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As summer comes to a close, and many prepare for another year at school, it may be time to start asking yourself: what do I want to do with my time here in Okinawa? Have you always wanted to learn to dive? Check out our Dive Report from Reef Encounters for convenient ways to get certified. Want to learn Japanese, surfing, or how to make an Okinawan craft? Then you'll want to see our feature, Learn a New Skill: The Total Okinawa Guide. Of course, eating and consuming entertainment don't have to be learned, only enjoyed, so take a look at our reviews of Wagamichi Ramen, Itoman Tourist Farm, Yomitan Pottery Village and Jimmy's, plus the latest Weird & Wonderful. You can view the magazine online at: www.totalokinawa.com

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YOMITAN POTTERY VILLAGE 14

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Itoman Tourist Farm

Home of the Peaceful Illumination Festival and more fun for the family!



Itoman, in the south of Naha, saw heavy fighting during World War II. Today, amongst other things, it's home to the Itoman Tourist Farm. This is a working winery and farm, with plenty to do for families. For a mere 600 yen each, you have full access to all the facilities. There are tractor rides, pony rides, a petting zoo, a small tropical garden, goats, horses, zebra and buffalo. There's a restaurant, gift shop and bathroom facilities too, as well as plenty of parking. Kids especially will love the pony rides, and the

opportunity to get up close to animals you don't encounter every day (like the zebra and buffalo). The grounds are pretty and peaceful, a great example of local commerce.

The gift shop is well stocked, and you can try a little wine too if you aren't the designated driver (or underage!), purchase typical Okinawan gifts (beniimo candy and Shisa dogs), as well as items specific to the farm (the plush Capybaras are super cute). The place is clean, tidy and the animals seem relaxed and in good health. Staff speak fairly good English, are helpful and friendly.

Once a year, around Christmas time, it hosts the Itoman Peaceful

Illuminations, a Christmas light display consisting of 1.3 million lights, representing Okinawa's modern population. Not only are they a festive treat (there are also laser shows, music, dancing and festival foods and entertainment), they represent the wishes of peace the local people have for the world. It's certainly worth a look when the holiday season returns.

Overall, Itoman Tourist Farm is a great choice if you need to wear the kids out!



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Transition 360 Alliance

Level up and start your dive adventure today!

Summer dive season is in full swing in Okinawa. The summer season brings lots of tourists and locals enjoying the waters around Okinawa. Reef Encounters has a full schedule of boat dives running daily to visit all the best dive sites, to include the Kerama islands, Onna sites such as Dream Hole and Horseshoe, and further north there are the USS Emmons, Hedo Air dome and Hedo Channel. We also are offering overnight trips to Kume-jima and other outer islands to truly get a unique Okinawa experience.



Not yet certified and want to enjoy the water? Reef Encounters has openings for certification classes daily. You can stop in any time and sign up and start your adventure immediately. We never have a waiting list. Everyone on staff at Reef Encounters speaks English, so there is no problem with translation. Plus, all textbooks are available in English and a variety of other languages if needed, to include: Japanese, Mandarin, Cantonese, Portuguese, Spanish and more if needed. Our international staff can also conduct classes in multiple languages. The free e-learning modules allow you to start your adventure without delay and work at your own pace, and our full-time professional instructors are available daily to answer questions and explain things in more detail. When your book studying is complete, we head to the water to practice your skills and become comfortable in the water planning and executing dives. You can customize your classes to fit around any work schedule, with weekend, weekday, morning and evening classes available.

Already certified and want to expand your knowledge or increase your depth? Reef Encounters has the most experienced dive team on island, and we can teach you to reach your goals. Advanced classes, rescue courses, technical dive courses, sidemount diving and professional level certifications up to instructor are all available at Reef Encounters. Come in and meet with one of our professional dive instructors for a no obligation consultation on what classes you need and what equipment would best suit you to meet your diving goals. Sidemount kits, regs and BC's can also be rented to try out before buying. Do not wait to begin your next big adventure! Come in and see us today, or follow us on Facebook at Reef Encounters Dive Team.

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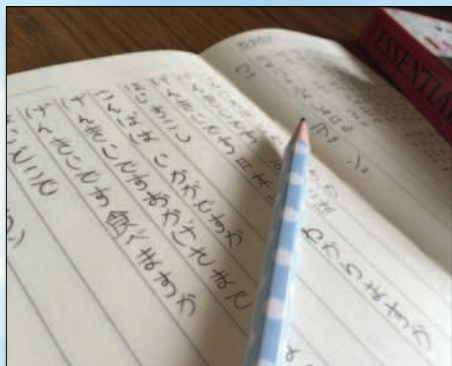
Written by Louise Dupuy

Edited and designed by Melissa Nazario

Have a few hours to spare from your busy schedule? Why not learn a new skill! Okinawa has a plethora of activities on offer. Here are five to get you going.



SPEAK JAPANESE



You can get by without learning the local language, but making the effort will allow you to interact more with your surroundings. Read signs, menus, order food and drinks, and make new friends! Kumon offer classes and correspondence courses starting at 8,400 yen a month. Find out more at http://www.kumon.ne.jp/jpn/english/course_class/

LEARN A MARTIAL ART

Okinawa is famous for being the origin of Karate. However, there are lots of other disciplines available, allowing you to find one that suits you! The Capoeira Academy in Chatan offers classes in Capoeira, Brazilian Ju Jitsu, Mixed Martial Arts, kids Martial Arts, and women's only kickboxing. Check their website at capoeira-okinawa.com for more information.

MAKE PRETTY POTTERY



Pottery is an important part of Okinawa's history and commerce. Why not give it a spin (sorry) yourself? The Naha Traditional Craft Center on Kokusai Street offers classes in pottery as well as other

traditional crafts including glass blowing, Bingata dyeing, lacquerware, and more! Their website has lots of info: <http://kogeikan.jp/international/english/workshop.html>.

SURF 'S UP!

Okinawa has some of the best water sports activities in the world, with diving being one of its most popular. If you aren't too keen on being far below the surface, why not embrace the waves and take up surfing? Happy Surfing Okinawa can offer lessons and locations to catch the perfect break.



Photo by Happy Surfing Okinawa

Lessons are 10,000 yen per person (also accepts dollar). If surfing seems too daunting, they also offer paddle board tours for the same price, and have a 7 person guest house if you wish to make a weekend of it! More info on their website at happysurfingokinawa.com.

SNAP HAPPY

It's no secret that Okinawa is photogenic. Get beyond the 'auto' function on that fancy camera with a workshop from one of the island's best professional photographers.

Pete Leong offers lessons on all

sorts of snap-related topics, in both Japanese and English. More info (plus galleries of his incredible work) can be seen on his website at fotoshisa.com.



Photo by Pete Leong

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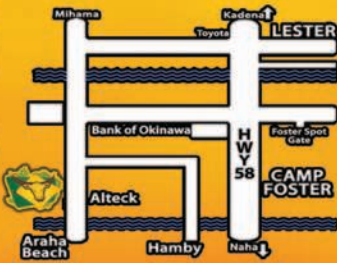
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Weird and Wonderful Japan

Okinawa OK's same-sex partners

Early last month, Naha approved the recognition of same-sex partnerships, making it the fifth prefecture in Japan to do so. The new certification system will allow same-sex partners to submit housing applications and make next-of-kin decisions when one partner needs medical care.

Great grapes?

A recent auction sold a bunch of giant Ruby Roman grapes for 1.1 million yen. That's one bunch of about 30 grapes that can grow to the size of pingpong balls. The exorbitant price reflects the social prestige one gains from buying a one-time consumable item.

Japanese satellite makes surprise discovery

Before it lost contact with Earth, high-tech Japanese satellite Hitomi (or "eye") observed for the first time gas movement in the heart of the Perseus galaxy cluster, at a much slower speed than was expected from hot gas.

Unpatriotic teacher gets pay cut

A Japanese court upheld a school's decision to cut a teacher's pay for refusing to stand during the national anthem during a graduation ceremony. The judge said the teacher "put her own sense of values before ... civil servant discipline." In other words, the nail that sticks up gets hammered down.



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Yomitan Pottery Village

Learn about this craft and find a plethora of pottery items to take home!

Yomitan Pottery Village does exactly what it says on the tin. Consisting of around 45 artisans, a lot of whom make their wares from home, it's open year round. If you love ceramics, you've come to the right place. There are a lot of little streets to explore, lined with houses and studios, with items at all prices, so something for all budgets. You can buy tiny tiny pots for tiny tiny flowers, or giant dishes big enough to sit a full grown adult in (please don't though!). Everything is hand made and hand painted, so no two items are the same, which is wonderful. Each place has it's own unique style too, from traditional to ultra modern, something to suit all tastes.

Okinawan pottery is traditionally very thick and heavy, often painted in earthen colours, however like I said, there are also a lot of modern variations. You can of course pick up Shisa Dogs here, again these vary in style, size and price. There are some wonderful traditional Shisa, as well as some quirky takes (I particularly liked the large, shaggy looking ones painted in bright blues and greens).

Although modern methods of pottery making have taken over in recent times, you can still see the old kilns, housed in a traditional barn, at the centre of the village. It's a small history lesson as well as a shopping destination. There's food available too, with street vendors offering up Okinawa Soba and baked Beniimo (local sweet potato, very tasty!), or, if you're really peckish, a lovely little cafe can serve you up a hearty curry with rice or noodles. It's sweet and delicious,

and everything is served on plates from the village itself. The owner is very cheerful and welcoming, it's almost like dining with friends. I loved it. If you're simply thirsty, you will find vending machines dotted about to quench your thirst.

Once a year, just before Christmas, the village has a market, where all sellers offer up some of their products at discounted prices. Some of it can be at 20% or more, making it an attractive day out (or weekend, it lasts from Friday to Sunday, usually the weekend before Christmas, but this varies year to year), great

for some traditional gift buying, or a way to nab that piece you had your eye on earlier in the year that your bank didn't quite agree with!

Not much for children to do, but the village is very pretty, peaceful, and the walk round may just wear them out, so still a place ideal for a family day out.



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Wagamichi Ramen

Enjoy tomato or volcano ramen in Chatan

The classic ramen experience is still one of my favorite parts of Japanese cuisine. Okinawa has no shortage of good ramen, so what makes this place worthy of note? In short, their fearless willingness to experiment with one of the most revered staples of Japan.

Entering the dark restaurant, just a stones throw from the American village parking lot, my expectations weren't all that high. I put my money into the vending machine inside the entryway and prepared myself for another delicious yet predictable bowl of noodles. Scanning the usual offerings I noticed more than a couple strange named dishes.



Volcano ramen? Sounds good to me. It was ¥1000, kind of pricy for ramen but I had a feeling it would be worth it. It was. It was amazing! It wasn't the least bit like any bowl of ramen I've ever had.



The soup was tomato and miso base. It was served separate from the noodles giving me full control of the soup to noodle ratio. The bamboo shoots, egg, green onions, and other ingredients were arranged pleasantly on the tray, beside the noodles. Among the usual suspects was a small dish of parmesan cheese.

The volcano name is fitting for at least two reasons. One, when the red soup was poured into the stone pot containing the noodles it bubbles and sizzles like lava. Two, the soup is spicy. I opted for level two spiciness on a scale of 1 to 4. It was perfect.

Too many ramen joints err on the side of caution. They stick close to traditional recipes afraid to fix something that isn't broken. It was refreshing to see some courage from the kitchen,

and to experience something entirely new.

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Jimmy's: Sweet Treat Heaven

Jimmy's actually have several locations on Island, but I visited the one in Urasoe, this is my take on it.

First off, Jimmy's is several things in one. It's a bakery, mini mart, cafe and restaurant. The bakery has everything your heart could desire, from simple breads to fancy cakes. The cakes especially are amazing. You can order customs too. The mini mart has a wide selection of sweet and savoury treats, as well as staples like milk, eggs, meat and vegetables. You can even pick up a cute Jimmy's t shirt! The cafe offers light meals and coffee, and of course, cake. After perusing the bakery and mini mart, I headed for dinner in the restaurant.



Small but perfectly formed, it's a buffet set up. American style but with a lot of Japanese influence and choices, you won't know where to start! There's a salad bar (which, oddly, has chocolate bananas on offer), mains and sides, and of course, dessert. It's all you can eat and drink, so score. The night I went they had noodles, pizza, mac and cheese, turkey, fish, lasagne, stir fry vegetables, rice, fries, the list goes on. You pick up what looks like a prison style plastic plate, stack up and enjoy. There's also bowls for soup and salad too.



Drinks wise, there's soft drinks, fruit juices and tea and coffee, or alcohol can be ordered at extra cost. The tea especially was really good, and they keep you topped up with fresh water.

Now let us get to the good stuff: dessert. A lot of buffet places offer fairly paltry desserts, but not Jimmy's. Oh no. Full sized cakes, brownies, pies and cheesecakes. All from their very own bakery. The chocolate cake in particular was divine, light and fluffy but moist. I could've eaten the whole thing!

Price wise, it's pretty good value. It varies depending on time of day, I visited in the evening and paid 1800 yen, tax and drinks included. Great place for a family meal, couples or business. Good all rounder.

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