versus a Buddhist temple is that the hands are pressed silently together in lieu of clapping.

Once you’re done paying your respects, head over to the *Juyosho* or *Nōkyō-sho* (amulet office) to acquire a sacred amulet or talisman that maintains the power of the kami.

Find out your fortune

Omikuji are an ancient form of fortune telling in Japan. These written oracles come in slips of paper that are commonly found folded inside a wooden box. To get your fortune you must pay the donation (usually ¥100–¥200), reach your hand inside and grab your sealed fate. Some shrines in mainland Japan will have a slightly different variation with a wooden or metal cylinder that you shake until a numbered stick pops out the small opening. The number will correspond to a drawer with fortune slips inside. Most popular shrines offer fortunes with English translation for foreigners!

Once you unfold your *omikuji* it’s time to see how much luck you have in store. There are several rankings that vary from very lucky, to good, to very bad. Some fortunes will have a short poem that

relates to the oracle, short details on what to expect in the near future and some insight into topics like love, travel, school, employment and many more.

If you’ve pulled a good fortune, you can keep your *omikuji* as a souvenir, placing it in your wallet—to keep the blessings close to you so they can come true or have greater effect—being a common custom. If you’ve pulled a bad fortune you won’t want to take it with you, instead leave them tied at the shrine. Bad fortunes will be ritually burned and offered to the deities for cleansing, leaving you with decent luck once again.



Hiring Our Heroes

U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation

Camp Foster Career Summit

FEBRUARY 2, 2026

Networking Reception:
5 - 7 PM JST

 **Ocean Breeze**
Bldg 5906 | Camp Foster
Okinawa, Japan

FEBRUARY 3, 2026

Job Seeker Programming:
9 AM - 12:30 PM JST

 **Foster Community Center**
Bldg 5908 | Camp Foster
Okinawa, Japan

FEBRUARY 3, 2026

Military Spouse Programming:
9 AM - 1 PM JST

 **Ocean Breeze**
Bldg 5906 | Camp Foster
Okinawa, Japan

FEBRUARY 3, 2026

Hiring Fair:
1:30 - 4:30 PM JST

 **Foster Community Center**
Bldg 5908 | Camp Foster
Okinawa, Japan

What to Expect

- ✓ Free career fair & networking opportunities
- ✓ Meet with military-ready companies actively hiring locally & nationwide
- ✓ Get insider tips from hiring managers and recruiters
- ✓ Careers in Cyber/IT, Healthcare, and Project Management

You'll Learn About

- ✓ SkillBridge programs
- ✓ Fellowships & internships
- ✓ Upskilling & reskilling programs
- ✓ Military spouse professional development & hiring programs
- ✓ LinkedIn for veterans & military spouses

20+

expected
employers

20k+

open
positions

No DoD, Marine Corps, or MCCA endorsement intended or implied.



Scan to register

Register now to connect with military-ready employers

For more than a decade, Hiring Our Heroes has helped hundreds of thousands of transitioning service members, veterans, and military spouses find meaningful employment through our comprehensive training and hiring events, fellowship programs, and online tools.

HiringOurHeroes.org/campfoster

@HiringOurHeroes





Receive protection

Believed to hold the spirit of the deities, *omamori* are protective amulets in the form of colorful embroidered pouches with one side displaying the name of the shrine and the other the specific type of request. Omamori are meant to stay closed, so avoid opening the bag as it is considered disrespectful and will cause the blessing to be void. These small charms are meant to ward off danger and offer good fortune for things like health, success, travel safety, love and safe childbirth, among others.

Once purchased, you're supposed to keep the amulet close to carry its protection, so hanging it from a bag or car is customary. It is also customary to bring back your omamori to the original shrine/temple after a year for proper disposal, typically around New Year's, but some places will accept omamori from other locations. You can also keep them as souvenirs.



Make a wish

Ema are wooden wish plaques also available at Shinto shrine amulet offices for an offering of ¥500–¥1,000 (depending on size), in exchange for a wish to the deity enshrined. There is usually a table with pens or markers for you to write down your wishes before tying the ema at the appropriate location. The only rule is that you cannot wish harm upon someone else, besides that you can wish for whatever your heart desires! You can also keep the ema as a souvenir.



Receive great low fares flying from Okinawa when you explore Japan!

JAL Japan Explorer Pass

Access over 30 cities in Japan with our JAL Japan Explorer Pass (JEP)

~Why JAL Japan Explorer Pass?~

Convenient online booking

Flexibility to purchase up to
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No blackout dates

Big Savings

Okinawa (Naha)

JAL Japan Explorer Pass can be used on direct flights from Okinawa to 13 domestic airports.

Scan to Book



Kanazawa
(Komatsu)

Tokyo
(Haneda)

Nagoya

Osaka
(Itami)

kansai

Okayama

Fukuoka

Amami-Oshima

Okinoerabu

Yoron

Kumejima

Miyako

Ishigaki



Free Inflight Wi-Fi

Stay connected with our inflight Wi-Fi service.

- Connection speed and stability may depend on flight or weather conditions.
- Wireless LAN devices and earphones are not available for rent.



2pcs of Checked Baggage

Travel with peace of mind with our generous checked baggage allowance.

Enjoy Two Pieces of Complimentary Checked Baggage.

Eligibility

1. Country of residence must be outside Japan.
2. Either a ticket number or booking reference of a Japan-bound international ticket is required at the time of purchase.
3. Passport information is required at the time of purchase.
4. Reservation and purchase of domestic flight sectors must be completed through the JAL JEP website.



Fly into tomorrow.



Commemorate your visit

Want a meaningful way to commemorate your visit? Join the wonderful world of *goshuin* collecting! Goshuin are stamps or seals that include the name of the shrine and date of your visit in calligraphy. They were given to pilgrims as proof of their dedication and prayer offerings and today, they serve as a way for travelers and worshippers alike to connect with Japan's spiritual history and traditions.

The goshuin office can sometimes be hard to find as it is often separate from the amulet office and most smaller shrines/temples don't offer them. You must first purchase a *goshuincho*, an accordion-style book devoted solely to collecting these stamps. Popular shrines will sell their own beautifully handcrafted books

with designs specific to that location, for an offering of ¥1,000–¥2,000. On Okinawa, you can purchase books at Naminoue Shrine in Naha (pictured) and Futenma Shrine in Ginowan.

Once there, hand your book to the temple/shrine worker open to the page you want your stamp placed on for an offering of usually ¥500; you may be given a numbered chip or a pager for you to pick up your book a few minutes later. Most popular places of worship offer pre-stamped paper inserts that you can later glue into your book. Some will have multiple stamp options, including unique seasonal or even monthly designs that are more elaborate for an offering of usually ¥1,000–¥1,500.

We hope this beginner's guide serves as a well-rounded introduction to temples and shrines and prepares you to experience spirituality, explore cultural and architectural marvels as well as participate in local traditions on your upcoming travels around Japan. Remember to share your adventures with us by tagging @okilivingmag on Instagram for a chance to be featured on an upcoming issue of *Okinawa Living Magazine*! |ol



Romantic Dinner

Saturday • February 14, 2026 | 5:30–8:30 p.m.

Enjoy a special four-course Valentine's dinner by the beach, featuring your choice of four delicious main dishes. Each meal includes soup, salad, selected vegetables, dessert and a glass of champagne.

> \$50 <

Menu

- *Soup:* Italian Wedding Soup and Bruchetta
- *Salad:* Fresh greens with strawberry vinaigrette, cranberries and toasted pecans
- *Main (choice between four):*
 - Ribeye Steak with chimichurri, garlic mashed potatoes and sautéed vegetables
 - Chicken Breast Parmigiana with linguine and sautéed vegetables
 - Vegetarian Pasta Primavera with grilled vegetables and garlic knots
 - Garlic Shrimp & Lemon Garlic Poached Salmon Filet with white rice and sautéed vegetables
- *Dessert:* Dawn's Decadent Dessert—a white-chocolate strawberry dream!

Reservations are required.

Please call 080-6489-8619 by 4 p.m. on February 1 (Mon–Fri • 9 a.m.–Noon & 1–4 p.m.).

Winter In the Sun

NOW–March 26, 2026

Sunday–Thursday (excludes holidays)

Winter may be here, but the sunshine never leaves Okuma! Enjoy peaceful days by the beach and cozy nights under the stars with our Winter in the Sun Deal—save 60% on any room type. Make your winter escape unforgettable!

For details, call our Reservation Desk at 098-632-1991/1992 (8 a.m.–5 p.m.)

Camp Under the Stars

NOW–March 26, 2026

\$1 • Per night

Signup @ Outdoor Recreation Equipment Rental

Breathe in the crisp ocean air, listen to the soothing sound of the waves and gaze up at the sparkling night sky. Gather around the campfire, share stories and toast s'mores for an unforgettable winter escape by the sea.



Okuma Beach

Contact Information:

🌐 [Kadenafss.com/okuma](https://kadenafss.com/okuma)

📘 facebook.com/theokumabeach

📷 @okumabeach

Okuma Beach • 631-1991

Lodging Reservations • 098-962-1991

Surfside Grill & Bar • 098-962-1805

Okuma Outdoor Recreation • 090-3795-6563

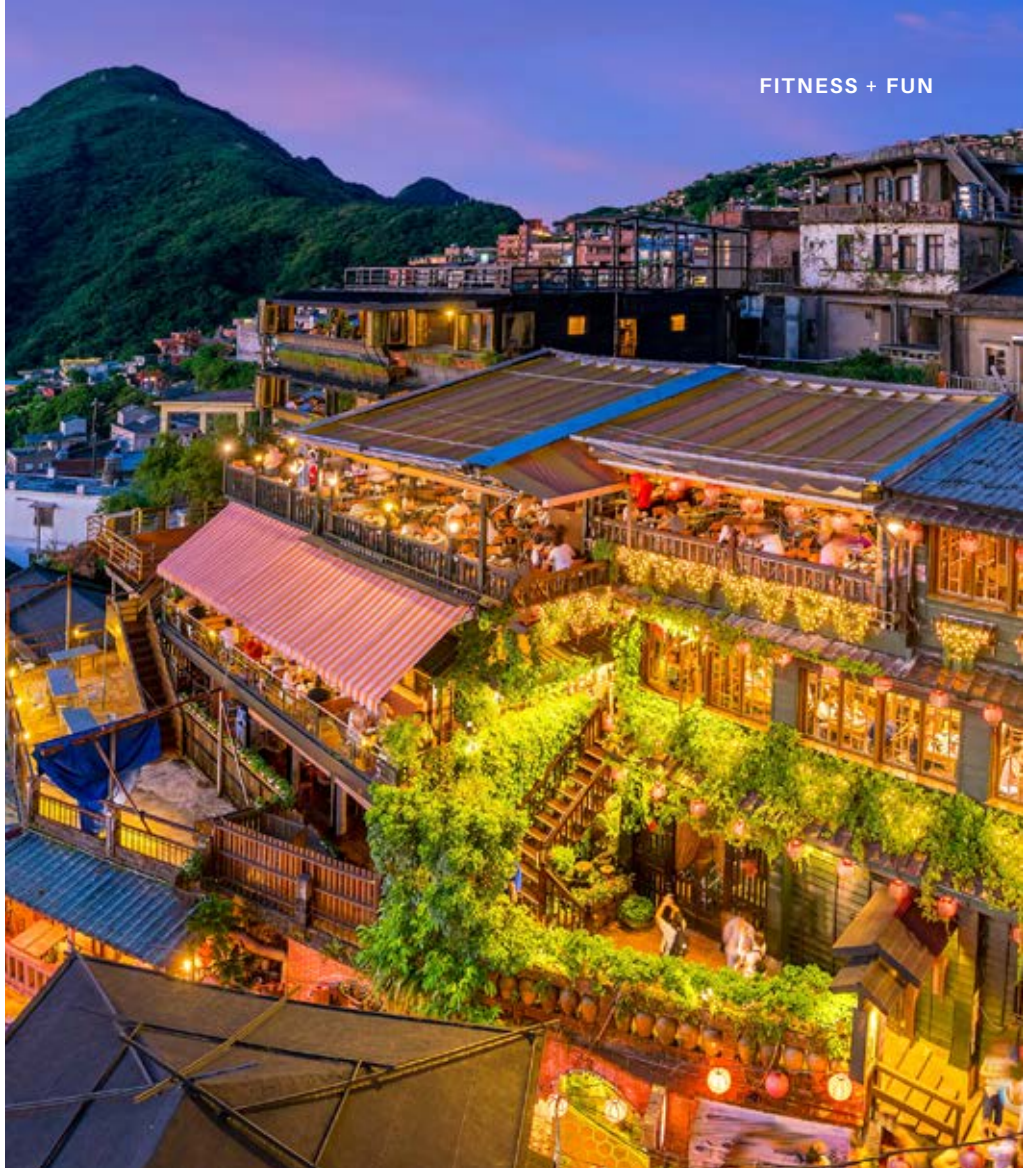
Massage Reservations • 090-6856-8276

Nago Cherry Blossom Festival

Witness the first bloom in Japan with Tours+

Every year, the Japan Meteorological Association tracks the blooming of sakura trees from the southernmost prefecture in January to the northernmost regions in April and May. Called the “*sakura zensen*,” its progress is covered in the daily evening news. Thanks to Okinawa’s relatively balmy winter climate, the sakura zensen begins months before many other Japanese locales see the traditional harbinger of spring. When sakura start appearing, usually beginning in the northern parts of the island during the end of January, the rest of the nation avidly watches via television reports. Some mainland residents even make the trip to Okinawa to see the local species—the *kanhi-zakura* in bloom.

Witness the first bloom of the sakura yourself with Tours+ on the Nago Cherry Blossom Festival Tour happening January 31 and February 1 from 11:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. both days. Explore the picturesque Nago Central Park and Nago Castle Site decorated with thousands of cherry blossoms, soak up the vibrant festival atmosphere and enjoy delicious food and exciting entertainment. Call Tours+ at 646-3502 for more information on this tour and how you can sign up! For information on other upcoming tours, visit www.okinawa.usmc-mccs.org/tours. **LOL**



Taipei Spring Tour...

...With MCCS Tours+

Do you know where *boba* comes from? Taiwan, of course! This island, which is just under 2 hours away (by plane) from Okinawa is the perfect quick spring getaway to explore delicious cuisine, historic temples, bustling night markets and towering skyscrapers. All of this and more can be experienced during the four-day Taipei Spring Tour with MCCS Tours+, March 14–17.

Tour package includes round trip airfare, 4-star hotel accommodation with breakfast buffet, ground transportation, two bus tours to discover Taipei City and the old towns where you’ll be dazzled by unique formations on the coast of Yehliu Geopark as well as be enchanted by the coastal village of Jiufen, which features one of the oldest streets in all of Taiwan and reminiscent of Hayao Miyazaki’s iconic movie—*Spirited Away*. Sight-seers will also visit the old railroad town of Shifen, where one can release wish-filled lanterns into the sky.

The city bus tour will stop at the famed Taipei 101 allowing travelers to enjoy its restaurants and shopping center as well as the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall, a national monument built in honor of the former president. Also, it wouldn’t be a trip to Taiwan without exploring the night markets and indulging in delectable street food, shopping for trinkets and feeling the energetic atmosphere.

To reserve your spot on the MCCS Tours+ Taipei Spring Tour, register by January 15 at a Tours+ office on Camps Foster, Hansen or Schwab. For more information about this tour and other offerings, visit www.okinawa.usmc-mccs.org/tours, email tours@okinawa.usmc-mccs.org or call 098-971-3502. **LOL**

Since 1954

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ROGER'S NEW YEAR SALE

02 - 25 JAN 2026



Roger's JARDIN

Ladies Fashion, Accessories,
Lingerie & Nightwear



Roger's PASSAGE

Ladies Shoes & Bags, Kids & Baby
Fashion, Fragrances & Cosmetics



Roger's ARENA

Men's Fashion, Shoes, Bags
& Stationery



Roger's HÔTEL

Living & Home Decor



PLAZA HOUSE 1954 KOZA

Japan's oldest shopping center, offering a world of style, taste, and travel-inspired living.

LOWER PLAZA
HOUSING AREA

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CHUBU TOKUSHUKAI
HOSPITAL



Lord of the Tengan Run

Calling all Runners!

Lace up your sneakers on Sunday, February 8, and head to the Camp Courtney Ironworks Fitness Center for the Lord of the Tengan 5k/10k Run. While awards will be given for 1st, 2nd and 3rd place finishers in all gender and age divisions, you are your best competitor, so remember any finish is always a win.

At 3.1 miles, 5ks are a fantastic way for those getting into the running game, with an average training time from couch to finish line being 6–8 weeks. A 10k race, on the other hand, is 6.2 miles and is ideal for experienced runners who are looking for more of a challenge (which is perhaps why the 10k is the second most popular race after the half-marathon) and requires a fitness level that balances strength, energy and endurance. When training for either a 5k or 10, it's important to have a pre-race plan that combines different runs focusing on either tempo, interval or speed and incorporates strength

training while being mindful of how you are fueling your body.

If you've made the decision to put in the training time (or you're just ready to run), then there's no time like the present to register! The Lord of the Tengan 5k/10k Run is open to both SOFA and non-SOFA runners island wide ages 12 and older. Register online for \$50 (t-shirt and medal included) or \$10 (t-shirt and medal not included). The registration deadline is February 4 at 11:30 p.m. for SOFA and January 28 at 11:30 p.m. for non-SOFA.

Race day check-in will be from 6:30 to 7:30 a.m. with a mandatory brief at 7:35 a.m. before the race starts at 8:05 a.m. For updated information, follow Semper Fit's Facebook page or email adultsports@okinawa.usmc-mccs.org. For more upcoming events and offerings from MCCS Semper Fit, visit www.okinawa.usmc-mccs.org/adultsports. **!OL**

Swing into the New Year

Ladies Golf Clinics

Is 'Develop a Hobby' one of your 2026 New Year's resolutions? If so, how about giving golf a try? Golf is a low-impact sport that's perfect for people of all ages and skill levels, offers time spent outdoors, a fun social environment as well as many health benefits. There's also no better time to pick up the sport than during the wintertime.

Enter Ladies Golf Clinics at Taiyo Golf Club, an inclusive women-focused golf initiative offering hands-on lessons by Professional Golfers' Association (PGA) and Ladies Pro-

fessional Golf Association (LPGA) qualified instructors. Tailored to beginners, experienced players and those needing adaptive support as well as clinics, mentorship and tournaments. Day clinics are on Tuesdays from 11 a.m. to noon and evening clinics are on Thursdays from 5:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. Ladies Golf Clinics are open to SOFA ID card holders.

For more information on Ladies Golf Clinics and upcoming events at Taiyo Golf Club, visit www.okinawa.usmc-mccs.org/golf. **!OL**

New Year's Bullfighting Tour

A Whole Lotta Bull!

Bullfighting on Okinawa, known as *tōgyū* or "*ushi ōrasē*," has quite a long history—approximately 300 years. During its early years, *tōgyū* was extremely popular among the rural population, especially older Okinawan farmers, with larger tournaments regularly attracting over 30,000 fans. Virtually every farming village had a bullfighting ring and although the practice all but disappeared before, during and after WWII, it resurfaced and regained popularity after reversion.

During these matches, bulls fight probably the only adversary that can meet them head-to-head on equal terms—another bull. Bulls are quite rambunctious by nature and butt heads on a fairly regular basis as it is, so watching two colossal bovines locking horns and vying for supremacy is definitely a sight to behold. It's important to note that bulls are rarely wounded, and all wounds are immediately attended to (usually with loving care). All tournaments are raucous affairs, with spectators banging steel drums and whistling piercingly, a general Okinawan demonstration of approval.

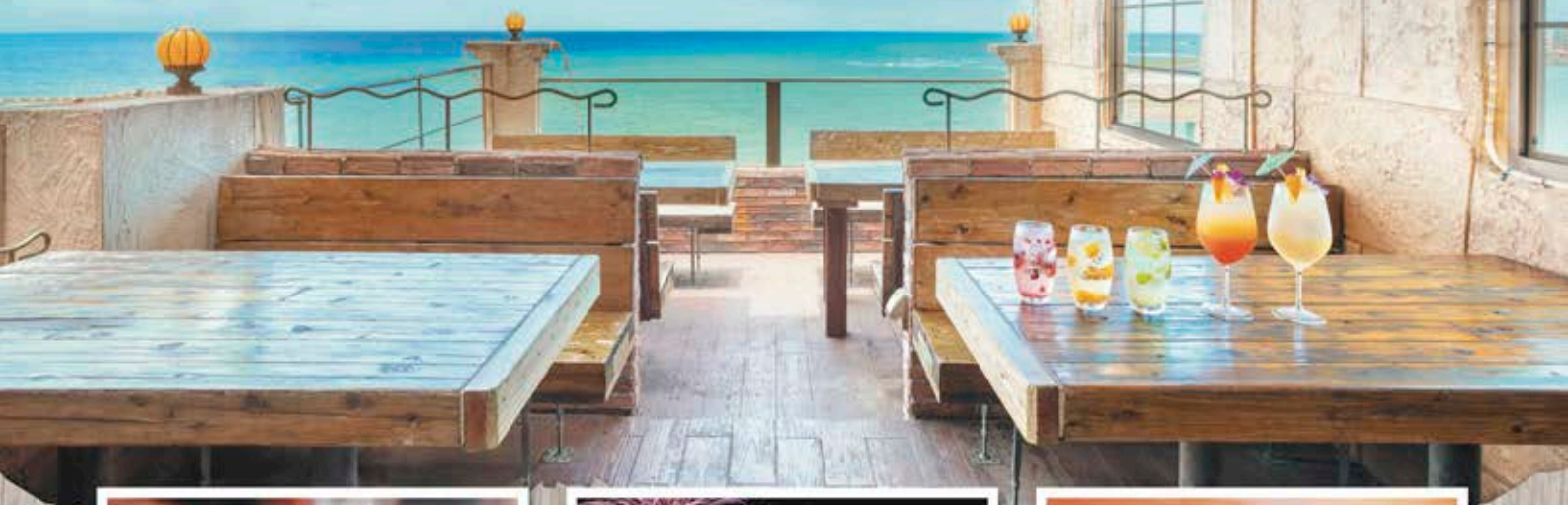
Join MCCS Tours+ as they visit one of these thrilling contests January 3, from 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. in Uruma City. The sign-up deadline is three days prior to the tour date and attendees should bring yen for food and souvenirs. For more information, including pricing, visit www.okinawa.usmc-mccs.org/tours. **!OL**



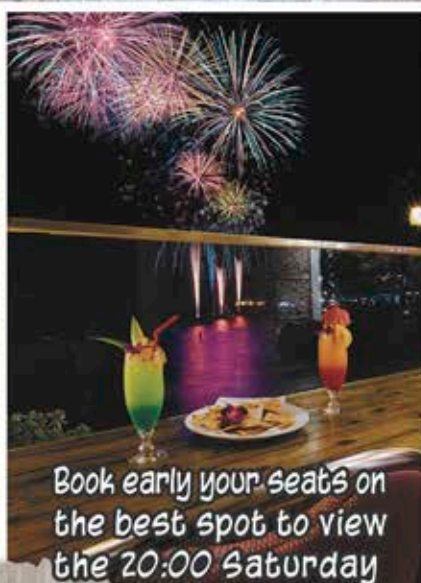
For the Best Times and Real Food, Beefy's is the Place!

BEEFY'S

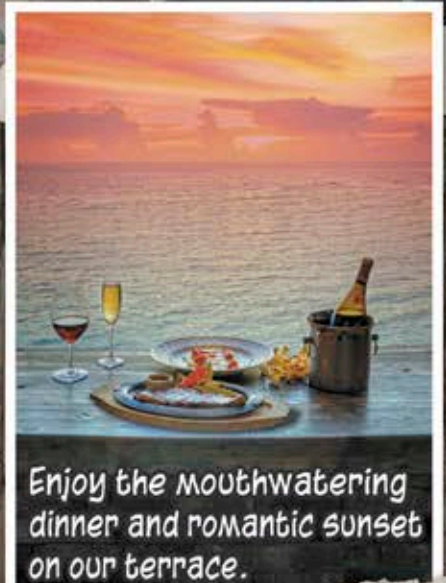
SEASIDE STEAK



Our super delicious charcoal-grilled steak is our pride!



Book early your seats on the best spot to view the 20:00 Saturday Fireworks.



Enjoy the mouthwatering dinner and romantic sunset on our terrace.



OPEN DAILY

Lunch : 11:30 - 15:00 (L.O. 14:30)

Dinner : 17:00 - 22:00 (L.O. 21:15)



INSTAGRAM



OFFICIAL SITE

BEEFY'S

SEASIDE STEAK

On Boardwalk Seaside Bldg. 4F



Depot Island Seaside Bldg. 4F Tel: 098-982-7566



In a Bit of a Pickle?

Time for a Game of Pickleball!

What exactly *is* pickleball, you say? It's a fun and competitive sport that combines three sports—tennis, badminton and ping-pong. According to usapickleball.org, pickleball was invented in 1965 on Bainbridge Island, a short ferry ride from Seattle, Washington. Three dads—Joel Pritchard, Bill Bell and Barney McCallum are credited for creating a game to entertain their bored kids. Since then, the sport has evolved into a popular activity enjoyed by millions throughout the U.S., Canada and internationally.

It's time to jump onto the pickleball bandwagon at the Foster Open Pickleball Tournament. Taking place on Saturday, February 14 and Sunday, February 15 at the Camp Foster tennis courts, this tournament is open to participants island wide ages 16 and older. Awards will be given to 1st, 2nd and 3rd place teams. Be sure to register before February 9 (1 p.m.) via Eventbrite for \$40 per doubles team.

For more information on the Foster Open Pickleball Tournament, call 645-4866, email adultsports@okinawa.usmc-mccs.org or visit www.okinawa.usmc-mccs.org/adultsports. **101**

Semper Fit Massage Therapy

Work Out Those New Year's Kinks

Massages are a convenient way to help relieve stress, encourage relaxation, improve flexibility and range of motion, manage pain and lower blood pressure. When was the last time you got a massage to work out those shoulder knots or that intense back pain? Can't remember? Well, Gunners Fitness Center on Camp Foster and Ironworks Fitness Center on Camp Courtney are offering various forms of massage therapy including aromatherapy, Hawaiian Lomi-Lomi, therapeutic, lymphatic, pre/post-natal, neuromuscular therapy, myofascial release and more.

Appointments are available Monday through Sunday with therapist availability varying weekly. Massages are open to DoD ID card holders (children ages 16–17 must have a consent form completed prior to scheduled appointment). All massages are \$40 for 60 minutes, \$60 for 90 minutes and \$80 for 120 minutes. To make a reservation, call Gunners at 645-3050 or Ironworks at 622-9221. For more information, email fitnesscenters@okinawa.usmc-mccs.org or visit www.okinawa.usmc-mccs.org/fitnesscenters. **101**

Don't Lose Your...

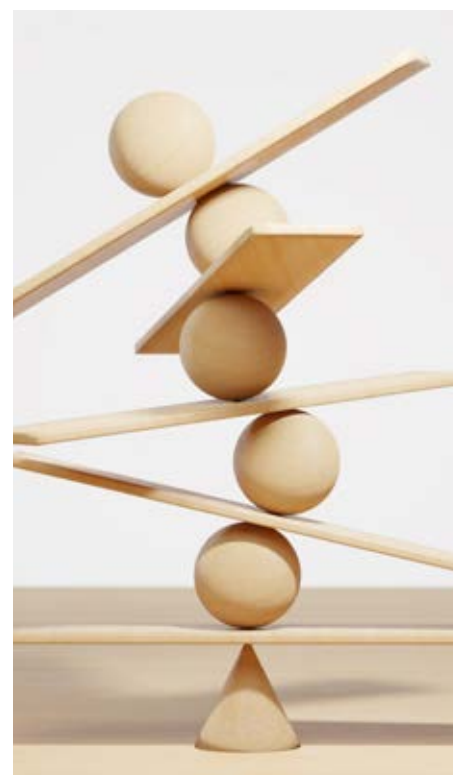
...(Work/Life) Balance!

As technology constantly intertwines into our lives, we've become increasingly connected, with notification bells and buzzers constantly causing us to glance at our phones and smartwatches. For many of us, this connectivity also extends into our workplace, which does increase productivity. However, this constant connection with work also can lead to obligations that follow us into the weekend and continue occupying too much of our personal time until Monday arrives once again. Add this vicious cycle to 40 (or more) hours in the office during the week while still trying to find the time to care for ourselves, friends and family—it can be pretty easy to lose our balance. Fortunately, January is Work/Life Balance Month—the perfect opportunity to take a deep breath, take a step back, turn off those notifications and restore your equilibrium.

To help you regain and maintain a healthy work/life balance, and sustain it through the rest of the year, MCCS Health Promotion will be disseminating information that can help you create and/or maintain supportive and healthy work environments which will also have a positive effect on balancing work and personal responsibilities.

Information on how you can maintain a healthy work/life balance will be available at Semper Fit Fitness Centers on Camps Kinser, Foster, Courtney, Hansen, Schwab and MCAS Futenma. Info will also be available at Health Promotion's main office on Camp Foster as well as online at facebook.com/mccsokinawa.sempersfit.

For more information on MCCS Health Promotion offerings, visit them online at www.okinawa.usmc-mccs.org/healthpromotion. **101**



NICE TO MEAT YOU

yakiniku with UME(plum)



▼ web site ▼

▼ LINE ▼



- LOCATION -

MIHAMA - chatan

ISO - urasoe

TOMITON - toyosaki



Table Order Buffet

ALL YOU CAN EAT

Yakiniku Restaurant

we are OPEN 365 days! we can't wait to welcome you!



okinawa goen

Q



Free Parking



Credit Card OK



▼ WEB site ▼



Family Strikes and Friday Nights

MCCS Bowling Centers

It's what you look forward to the most after a week of working 40 hours (or more)...Friday nights, the official start of the weekend. Begin your well-deserved weekend right by winding down and enjoying the slow pace—forgetting work and the worries that it encompasses. Why not let loose with some bowling with family and friends? A typical bowling night includes lots of laughs, friendly competition and thunderous claps as each contestant tries to prove they're the best. Sometimes things get *too* intense when you turn around and notice your competition bite their nails from anxiety while looking at the scoreboard.

If letting off steam after a stressful work week is your top priority, join us at Family Strikes and Friday Nights brought to you by the MCCS Bowling Program—they're the perfect opportunity to unwind with your loved ones. Come on down to the bowling centers on Camps Foster and Courtney every Friday night from 6 to 10 p.m. for hours of strikes, spares (and some gutter balls) with your beloveds. Both locations will be offering family packages, kids' bumper lanes and themed nights to further elevate the mood. Family Strikes and Friday Nights events are open to all SOFA status personnel. Make lasting memories with the entire family on Friday nights...who knows, this may even turn into a weekly tradition after you experience all the fun.

For more information on MCCS Bowling Center locations, specific hours of operation and phone numbers, visit www.okinawa.usmc-mccs.org/bowling. **!OL**



Month of the Military Child

Art & Poetry Contest

Children in military families don't volunteer for service, but that doesn't mean they don't make sacrifices alongside their parents. The oft-used analogy of comparing these kids to dandelions—which bloom anywhere the wind carries them—is a testament to their resilience.

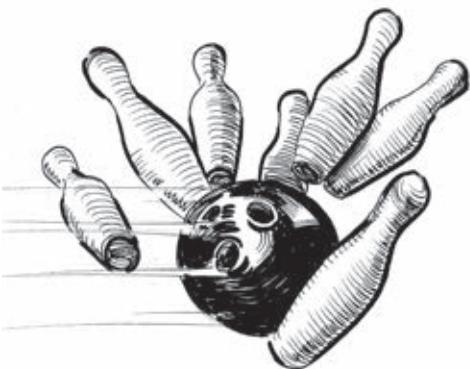
This year will mark the 40th anniversary of the designation of April as the Month of the Military Child. In 1986, then-Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger set the month aside to honor military children for their significant roles in the military community. Since then, U.S. military bases throughout the world have sponsored activities for the multitudes of young military family members.

This April, MCCS Okinawa Libraries and *Okinawa Living Magazine* will recognize the talent of these young heroes of our community with an art and poetry contest.

From January 1 to February 15, libraries on Camps Kinser, Foster and Courtney will be accepting both artwork and poems from SOFA-status children stationed on Okinawa. The contest will have three age categories: 5–8, 9–12 & 13+ and the theme will be “What I love about being a military child”. Prizes from event sponsors Manga Souko, Sam's Restaurant Group, Red Lobster, Diamond Comics, Urasoe Art Museum and PST Okinawa will be up for grabs.

Artwork and poetry will be displayed at the library it was submitted and contest winners' submissions will also be published in the April 2026 issue of *Okinawa Living Magazine*!

For complete rules for the 2026 *Okinawa Living Magazine* Month of the Military Child Art & Poetry Contest, visit www.okinawa.usmc-mccs.org/libraries and follow the MCCS Okinawa Facebook page for updates. **!OL**



OKINAWA

L I V I N G

ART & POETRY CONTEST

"WHAT I LOVE ABOUT BEING A MILITARY CHILD"

This April, MCCS will recognize the talent of the military children of our community with an art & poetry contest!



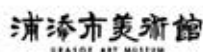
January 1–
February 15

Age
categories:
5–8, 9–12
& 13+

THE THEME FOR 2026 IS "WHAT I LOVE ABOUT BEING A MILITARY CHILD". SUBMISSIONS WILL BE ACCEPTED AT MCCS LIBRARIES ON CAMPS KINSER, FOSTER AND COURTNEY. CONTEST WINNERS' SUBMISSIONS WILL BE PUBLISHED IN THE APRIL ISSUE OF OKINAWA LIVING MAGAZINE!

FOR COMPLETE CONTEST RULES, VISIT
WWW.OKINAWA.USMC-MCCS.ORG/LIBRARIES.

Sponsored in part by:



Educational and Career Counseling Services

Voluntary Education Program

Educational counseling is a powerful resource for military-affiliated learners—active-duty service members, veterans, military spouses, civilian employees and contractors—seeking to advance their education or transition into new career paths. There are six MCCS Education Centers located at camps throughout Okinawa, staffed with Education Service Specialists, Personal & Professional Development Advisors and Education Technicians that are available to assist community members in identifying and achieving their academic, professional and personal development goals.

Looking to explore education and training opportunities, align your career path with personal interests, make informed decisions about degree planning, skill development and tuition assistance, receive up-to-date information on funding opportunities, testing and academic resources or receive assistance with your transition from the military to the civilian world?

Schedule an appointment today to receive individualized support tailored to your goals and circumstances by visiting your preferred Education Center in person (Monday through Friday, 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.). For more information on the Volunteer Education Program including their locations, visit www.okinawa.usmc-mccs.org/education. For any additional questions, email education@okinawa.usmc-mccs.org.



MCCS Health Promotion Commissary Tours

Is Eating Healthy your New Year's Resolution?

Before you purchased that box of breakfast cereal for your first meal of 2026, did you flip it over to check out the Nutrition Facts on the back? If you didn't, then maybe you should. Mandated by the Department of Agriculture, these charts contain important information on the 14 nutrients contained therein—including calories, calories from fat, total fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, sodium, total carbohydrates, dietary fiber, sugars, proteins, vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium and iron. But, what exactly do these numbers mean? Which box of cereal (among all the other products lining the shelves of the commissary) truly supports your 2026 New Year's resolution health goals?

MCCS Health Promotion's Commissary Tours are here to help you shop with confidence. Led by expert health educators,

these interactive tours will guide you through the aisles, teaching you how to decode nutrition labels, compare ingredients and make informed choices that align with your lifestyle. Whether you're focused on weight management, heart health or fueling your workouts, MCCS Health Promotion will help you build a cart that works for you—not against you. It's a hands-on way to turn everyday shopping into a powerful wellness tool. Commissary Tours are open to all community members and are a great way to kickstart healthier habits to begin 2026.

Commissary Tours are held quarterly, and reservations are accepted via Eventbrite. For more information on the next class, and more offerings from MCCS Health Promotion, visit www.okinawa.usmc-mccs.org/healthpromotion. **101**

Bridging the Generation Gap

Learn from Each Other

Although grandparents, parents and ourselves have lived through different eras ranging from black and white film prints to buying CDs to listen to music to having devices in our pockets wirelessly streaming a library of 10,000 songs directly into our ears, we all have tales to tell describing our experiences. However, regardless of generational difference, there's one important goal that should be shared—our connection with one another.

Marine Corps Family Team Building (MCFTB) invites service members and families to attend the Bridging the Generation Gap workshop at the Camp Foster Education

Center on January 6, from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. This engaging session brings together Gen Z, Millennials, Gen X and Baby Boomers to explore how each generation can learn from, collaborate and connect with one another. Through interactive discussions and fun activities, participants will gain insights into generational perspectives, improve communication and strengthen teamwork across age groups. Registration is required via Eventbrite.

For more information about MCFTB and their offerings, visit www.okinawa.usmc-mccs.org/mcftb, email MCFTB@okinawa.usmc-mccs.org or call 645-3689. **101**



Lunch & Sweets Buffet

THE SNOWY & the WITCH'S MIRROR

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2025 10/4 SAT 2026 1/12 MON

DoubleTree by Hilton Okinawa Chatan Resort (2F)
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43Mihama Chatan-cho Nakagami-gun Okinawa 904-0115, Japan
TEL 098-901-4600 FAX 098-901-4601

TIME 12:00~14:30 **PRICE** Adult ¥4,500/Child ¥1,500 [6-12]
*L.O. 13:45 *Price includes tax and service charge



Build a Resilient Connection...

...with Family Advocacy Program

The Family Advocacy Program is committed to fostering strong and meaningful relationships within the military community. They firmly believe that every relationship deserves a solid foundation based on trust, love and understanding. A foundation that is cultivated through a wide range of resources, educational opportunities, support and intervention.

Empathically Building a Resilient Connection (EmBARC) is an 8-hour workshop about coping with conflict in relationships, and will touch on communication, coping and conflict resolution skills, relationship attachment styles and values, and most importantly the effects of high levels of conflict and/or domestic violence on children.

The Family Advocacy Program will be hosting full day workshops every first Monday of the month from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. on Camp Foster. The EmBARC Workshop is beneficial for anyone who is currently or has previously been in a relationship with high levels of conflict and looking to gain helpful skills to enhance their relationships. Register for the workshop by emailing caitlin.e.mroz.civ@usmc.mil. |ol

Gottman Workshop

The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work

The Family Advocacy Program is committed to fostering strong and meaningful relationships within the military community and they firmly believe that every relationship deserves a solid foundation based on trust, love and understanding.

The Family Advocacy Program will be offering a workshop based on the book *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* by John M. Gottman on Saturday, January 10 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Camp Foster. In the workshop, Gottman: The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work, participants will be guided on how to improve their friendship,

fondness and admiration for their partner. It will also offer skills and tools on how to manage conflict constructively as well as addressing both solvable and perpetual problems within one's relationship.

Registration for the workshop is available on Eventbrite. To learn more about how the dedicated Family Advocacy Program team provides personalized care, catering to the unique needs of everyone through counseling, psycho-educational classes and workshops, advocacy and new parent support, visit www.okinawa.usmc-mccs.org/fap, email fapprevention@usmc.mil or call 645-2915. |ol

Feel at Home...

...with L.I.N.K.S.

Discover Marine Corps life and your new community with Lifestyle, Insights, Networking, Knowledge and Skills (L.I.N.K.S.), an interactive program by Marine Corps Family Team Building's (MCFTB). These comprehensive sessions are ideal for both spouses and service members new to military life or living overseas as they offer insights into Marine Corps history, rank structure, local resources, benefits, deployments, communication styles, community involvement and traditions.

The series of workshops also include L.I.N.K.S Foundations, L.I.N.K.S for Japanese Spouses, L.I.N.K.S Mentor Workshop and Cuppa Conversations, offering participants space to connect with fellow spouses and service members, build resilience and feel at home in their new surroundings.

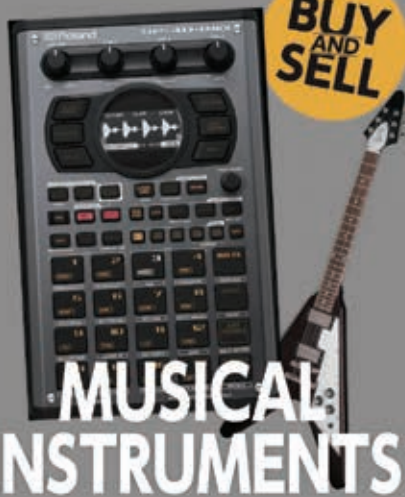
The upcoming L.I.N.K.S Foundations Workshop will be virtual and will take place on January 21 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Registration via Eventbrite is required. For more information on these L.I.N.K.S. workshops and other offerings by MCFTB, call 645-3689, email mcftbokinawa@okinawa.usmc-mccs.org or visit www.okinawa.usmc-mccs.org/links. |ol





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Hungry?

How About Bulldogs Burgers?

Looking for a new go-to spot on base for when you're extra hungry? How does a juicy burger or a delectable hot dog sound? If you haven't tried Bulldogs Burgers—with locations on Camps Kinser, Foster, Courtney, Hansen (opening this spring!), Schwab and MCAS Futenma—what are you waiting for?

Bulldogs Burgers offers a variety of burgers topped with fresh lettuce, tomato, red onion (or grilled onions) and their special Devil Dog sauce in between two freshly baked buns. For the plant-based/vegetarians looking for the occasional indulgent eat, there's the Beyond Burger as well as the option to substitute any beef patty for a

Beyond Burger patty for only \$2.

Although the restaurant name only mentions burgers, their menu also includes sandwiches, hot dogs and salads. If you're more of a chicken sandwich person, they've got you covered. With appetizing and satiating options for everyone, Bulldogs Burgers is a one-stop-shop that will fulfill your all-American food cravings. All Bulldog Burgers are available as a combo that includes a choice of french fries, sweet potato fries or onion petals and a fountain drink. To see the full menu, hours of operation, phone numbers and location information, visit www.okinawa.usmc-mccs.org/bulldogs. **LOL**

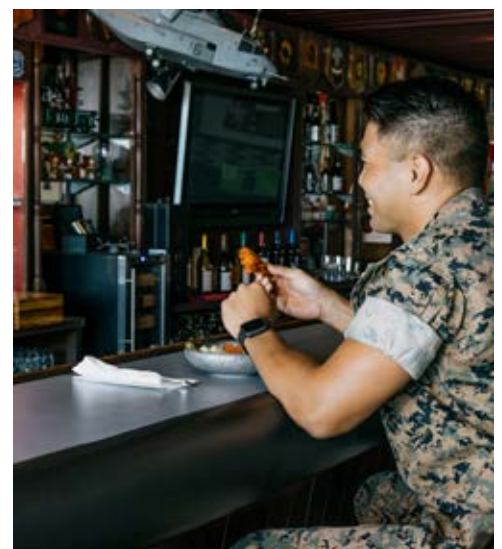
Habu Pit

Final Fridays

Want to celebrate making it through the first month of 2026? There's no better place to do so than at Final Fridays! Every month, the Habu Pit team puts together seasonal and themed events that feature activities like karaoke, trivia and games, where patrons can win big. Complimentary food is always available between 5 and 7 p.m., so gather your friends and join us at this month's Final Friday on January 30 from 5 to 9 p.m. on MCAS Futenma. These events are open to SNCO's, officers and civilian equivalents.

Other offerings at Habu Pit include À la Carte Lunch (Monday–Thursday, 11 a.m.–1:30 p.m.), À la Carte Dinner (Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday, 5–9 p.m.), Mongolian BBQ (Thursdays, 5–9 p.m. and Fridays, 11 a.m.–1:30 p.m.) as well as Sunday Breakfast Buffet (10 a.m. to 1 p.m.).

For more information on Habu Pit, including their location, hours of operation and menus, visit www.okinawa.usmc-mccs.org/habupit. **LOL**



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MILITARY DISCOUNT

Indulge Your Sweet Tooth...

...at 58 Sweets

If you haven't paid a visit to the Foster Library, you really should, because they are no longer an ordinary haven of books! Since January 2025 they have also become home to the newest MCCS concept, a charming French *pâtisserie* and café named after Route 58, Okinawa's iconic highway. 58 Sweets invites visitors to slow down and explore the library's plentiful bookshelves before indulging in some well-deserved treats.

Stop by our sweets emporium today and treat yourself to delightful creations including an assortment of French macarons with flavors like Vanilla, Chocolate, Coffee, Salted Caramel, Red Velvet, Birthday Cake, Coconut and more. In addition to macarons there are also various cakes including Blueberry, Strawberry and plain Cheesecake, Tiramisu, Lemon Cake, Red Velvet Shooters and much more! Pair your pick of dessert with a rich espresso, a creamy *café au lait*, or cool off with a refreshing frozen yogurt.

Whether you're looking for a place to study, to take advantage of the library resources (which include books, computers, Innovation Lab equipment, games and movies) or a place to treat yourself, 58 Sweets and the Foster Library offer a small escape from the bustle of everyday life. 58 Sweets is open daily from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. and is located inside Bldg. 5679. For more information, visit www.okinawa.usmc-mccs.org/58sweets or www.okinawa.usmc-mccs.org/library respectively. **101**



MCCS Catering

Meals-To-Go

Cooking is strenuous. The never-ending list of ingredients, shopping at various grocery stores, waiting in line to pay, storing the produce, the prepping of all elements, the cleaning of cutlery, the constant washing of hands... it's a lot. You know what's easy and stress-free, especially when hosting a gathering? Have your party catered by an MCCS Club or Restaurant, of course!

Whether you live in the north, central or south side of the island, MCCS has got you covered from Surfside on Camp Kinser, The Palms on Camp Hansen, Ocean Breeze on Camp Foster, BeachHead on Camp Schwab, Butler Officers' Club on Plaza Housing and Tengan Castle on Camp Courtney, MCCS executive chefs, catering coordinators and

management staff closely interact to provide professional offerings island wide.

Ordering doesn't have to be complicated and with MCCS Catering Services, it's as simple as making an arrangement with your preferred club or restaurant. Orders must be placed five days prior to pickup and must be paid in full two business days before pickup. A wide selection of fine foods tailored for your special affair is available. And, if you need a customized menu suited for your event, we suggest you speak with the club manager or catering coordinator to discuss how to satisfy your needs.

For more information including locations, phone numbers, menus and more, visit www.okinawa.usmc-mccs.org/catering. **101**





La Cocina

It's Simplemente Deliciosa!

Text by: Mike Daley | Photography by: Mia Cox

Happy New Year and welcome to the Year of the Horse! If it were up to some of us here, this year (and every year, for that matter), would be known as the “Year of the Taco.” All jokes aside, no time is a bad time for tacos, burritos and quesadillas!

Launched in spring 2022, the MCCS La Cocina food truck has satisfied countless happy customers on Marine Corps Camps from Schwab to Kinser with its selection of authentic *simplemente deliciosa* Mexican street food. In spring of 2024, due to popular demand, La Cocina opened the doors of its first brick-and-mortar location inside Surfside on Camp Kinser—featuring all the same Mexican street food items that everyone lined up for alongside some items only available at their Surfside location.

Delicious tacos and burritos filled with braised pork carnitas, lean grilled chicken or juicy char-grilled steak are still available, of course. Tacos are topped with onions, fresh cilantro and a choice between salsa verde or salsa roja. While burritos are topped with cilantro rice, borracho beans (tender and creamy pinto beans simmered with bacon, spices and beer), pico de gallo, cheese, fresh cilantro and either salsa verde or roja. Extra toppings such as jalapeños, salsa, guacamole and sour cream are available to augment your delicious creation, and meals can be made into a combo (which includes a side of rice and beans or chips & salsa as well as a drink).

Along with La Cocina’s famed mobile burritos, tacos, cinnamon crispas and salsas, Kinser’s location also features menu items that can’t be found at the food truck such as cheesy quesadillas, loaded nachos, fresh salads and velvety smooth caramel flan to further tempt you to immediately break your New Year’s resolution.

The quesadillas are as hefty as they are delicious and can be filled with your choice of pork carnitas,

grilled chicken or char-grilled steak between two generous tortillas. Borracho beans, and plenty of that aforementioned cheese, are also along for the ride. All quesadillas are served with fresh pico de gallo and guacamole (because, of course they are)!

As a shareable (or not), the loaded nachos are almost fully qualified as an entrée—crispy tortilla chips piled high and topped with your choice of pork carnitas, grilled chicken or char-grilled steak alongside beans, queso, pico de gallo, guacamole and fresh cilantro.

For those looking for a healthier alternative, salads are also available and can be ordered with either char-grilled steak or cantina chicken nestled upon fresh greens with cheese, pico de gallo, crunchy tortilla strips and zesty guacamole topped with a salsa roja ranch.

Thirsty? Wash your generous meal down with refreshingly bubbly Mexican Jarritos. And for dessert, choose from La Cocina’s famed cinnamon-dusted crispas or their velvety smooth and criminally rich caramel flan.

As the New Year begins with its new challenges, we should always remember to reward ourselves. And, there’s no better way to do that—along with celebrating the Year of the Taco—than by heading to La Cocina!

Can’t make it to Camp Kinser today? Don’t worry! The La Cocina food truck isn’t going anywhere—figuratively speaking that is—because it’ll still be rolling up to Marine Corps installations island wide.

For the full menu, hours of operation of the Kinser Surfside location, and the La Cocina food truck schedule, visit www.okinawa.usmc-mccs.org/lacocina.

For more information on how the La Cocina food truck can support command, unit or other special events, email mccsfoodtrucks@okinawa.usmc-mccs.org. **LOL**

Location

Bldg. 1202
Camp Kinser

Hours of Operation

Monday–Thursday,
10:30 a.m.–9 p.m.
Friday–Saturday,
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Daytime Playtime Gymnastics

Let Loose, Have Fun!

Is your tiny human running, tumbling and jumping all around the house? Wish you had a safe open gym space where they can let loose? Come on down to the Excellence Gymnastics Academy (EGA) inside Gunners Fitness Center on Camp Foster for Daytime Playtime on Mondays from 10 to 11 a.m., Wednesdays from 10 to 11 a.m. and Fridays from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Daytime Playtime Gymnastics is open to families with children ages 10 months to 4 years old and is the perfect opportunity for your little ones to

socialize with children their age!

One parent must accompany their child at all times. Coaching staff members will also be present and actively engaging throughout the session to ensure gym/equipment safety and rules are being properly followed. Registration is \$5 per child with limited space.

For more information or any questions you may have, email ega@okinawa.usmc-mccs.org, call 645-1602 or visit www.okinawa.usmc-mccs.org/gymnastics. **101**

Strong Roots

Resilient Parenting
with Growing Children

As kids grow and develop, the ways in which we interact with them, our expectations of them and our ways of disciplining them must change as well. Strong Roots is a 4-week group workshop that focuses on building resilient parenting practices as kids age. Topics include coping skills for parents, discipline, empathy-building and adding tools to your parenting toolbox. Each session is intended to build parenting skills and meet kids where they are through each phase of their lives.

On Wednesdays from 11:15 a.m. to 12:45 p.m. on Camp Foster (Bldg. 439, 2nd Floor), join the Family Advocacy Program for Strong Roots. To register for the workshop, email caitlin.e.mroz.civ@usmc.mil. For more information, visit www.okinawa.usmc-mccs.org/fap or call 645-2915. **101**

Home or Office Visits...

...with New Parent Support Program

Are you a parent or caregiver that is embracing the incredible journey of raising children aged 0 through 5, or are you eagerly anticipating the arrival of a brand-new bundle of joy? The New Parent Support Program (NPSP) is here to support you on your wonderful journey with services that will build confidence as well as enhance the skills you already have!

The dedicated NPSP team is comprised of trained professionals, including social workers, counselors and registered nurses that stand at the ready to support you on your journey through parenthood. With personalized home and/or office visits, their program offers expecting families, and those with at least one child under the age of six all about safety, healthy relationships and the vital skills needed to parent successfully.

For more information on home/office visits and other services offered by NPSP, call 645-0396, email npsspokinawa@usmc.mil or visit www.okinawa.usmc-mccs.org/npssp. **101**



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Instagram





Want to Swim with the Dolphins?

Try out for the team!

Have a little one who dreams about swimming with dolphins? Why not help turn their dream into reality with the added bonus of a lifelong passion for swimming with the help of the Okinawa Dolphin Swim Team (ODST)? ODST provides opportunities for young swimmers of all abilities and swimming levels to achieve success.

ODST Tryouts are open for youth swimmers ages 7 to 18 who have not been part of previous Dolphins Swim Team seasons. Participants will be expected to swim a 25m butterfly, a 25m backstroke, 25m breaststroke and a 50m freestyle (front crawl). A brief rest between the 25m swims is permitted (must be less than 20 seconds). Besides the short rest, each swim must be non-stop

with swimmers displaying proper breathing and stroke techniques. Tryouts take approximately 5–10 minutes, and parental interaction is discouraged for the duration of the tryout. ODST offers flexible monthly membership fees which vary depending on selected practice days. Weekly practice days are on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays.

Interested? To schedule a tryout for the upcoming season, email mccsaquatics@okinawa.usmc-mccs.org. Tryouts this year will be at the Hansen Aquatic Center. For more information on other MCCS Aquatics offerings and questions you may have regarding the program, visit www.okinawa.usmc-mccs.org/aquatics or call 645-3180. **lol**

Learn to Swim!

You DO live in a Subtropical Paradise

Whether you're an eager beginner trying to conquer blowing bubbles underwater or a seasoned swimmer seeking to refine your technique, swimming is an adventure that enriches both the body and the mind. If you fall into the beginner category, the best approach to gaining confidence in the water starts with the development of water safety skills and the cultivation of strength, endurance and flexibility. Take the first step of your swimming journey by enrolling in Semper Fit Aquatics' Dolphin Swim School at the Camp Hansen Aquatic Center and prepare yourself or your loved ones for a delightful aquatic adventure that'll continue to bring you joy (and keep you healthy) for years to come!

This comprehensive program caters to adults and children, with

group swimming lessons divided by age brackets. At Dolphin Swim School, participants will learn about water safety and various swim strokes and become more comfortable in the water while improving their swimming skills.

Each session consists of four consecutive weekday classes, subject to favorable weather conditions. Classes run January 6–28 with registration via Eventbrite available through January 4 (11:59 p.m.).

For more information about Dolphin Swim School, please visit www.okinawa.usmc-mccs.org/aquatics. For inquiries about other Semper Fit Aquatics Program offerings, call 645-3180 or email mccsaquatics@okinawa.usmc-mccs.org. **lol**



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2026 Resolution #1

Take Better Care of your Car!

Okinawa is a great place to drive. Before you cruise down the coast and drink in the million-dollar scenery...is your ride ready for the Year of the Horse? The professionals at your nearest Typhoon Motors can help you be sure that it is!

First order of business—cruising takes tires, right? Are yours showing a bit of wear-and-tear? It's the perfect time to treat your ride to a new set of tires because Typhoon Motors locations on Camps Hansen, Courtney, Foster and Kinser will be offering 10% OFF new tires as well as mounting and balancing.

Prefer DIY? Working on your car is kind of rough if you don't have the proper tools to get the job done—let alone a lift or a pit to get underneath. So, taking your car to a proper shop and using one of their stalls is

obviously a better choice, but the issue is... that costs money. If the reason you're fixing your car yourself is to save a couple (or more) bucks, then head to Typhoon Motors!

Typhoon Motors located on Camps Hansen, Courtney, Foster and Kinser, offer access to lifts and some of the best tools and equipment available, as well as advice on proper use. And, from January 18 through 20 the centers above will be offering \$1 Lift and Stall rentals, which will save you even more bucks!

Once you've got your car running smoothly inside and out, washed, waxed and buffed to a mirror sheen (Kinser Typhoon Motors also offers auto detailing services, by the way) you're almost ready for the road. How are your tunes? Still stock, you say?!

Listening to your favorite track and feel-

ing it as much as hearing it is not only stress relieving, it'll give you a bounce in your step throughout the year.

You too can breathe new life into your ride's audio system by taking it over to Typhoon Motors on Camps Foster and Kinser and taking advantage of their Martin Luther King Jr. Sale which offers 15% OFF all Sundown amps and woofers throughout the month. Equipping your sound system with a new head unit, amps and a woofer or two will ensure that your favorite tune knocks your socks into next January.

This year, make it a resolution to cruise in style, while saving some bucks in the process! For more information, call your nearest Typhoon Motors or visit them at www.okinawa.usmc-mccs.org/typhoonmotors. **101**

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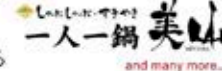


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To start your job search, head to www.okinawa.usmc-mccs.org/jobs or keep up with the weekly “hot jobs” announcements sent directly to your inbox when you subscribe to our newsletter (www.okinawa.usmc-mccs.org/newsletter). For more information on becoming a member of the MCCS team, call 645-3052. **101**



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Firstly, you need to attend a Woodshop Orientation, held on a walk-in basis for a mod-

est fee of \$10. Participants will learn the basics of woodshop safety and upon completion will receive a Woodshop Safety Card, which grants access to this DIY haven. At the woodshop, you will also learn essential techniques in design, carving, finishing and assembly while exploring new ways to turn raw materials into functional and beautiful works of art. A storage locker to hold your projects is also available for rent for \$10 a month.

Courtney Arts and Crafts is located in Bldg. 4453 (across from Ironworks Fitness Center) and is open from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., Thursday–Sunday. For more information on the Woodshop and other offerings, call 622-7492, email artsandcrafts@okinawa.usmc-mccs.org or visit www.okinawa.usmc-mccs.org/courtneyartsandcrafts. **101**

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Happy New Year 2026! Can you make your way from start to finish?







HORSE ASSISTED LEARNING OKINAWA (H.A.L.O.)


UNEARTH THE POWER OF EQUINE

Text by: **SWETHA GOGUE** | Layout by: **ALORA WILSON**

Photography & Translation by: **MIA COX**

2026 IS THE YEAR OF THE HORSE, THE 7TH ANIMAL IN CELESTIAL ORDER ACCORDING TO THE CHINESE ANIMAL ZODIAC, WHICH ROTATES 12 ANIMALS EVERY 12 YEARS WITHIN THE LUNAR CALENDAR. FOR MANY ACROSS THE NATION AND ON THE ISLAND OF OKINAWA, OSHŌGATSU (NEW YEAR'S) IS A QUIET TIME FOR REFLECTION WITH SOMBER CELEBRATIONS; MOST FAMILIES RING IN THE NEW YEAR WITH GATHERINGS, PHONE CALLS, VISITS TO SHRINES AND TEMPLES BESTOWING SACRED OFFERINGS AS WELL AS EMBARKING TO RELATIVES' HOMES WITH GIFTS IN HAND. BOWLS OF SOBA ARE ALSO SLURPED FOR GOOD HEALTH AND PROSPEROUS BEGINNINGS AS NOODLES ARE BELIEVED TO SIGNIFY LONGEVITY IN ASIA.





With the horse galloping through the star-based grid system this year, we thought it was the perfect opportunity to highlight H.A.L.O. (Horse Assisted Learning Okinawa), a SOFA-volunteer-based nonprofit organization that offers equine assisted learning for all on island. Since 2019, H.A.L.O. has been offering an experiential approach through various activities to help people with disabilities develop life skills while working with horses as well as the opportunity for volunteers to help spread their mission.

“We do a lot of groundwork—how to care [for the horses], learning about what they provide through their presence and allowing them [people receiving equine assisted learning] to be free to be themselves,” shared Julia Horgan, Program Manager of H.A.L.O. and long-time lover of horses.

Off the Okinawa Prefectural Road 6, along the coastline of the East China Sea in Onna Village, H.A.L.O. is quietly nestled at the Horse Ranch, a one-acre property of local farmer Toma Tsuguhira. When asked about how H.A.L.O. came to be, Tsuguhira-san explained it was organic; that through word of mouth from different members of the community who desired a place to ride and be around horses eventually lead to the establishment of the organization six years ago (although, the COVID-19 pandemic caused H.A.L.O. to temporarily shut down because of restrictions and the loss of SOFA volunteers due to PCS).

“Forty to fifty years ago, my family had also worked with horses for physical therapy and hippotherapy,” Tsuguhira-san reflected. The island farmer who cultivates *satsumaimo* (sweet potatoes), *jagaimo* (potatoes) and *soramame* (fava beans) through pesticide-free practice has a secret ingredient for his crops—his special soil amendment—horse manure. “It has more nutrients than cow manure. It helps my potatoes grow big and flavorful because of the high mineral content.”

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At the Horse Ranch, the precious herd was saved from meat factories by Tsuguhira-san and are now sustainably living off the land through barrels of rainwater collected, diets rich in rice byproduct, *miso* (fermented soybean paste), *okara* (tofu byproduct), *shima* (island) banana leaves and trunks as well as local grass. The five residents (one horse and four ponies to be exact)—President, Hana, Marley, Meeka and Rosie are cared for by benevolent SOFA volunteers and the three spear headers behind the nonprofit (Horgan, Bridget Lamb and Mellany Aguirre), who pour their time, energy and love with the limited resources available.

“We face unique challenges living on an island where we don’t have accessibility to equine veterinarians or have medicine that can be shipped.

I have an equine medicine book that I’ve been reading. It’s a lot of holistic remedies. For instance, one [horse] had discharge coming out of their nose and I read that probiotics would help so we gave her yogurt, and she was cleared up. Most medicine is either by donation or we have to get creative,” Horgan said.

Volunteers oversee grooming, deworming, cleaning stalls as well as maintaining horse safety procedures. With the responsibilities of caretaking, volunteers—like those who receive equine assisted learning—discover the importance of boundaries, respect and relationship. Individuals with physical disabilities that cause difficulty with motor skills and verbal communication express their joy through body language and the universal smile.



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Though engaging with an animal larger than humans can be daunting, horses are an emotional mirror with their superpower equipping individuals to decompress and convey emotions through silence and sentiment; to be seen, felt and heard without judgment.

"My favorite part about volunteering is grooming and feeding them. I learned that there's someone that understands even if they're not human," Sami, a volunteer shared.

H.A.L.O. also partners with Hope&Wish, a Tokyo-based nonprofit organization started in 2010 that supports children with life-threatening illnesses and their families across the country. In 2020, they launched their branch on Okinawa and together with H.A.L.O., are able to provide immeasurable experiences for Japanese children and families who wouldn't normally have an opportunity to immerse themselves in equine assisted learning.

"It [Hope&Wish] is a wish-based program where we invite children with critical illnesses and the whole family for a cost-free trip around Japan. Families are happy at H.A.L.O. because they get to exercise English and be around Americans...it's like a friendship. They're grateful to be in the outside world and have a great experience. I've seen mothers cry because of the interaction between their child and the horses. It reminds us that there are things in life we don't have to give up on," Manri Abe, Hope&Wish Branch Manager said.



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If you'd like to volunteer with the amazing H.A.L.O. team, send them a message on Instagram @halo_okinawa or find them on facebook.com/HorseAssistedLearningOkinawa to get involved with this great cause; volunteer orientations are held once a month and will include a hands-on session. No experience is required. H.A.L.O. volunteers meet weekdays on Tuesdays and Thursdays as well as during the weekends on Saturdays and Sundays. While volunteering your time may be difficult with schedules and the demands of everyday life, H.A.L.O. also accepts donations and has an Amazon wishlist for anyone interested in supporting their vital work.

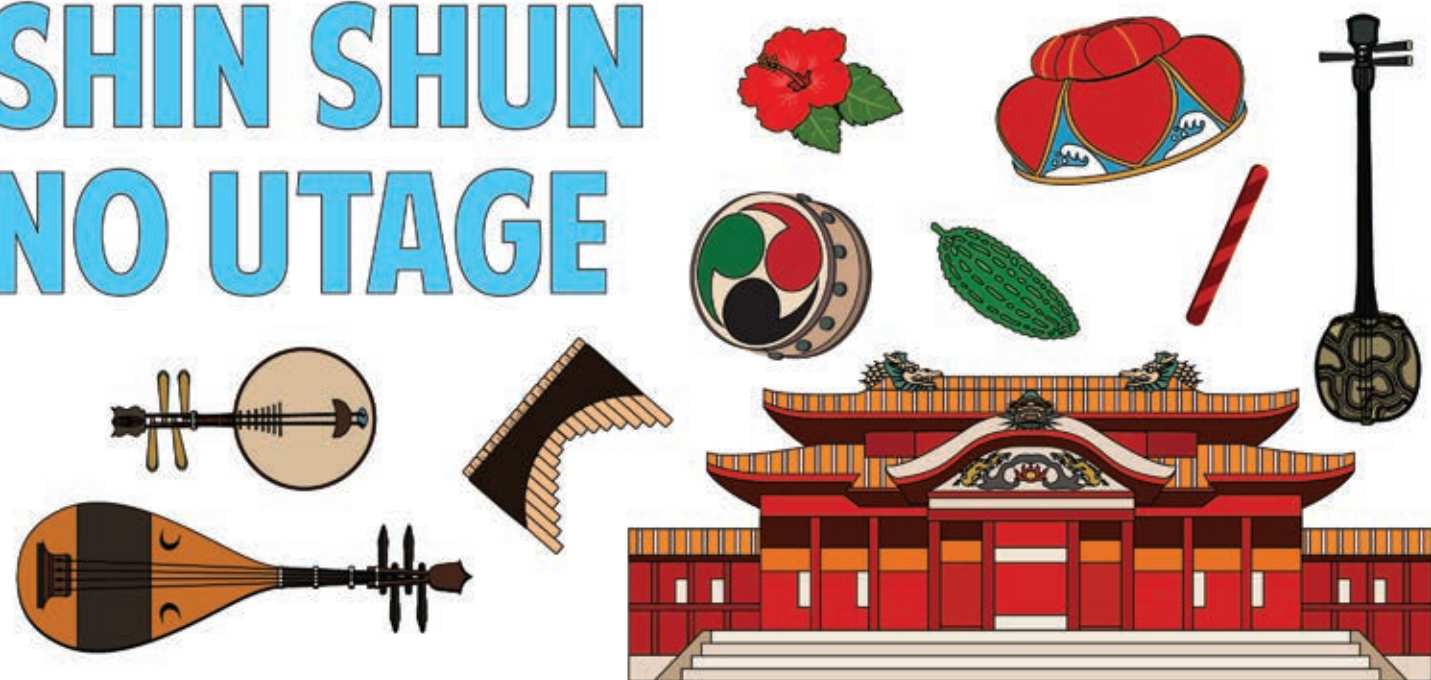
"There is a learning curve when you're here, but horses have a deeper understanding of people that [helps you] connect with others," volunteer Lillian said.

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This year, we encourage you to be a part of something bigger than yourself. Unearth the power of equine with H.A.L.O. as the nonprofit bridges the gap between SOFA members, the local Okinawan community and our host nation through selfless service. From all of us here at *Okinawa Living Magazine*, we wish you a prosperous 2026 New Year! **JOI**

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Yaki Gyōza (Pot Stickers)

Serves 8 to 10 (as an appetizer)

Ingredients

1/2 lb. ground pork
 3/4 cup shredded cabbage
 1 green onion, sliced
 2 tsp. ginger, minced
 1 egg, lightly beaten
 1 tsp. soy sauce
 1/4 tsp. hot chili oil (or to taste)
 1/4 tsp. sesame oil
 2 Tbsp. vegetable oil
 30 gyōza wrappers (available at any local grocery store)
 1/2 cup water

Method of Preparation

1. Bring a pot of salted water to a boil and prepare a separate bowl for an ice bath. Blanch the shredded cabbage until it is slightly tender (roughly 2 minutes). Plunge cabbage into ice-cold water, drain thoroughly and set aside.
2. In a medium bowl, combine everything except for the vegetable oil, water and gyoza wrappers. Knead mixture until it is blended thoroughly and has a pasty texture.
3. Lay a gyōza wrapper in front of you and lightly moisten the edges with water. Place a teaspoon of filling in the middle of the wrapper. Fold the sides up to form a semicircle, and then firmly pinch/fold the edges to seal completely (usually six equally spaced pinches/folds work best). Continue with the rest of the wrappers until the filling is gone.
4. To cook, heat vegetable oil in a heavy frying pan over medium-high to high heat. Add 12–15 of the gyōza and cook for two minutes, or until they're golden brown and crispy on the bottom.
5. Add 1/2 cup of water to the pan. Cover the pan and steam the gyōza until the water has evaporated (5–7 minutes). Repeat with the remainder and enjoy!



Pork & New Year's

Pork is an essential part of many Okinawans' diets, and although almost all of the 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*. *Rafute* was once reserved for royalty and visiting dignitaries. Today, everyone on Okinawa can enjoy 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 special occasions such as New Year's.

Sōki are short pork ribs, usually marinated in soy sauce and sugar and simmered until extremely tender, that are likely to be seen topping a healthy serving of Okinawan *sōki* *soba*. Many families boil *sōki* without soy sauce and use the stock to make the accompanying broth, or *dashi*, for their *toshi-koshi* ("year-crossing") *soba* noodles as well. **101**



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