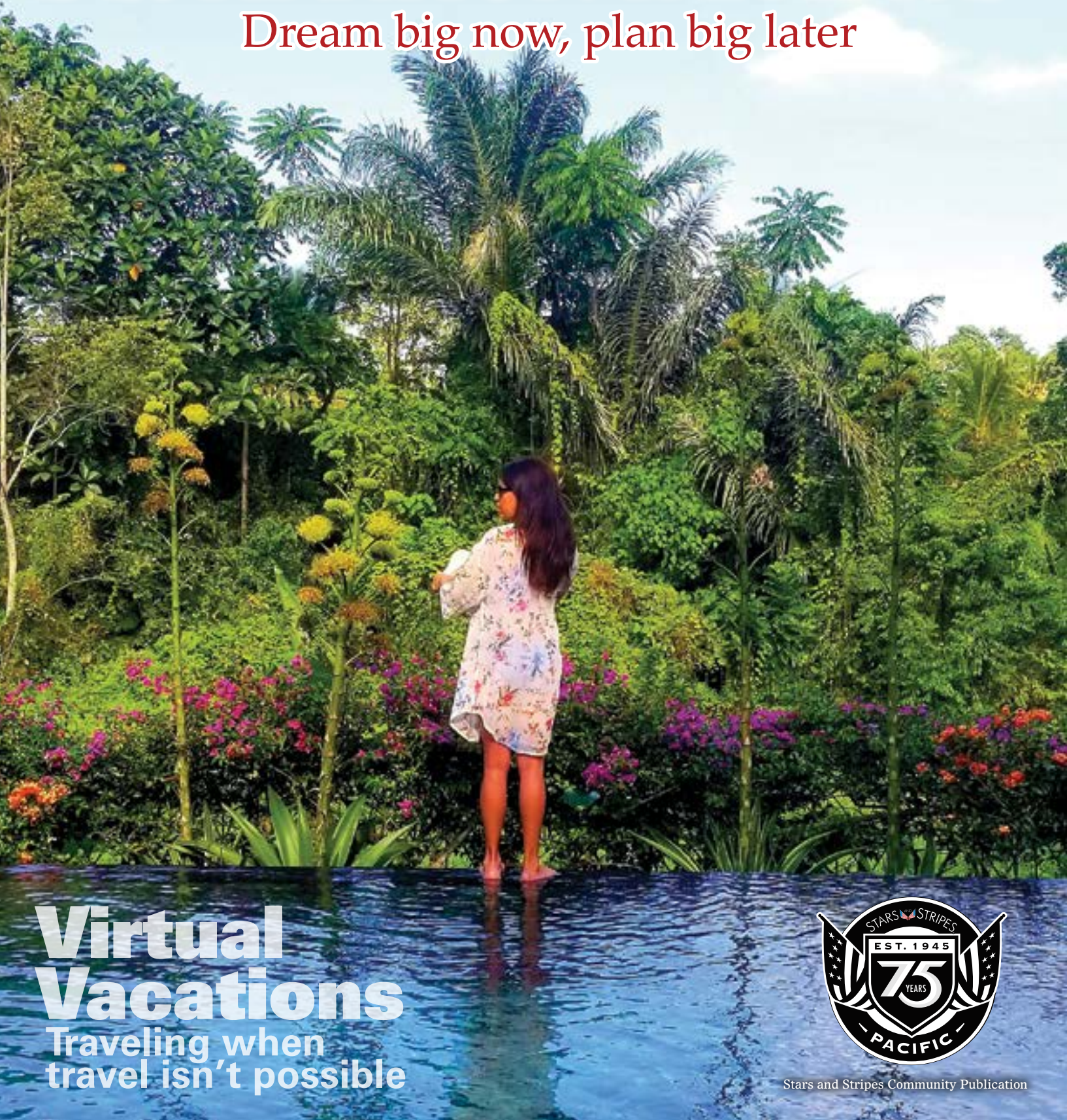


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2020-2021

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Stars and Stripes Community Publication



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DESTINATION PARADISE

2020-2021

Guam PAGE 6	South Korea Page 8 & 20	Singapore Page 12
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Thailand PAGES 7 & 24	Mainland Japan PAGES 7, 8, 30 & 34	



"Your imagination is your preview of life's coming attractions."

-Albert Einstein

For many of us stationed overseas, one of the upsides of being in a foreign country away from family and friends are the opportunities to travel. Like you, at Stripes we love to travel. And, like you, this year of uncertainties has touched all aspects of our daily lives, including our travel plans.

In 2020, many of our vacation plans were canceled or postponed indefinitely. We've traded in airplane tickets for a seat on the couch. And, what all this means for travel in the future leads to many questions: What will travel look like in a post-COVID-19 world? What locations will re-open for tourists? How will we travel and what changes and adjustments will we have to make?

Although I was bummed when my trip to Europe was canceled, I used this time of reflection to return to the travels of the past. I turned to my photo albums and phone camera roll where I revisited the pyramids in Teotihuacan, walked Tokyo's Asakusa District with my mom, the Taj Mahal with my sister, snorkeled off Tumon Bay and closed my eyes to remember the explosion of flavor in every bite of food I devoured in Bangkok. Most of all, these memories made me feel grateful for what I'd seen and where I'd been, but also hopeful for what's to come.

Every year, this magazine serves as a place for you to share with us your tales and images of travel. This magazine is a love letter to that sense of wanderlust and human instinct to explore. So, how then do we talk about travel when we don't know when we'll be able to do it again and do it safely?

We remember just as I reminisced in the past, but with an eye towards the future. We research, dare to dream bigger and let our imaginations do the traveling.

For the writing staff and I that work on the Stars and Stripes community publications and websites, to travel and write about it is a challenge these days. And from that challenge, our Virtual Vacation video series has grown. You'll find links to these thoughtfully curated videos in the following pages where we hope to inspire you to dream big now and plan big later.

This desire to travel and this theme of writing a love letter to our travels echoes throughout these pages with stories from readers like you. Samantha Bettenhausen was so inspired by a trip to Okinawa she wrote her own love letter to the island we've published on Page 28. Rosie Torres, a Navy spouse on Sasebo Naval Base in Japan, shared her love of Bali on Page 22. And, on Page 34, regular contributor David Krigbaum takes us to the Japanese jungle.

Our commitment to bringing you great travel ideas and stories does not end with this magazine, nor does it end with travel. As Stars and Stripes marks 75 years in the Pacific, our team continues to bring members of the military community the important news and vital information necessary to continue the mission. Join us on our new website, 75.stripes.com/, as we reflect on our history and our commitment to serve our troops and their families.

You'll find that commitment in our community newspapers and websites – japan.stripes.com, okinawa.stripes.com, guam.stripes.com and korea.stripes.com – which serve up travel and culture stories, restaurant reviews, and the latest happenings on and off the local bases. And don't forget to check out Stripes Pacific on Facebook for more stories, helpful videos and fun contests.

While going out and exploring is not really on the agenda at this time, we do love a good travel tale. So, don't be shy. Reach out and tell us what's on your mind. I promise we'll get right back to you.

In the meantime, join us as we travel through written word, photos and videos while we dream up where we'll go next. And as Einstein said, let your imagination (and this magazine) be your preview of life's coming attractions.

Denisse Rauda
Publishing and Media Design Editor
Stars and Stripes

STARS AND STRIPES



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Front page photo

Rosie Torres enjoys her time in Bali. Check out her story and more photos on Pages 22-23.





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LET'S TAKE A VIRTUAL VACATION

For many of us, the coronavirus pandemic meant canceled flights and postponing our travel plans in 2020. How we think about travel and how travel will be impacted in the future remains a mystery. We may be stuck at home, but that doesn't mean we can't dream of where we'll go next.

There is still so much of the world we have left to see, so join us as we revisit our favorite locations in the

Pacific and highlight the must-see spots. Take a plunge in one of Okinawa's pristine beaches, dance the night away in Seoul's Gangnam District, or hunt for some deals in one of Bangkok's famous floating markets — all from the comfort (and safety) of our homes. Join us, take notes, and don't pack your bags, we're going on a Virtual Vacation!



Hanoi

War and conflict might be what many think of when they think of Vietnam. But the country is a thriving location with history, culture and delicious food you'll love exploring. In this video, we'll take you to beautiful and busy Hanoi where we'll visit the Hanoi Cathedral and Opera House, Hoan Kiem Lake and more. We'll save you a bowl of pho!



CHECK THE VIDEO!



Guam

For this virtual journey, we head to "Where America's day begins" – tropical, beautiful Guam! This a snorkelers' paradise and one with easy access from anywhere in the Pacific. We'll head to Chamorro Village for some good eats and local shopping, then to the Latte Stone

Park for a trip back to ancient Guam. We'll also try some delicious Chamorro foods like kelaguen and finadene sauce. A stop in Guam also requires a visit to Two Lovers Point for a beautiful view of the crystal turquoise waters and some beautiful photos. Whether you're stationed outside of Guam or will soon PCS to the island, you won't want to miss what we have in store for you in this online tour.



CHECK THE VIDEO!



Seoul

There is a ton to see and we only have a short time to do it, so let's head out! We'll take you to Insadong, a busy district with traditional tea houses and art galleries, then to Myeongdong, one of the most famous shopping areas in Seoul. We'll also make a stop in Gangnam and Hongdae for a look at the nightlife and hotspots where young Koreans go to trendy cafes and bars. Seoul is a hop and a skip from most places in the Pacific, so it will be a great spot to consider when travel is open again.



CHECK THE VIDEO!

Manila



CHECK THE VIDEO!

Hop on as we head to the capital city of the Philippines. Here, old meets new with the Spanish-influenced architecture and towering skyscrapers. We'll take a look at Old Manila, the city-center, where Fort Santiago and Manila Cathedral offer you a close-up look at the city's history and future. In this feature, we'll also stop in and look at former U.S. military installation, Clark Air Base, which is now having a second life of its own, as a public park and airport.



Bangkok

Let's take a virtual journey to the busy streets and colorful markets of Bangkok. We'll try delicious Tom Yum Kung, mango sticky rice and Thai milk tea as we stroll through Wat Pho for a look at the reclining golden Buddha and for an adventure in the labyrinth-like Khao San Road area. We'll also take a detour to Thailand's ancient capital, Ayutthaya, for a peek at the Wat Mahathat in the banyan tree roots.



CHECK THE VIDEO!

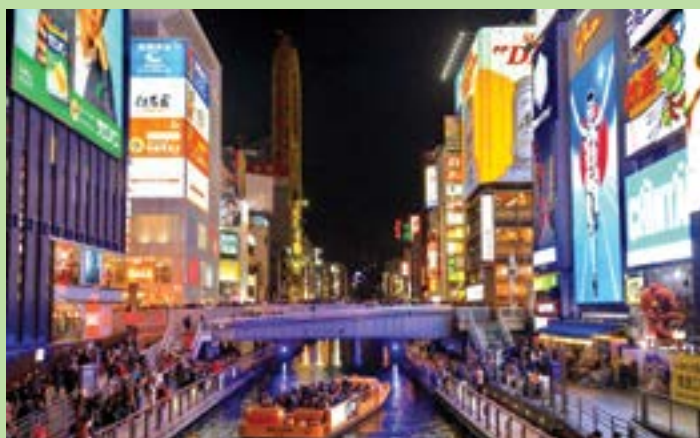


Osaka



CHECK THE VIDEO!

Get ready to head to another hotspot in Japan – Osaka! We'll visit Dotonbori, Osaka Castle and more in this video getaway. Hop on a boat ride to take in a good look at the city lights, try their signature octopus street food, takoyaki, and get a great view from above at the Umeda Sky Building. If you're stationed in Japan and Osaka has been on your list, you won't want to miss this virtual vacation!





LET'S
TAKE A

VIRTUAL VACATION



Tokyo

Is a visit to one of the busiest and brightest cities in the world your dream? Tour Tokyo with us as we hit some of the must-see spots this unbelievable Pacific destination has to offer. Maneuver through crowded Shibuya Crossing, visit old Tokyo in Asakusa District and get lost in the neon lights and manga of Akihabara— all without leaving your home!



CHECK THE VIDEO!

Bali



CHECK THE VIDEO!

Take a trip to tropical and exotic dream destination Bali! Here we'll make virtual stops at one of the country's oldest temples for an amazing view and a taste of local traditional dance. Then, we'll swing from the palm trees above the Jatiluwih rice terraces for some adventure and great views. Later, we'll pick up some tasty satay chicken and mee goreng fried noodles. Let's go!



Okinawa

Let's get ready to hit the beach and visit Japan's sub-tropical island, Okinawa. This island will make you feel worlds away from the mainland with its crystal blue waters and sandy white beaches. But, don't worry about packing a bathing suit or sunscreen because this journey is virtual! We'll skip the lines and the crowds and head straight into Okinawa Churaumi Aquarium, then dive in at the Maeda Point's beautiful blue grotto and more!



CHECK THE VIDEO!

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I'm the one on the left.



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My name is Thien and I am a 1st-term student at Lakeland University Japan. As a student veteran, I think I have a fairly unique background. I was born in Denver, Colorado, from immigrant Vietnamese parents and as I grew up, I learned to appreciate my heritage and wanted to begin my own legacy as an American.

I enlisted into the U.S. Marine Corps at the age of 17 and left home to boot camp right after high school graduation. Stationed in southern California, I served 4 years as a Field Wireman and deployed multiple times on Marine Expeditionary Units and Unit Deployment Programs.

Those deployments gave me the opportunity to explore many different countries, cultures, and cities throughout the Persian gulf and Southeast Asia. However, one country stood out to me from the rest during my enlistment and it was Japan.

Drawn in by the unique culture and people, I decided to return. During a rainy day in the chow hall line, I read about LUJ off of an advertisement in the Stars and Stripes Magazine. The school was an opportu-

nity for me to pursue a college education while experiencing Japanese culture. So I applied.

Now having parted from my friends and family state-side, I am studying and taking university level classes while creating new connections with locals, international students, and other fellow veterans. LUJ gave me a chance to utilize my G.I. Bill and experience the unique and robust lifestyle that is found only in Tokyo.



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HEALTH & SAFETY MEASURES

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- Temperature check is conducted for everyone entering the building.
- Hand sanitizer stations are located in public areas.
- Social distancing protocols are implemented in public areas.
- Acrylic boards are installed at the Front Desk and Guest Service Desk.
- We disinfect and sanitize facilities regularly especially high touch areas including elevator buttons, door handles, tables and chairs, etc.
- We decluttered unnecessary items to reduce the transmission of germs.
- Ozone generator is used to clean guest rooms after checkout.
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We will continue monitoring the COVID-19 updates and respond appropriately based on the advice and requirements issued by our local authorities.





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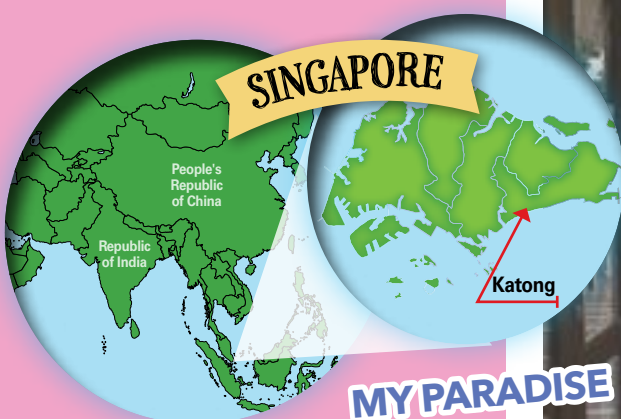
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“What I really fancy doing when I visit a foreign country is to frequent the places the locals go. Eat the where the locals eat. And stay where the locals stay.”

Live like the locals in Singapore

Story and photos by
JO M.

WHEREJOELYGOES.COM



One of my favorite parts about traveling is having the opportunity to experience how other people live. Sure, seeing the sites, shopping and zoos are fun, and I enjoy them as much as the next girl or guy (actually, probably more). But what I really fancy doing when I visit a foreign country is to frequent the places the locals go. Eat the where the locals eat. And stay where the locals stay.

I recently went to Singapore, and while most people I know like to stay downtown, I opted to stay in a residential neighborhood about 15 minutes away by taxi.

Staying downtown is great. It's close to loads of fantastic restaurants, museums, and parks. There's so much to do in that area. But it's not where most of the natives live. So instead of staying among the sparkling lights, tourists and the hustle and bustle of downtown, I chose to stay in the beautiful, historic Katong district.



I did little research and learned that Katong has all the conveniences of being downtown (plenty of shops, restaurants, bars, etc.), but with a completely different vibe. It's more low-key and less touristy, but also very cool and hip. It's primarily a residential area, and the Joo Chiat neighborhood is within walking distance. To be clear, there are a few hotels in the district, so it's not completely tourist-free.

Katong has a very distinct look and feel. And if I'm being honest, it's like nothing I would have imagined seeing in Singapore. The architecture is not like any place else in the city. It reminded me a little of the row houses in New Orleans. The buildings are made of cement (I'm pretty sure); some are colorful and most have ornate details and arches.

The reason Katong is so unique is that it's where the Peranakans (natives mixed with local and Chinese ancestry) and Eurasians originally settled. And their cultures still remain in Katong today. From the buildings to the clothes to the food, this district has things you won't find in any other part of Singapore. Also, it's a quiet, relaxing place to come back to after spending hours walking, sweating and sight-seeing in the city.





We stayed at the Hotel Indigo, and it is fabulous. The rooms are a very nice size, the hotel is new and modern, and there's an infinity pool on the roof with an amazing view. The decor is stunning; from the furniture to the tiles to the art, it's all beautiful and unique. The hotel also features a 24-hour fitness center, a business center, free Wi-Fi and same-day dry cleaning. Unfortunately, it does not have a self-laundry facility. The hotel restaurant, Baba Chews, is another perk. The breakfast is incredible! I devoured my morning meal there almost every day I was in Singapore and was always immensely satisfied. I also stopped by every evening for a nightcap (or two). The bartender never disappointed. I happily slurped many slightly-overpriced cocktails with a Katong-twist (to be fair, alcohol in Singapore is pretty expensive anywhere you go). My favorite amenity Hotel Indigo offers is the Handy. While a lot of travelers nowadays opt to purchase portable Wi-Fi or pre-paid sim cards, if you stay at this hotel, you won't need to. The Handy is a smart-phone you can use during your stay; you can make unlimited local calls and have unlimited access to the internet. It even has several popular apps already installed. Additionally, it has tons of information and suggestions on Katong and Singapore.

MY TOP FIVE

While Katong isn't a place you'll need days to explore, it does have a lot to offer. Below are my five favorite things about this neighborhood.

1 LAKSA

With Peranakan culture comes laksa; a spicy noodle soup (and also my new favorite food). While you can find laksa all over Singapore (especially at the hawkers), Katong has its own version and it is insanely tasty. I really loved 328 Katong Laksa the best. The broth is a pretty orange-sherbet color and has what tastes like a shrimp and coconut milk base. It's spicy, but not too spicy (they give you extra spice if you want more). The



noodles are rice noodles (I think) and they're cut in short strands, which I really like. And the soup has a pretty good amount of prawns. If you're allergic to shellfish, or just don't like them, this isn't the dish for you. But if you do, you'll be in heaven. I also tried their crabmeat steamed buns, which were super good also. I recommend grabbing a large lime juice with your meal. It goes perfectly with the soup and is tart and refreshing (ideal for those hot, humid days). Honestly, I can drink it all day, every day. It's that good.

2 SHOPHOUSES

Koon Seng Road (between Pulasan Road and Rambai Road) houses some of the prettiest shophouses I've ever seen. They are vibrant and elegant. The two-story shops are historic and very popular. There were quite a few people taking pictures when I got there. While there are lovely shophouses all over the Joo Chiat and Katong neighborhoods, but these... they're special. Definitely, something to see.

3 SRI SENPAGA VIBAYAGAR TEMPLE

I'm a huge fan of temples, shrines, and churches. The architecture and design fascinate me. Katong and Joo Chiat contain a few temples you can visit. However, the Sri Senpaga Vinayaga Temple is by far my favorite. It's a Hindu temple for the god Ganesha, and it dates back to the

1850s. Its architecture boasts features of the Chola style, and its entrance tower is one of the tallest in Singapore. The temple is a historic site, and while tourists are welcome, I didn't see any during my visit. Only worshippers. This made my experience feel that much more authentic. The Sri Senpaga Vinayaga Temple is definitely worth a visit.



4 HEAVENLY WANG

No! Not in the dirty way! Katong is home to many (and I mean MANY) restaurants, bakeries, bars, and cafes. And one thing I discovered I LOOOOOOOVE during my trip is Singaporean coffee, or kopi as they call it. It is more than good. It's AMAZING! I didn't have a single cup that I didn't enjoy. But it was especially good at Heavenly Wang. Kopi is made differently than it is the U.S. or even Europe. It's brewed on the stove in a tall pot with a long spout; inside it, there's a cloth sack that infuses the coffee. It's served a variety of ways, but my favorite is with sweetened condensed milk (known as just kopi). It makes the coffee sweet and velvety. I also tried the traditional Singaporean breakfast of soft-boiled eggs, toast (I chose the peanut butter toast; I hate regular butter) there; it's also really good. Honestly, if coffee isn't your thing, Katong has such an amazing variety of pubs, bars, and restaurants. You'll surely find something you absolutely love.

5 SOUVENIR SHOPPING

So to be completely honest, I'm not a huge fan of stuff. In the last few years, I've become less interested in buying things (especially things that don't serve a purpose) and more interested in the experience. So doing things, going places... that's more my thing. But I do enjoy window shopping, especially for things that I can't possibly get anywhere else. I love checking out souvenir shops. And no, I don't mean the cheap, made-in-China magnets and t-shirts. I'm talking about woodwork, hand-beaded shoes and original textiles that are considered traditional in the places I visit. Katong has some fantastic souvenir shops with authentic Peranakan dresses, ceramics, and snacks (my favorite kind of souvenir).





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“The ocean is crystal clear, the sand is perfectly white, and sea life is absolutely incredible. It’s a perfect paradise.”

Maldives on a budget

Story and photos by
JO M.

WHEREJOELYGOES.COM



The Maldives is the perfect tropical vacation destination. The ocean is crystal clear, the sand is perfectly white, and sea life is absolutely incredible. It’s a perfect paradise. But it can come with a pretty hefty price tag.

If you’ve ever dreamed about going to Maldives (and taken the time to research it), you know exactly what I’m talking about. Hotels can cost you hundreds of dollars a night. And that’s not even the fancy, over-the-ocean bungalows. You add flights, food, and entertainment, and you’re looking at quite a bit of money.

But it doesn’t have to cost you an arm and a leg. I did it for less than a thousand bucks!

AIRFARE


The first step to any trip is airfare. I was already in Singapore when I decided to go, and from there I was able to swing the ticket for just under \$300. AirAsia offers really great deals. You just have to be flexible on your dates of travel and check the websites often. But you can get decent deals on airfare from other locations, too. I was able to find a round trip ticket from Frankfurt the other day for \$600. I tend to find the best deals on Skyscanner. But on the mobile app. For some weird reason, the prices on their website always come up a little more expensive.

HOTELS

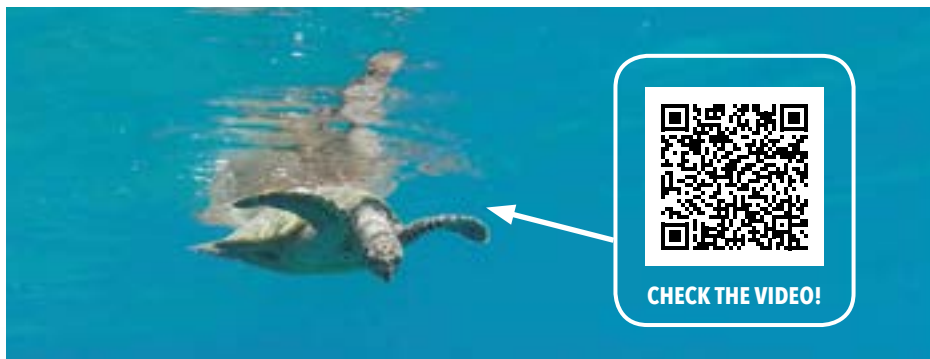
The next step, in planning the trip is finding where to stay. For this, you really need to determine what you want out of your vacation to the Maldives. Do you just want to sit by the beach or pool sipping cocktails and reading magazines? Or do you want to spend your time exploring the ocean and riding jet skis? Maybe both?

This first thing to know about deciding where to stay is that the Maldives is a group of islands scattered in the Arabian Sea of the Indian Ocean. The main airport is in Male, but it’s probably not the island you want to spend your vacation on. It’s a busier local island.

You’re not going to find the magical paradise experience you see on Instagram here. That’s found on other islands. So you’ll also have to coordinate and consider the costs of getting to those islands. The options are either by speedboat or seaplane.

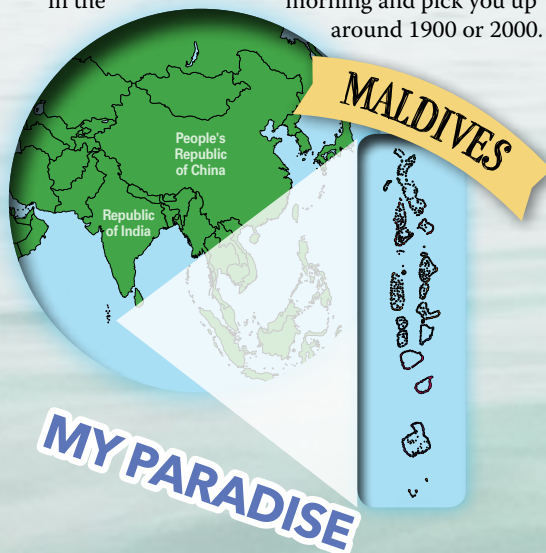
You have lots of options when it comes to which isle to stay on. Many of the atolls are owned by hotels that build their resorts on them. If you want to sit by the beach/pool to unwind, this is the kind of place you want to stay at. They tend to be pricey, but have some perks. One benefit is that they’re very well-maintained. These resorts are also very private. And they serve alcohol. Local islands don’t. But the downside, at least to me, is that you don’t really get to experience any local culture. Another option is to stay at a hotel or resort on a local atoll. The prices are generally quite reasonable, and the accommodations are pretty good. But do your research and read the reviews. 





→ We did both. We stayed at the Arena Beach Hotel on the island of Maafushi for part of our stay and the Adaaran Prestige Vadoo for the other part. The Arena Beach came with free breakfast and was right on the beach for about \$80 a night. The rooms were clean and comfortable and ours had a balcony with a nice view. The hotel restaurant was pretty good, and while I'm not a huge fan of buffets, the one here had a lot of variety, fresh food and even featured live music. Since the Arena Beach is on a local island, adult beverages weren't available. However, there is a party boat you can go on to enjoy a few cocktails and meet other travelers. The hotel can call it for you, and they'll pick you up. They also offer passes/trips to the resort hotels. They'll drop you off via speedboat early in the

morning and pick you up around 1900 or 2000.



The Adaaran Prestige Vadoo is AMAZING! It's a smaller, private resort with about 50 water bungalows. The resort has a number of restaurants, bars, and a spa. The pool is fantastic, and there are gorgeous gardens surrounding it. We were only here one day because it's quite pricy and I'm a bit of a busy body (I can't lay by the beach/pool for too long without getting bored). But it was beautiful and so relaxing. Plus, we didn't have to get on a seaplane to get there. Also, the food here was better (I like to eat).

ENTERTAINMENT

There are a lot of cool things to do in the Maldives. All of the travelers we met were on their honeymoon or a romantic getaway (my best friend and I were literally the only single people everywhere we went). Many of them just wanted to relax and enjoy being on a secluded tropical island. But others wanted to explore the ocean and have a bit of fun. And there really are plenty of fun things to do here.

If you stay at an island resort, what you have to do is limited to what the resort has to offer and any outings you choose to purchase. All of the hotels I looked into offered a variety of trips. Most of them have the same or very similar opportunities. However, the prices tend to be a little more expensive at the resorts.

My friend and I got a package of expeditions. We went on two snorkeling adventures (both over six hours long), jet-skiing, banana boating, paddleboarding, night fishing, and a local island tour for about \$150. We did it through the local-island hotel. I think the price was quite reasonable. I also think it was probably negotiable based on what some of the other travelers said they paid. But I don't feel like we

overpaid. The private resort offered some similar experiences and other adventures like parasailing and scuba diving. It all depends on what you want to see and how you want to spend your time. I highly recommend snorkeling. Swimming with sea turtles (Link to video above) and dolphins was such an incredible experience. I almost drowned at least a dozen times from smiling so much water got in my mask. Totally worth it.

What I liked about staying at the local island was being able to see where and how the locals live. Especially because this was more of a fun, let's go exploring kind of trip and not a romantic getaway. It definitely allowed me to spend quite a bit less and still experience the magic of the Maldives.

What incredible location have you been able to explore without breaking the bank? And what tips do you have?

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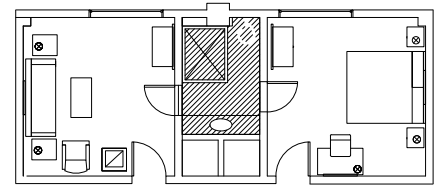
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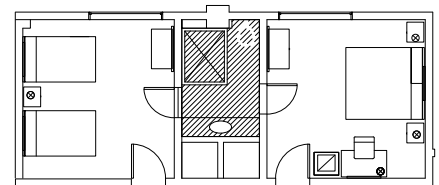
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“Overall, my family and I enjoyed our long awaited mini vacation to Busan. It reminded me of a city mix of San Francisco, Waikiki, New York City, and a dash of Seattle.”

A trip to beautiful Busan

Story and photos by
LENINA CLARK



My family arrived South Korea late May 2020 and was quarantined for two weeks at the barracks. I was researching and looking forward to exploring Korea as soon as possible.

It was Fourth of July weekend and we decided to head southeast to Busan. It was a fun four-hour journey of beautiful green mountains as far as I could see. We came from Tampa, where there are no mountains whatsoever so this was a nice change.

As we were getting close to Busan, I started seeing clusters of buildings of all different heights all on top of one another. I had never seen so many buildings. I was in awe seeing buildings of old and new mixed together.

As soon as we checked into our hotel, we decided to explore a bit. We were surprised to find out we were only a block away from the infamous Gukje Night Market and Jagalchi Seafood Market.

Gukje was a sight to see. Alleys with rows of vendors to my left and right. The foods were amazing to look at and consume.

Be careful of scooters because they feel like they have the right of way. I'm still amazed how people on scooters can maneuver through tight spaces.

This place is the best to try out authentic street food. You'll have to accept the fact that you'll eat standing up or sit your butt down on a street curb. We decided to head to Jagalchi Seafood Market and grab a bite there instead.

On the way, we saw little mom and pop shops along the street with all types of fish, shell fish, mussels, eels, and octopus. I've never seen live octopus outside an aquarium let alone in a small wash tub on the side of the street.

If you are daring, you can try to eat live chopped

octopus tentacles at the Jagalchi seafood building. The first floor is where you can buy your fish and take it up to the second floor for them to cook it for you. We didn't know what to buy so we headed to the second floor to look at a menu first. We decided on seafood broth with all types of mussels and one order of fried fish. We literally saw the fish alive right before they cooked it!

If you want the freshest seafood, head towards Jagalchi or Gukje Night Market.

My next favorite site was Haedong Yonggungsa Buddhist Temple. It was a 40-minute drive from our hotel. There are buses and trains that will easily take you there. The cost of the temple was free and parking was 3000 won. It was definitely picturesque with all the Buddha statues throughout the park. There's also 12 animal statues that signify the zodiac animal year which everyone took pictures with their birth animal.

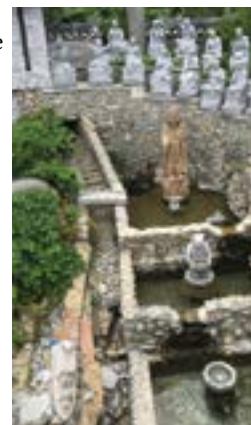
Food is never scarce here. Even at the temple, there are street vendors selling food and drinks so don't worry about not having anything to eat there. There's also a cute coffee shop there with ocean views.

Next on the list was Songdo Beach with cable car rides. We rode the cable car which took us to a mini island across the city. You had the choice of cable cars, one with open glass flooring or just a regular floor.

Once we got off, we were greeted with more food vendors and there was a beautiful park to explore.

There were animated dinosaurs, Instagrammable statues, a piano to play with, and even a nice hike along the mountain. You can stay as long as you want before taking the cable car back to the starting point.

Lastly, if you love the beach, then head down to Haeundae Beach. You can rent lounge chairs and umbrellas if you didn't bring any.



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“My husband even splurged a little more for a romance package which included the floating breakfast, candle-light dinner, couples massage, room decoration, and bath filled with flowers.”

‘The great escape’ to Bali

Story and photos by
BY ROSIE TORRES



As travel restrictions begin to lift, surely many will begin following up on previously planned vacations. One particular destination which remains popular is Bali, Indonesia. It was in June 2019 when we embarked on our first family trip of four to Indonesia.

We had heard countless stories from many people with and without children who had marvelous experiences in Bali and we had to check it out for ourselves. I began planning our trip about 10 months in advance, looking for the best sightseeing places and lodging. It took some time which airport and villa would be best fitting.

Since we are stationed at Sasebo Naval Base, we had to choose between departing from Nagasaki Airport, a 45-minute drive, or Fukuoka Airport, which was 2 hours away. These two airports also offer affordable overnight parking, perfect for our seven-day trip. Luckily, the prices were similar departing from either airport, so we opted for a Nagasaki departure and return, costing us \$179 each for the round trip.

Keep in mind, we purchased the tickets in advance and bought insurance on them as you quickly learn things can change rapidly when you're a military family. Due to the savings in flight tickets, I decided to splurge on lodging. We stayed five nights

at Dwaraka The Royal Villas in Ubud. The place was roughly an hour away from Denpasar Airport.

We booked the villa in advance as well and they had great savings and packages, including pick-up and drop-off from the airport. The special online booking was priced just a little over \$100 per night and being able to correspond with management for details of our itinerary for pick up and departure provided further savings. They also had discounts on room service, daily meals, crafts, sightseeing packages, drivers, restaurants, and massages available within the villa.

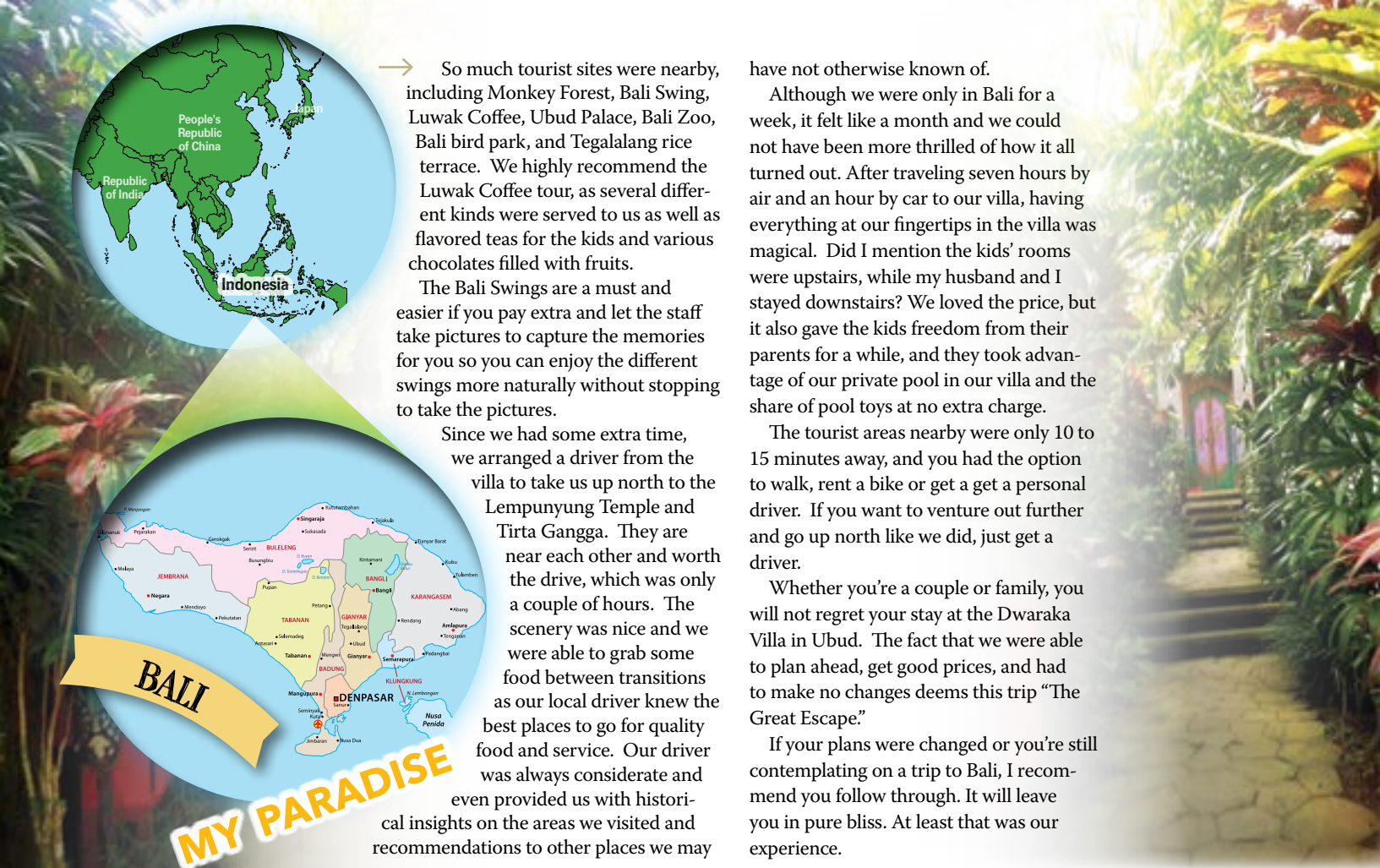
There was really no reason to leave the villa, as it was a vacation within itself with three different infinity pools, a pool within our own two-story villa, and beautiful rice fields to walk amongst.

The kids enjoyed the pools, massages, and daily fresh fruits and delicious meals available at almost any hour of the day. My husband even splurged a little more for a romance package which

included the floating breakfast, candle

light dinner, couples massage, room decoration, and bath filled with flowers. They assumed it was our honeymoon and we enjoyed the attention so much. We just went with it. Why not a second honeymoon?





→ So much tourist sites were nearby, including Monkey Forest, Bali Swing, Luwak Coffee, Ubud Palace, Bali Zoo, Bali bird park, and Tegalalang rice terrace. We highly recommend the Luwak Coffee tour, as several different kinds were served to us as well as flavored teas for the kids and various chocolates filled with fruits.

The Bali Swings are a must and easier if you pay extra and let the staff take pictures to capture the memories for you so you can enjoy the different swings more naturally without stopping to take the pictures.

Since we had some extra time, we arranged a driver from the villa to take us up north to the Lempuyung Temple and Tirta Gangga. They are near each other and worth the drive, which was only a couple of hours. The scenery was nice and we were able to grab some food between transitions as our local driver knew the best places to go for quality food and service. Our driver was always considerate and even provided us with historical insights on the areas we visited and recommendations to other places we may

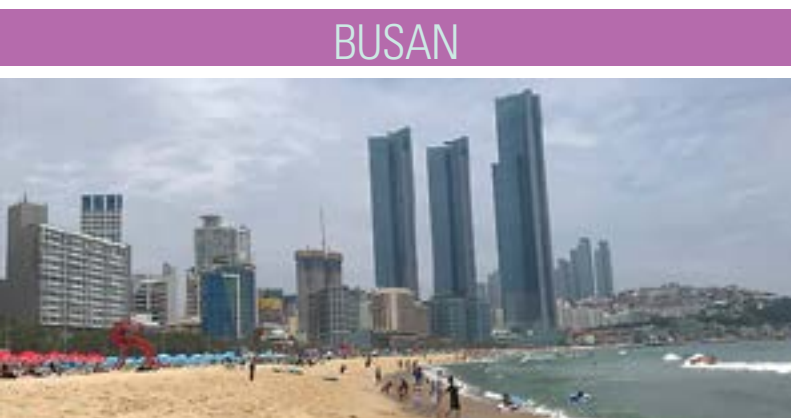
have not otherwise known of.

Although we were only in Bali for a week, it felt like a month and we could not have been more thrilled of how it all turned out. After traveling seven hours by air and an hour by car to our villa, having everything at our fingertips in the villa was magical. Did I mention the kids' rooms were upstairs, while my husband and I stayed downstairs? We loved the price, but it also gave the kids freedom from their parents for a while, and they took advantage of our private pool in our villa and the share of pool toys at no extra charge.

The tourist areas nearby were only 10 to 15 minutes away, and you had the option to walk, rent a bike or get a get a personal driver. If you want to venture out further and go up north like we did, just get a driver.

Whether you're a couple or family, you will not regret your stay at the Dwaraka Villa in Ubud. The fact that we were able to plan ahead, get good prices, and had to make no changes deems this trip "The Great Escape."

If your plans were changed or you're still contemplating on a trip to Bali, I recommend you follow through. It will leave you in pure bliss. At least that was our experience.



BUSAN

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 20

If you are hungry, look out for a man that walks along the beach repeating "ChiKen, ChiKen". If you flag him down, tell him your order and he'll deliver it to you. There were couple of people handing out a magnetic menu (which sticks to the pole of your umbrella) of the chicken wings. There were 6 flavors to choose from.

Additionally, there was a coffee lady walking around so look out for her, too.

Haeundae Beach was clean and the waters were mellow. There were adequate and clean restrooms. Make sure you have to coins to operate the outdoor showers. There's also a trailer to change your clothes in but I think you have to pay for it.

Did I mention how you can never be hungry here? Well, there are street vendors here at the beach selling foods and restaurants if you want an indoor dining experience.

Overall, my family and I enjoyed our long awaited mini vacation to Busan. It reminded me of a city mix of San Francisco, Waikiki, New York City, and a dash of Seattle. There were many more attractions offered which lead to us to want a return trip in the future. You can relax at several beaches in Busan. You can hike mountains and visit temples along the way. Or, stay in the city and immerse yourself with the locals at the night markets and restaurants.



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“The morning dawn over the river was beautiful and included a great view of a lone fisherman in his hollowed-out boat with the hills of Laos as a backdrop.”

Exploring Thailand's amazing Lanna culture

Story and photos by
ROBERT ZUCKERMAN



I had the good fortune of touring the hidden gems of Thailand's Lanna region in the fall of 2019. Unlike the south where beach tourism abounds, the north offers true insight into traditional Thai culture with exquisite architectural and natural beauty combined.

Upon arriving in Thailand, I was greeted by my guide, Tippee, who knows all that Bangkok has to offer. My first few nights I stayed at the beautiful Sivatel Bangkok Hotel, recognized by UNESCO for its original eco-friendly cuisine. I can attest to how delicious and artful the menu options are.

While in Bangkok, I visited such famous temples as Wat Arun (the Temple of the Morning Dawn), and Wat Prah Chetupon (Wat Pho), where the now world-renown

Thai Massage was born. Wat Pho, built in the 16th century, is the site of Thailand's famous 151-foot-long golden reclining Buddha. We traveled by river boat going down the Chao Phraya, the major river which winds its way through central Bangkok and beyond, taking in views of Bangkok old and new. While visiting Wat Pho, I saw elementary school students learning traditional Thai martial arts with real swords.

That evening we dined at Bangkok's newest skyscraper, the King Power MahaNakhon Tower. The glass-bottom veranda on the 78th floor

offers spectacular views of this sprawling city at sunset. Its nouveau cuisine, which is served up two stories below via an all-glass enclosed spiral staircase, is an artistic epicurean delight.

Speaking of great food, two wonderful restaurants Suan Thip and the Deck both offer delectable Thai treats in traditional settings. Suan Thip is located on an old durian plantation and customers may sit in the traditionally decorated main house or outside on their equally beautiful patio. Deck has a river-side location and is an old Thai home which has been converted to a pension and one can dine with a lovely view of the river boats going by.

During my visit I also stopped at the Grand Palace. The most important relic on display is the Emerald Buddha. Made of jade, it is dressed in seasonal garb and is breathtaking. The palace itself is a sight to behold, from its beautifully inlaid god and goddess statues to the actual guards standing stoically at the palace entrances. The guards are not permitted to flinch nor smile no matter how much tourists tempt them. I took some photos of crazy tourists approaching them, and once they had departed and my camera was down, one guard actually smiled at me.

One secret Bangkok hideaway I enjoyed visiting was Koh Kred, a small island located within the city limits along the Chao Phraya. The island has a culture all its own as it is a small pottery village with its own Buddhist temple and small shops. Visitors can purchase handicrafts and pottery from the vendors along the island's narrow streets. You can even get a close look at the potters working on their craft with bilingual explanations available.



HEAD NORTH

With the highlights of Bangkok behind us, it was time to fly north to Chiang Rai via Bangkok Airways. From Chiang Rai Airport we went directly to the Black House, or Baan Dam. Built entirely of beautiful polished teakwood, this is exquisite site is the life work of National Thai artist Thawan Duchanee. Far from a typical art museum, this is an estate featuring traditional Thai Lanna architecture.



The main A-framed buildings are decorated with skulls, animal skins and erotic sculptures. With a couple water buffalo on the grounds, including the first albino water buffalo I've ever seen, it is quite the spot to take in.

From there we headed to our bungalow hotel located roughly 70 kilometers north of the city along the Chao Khong, (better known to westerners as the Mekong River). We ate dinner out on the patio and retired early to our bungalows. The morning dawn over the river was beautiful and included a great view of a lone fisherman in his hollowed-out boat with the hills of Laos as a backdrop.

After enjoying a Lanna-style breakfast, we departed toward the renowned Golden Triangle. Enroute, we fell upon a lovely temple with a 2,000-year history, Wat Phra That Pha Ngao. With a chedi built upon a large rock in the compound, the name means "rock that gives shade."



The Golden Triangle is located at the point in the Chao Khong where Thailand, Laos and Myanmar (Burma) meet. This is the area where most of the poppies which caused the infamous Opium Wars were grown. Poppies are now an outlawed crop in Thailand due to this history.

We drove up the mountain to take in an amazing panoramic view of the area. We then went for a speedboat ride and saw some beautiful scenery as well as Laotian fuel trucks filling up in Thailand and going back across the river to Laos to supply its gasoline stands. We got so close to Laos that my cell phone received the message welcoming me to Lao Telecom even though we never stepped foot on Laotian soil!

After the boat ride, it was time for lunch at the beautiful Hotel Anantara Chiang Rai. The grounds are rustic, with elephants and other wildlife roaming freely within its boundaries. Hotel guests may approach and even pet the elephants with the staff mahout (elephant trainer). After lunch, we visited the Hall of Opium, a must-see, with multilingual explanations of opium's manufacture and influence in Thai history.

From the Hall of Opium, we ventured off to see the beautiful royal Mae Fah Luang Garden, Doi Tung. The gardens are immaculate! That evening we returned to dine at the Chivit Thamma Da Coffee House, an old home with lovely grounds. At this family-run café, meals are served on their antique collectibles which are also available for purchase. After dinner, we



turned in at The Riverie by Katathani Hotel for the night. This hotel was lovely and, in the morning, I enjoyed the Thai and western breakfast buffet with a view of the staff setting up for a wedding.

After breakfast, we went to see both the Blue Temple (Wat Rong Seua Ten) and the well-known White Temple (Wat Rong Khun). The latter is an ongoing masterpiece designed by famed artisan Chaloechai Kosit-

pipat. The White Temple depicts the spiritual journey the soul takes from our daily hell, passing by Yin/Yang as you approach the bridge, and eventually reaching the serenity of nirvana upon entering the main hall. Once inside, you do not only see the usual Buddhist images but countless statements of the designer's political stance throughout, like one of US President GW Bush riding aboard a missilehead with none other than Osama Bin Laden and others of global warming and other issues. Though the main temple buildings here are entirely white, the one golden building on the premises is, believe it or not, the rest room! Though I did not enter said building, it is the fanciest restroom building this traveler has ever seen!



At the Blue Temple, I got a look at the hall's standing white Buddha which was completed in 2016. This temple is designed by Phuttha Kabkaew, a protégé of Chalermchai Kositpipat. Its name literally translates to the House of the Dancing Tiger. Unlike Wat Rong Khun, visitors are permitted to take photos both inside and outside the buildings. It's rich shades of blue are exquisite and make for a beautiful serene setting for those praying inside.

Our next stop on the tour was Singha Park, owned and managed by Thailand's internationally renowned beer maker of the same name. The park has many sporting opportunities, and vast farmlands as well. We had a lovely lunch at Phu Phi Rom restaurant which overlooks a tea plantation.

CHIANG MAI

From Singha Park, we drove south to Chiang Mai, northern Thailand's most popular tourist destination with a charm all its own. Our first evening there we attended a dinner theater performance at the Chiang Mai Cultural Centre where we enjoyed a Khantoke dinner set as we watched the traditional performances.

One of my favorite temples we visited, despite it being a rainy day, was Wat Ton Kwen, located on the outskirts of Chiang Mai. Built in 1858, this is one of the most classic Lanna temples still preserved in its original state. From its original wooden wihaan, or ordination hall, to its stone naga, or mythical snake-lined staircases, this, too, is a site not to be missed!

Though the Lanna architecture and culture are fabulous to take in, the absolute highlight of this entire trip was the Patara Elephant Farm. Owned and operated by Theerapat Trungprakan, the farm is one of only a few places that take in injured and previously mistreated elephants. Everything at Patara Elephant Farm is based on the four R's of elephant care: rescue, recovery, reproduction and reintroduction.



CONTINUED ON PAGE 26



Each elephant is assigned to its own mahout 24/7 so they can build a personal relationship with their own caregiver. The mahouts live on site and do everything from feeding and bathing the elephants to checking their dung several times a day. The farm offers several tours, all of which require attendance at the morning orientation session where Trungprakan presents the basics about their facility and allows visitors to interact with the elephants. Using Thai commands, I fed elephants and also learned how to brush them off and bathe them in the river. Walking the elephants into the river for bathing and wiping them down with a brush and leaves was quite the experience. I was lucky enough to ride my assigned elephant up the hill bareback.

Other places we visited in Chiang Mai included the MAIIAM Contemporary Art Museum, owned and managed by the same family as the world renown Jim Thompson House of Thai silk in Bangkok and a lacquer ware center where you can see the artists at work. At the MAIIAM, one of Thailand's premier centers of modern art, the exhibits are a sharp contrast to its sister site in Bangkok.

LAMPANG

Next we drove to Lampang, where we visited the iconic home, Baan Sao Nak. Built in 1895 and still preserved in its original state, this home is supported by 116 square teak pillars mixing Myanmar and Lanna styles of architecture.



Another highlight was visiting the Chongka Temple, built of white stucco, quite different from the gold leafed or teak wood Thai temples. Run by two brothers, we were fortunate to visit when the abbot monk was present. He not only invited us to come up to the temple's main hall but allowed us to take as many photos as we like. To my surprise, he even greeted me in English, asking me where I was from.



The gastro-nomic delight of Lampang is chicken soup as its mascot is the rooster. Known as Kuaytiew Kai, this chicken noodle soup does not waste any parts of the chicken. In it you'll find all parts of the chicken,

literally head to toe! For this delicacy we stopped at Heuan Ngew Dang, run by a couple and their young son.

The final night of this whirlwind trip was spent back in Bangkok where we visited one of its largest flea markets, Ratchada. This is a massive place offering everything imaginable, from foot massages to clothing, all types of street foods and more. My send-off dinner was at the famous Sonboom Seafood Restaurant where we shared many types of seafood, including their specialty, seafood curry. I then returned to the Sivatel Hotel for a final night in luxury before returning to Japan.

A big KAB KUN KRAB to the guides for allowing me to get some insight into traditional Lanna culture. It is an adventure I highly recommend! Enjoy amazing Thailand!

Rules when visiting a Buddhist temple

- Dress properly (knees and shoulders should be covered),
- Take off your shoes when entering buildings.
- Be quiet and no public displays of affection are allowed inside buildings.
- Don't take photos of people praying.
- Don't point your feet toward Buddha's image or any Thai person. This means you wish them dead.
- Don't smoke inside.
- Never touch a Thai person on top of their head, it's the Buddha spot.



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“Okinawa took my breath away. Sunabe Sea Wall was my view every morning- I cannot tell you how often I found myself standing against the railing and just taking in the views.”

A love letter to Okinawa

Story and photos by
SAMANTHA BETTENHAUSEN



It's officially been a few days since coming home from my first trip to Okinawa. I will admit, coming home has been difficult. Anyone who travels often knows the three phases of every trip:

- 1)Pre-trip: anticipation
- 2)The trip itself: wonder
- 3)Post-trip: heartache

The pre-trip phase is exciting! You buy your ticket and start looking up all the local shops, food, attractions, museums, and learn a phrase or two in the local language. I flew in thinking that because I was staying with Americans, I would be lead around like a little mute mouse. I was wrong— but more on that later.

Pre-trip shopping was fun too! I was looking forward to ditching my daily business casual for island life attire and going from my spring clothes in the desert to sundresses

and beachwear attire.

Soon, it was time to drive to the airport and endure all the traveling to get to Okinawa. First, I had to drive from Tucson to Phoenix, then three separate flights until finally arriving at my destination.

Can I take a second and mention how disappointing the domestic flights terminal was in Narita??? I could not believe there was only one airport shop in the terminal and only one or two tellers for the four gates!

By the time I landed in Okinawa, I was exhausted and ready for bed, but most excited to see one of my best friends that I hadn't seen in over a year. I think I was most surprised by the little blue car he was now driving that was a far opposite from the big 4-wheel drive truck he had in the states. I knew the cars would be different, but the “mini” cars as well as driving on the left side took some time to get used to.

I was finally ready for the second phase of trip planning – the wonder of the trip itself. Okinawa took my breath away. Sunabe Sea Wall was my view every morning- I cannot tell you how often I found myself standing against the railing and just taking in the views. I really loved exploring the city life of Chatan and the surrounding areas. The small stores, restaurants, and bars were captivating and intriguing.

American Village became one of my favorite places to visit on the island. There we ate at many restaurants, tried the coffee and bars, and I spent a morning at M-Grace Spa getting a mani-pedi and wandering the shops.

Before my trip, I was worried about traveling alone or having

to be on my own at any point given the language barrier, lack of cell service for maps, and knowing very little about the island. On this trip, I wandered Sunabe and explored Chatan on my own and I have my friend and the Okinawan people to thank for that. Not only did I explore these alone by foot, but I also did it without cell service or wifi (very counter-2019 culture). The freedom from being “always connected” was something I didn't know I needed, and it made the time walking the sea front that much more amazing.

I was eager to see more of the island. We went trekked up the island to Churaumi Aquarium,





Maeda Point to snorkel, walked the trail to Hiji waterfalls, and took the scenic Route 2 around the northern part of the island. Take note, fellow travelers, up north, there are few homes and almost no restaurants. We stopped out at a roadside market and picked random items to munch on (of course, the restaurant at the market closed 15 minutes before we made a pit stop). The road home took us down the eastern side of the island and eventually to Sea Glass Beach in Nago. The overcast skies and few sprinkles of rain meant we had the entire beach to ourselves. The rain held off for a while and we sat there just soaking it all up- and collecting some shells, glass, and making a few hermit crab friends.

As for the food, I knew I would not be disappointed. My friend is a foodie just like me, After all, our friendship in the Arizona desert grew on this fact and we would try new restaurants in Tucson weekly. We visited many places and I tried many local foods including soba, mochi (both savory and sweet!), squid ink bread, purple sweet potato shaved ice, bubble tea, bimbimbap, matcha, drinks from the vending machines on the side of the road, and more!

The last dinner that we had on the island was the most relaxing way to end my trip. My friend that I was staying with pulled a few strings and some very good friends came through with local mahi-mahi they had caught on a fishing trip. From that catch we made homemade poke bowls. I had never had something so incredible and fresh!

My last night in Okinawa was spent laughing with friends, sipping wine, and enjoying the ocean view. Before me in my friend's home was the perfect harmony of the familiarity of the furniture I had helped pick out in the desert, the company of my loved ones combined with the fact that we were halfway across the world on a tropical island listening to the sound of the ocean and not the coyotes howling at the moon.

As quickly as the second phase had started, I was soon in the final phase of travel. My friend was flying out the same day to go on his own adventure, so we packed all our luggage into that little blue car and were on our way. My final morning in Okinawa was a relaxed one, and,

Delicious restaurants I visited during my stay

- Wagyu-Cafe Kapuka, 904-0115 Okinawa, Nakagami District, Chatan Mihama (+81 98-923-5010)
- Kupu Kupu, 904-0114 Okinawa, Nakagami District (+81 98-923-1927)
- Gadou Ramen (+81 98-936-2113)
- Little Cactus Coffee 2-191 Miyagi, Chatan (+81 70-5487-6601)
- & Eggs 3-177 Miyagi, Chatan (+81 98-923-0080)
- Blue Seal Ice Cream- locations throughout the island
- Hard Reef 1-20 Miyagi, Chatan (+81 98-936-9699)
- Yakiniku Yumemaru Mihama- (+81 98-921-7760)
- Climax Coffee- American Village (+81 09-988-7677)
- Zhyvago Coffee Works- American Village (+81 98-989-5023)
- Pork Tamago Onigiri- American Village (+81-98-911-7614)
- Hale Noa Café 2-Chrome-18-6 Chatan (+81-98-911-7614)
- Hali Hali Pancake Restaurant (+81 98-989-0333)

after trying two different restaurants (local businesses on the island sometimes close on random days and keep random hours), we had a nice breakfast at a local eatery.

The "leaving here" moment started as we drove past the big shisa dogs (which I just adore and bought miniature versions of as gifts), and past the ocean on our way to the airport. By the time I landed in the Osaka airport, I was fully aware that I was heading back to the reality of home. Culture shock hit me hard when I was in line for coffee at the SEA-TAC airport and surrounded by frustrated air travelers. Oddly enough, I hadn't noticed that tension in the airports in Japan, either because it was less stressful there or because I was oblivious. By the time I got off the plane in Phoenix, the 102-degree Fahrenheit dry heat and the fact that my trip was over hit me full force. I suddenly craved the humidity of Okinawa.

I'd be lying if I said coming home was easy. I sought out my friend who had just PCS'd from mainland Japan the same day that I flew back to Arizona. He was going through the same "post-travel blues" that I was. I pulled my co-worker aside to talk with her about her trip to China and was relieved to hear that it was just as hard for her to come home.

Traveling is a gift. The chances to explore new cultures, foods, sights, and to see the world is a beautiful and unique experience. It's a change from the stress of daily tasks: work, co-workers, cooking, cleaning, paying bills, feeding the dog, going to the gym, etc. I can truthfully say that I never slept so well or felt as rested every morning as I did on this trip.

My take away from the entire experience can be summed up as so: Breathe. Take time to NOT plan. Take every day as it is, weather and all, and let your plans flow with it.

Finally, and most importantly: Thank you, Okinawa! To the people, places, flora and fauna, weather, etc. I am grateful.



“Each carefully placed stone, tree, and plant paints part of a larger picture, and many times these tell stories from Buddhism or Taoism, such as the carp that transforms into a dragon, or the Zen symbolism of the turtle and the crane ...”

The beauty of Japanese gardens

Story and photos by
SARAH B. HODGE



Ever since my first time being stationed in Japan a decade ago, I've been fascinated by Japanese gardens. For the last several years, I have been active in a number of online Japanese garden groups and have tried to visit as many Japanese gardens as possible. In addition to the outstanding gardens here in Japan, prime examples of Japanese gardens can be found around the world, including Australia, the UK, Germany, the Netherlands and the U. S.

Each carefully placed stone, tree, and plant paints part of a larger picture, and many times these tell stories from Buddhism or Taoism, such as the carp that transforms into a dragon, or the Zen symbolism of the turtle and the crane, represented by vertical and horizontal stone elements. Many Japanese gardens, particularly in Kyoto, are strongly

influenced by Zen philosophy, including karesansui, dry landscape or “zen” gardens meant for contemplation. Oftentimes large gardens will have not one, but several Japanese teahouses on the premises, each with its own small tea garden, or roji. Edo-era feudal lords built elaborate kaiyushiki teien, or circular strolling gardens, which featured a large pond in the center.

Thankfully, a great number of these gardens have been restored and preserved for visitors to enjoy today, and many are at least partially wheelchair and stroller-accessible (check with each garden for accessibility info; most include wheelchair-friendly routes in their pamphlets). Many also offer free guided tours in English. Below are nine of my favorite gardens around Japan:



1 Tokyo: Kiyosumi Gardens

One of Tokyo's best-kept (and most affordable) secrets, these lovely strolling gardens in the heart of Tokyo are easily accessible via metro station Kiyosumi-Shirakawa on the Oedo Line. (Fans of third wave coffeeshops will be happy to know there's a Blue Bottle Roastery and Cafe not too far down the road!)

In 1878, Mitsubishi founder Iwasaki Yatarō selected this location in Fukagawa to create a garden for his employees and for entertaining important guests. The garden first opened in 1880 as “Fukagawa Shimbokuen.” Water from the Sumida River was

diverted to enlarge the pond, and over time, hills and dry waterfalls were created using famous and valuable landscape stones from across Japan. Later donated to the city of Tokyo, Kiyosumi Gardens opened to the public in 1932 and was designated as a Tokyo Metropolitan Place of Scenic Beauty on March 31, 1979.

The gardens feature numerous stone lanterns, pagodas, bridges, and iso-watari, unique stepping stone pathways that create beautiful mirrored reflections. Each step offers the viewer a constantly changing landscape. In the center of the pond is a sukiya-style teahouse that can be rented out for special events and the gardens do hands-on craft workshops (in Japanese with English support) throughout the year.

Website: www.tokyo-park.or.jp/park/format/index033.html

Other recommended Japanese gardens in Tokyo: Rikugien, Koishikawa Korakuen, Ikegami Honmonji (open irregularly), Denbo-in (abbot's private garden at Sensoji; generally open to the public in March for cherry blossom viewing).



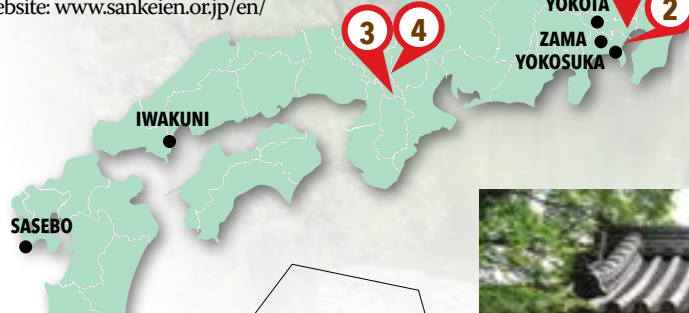


2 Yokohama: Sankeien

Sankei Hara, a wealthy silk merchant in Yokohama, built Sankeien in the early 1900s as his personal garden and villa. Spanning about 43 acres, Sankeien consists of an outer garden (open to the public since 1906), and an inner garden, originally kept private for Sankei's personal use. Seventeen historical structures relocated from Kyoto, Kamakura and elsewhere are harmonized with nature to present magnificent landscapes. Ten of the garden's buildings were declared Important Cultural Properties and three more are

Tangible Cultural Properties of Japan. Severely damaged during WWII, the garden was restored to its original beauty in the mid-1950s. Sankeien offers daily free English tours and regularly hosts art exhibitions and seasonal events for Japanese New Year's, cherry blossom illuminations, firefly viewing, and early morning lotus viewing. A Japanese tea ceremony experience is also available for a fee in the inner garden.

Website: www.sankeien.or.jp/en/



3 Kyoto: Shoseien

When I arrived in Yokosuka in December 2015, one of my first destinations was Kyoto. As I had visited Kyoto six times during my previous deployment in 2011, I asked my hotel concierge for a "local" recommendation, and he sent me off in the direction of nearby Shoseien, a 10-minute walk (but a world away) from bustling Kyoto Station.

One of Kyoto's best-kept secrets, this beautiful 8-acre garden has belonged to nearby Higashi Honganji temple since 1641, when it was donated by Japan's third shōgun Tokugawa Iemitsu. This peaceful oasis features traditional villas and teahouses, several ponds and bridges, and best of all, relatively few visitors. The garden was destroyed by fire on several occasions, so the present structures are 19th century reconstructions. Notable features include a unique ceremonial gate and covered bridge. Shosei-en is surrounded by a high wall and the entrance is easy to miss.

Website: www.higashihonganji.or.jp/english/tour/shosei-en/

Other recommended Kyoto gardens: Nanzenji, Tofukuji, Murin-an, Kokedera (Saihoji), Gyoji, Tenryuji, Okochi Sanso Villa, Hogon-in, garden tours with An Design Kyoto (<https://www.andesignkyoto.com/>)



4 Ohara: Sanzenin / Hosenin

Sanzenin was actually a serendipitous accident – I'd been trying to make an online reservation at the famed moss gardens of Kokedera, but was turned down for my requested date. My guide suggested heading out to Sanzenin instead, and it was one of my best discoveries ever!

Sanzenin is about one hour north of Kyoto and offers a similarly gorgeous moss garden with no reservations required. Green tea and a seasonal sweet are available for 500 yen; it's worth the price to sip and savor as you look out over magnificent Shuhakien Garden.

Nearby Hosenin temple has a small but beautiful garden and a 700-year-old pine tree. History buffs will want to check out the ceiling – Hosenin is one of several chitenjo, or "blood ceiling" temples, that incorporated floorboards from Fushimi Castle. In 1600, the defeated samurai of Tokugawa's retainer

committed ritual suicide to avoid capture, their blood soaking the castle floorboards. 400 years later, visible handprints and footprints remain as a solemn reminder of their sacrifice.

I prefer the temple complex at Hosenin to that of nearby Sanzenin; each room offers spectacular views and the compact but lovely garden is always a delight. Be sure to put your ear to the musical bamboo pipes, or suikinkutsu, to hear the chime-like water drops from the stone basin.

Tip: Ohara is famous for the red shiso leaf used in Japanese pickling, and you can try akajiso soft serve at many roadside stands leading to Sanzenin.

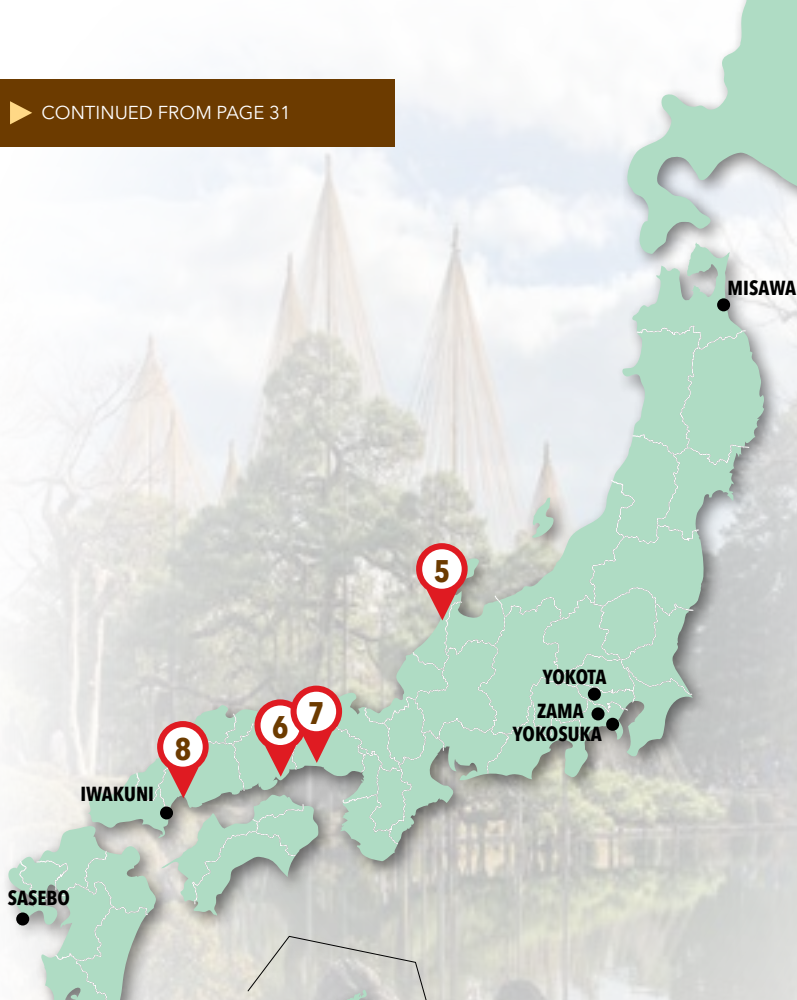


www.sanzenin.or.jp/en/



www.hosenin.net/

CONTINUED ON PAGE 32



5 Kanazawa: Kenrokuen

Kenrokuen is one of the three Great Gardens of Japan; based upon six classical attributes, you'll find beauty at every turn. The garden was created by the ruling Maeda family over three centuries beginning in 1676. The garden was destroyed by fire in 1759, restored in 1774, and in 1822 the garden acquired its current name Kenrokuen. Be sure not to miss green tea in the beautiful teahouse set over the pond

and the famed Kotojitoro lantern. There are also seasonal illuminations. Nearby Kanazawa Castle also features a second beautiful garden, Gyokusen'inmaru garden, dating back to 1634, that features nightly lightups set to music.

Website: www.pref.ishikawa.jp/siro-niwa/kenrokuen/e/index.html
www.pref.ishikawa.jp/siro-niwa/kanazawajou/e/night/



6 Okayama: Okayama Korakuen

Considered one of the Three Great Gardens of Japan (along with Kenrokuen in Kanazawa and Kairakuen in Mito), Korakuen dates back to 1687, when daimyo Ikeda Tsunamasa ordered construction of Korakuen. Completed in 1700, the garden has maintained its appearance until the present. In 1884, ownership was transferred to Okayama Prefecture and the garden was opened to the public. The garden suffered severe damage during floods and later World War II bombing in 1945, but has been restored based on period paintings and diagrams. In 1952, Korakuen Garden was designated as a Special Place of Scenic Beauty and has been preserved for future generations to enjoy.

Website: okayama-korakuen.jp/section/english/index.html



7 Himeji: Koko-en

If you will be visiting beautiful Himeji in Hyogo Prefecture, be sure not to miss the stunning garden located directly next to the castle. A fairly recent addition, Koko-en was built in 1992 in commemoration of Himeji City becoming a municipality. It consists of nine separate walled gardens built in various Edo-period styles, including a tea garden, pine tree garden, bamboo garden, and a flower garden. There is also a traditional Japanese restaurant and teahouse on-site.

Website: www.himeji-machishin.jp/ryokka/koko-en/index.php



8 Hiroshima: Shukkeien

One of my favorite "hidden treasures" is Hiroshima's Shukkeien, a fine example of a "shrunk scenery garden," which incorporates miniature vistas of valleys, mountains, and forests through the garden's landscapes. The garden was commissioned by the ruling Asano family and dates back to 1620, shortly after Hiroshima Castle was completed. A circular strolling garden, Shukkeien makes excellent use of very limited land space by including a large variety of scenery

including a large central lake containing fourteen islands that represent the islands of the Seto Inland Sea. There are multiple teahouses around the garden, with special monthly tea ceremony events.

The garden was not open to the public until 1940, and five years later was destroyed by the atomic bomb, with only the arched stone bridge surviving the blast. It was later rebuilt and restored to its former glory and today over 230,000 visitors a year come to enjoy it.

Website: <https://shukkeien.jp>



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- Sanuki Udon HANAMARU - Noodle Shop
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Okinoerabujima: Welcome to the jungle

Story and photos by
DAVID KRIGBAUM



As the interisland ferry approached Okinoerabujima, I still wasn't sure if I'd made a mistake coming here. Before us was an island of high sea cliffs with green fuzz on top and little else. Wadamari, the island's port town and largest "city" couldn't have had more than a few thousand people in its small collection of low buildings and streets. I'd read it was dreary and desolate, a remote outpost where samurai were exiled as a slower and more miserable alternative to a swift execution. The sky was grey and overcast with intermittent sunlight reinforcing the ambience.

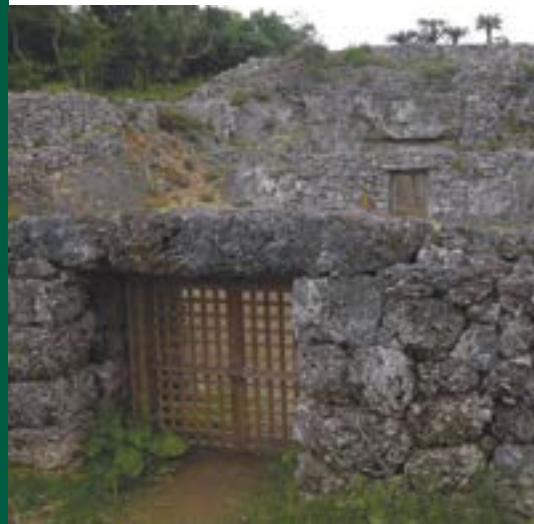
What began with some trepidation ended with the discovery of one of Japan's quietest undiscovered getaways. Okinoerabujima is one of the Amami Oshima islands partway between Kyushu and Okinawa; it's a lightly populated jungle island with natural beauty, history and good food. Everything you could want from a simple vacation, but without the crowds of tourists, high prices or traffic. We arrived just before noon and would have 24 hours to see what the island had to offer.



The most adventurous part of Okinoerabujima was the ruins of Goranmagohachi Castle, built by its namesake 15th-century ruler. This Ryukyu castle was overrun by jungle a long time ago, creating a perfect blend of walkable nature and history.

To get to the castle ruins, we had to enter through a man-made 'hole' in the wall of lush jungle and banyans. Once inside, we were fully enveloped under the jungle canopy. A map at the entrance shows where the trails go, though they're just defined enough to follow. Sometimes I wondered if we got off the path before bumping into a reassuring sign that we hadn't. Earlier in the walk it was easier to follow, but as got closer to the ruins it became more challenging. It really made us feel like we were searching for a lost place.

Our first view of the ruins were the partially collapsed stubby coral walls. After penetrating the first layer of defenses, we had to get under a banyan tree and go through more ruin rubble to get to the remains of the living area. (Yes, this is on the official trail with marked signs) Beyond this, the trail gets fuzzier and we found ourselves surrounded by ropy banyan trees beside a drop leading down to a tall bamboo forest. We raced the sunset to find an exit after an hour of exploring; my wife said she hadn't felt "doki-doki" like this since she was a girl. ↗



➔ Before leaving the area we visited another nearby historic ruin, Yononushi Tomb. It was built for a 15th century ruler that is unlike the turtleback tombs of Okinawa or any Japanese mainland burial sites. The tomb itself is built into a hillside and surrounded by a walled courtyard.



For history, we hit up all things Saigo. Saigo Takamori was one of the men who led the Meiji Restoration that brought about Imperial rule in 1868, and sadly whose life ended in 1877, leading a rebellion against the government he helped create. But before all that he was for banished in 1862 to Okinoerabujima. He only spent a year and seven months here, but even as a prisoner he impacted the island and today the places he visited are memorialized.

Wadomari has a Saigo Shrine

and the Saigo Nanshu Museum shares his Okinoerabujima story. A stoic bronze Saigo in a cage marks where he was held captive. We also dined at the Saigo Diner for the Segodon-buri. A cheesy word pun but filled with all the finest fresh seafood the island has to offer and at a reasonable price.

To learn more about the island itself we stopped at Wadomari Town History & Folk Museum, which is a combination natural and cultural history museum. It was nearly closing time, but the attendant told us don't worry about it and after we finished he gave us a tour of the museum's old house and granary.

Being a tropical island, natural beauty is in abundance. Throughout the trip, we were surrounded by jungle and sugar cane fields, making all the driving we did rather relaxing. Driving a coastal road we were greeted with view after view of high rugged cliffs buffeted by the sea, creating explosions of white foam that disappeared back into the swirling multi-hued blues and greens. The wind whipped hard and it was overcast, but there was a beauty to it I didn't expect. We stopped a few times to walk the cliffs and take in the views at Hanazaki and Sea Turtle Point.

The "biggest" single natural attraction is Japan's largest banyan tree at Kunigami Elementary School. The school's first graduating class planted this now house-sized tree more than 120 years ago.

We stayed overnight in a combination convenience store/diner/inn in a rural village. The accommodations were a bit worn, but the owner was very friendly and a great cook. She made us dinner and breakfast and shared with us a local island treat- tai-imo with brown sugar chunks. Tai-imo is a country potato, that when eaten with a chunk of sugar, tastes a lot like a homemade tortilla but sweeter. Raw brown sugar is a common treat here and during our stay we were given brown sugar candy and sugar chunks to snack on.

The owner was typical of the people we met in the islands. People were friendly and helpful. They went out of their way to offer a few random strangers tea or to help us out. We always seemed to leave places with more brown sugar than when we arrived.

I would recommend this or the other Amami Islands to anyone wanting a quite, slow island vacation over visiting Okinawa's main island. As our host pointed out, due to a lack of accommodations, the island can't actually get over-crowded. Everything was also cheap, from accommodations to food and admission fees. None of the historic sites charged admission.

All of the Amami islands have these core selling points, but each is also unique and so a week of island-hopping using the ferries is a potential vacation in itself. There was also more beaches, mountains, mangroves and caves to visit than we could add to our one-day itinerary, so it may be worthwhile allotting a few days to Okinoerabujima.

'Road trip' from Sasebo to Okinawa

We stopped in the Amami Islands as part of a PCS road trip from Sasebo to Okinawa, which thoroughly confused some people when I filed a travel claim stating I drove to Okinawa. We made a road trip out of it (with the help of ferries) to have one last long trip around my wife's home islands of Kyushu and so we could visit the Amami Islands with a car. We would also have our car with us when we arrived on Okinawa and wouldn't have to go through the hassle of buying a new one. And being a PCS, the trip's cost was partially covered by my travel claim, though that was weeks later.



Despite its remoteness, these islands aren't difficult or terribly expensive to access. For service members stationed on Okinawa, the A Line ("Maru A") and Marix ferries are the cheapest and most adventurous option as they leave from Naha and Motobu every day and stop at four

Amami islands on the

way to Kagoshima. Seats are cheap, but bringing a vehicle is expensive, so I would recommend arranging to rent a car on island before your arrival.

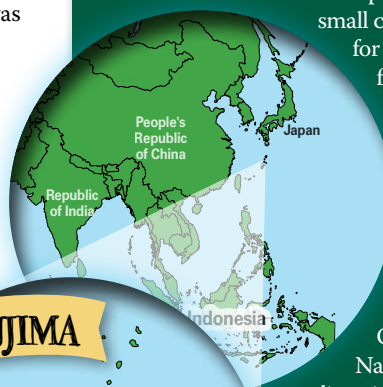
The Kagoshima to Okinawa ferry stops at Amami Oshima, Tokunoshima, Okinoerabujima and Yoronjima. Each island also has an airport with flights from Kagoshima and Okinawa. For those coming from mainland bases, flying to Okinoerabujima may be a better option unless you don't mind the added expense of a drive or train ride to Kagoshima to take the ferry.

The ferry itself from Kagoshima to Okinawa is a 25-hour trip. Getting to the first island, Amami Oshima, is an overnighter so passengers need to pay for 1st, 2nd or 3rd class accommodations. So, you can get a private room, a small cabin with a few other passengers, or sleep on the floor in an open bay on a futon mat. Modestly priced meals are available to purchase during meal hours, and there is a small convenience store and vending machines for snacks, soda and alcohol. Cash is needed for all onboard amenities.

Beside Okinoerabujima, we also visited Amami Oshima for one day. Amami is much larger but boasts the same kind of tropical beauty and attractions. We spent most of the day just driving around the island and admiring its many scenic views.

Amami is far more populous than Okinoerabujima and staying in a downtown Naze hotel, we could enjoy typical nightlife, listening to 80s Japanese rock while drinking at an izakaya. For those who want a little liveliness to an otherwise quite trip, this may be the place to stay.

For our island stays, my wife looked up hotels and also tried different booking websites like Jalan. I recommend having MWR or a Japanese-speaking friend assist you for the best deals if you or your spouse doesn't speak Japanese. We contacted the ferry directly for information and made reservations over the phone. Their websites are in Japanese. It's a little extra work, but not insurmountable and worth it for the trip.



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