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Naha: Not-so-touristy spots



There is the saying, "April showers bring May flowers." Hopefully the wet weather won't compromise your plans for exploring Okinawa this spring! We've got our list of

spots in Naha to check out, some that you may not have seen before! If you plan to see the sights in Naha, also check out our review of Naminoue Shrine, which has info on this historical and cultural treasure. If you'd rather get away from the city and still get some authentic Okinawan food, check out our reviews of Uminchu seafood restaurant and Syokudo & Teishoku restaurant. We've also got the latest dive report from Reef Encounters as well as Weird & Wonderful. You can view the magazine online at: www.totalokinawa.com



Issue 34



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Restaurant Review

by Tom Landis

Uminchu Restaurant

Fresh seafood, Okinawan-style



The name of this little restaurant means "fish shop" in Okinawan dialect. It's well named for several reasons. Uminchu is located inside Toya fishing port in Yomitan. They have the freshest sashimi I've ever tasted; to find fresher I imagine you'd have to board a fishing boat. On your way to ordering, you're sure to pass tables of their staff slicing up all kinds of ocean creatures.

Seating is at unassuming picnic tables, and their customer base seems to be a mix of working class locals and tourists. Their Okinawan-style tempura is what most people seem to

order, and it's made to order from freshly caught fish, squid and seaweed.

Their prices are very reasonable. Fresh cooked tempura is 60 yen, cheaper than supermarket prices! The low prices also mean you have to write down your own order and hand it to the cashier. The order form has English on it, so Japanese skills aren't required. The takeout sashimi is also cheaper and fresher than any supermarket fish I've tried.

The menu is quite small, and it's all seafood. The hours of operation are 10 am to 4 pm for the full menu, and



they keep serving tempura until 5:30. So it's an ideal place

for grabbing lunch or an early dinner.

If you like eating seafood in a swanky restaurant, complete with jazzy tunes playing and menus that come in a leather book, then this place probably isn't for you. Howver, if you want to try an authentic Okinawan dining experience, complete with noisy cats and signs advising you not to feed them, then do yourself a favor and try Uminchu.







33 Toya, Yomitan

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Dive Update

Spring for safety

t's spring and the warm weather is finally coming. This is the time of year that many divers will be dusting off their gear and getting back in the water, and many more new divers will be dipping their toes in for the first time. This is also the time of year when we see many close calls and accidents, as those rusty dive skills are not quite up to mid-season form yet. If you have been out of the water for a while, a refresher course or dive with a professional is a very good idea. A review of critical dive skills such as mask clearing, sharing air, buddy checks, assists, and rescues are all part of a thorough refresher course, along with dive planning and gas management review. It is also a good idea to get gear checked out to make sure everything is in good working order before taking it on a plunge into the ocean.

For those getting certified to dive, remember all dive instruction is not created equal. There are differences in courses taught and how they are done. A few key questions you should be asking your instructor:

Will we be doing skills while hovering or do we kneel on the bottom?

Skills should be tested while hovering, not kneeling. When we are diving we are swimming and very rarely anchored on the bottom, so divers need to know how to do skills while neutrally buoyant.

How much open water dive time will I have logged by the end of the course?

You learn how to dive by diving. Although there are critical theory elements all divers must grasp, your open water time is the most important portion of your diving course. You should be logging over 2.5 hours of open water (not pool) time by the end of a quality dive course. Many cheap courses do the bare minimum of dive time and turn out inadequately prepared divers.

Will I be taught buddy rescue and self-rescue techniques, including worst case scenarios such as bringing an unconscious buddy to the surface?

All courses teach at least introductory techniques for dealing with an emergency. As diving is an adventure sport, we must be prepared for the worst, and that means being able to help in even the most severe scenarios. A quality course prepares you for these emergencies and more.

If you have any questions on dive certification, please contact one of our trained professionals at Reef Encounters, who have more than 20 years of serving the Okinawa dive community. Our full range of classes and our new expanded retail facility can now meet all your diving needs in one stop.

www.reefencounters.org

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Directions, Hours, Telephone





Naha: Not-so-touristy spots

by Louise Dupuy

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Unless you're brand new to island (and if you are, welcome!), you've heard of Kokusai Street. It's a popular tourist destination, and has all the trappings of such: large crowds, souvenir shops and expensive restaurants. But what if I told you there's more to it than glittery shisas and sake? Here are my top 5 picks of not-so-touristy Kokusai Street highlights.





Yatai-Mura

Yatai-Mura is a new food village, opened in June 2015. It's home to more than 20 eateries. Head here for a real taste of Okinawa, with offerings including oden, ramen, sushi, drinks and sweet treats. There's also a gift shop, tourist information and bathroom facilities, only a short walk from the hustle and bustle of Kokusai Street. Accepts: Yen

Takara Records

Takara Records, located along Kokusai, has local and international music, musical instruments, equipment, books, CDs, vinyl records and more. If you're keen to hear local artists, look no further. It's a nice breather from the throngs of tourists, too.



Look out for blue writing on a yellow sign; it'll be in Japanese, not English. Accepts: Yen and credit card





Opposite the famous 'Naha tug-ofwar' rope is a small bank of hands-on studios. You can order custom-made

crafts, or try it out for yourself! Have a go at making Tsuboya pottery, Shuri textile, Ryukyu bingata and Ryukyu glass. The information desk opposite the craft store has everything you need to get started. Accepts: Yen

Naha City Traditional Crafts Store

Looking for souvenirs with a higher quality, authentic feel? Naha City traditional crafts could have what you're looking for. Far removed from the massproduced items found along Kokusai, it's high quality, hand made crafts from local artisans. Ryukyu glass, textiles, artwork and homeware make up a small portion of their offerings. Accepts: Yen and credit card





Heiwa-Dori Market

Last but not least, Heiwa-dori, a large indoor market off Kokusai Street, popular with tourists. However, if you make it past the plethora of souvenir shops, you'll find some wonderfu things: deep in the market are local residents going about their day, plus some amazing shops: fresh produce, clothing, homewares and food stands. Purchase fresh

meat, fish, drinks, and my favourite thing, desserts. One stall in particular had the best pastries I've ever tasted! They're Aall at a reasonabley priced. Accepts: Yen only

> Check out our map to these places by going to http://tiny.cc/nahaspots or scanning this QR code:



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Weird and Won<mark>derful Japan</mark>

SoftBank splits in two

SoftBank plans to reorganize into two subsidiaries, one focused on global operations, including Sprint, and one focused on domestic operations, including Yahoo Japan. Meanwhile, customers are still waiting for their calls not to drop.

In a rush to remarry

The cabinet passed a bill to shorten the waiting period for women to remarry after divorce from six months to 100 days with a doctor's note proving they weren't pregnant at the time of divorce. Seems they missed an opportunity to even the field, as men can remarry immediately.

Police prepare for yakuza 'civil war'

Japanese police have created a special unit to "intensify" their response to two rival gangs. Top leaders in one major gang in Kobe have defected and formed their own group, contributing to a spike in gang violence and fears of a possible civil war akin to the gang violence of the 1980s.

Big Brother is watching

An Osaka court ruled that it wasn't illegal for police to install GPS tracking devices on cars of suspected criminals without a warrant. The decision denies an Osaka man's appeal after he was tracked, arrested, and sentenced to five years in prison for stealing cars.





by Louise Dupuy

Naminoue Shrine

Visit this "Gateway to Heaven" in Naha

Naha. It sits serenely atop a rocky outcrop, casting an imposing shadow over Naminoue beach below. The area is a sacred place of worship, dedicated to Nirai Kanai (world of Gods). Located close to Naha port, fishermen and seamen revere it wishing for safe journeys and prosperous fishing hauls.

Naminoue translates to "Above the waves shrine." During the Meiji era, it was crowned as Kanpei-Shousha, or



"nationally significant shrine", and it became Okinawa Sochinju, protector of the whole of Okinawa. The original structure was destroyed during the war, but was rebuilt starting in 1953. In 2006 it was designated as the Naha City Historical Site of Cultural property.



VISITING

This is a beautiful example of a traditional Shinto shrine, so if history and culture are on your to do list, this will tick both boxes. It is free to enter. Entry is through a gate up a slight incline. There are stairs, so mobility impaired people may struggle. Other facilities include restrooms, street food vendors and a shop where you can purchase charms. It's very peaceful, and extremely well kept. Keep children close, as noise and running around isn't tolerated in this

active place of worship. Take part in a purification ritual, or observe a worship session. You can also learn how to send a prayer, or pay to have a written oracle. Most signs have an English translation, and staff are fairly fluent. From the shrine, you can access Naminoue beach, as well as a multi-level garden area, brimming with flora and fauna. Seating areas make a great place for picnics, prayer stones and statues catch the eye when walking round too. Next door to Naminoue is Gokoku-Ji shrine, a Buddhist temple originally founded in 1367. Also close by is Shiseibyo, a Confucian temple with origins going back as far as 1671-1675 (though the building standing there now is a reconstruction built in 1975).

LOCATION

It's located in an area of Naha called Wakasa, a mere stone's throw from the port. It's fairly easy to access, steeped in history, so an entire day can be spent here. A short distance from the shrine is a parking area. For a mere 500 yen (you pay in a shop next door, follow the hand crafted signs with the "P" on), you can park for a full day.



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Restaurant Review

by Tom Landis

Syokudo & Teishoku Restaurant

Economical family dining



his small restaurant features a very small menu of Japanese and Okinawan dishes, mostly soba. I really liked the food but my wife was less impressed. We agree that it's above average, but nothing to write home about.

I was warned by the friend who introduced this restaurant to me that the portions were big. Since I was hungry, I brazenly disregarded the warning. I ordered the fried chicken curry. It was tasty, but there was just

too much food. When I go back I will definitely split one dish with my wife. The tofu soba was good, too. Sadly, because of the huge portion size, my wife only was able to eat about half. Another glance at the menu reveals a half order of soba for only ¥350, oops. Looking around the packed restaurant we noted the customers were almost all families.

The food service was fast and friendly. Some Americans seated near us asked for and received an English menu. I just relied on my Japanese friends to order for me. The

restaurant seems really popular among the locals. There was a small line outside the restaurant for lunch on a Saturday.

At ¥750 for the curry I ordered, the prices are fantastic. That fact notwithstanding, I doubt I'd go out of my way to eat at this restaurant again. If I'm in the neighborhood I certainly wouldn't shun the place, either. The food was good and so were the prices, but it was a bit forgettable. For those with big appetites and near-empty wallets, it's a must try.





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