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# THE XMAS ISSUE

## Okinawan Gift Ideas

totalokinawa

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DECEMBER & JANUARY

2012/2013

Issue 13



This issue we've got a special Okinawan gifts article with ideas for local presents for your family and friends. We're even bigger this month with three restaurant reviews from Som Chai, Osaka Ohsho and Bollywood Dreams. We've also got our round up of "Weird & Wonderful" as well as an article on Xmas & New Year in Japan. Finally there's our regular dive update from Reef Encounters. As usual you can also view the magazine



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Totalokinawa.com

online at: [www.totalokinawa.com](http://www.totalokinawa.com)

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## OKINAWAN GIFT GUIDE - 12

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by Melissa Nazario

## Som Chai Thai Restaurant

Som Chai in the Koza shopping district is a jewel of a restaurant, and it's easy to see why it's been in business for seven years. Though quite small, the atmosphere is charming and clean, the staff are attentive, and most importantly, the Thai food is on point.



When you first enter Som Chai, you might sit down at one of its four tables (plus another outside), but the staff won't hand you a menu; instead, they'll point you to the 11 or so entrées featured in photos and descriptions on the bright turquoise wall. You'll also pay, in yen, beforehand, and they'll bring the food to your table. Water is self-serve, but if they have a moment, the owner and staff will come around to refill and chat a bit. Other drinks include Singha (¥550) and Orion (¥450) beer, plus shiquasa

(Okinawan lime) juice, sweet Thai iced tea, and frozen coconut juice, when available.

All the entrées we tried were delicious and laced with signature Thai flavors (such as lemongrass and cilantro), including the Kao Pad spicy fried rice, garnished with blood orange (¥870), the lighter Yam Gai chicken over salad with sweet chili dressing (¥870), and the creamy yet tangy Tom Kha coconut milk and mushroom soup (¥500 regular, ¥800 large). Pad Thai noodles and Tom Yum soup are other available crowd favorites, and all dishes are under ¥1,000.

Just off of Park Avenue's shopping strip, diagonal from Sideways bar, Som Chai is easy enough to find, though parking may not be. Here's a great tip: when you drive up Park Avenue from 330/Hideaway bar, make a left when you see Bistro's, and park in the lot to the right. The attendant will take your keys and give you a ticket, which you can get validated at Som Chai.

Open for dinner Tuesday through Saturday from 5 pm to 10 pm, last order 9:30 pm

Off Park Ave., Okinawa City

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Google Map & Directions



<http://tiny.cc/somchai>

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to

## Dive Update

### Warm Waters & Calm Seas...



As the year comes to a close the winter diving season on Okinawa kicks off. As many divers are packing up their fins and waiting for summer, the most experienced divers are still anticipating the best season for diving on Okinawa - Winter! Winter diving is some of the best offered on Okinawa. As the water cools, it also becomes even more clear, the rush of tourist divers disappear and dive sites become less crowded with divers and more crowded with critters both big and small. Nudibranchs – every divers favorite little guys - will be out in large numbers laying eggs and mating. With well over 100 species of these little guys spotted around Okinawa there is plenty variety to keep the dedicated nudilover searching to fill his or her photo log.

For big critter lovers on Okinawa its now time for you to enjoy your diving as the giants of the ocean come calling. Starting in late December and continuing through spring the annual migration of humpback whales come to Okinawa waters. These gentle giants will be highlighting their acrobatic feats of breaching and tail waving while their haunting songs echo throughout the waters of Okinawa. Reef Encounters will be running their annual whale diving tours starting in January to give the truly adventurous the chance to swim with these amazing giants of the sea.

Also starting in January the annual schooling of hammerhead sharks will occur off the coast of Yonaguni. Every year large schools of hammerheads congregate off this tiny island in a presumed mating behaviour. At the convergence of the East China Sea and the Philippine Sea these huge schools of sharks can be seen cruising the pinnacles and walls of limestone that jut from the bottom and shoreline of this isolated haven of ancient Japan. Reef Encounters will be running it's annual trips to swim with this majestic animals in both January, February and March. These trips will also explore the ancient underwater ruins found of the coast line in Yonaguni.

The clear water and less crowded dive sites also make this a perfect time to explore the deeper reefs and wrecks around Okinawa. We will be offering the full range of technical classes that allow you to safely explore these deeper realms with confidence. Also for those looking to share their love of the ocean with others a full range of professional level courses from dive master to instructor are available allowing you to start teaching by the spring. **Contact us now to schedule your course or trip at [info@reefencounters.org](mailto:info@reefencounters.org)!**

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Directions, Hours, Telephone



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Google Map

by Melissa Nazario

## Osaka Ohsho

If you've visited the San-A shopping center in Chatan or in Ginowan next to Round 1 (the sign is yellow with red triangles), you may have seen Osaka Ohsho, a clean, well-lit Chinese restaurant chain that's been around for more than 40 years. The friendly staff will immediately greet you, place a pitcher of ice water on the table, and possibly hand you an English menu, to help with ordering, though the pictures in the Japanese menu will generally suffice. Like many places in Japan, the server will wait until you've pressed the electronic doorbell on the table to come and take your order.

If you like to order appetizers, the gyoza here are a must try. They're made fresh daily, "using 100% domestic vegetables and meat" (as per the menu), then boiled and pan fried on one side for added texture and crunch. Eat them plain, or dip them in one of three different sauces: soy sauce with vinegar, spicy flavored oil, or my favorite, the tangy miso sauce. With so much attention to detail and quality, it's no wonder the "yakigyozu" are Osaka Ohsho's signature item, and I dare say that they're probably the best gyoza I've tasted, on or off Okinawa. While many sets include a plateful of these tasty dumplings, they also come in a 1 portion order of 6 pieces (¥210) or a 2 portion order of 12 pieces (¥420). If you're not a gyoza fan, other starters include various dim sum (¥190--¥340), plus shrimp tempura (¥590), fried chicken pieces (¥300--¥460), and fried spring rolls (¥430).

For entrées, the chili shrimp (¥690) and fried garlic chicken (¥640) are smothered in a sweet and sour sauce similar to General Tso's, good choices if you want more classic Chinese takeout flavors. You can add different sets to these dishes to include gyoza, egg drop soup, and/or fried rice (¥300--¥370). Smaller sized "Ladies Sets" include combinations of gyoza, fried rice, and ramen soup or different "don" rice dishes (¥660--¥690). If you like tofu, the Mabo-don is pretty tasty; it features a bowl of dark, subtly-flavored miso gravy and cubed tofu over white rice, plus gyoza and choice of soup (¥540--¥690), depending on the set you get.

Endless trips to the drink bar can be added to your ticket (¥130 with meal or ¥250 without), as well as beer (¥280--¥480), awamori, or grapefruit or lemon Chuhou--a Japanese liquor with soda (¥290). A filling lunch for two will usually come out to just under ¥2,000, making this establishment one you might want to add to your list of restaurants to try, whether dining in or for takeout. **Hours: 11:00 am -- 11:00 pm every day**

6-13 Minato, Chatan

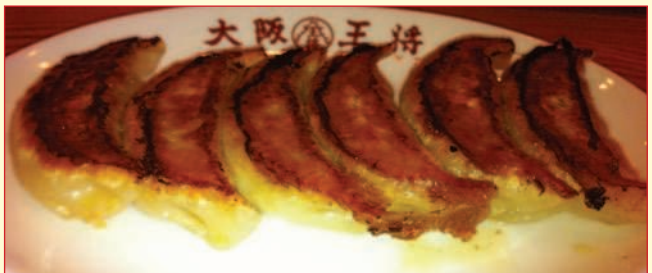
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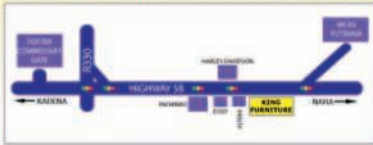
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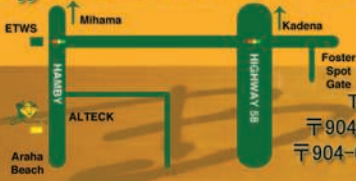


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# Okinawan Gift Guide



# Okinawa Gift Guide

## Kokusai Street Naha

Think of it as the mecca of Okinawan stuff—you'll find everything from the locally made honey and jewelry to more quirky items, like frog purses and habu sake. Be sure to bring plenty of yen, and wear walking shoes and layers—many shops don't have A/C or are open air.



## Okinawa World

Make a day of it—check out this cultural park's underground caves and habu show, interspersed with lots of photo ops and shopping. Traditional crafts are featured, including bingata, pottery, and an amazing Ryukyu glass store. For an additional fee, blow and shape your own glass (you'll have to come back the next day to pick up the finished piece). Entrance Fee Applies



## Ryukyu Mura

Another cultural day trip & shopping experience, Ryukyu Mura offers a peek at a reconstructed Okinawan village from 100+ years ago. Paint shisa, try and buy herbal tea & snacks, and rent traditional kimono for a family photo (great for holiday greeting cards). The shops also sell Okinawan liquor, beautiful printed handkerchiefs, plus stuffed animals of distinctly Okinawan creatures, like kijimuna sprites, habus, and whale sharks.

N.B (There's a free area with a souvenir shop and stage with sanshin performances; the "village" area has an entrance fee.)



Finding a great gift can be difficult. Finding something most people would enjoy, that can stump and short on time, here are some ideas plus our list of this year's Top 5 Okinawa Gifts

## Where to find

Shisa: Shisa factory on Ryonan  
[www.si-sa-ya.com](http://www.si-sa-ya.com)

Ryukyu Glass: Okinawa World

Onna Glass Factory: 904-0211

Purple Potato Factory: 904-2223

100 Yen Shop: 901-2223 Ginowan

Pineapple Treats: Pineapple Treats

Minsa Textiles: Purple Potato Factory

on Ishigaki Island

Yotsutake Dinner Theater: 904-2223

Tel: 098-861-7512 [www.yotsutake.com](http://www.yotsutake.com)

Get all the locations on the map

Here : <http://tiny.cc/dm>

When in doubt, why not pick something only be found in Okinawa? If you're looking for five places to shop for all things Okinawan gifts and where to get them.



### 100 Yen Shop

If you're on a budget but have lots of people to shop for, don't overlook all the fun finds at the 100 Yen shops. The large store next to Uniqlo near Tropical Beach features a good selection of dishes (also chopsticks and bento boxes), home décor, and cute presents for the cooks, crafters, and kids on your list, plus interesting snacks to try.

### Purple Potato Factory

Near Zanpa lighthouse, this place is hard to miss, with its gigantic red and blue hanagasa, the hat worn by traditional Ryukyu dancers. Inside, watch cookies and tarts come off the conveyer belt, and sample and buy Okinawan goodies of all kinds, including shisa-shaped bubble gum and cakes filled with mango or shiquasa lime cream.

No Entry Fee



Site 6, Okinawa World, Purple Potato Factory

World, Onna Glass Factory

413, Onna

0328 Yomitan, Uza 657-1

owan, Oyama 6

e Park, Ryukyu Mura

to Factory, Kokusai Street, Minsa Kogei Kan

3-15-6 Kumoji, Naha

tsutake.co.jp

one convenient Google Map

kinawaxmas



## TOP 5 OKINAWAN GIFTS

### 1 Shisa

No home is complete without a pair of these figurines, thought to provide protection from evil spirits. It's also considered good luck to receive them, making them perfect gifts. If authenticity matters, check the label or buy directly from one of the island's workshops.

### 2 Ryukyu glass

Beautiful and often functional, a piece of Okinawan glass will surely make its receiver smile. Like the shisa, check labels for authenticity.

### 3 Pineapple Treats

Though not unique to Okinawa, this tropical fruit is a crowd pleaser, whether fresh or made into sweets. While many stores on island sell pineapple wine and cookies, the Pineapple Park is the place to shop (and sample!) for pineapple lovers.

### 4 Minsa textiles

Traditionally, women from Okinawa's Yaeyama region presented woven minsa as engagement presents to their future husbands. Different parts of the design have different meanings, the most significant being "Yours Forever More." Today, minsa fabric adorns everything from wallets and purses to key chains and glasses cases.

### 5 Tickets to Yotsutake Dinner Theater

Share a piece of Okinawan culture with dinner & a show in Naha. Choose from American or Okinawan style dinners for adults (with or without lobster) and for children, and watch performances of karate, eisa dancers, and huge shisa puppets. Bring yen for drinks.

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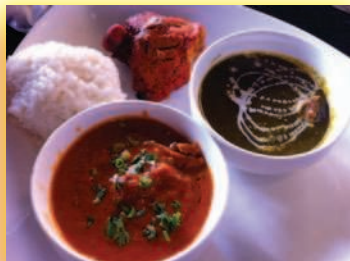
Google Map



## Bollywood Dreams

by Melissa Nazario

Since it opened in 2010, Bollywood Dreams has remained competitive in American Village's restaurant scene, due to its contemporary styling and huge selection of authentic Indian cuisine. Located at the back of Depot Island, it can seat more than 40 people in its black velvet chairs, plus an extra 14 on the outdoor terrace. Inside, Bollywood film stars frame the walls and sing and dance in music videos on TV, allowing diners a glimpse into vibrant Indian pop culture. The 100+ items on their dinner menu ensure there's something for everyone's tastes, including



curry, basmati rice dishes, naan bread, and tandoori barbecue grilled in their clay oven. For appetizers, the samosas (¥500) were savory little morsels, a plate of three fried dumplings filled with spices and minced chicken or vegetables. Even better was the generous portion of paneer pakora (¥600), an Indian version of fried cheese sticks. The fluffy naan bread was delicious on its own, or dipped in curry, and ranged from ¥290 for plain butter to ¥550 for garlic and cheese. Try the jumbo naan which serves 2-3 people if you're really hungry!



The variety of curries take up most of the menu, and can be ordered at three different spice levels, from mild to tongue-tingling "super hot". If you crave lots of zip, the chicken keema (¥1,180) at Level 2 "hot" is spoon-licking good, and mixes minced chicken with familiar flavors of onion, garlic, ginger, and cumin. The mutton (lamb) korma's (¥1,280) cool weather seasonings of clove, cinnamon, and nutmeg will also warm you up. If you're new to Indian curry or more sensitive to spice, the mango chicken or pineapple chicken curries (each ¥1,380) are

mild and sweet, though they could be kicked up to a higher spice level by request and are Bollywood Dreams original creations. If you go for dinner, be forewarned: most menu items are à la carte--naan bread or rice cost extra, unless otherwise indicated on the menu as a set.

Go for lunch from 11 to 3:30 and you'll stretch your money a bit further. Lunch sets range from ¥980 to ¥1,280 and include a choice of drink (try the sweet yogurt lassi or chai tea) and petite cabbage salad drizzled in Thousand Island dressing. The curry sets offer selections from eight different curries, plus extras like naan, rice, and tandoori chicken. For a big appetite, we recommend the tandoori set (¥1,180), which consists of two choices of curry, naan and rice, drink, salad, and a piece of smoky, slightly spicy tandoori chicken. It was delicious when dunked in chicken tikka masala, a tomato and onion curry surrounding chunks of barbecue chicken. Since I requested Level 2 "hot" for my curry, the creamy lassi helped cool me down, and served double duty as dessert, as I was too pleasantly full to even finish my meal.

Open 11:00 am - 10:00 pm Sunday to Thursday (last order 9:30),  
11:00 am - 10:30 pm Friday and Saturday (last order 10:00)



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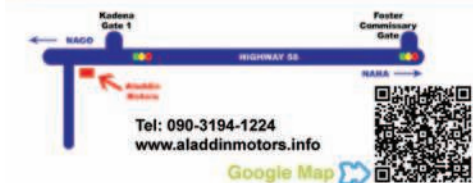
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# Weird and Wonderful Japan

## Japan's Biggest Sushi Roll

\* In the port city of Kure, they created what they claim to be Japan's largest futomaki sushi roll. Containing a massive 1.1 tons of rice, carrots and mushrooms with nori wrapped around, the roll came out at 21 meters long!

## Fake Monk Fundraising Scam

\* Fake Buddhist monks have appeared in tourist areas of Tokyo, tricking tourists into donating money to their nonexistent temple. After a news crew followed them home they discovered that they were Chinese and had been spending the money on luxury clothes and watches.

## Thieves Don't Like iPhone 5

\* Thieves broke into an au shop in Sagamihara city and stole 36 models including older iPhones and other smartphones. They apparently left the shelf storing the iPhone 5's untouched though!



## Anti-Japanese Riots

\* After the anti-Japanese riots in China, major Japanese insurance companies have decided to stop offering insurance to companies that do business in China. This is probably another nail in the coffin for Japanese investment in China with many companies thinking twice about where to locate overseas operations.

## Senkaku Dispute Ongoing

\* The dispute over the Senkaku islands is still ongoing with continual incursions by

Chinese boats into Japanese waters.

At the same time there are reports of customs delays for Japanese shipments, causing expensive delays for Japanese companies. Beijing doesn't admit these delays are deliberate as to do so would be to admit breaking international trade agreements.

## Beijing Marathon NO to Japanese

\* The Beijing marathon organisers were forced to reverse their decision to not allow Japanese to register for the marathon. Japan was missing from the list of 238 countries. After the story was picked up by the international media, organisers backtracked and allowed Japanese athletes to register.

## Election Time

\* Prime Minister Noda has set the election date as December 16 in Japan. It's a gamble that's likely to end up costing the DPJ their power. Commentators expect some kind of coalition being formed with not only the LDP but other smaller parties to eventually form a government.

## Drink Pepsi - Lose Weight?

\* Pepsi has introduced a new cola in Japan that promises to reduce fat absorption. The Pepsi contains dextrin which is supposed to prevent the digestive system from absorbing fat. This and other foods containing dextrin are actually certified by the Japanese government as "foods for specific health use". It will be interesting to see whether this trend is embraced by other Japanese brands and we soon see other fat reducing drinks on the shelves.

## Celebrating in Japan

Japan celebrates the end of the year a little differently, read on for more info.

### Christmas



Christmas in Japan is really an imported holiday and not an official Japanese holiday. Therefore there's no big holiday and turkey blow out on December 25, but children do see it as a day to receive gifts from St. Claus and for more romantically minded Japanese December 24 is an evening to share a romantic meal with your loved one.

You also can't forget the masterful marketing of KFC and the ingrained idea amongst the average Japanese consumer that Christmas = KFC. So if you just want to drop in for a chicken burger then probably December 24 and 25 isn't the day to do it!

### Bonenkai

Bonenkai or "forget the customary way of workers hair down to celebrate the a big celebration, usually of the year and mostly New Year starts which family. It's also customary equivalent of a "spring their offices and factories

### New Year

New year is a much Japan than Christmas and normally several days off government departments, salary man taking time to spend with family and visit the Shinto shrines or Buddhist temples. If you want to get a glimpse of how Japanese celebrate the New Year then one of the largest temples in the area close to Foster's Legion gate comes alive at the New Year. Located just at the intersection of Highway 330 and 81, it has a constant stream of thousands of visitors over the New Year period with many stalls lining the streets with food and goods.

Apart from some serious "spring" cleaning you'll also see bamboo rakes and decorative palm trees placed at entrances to homes and business to hope for good fortune in the New Year. Finally if you want to try a traditional Japanese New Year's treat then it has to be mochi, sold in every supermarket prior to New Year. It's a sweet, glutinous rice moulded into various shapes. Take it easy though as every year it accounts for several accident and deaths, mostly among the elderly due to it's difficulty to swallow!



old year" parties are the and friends letting their end of the year. They're during the last few weeks for co-workers, before is a time for being with for workers to do an clean" to clean and tidy before the end of the year.

bigger celebration in is a time for family. There's for most companies and with even the busiest

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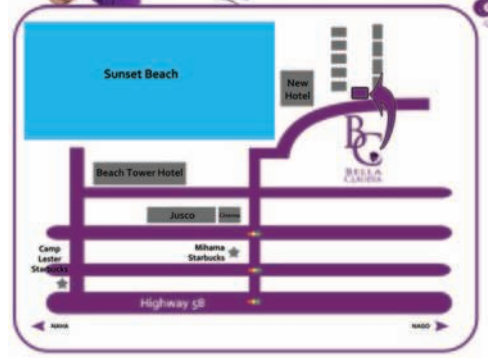
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