

STARS  STRIPES.

# DESTINATION PARADISE

2021-2022

Readers share local adventures,  
dreams of faraway places



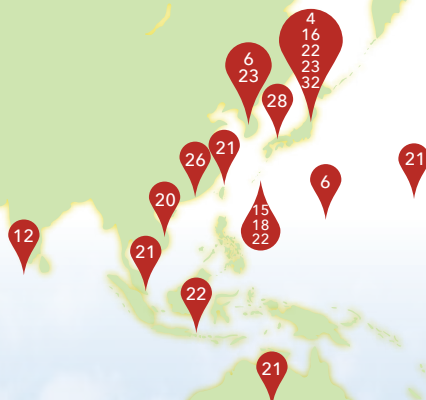
**Special inside: 13 virtual vacations**

Stars and Stripes Community Publication



# DESTINATION PARADISE 2021-2022

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*"I am not the same having seen the moon shine on the other side of the world."*

- Mary Anne Radmacher

This year has not been the best for those of us who love to go on adventures and travel. As the world still reels from the effects of the pandemic, travel still seems to be on hold for most of us.

We know our readers love to travel and explore new places in the Pacific. And your desire to explore and give in to our wanderlust has led to some creative ways to get back that rush. Like many of you, we've also had to change how we think about travel. And, like you, we have had to make the best of a difficult situation.

Our travel plans for the year included trips in full ninja regalia to the local supermarket for ingredients so we could explore via our kitchens and stomachs. Our staycations were a time to not only take care of projects we had been putting on hold, but also for exploring our neighborhoods and local areas.

As the state of the pandemic evolves and rules change, we're looking forward to what getting on a plane to a dream destination will look like. Where will we go? When could we go? How will we stay safe when we get there?

The year of questions continues, but know that you can rely on us to give you the latest information in our daily Stars and Stripes paper and stripes.com, as well as Stripes Japan, Stripes Okinawa, Stripes Korea and Stripes Guam community papers and websites. You can also count on us to bring you some of the great places to visit safely and locally. And when travel finally does fully open, you'll also know we'll be here to show you where to go and how to get there.

Every year, this magazine serves as a place where you can share your travel tales and photos with us. This magazine is a love letter about our desire to see the world.

The beauty is in our memories. It is in the hope that dreaming bigger and letting our imagination take flight will get us through until we can make those dreams reality again.

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.

As you flip through this magazine, you'll see stories from readers like you. Readers who sent in their travel tales to inspire you to continue to seek out the unknown, to get off base, go forth and learn a little about your surroundings and yourself—in safe manners.

Our commitment to bringing you great travel ideas and stories does not end with this magazine, nor does it end with travel. In addition to our 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, don't forget to check out Stripes Pacific on Facebook for more stories, helpful videos and fun contests.

As we slowly start to get back outside, keep us in mind as we 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.

Denisse Rauda  
Publishing and Media Design Editor  
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## Front page photos

Although travel has been limited over the past couple of years because of COVID-19, some in the military community have done their best to explore their local areas. Kyle Haney went rafting in Korea, Cindy Birch and her family enjoyed camping near Mt. Fuji, Allie Whalen's family explored The Lost Beach of Okinawa. As for Jerome S. Baquilar, he can't wait to explore Tokyo again.

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“I am practicing my camera skills, and enjoying the sights, sounds, and flavors of life in my own backyard. The beauty is here. You just have to open your eyes and see it.”

## Light at the end of Tunnel

Story and photos by  
**DALEENA NICHOLS**



“**J**APAN!”  
How excited I was to hear this from the lips of my husband! Oh, the places to go. The foods to try. The sights, sounds, and smells of the heart of Tokyo! Let us not forget Okinawa, Hiroshima, and Mt. Fuji, just to mention a few of the places to experience. I was ready to get back to living life overseas! I knew COVID would be under control by the time we would arrive at Yokota Air Base in September 2020.

Well, nine months later, I have not experienced much of the excitement of Tokyo. I have not made it to Okinawa, Hiroshima, or even Mt. Fuji, yet. But I will! I've been out in Fussa and I have enjoyed the beauty of Yokota. My husband bought me the best gift ever! He gave me a Canon EOS 60 D. I have discovered a love for photography!

### Fun-filled day trip

Recently, a friend took me to Takashimaya, a department store in Tachikawa. It is about a 20-minute drive from Yokota. I had the best time! We ate at an Okinawan restaurant. I closed my eyes and pretended I was on the beach. I savored every bite of food. My friend told me the food of Okinawa was better than your typical Japanese cuisine. I think she is right! If you like shopping this is the



place to go. The mall was so big! Whatever you want you will find there. I was impressed with the tarts. They were like beautiful works of art. I could have stayed longer. There were so many wonderful things to see. It was a great day trip. I can't wait to go back and explore more.

I can see the light at the end of the tunnel. I know, it won't be long until we will be going to the heart of Tokyo, Okinawa, Hiroshima, and many more places. Until then, I am practicing my camera skills, and enjoying the sights, sounds, and flavors of life in my own backyard. The beauty is here. You just have to open your eyes and see it.







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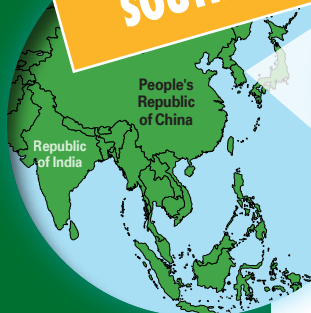
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“As I began traveling, I realized that the ‘X-number’ of days we have left in our assignments, or situations in general, is actually the end of what could be an amazing opportunity that life has given to us.”

## Remain in the moment

Story and photos by  
**KYLE HANEY**



Fifty-two weeks—fifty-two weeks is what I have left in Korea before I’m off to somewhere else. And if you’re anything like me, you’ve probably chanted some version of this phrase yourself in a mantra-like fashion at least once in your career; “only ‘x-number’ of days left until I’m...” fill in the blank.

I used to believe that focusing on the future was just what people did to make their current situations more bearable so, naturally, I followed suit. I thought this line of thinking was normal and I embodied that mindset for most of my adult life when unfavorable situations arose. However, as I began traveling, I realized that the ‘X-number’ of days we have left in our assignments, or situations in general, is actually the end of what could be an amazing opportunity that life has given to us. Funny how something like traveling can be a catalyst to a change of mind, isn’t it?

Let me clarify, when I tell myself I only have ‘X-number’ of weeks left in Korea/this assignment/blank, I say it with a sense of urgency, not despair. The more traveling I do, and the more life throws at me, the more I

realize how much of it I’m not going to experience with my short amount of time I have here—in Korea and on planet earth. My perspective of learning, growing, or simply cherishing a moment gets stronger with each situation I find myself in and it’s up to me

if I’m willing to act accordingly. I have to strive to remain in the moment because before I know it, my moments will be a thing of the past.

When I first took my assignment for a 365 in Korea, I dreamed of riding an elephant in Thailand and snorkeling alongside green sea turtles near the Great Barrier Reef in Australia but, COVID really ruined those plans. So, I had a choice: remain bummed at the loss of an opportunity or change my mind.

South Korea, at least the South Korea I’ve experienced in my short two months since being stationed here, is absolutely gorgeous. It offers incredible cityscape views, delicious food combinations, and 22 National Parks that personify magnificence. Not only that, but South Korea also has beaches for lounging on with the family, springs for soaking in after a rough week at work, and hundreds of cultural activities offered year-round. With this plethora of things to do, the sense of urgency to see it all becomes very, very real, and I constantly remind myself to stay in the moment or I might miss what’s in front of me.

### How to travel during pandemic

But we’re all in some version of a lockdown, right? How are you supposed to see anything with the threat of COVID and its entourage of lockdown and quarantine still looming around every weekend? Well, that depends on how you approach the lockdown situation. You can approach it with a sense of doom and gloom, or you can be like water and move towards the path of least resistance. For example, if areas I and II are off-limits, then you can choose to see that as being a part of Korea that you won’t get to see, or as a universal aid to helping you eliminate choices on what you’re going to see/do this weekend. That’s how you travel during a pandemic; it’s that





VIEW STORY  
AND VIDEO!

easy. Read my blog how I explored the US during 2020 at [www.globetrotterkyle.com/how-i-took-advantage-of-covid/](http://www.globetrotterkyle.com/how-i-took-advantage-of-covid/).

Just a few weeks ago I made plans to visit Seoul but, like everything in life, plans changed and Areas I and II (Seoul included) were declared off-limits a few days before the weekend. So, I pulled out my map app ([Kakao Maps](#)) and scrolled south, not knowing what I was looking for. I noticed a pin dropped in a remote area and all it said was “waterfall”, and just like that I had new plans. “How often do you get to visit waterfalls in South Korea?” I asked myself. Saturday morning came and I wandered down south to Gyeongongsan National Park.

As I neared the entrance to the park, I decided to stop and grab a bite to eat at a spot that simply read “Brunch”. Brunch in this case was a quaint little café set in the valleys of the Gyeongongsan mountains with an incredible pastry spread. I sat smiling as I ate Korean pastries in a Korean café set just a few hundred feet from South Korea’s 2nd oldest National Park. I was experiencing something few Americans will ever get to claim they’ve also done.

I finished my pastries, walked up to the gate to buy my entrance ticket, and before I knew it, I was surrounded by lush tree coverage and my kind of people: explorers. I pressed deep into the National Park and soon discovered

a temple that was built by a Buddhist monk in 713 AD called the Donghaksa Temple. After I finished admiring the iconic temple architecture, I pressed deeper into the park deciding to summit a nearby mountain rather than viewing a waterfall.

I stuck to a trail that took me 766m into the air with 360-degree views of the picturesque Korean mountains that took my breath away (figuratively and literally, thanks to the incline). In one heading, the skies were cloudless and deep blue while in another direction, a massive thunderhead was building in anticipation of unleashing hundreds of gallons of water some nine or 10 kilometers away. The air was crisp, and the sound of silence was all around me. I paused and soaked the moment in before my weary legs begged me to return to the car.

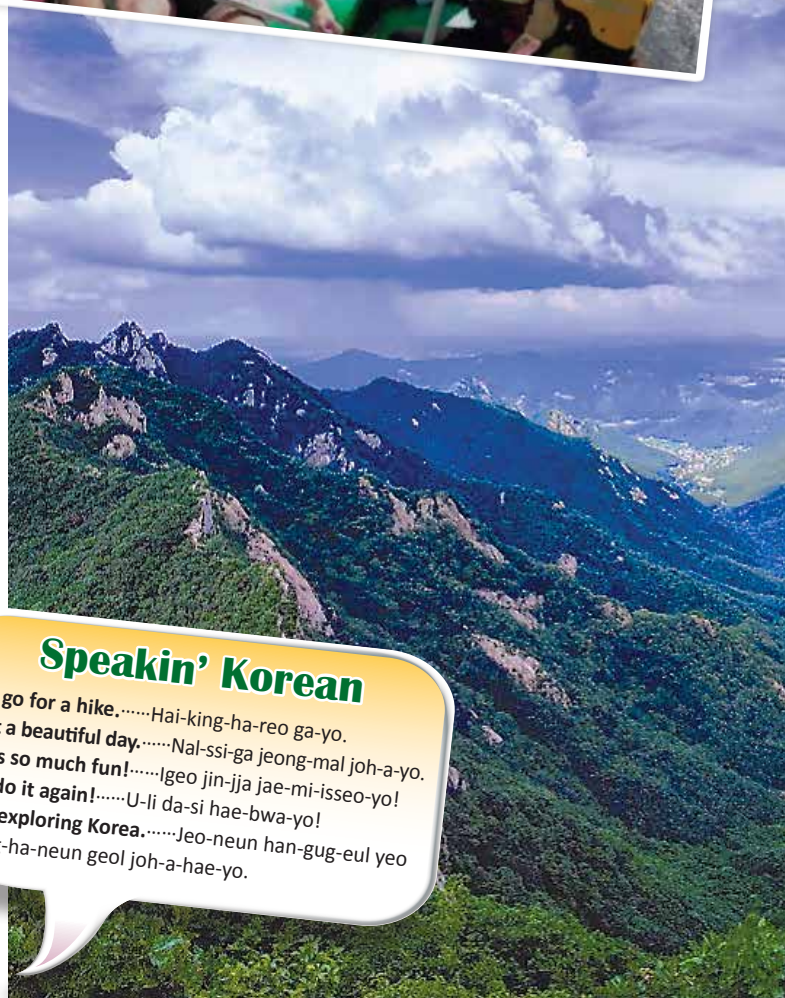
The trail continued in a loop fashion, back towards where I had begun, so I continued down. Towards the end of the hike, as if I had planned it, I came across a waterfall on the trail I had taken by complete chance. With no one around, I removed my shirt and took a deep soak in the cold waters, cooling my body off. My legs were tired, my body was sore, but I was at peace.



KAKAO MAP



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### Speakin' Korean

Let's go for a hike.....Hai-king-ha-reo ga-yo.  
What a beautiful day.....Nal-ssi-ga jeong-mal joh-a-yo.  
This is so much fun!.....Igeo jin-jja jae-mi-isseo-yo!  
Let's do it again!.....U-li da-si hae-bwa-yo!  
I love exploring Korea.....Jeo-neun han-gug-eul yeo  
-haeng-ha-neun geol joh-a-hae-yo.

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“While strolling the islands, you’ll see the famous weird-looking Maldivian hammock. Like the stray cats, they’re everywhere. Goofy-looking contraptions (netting sewed or tied around steely frames), they are, nevertheless, comfortable.”

## MALDIVES: Your tropical island escape

Story and photos by  
**RON ROMAN**



A view of downtown Male from Villingili.  
(Notice Maldives' tallest building in center)

**T**hinking of escaping to a tropical island paradise? Well, don't think too long if you have the Maldives Islands in mind.

Located in the Indian Ocean southwest of Sri Lanka, they're slated to be swallowed up in 20-30 years owing to rising sea levels courtesy of global warming. (Their highest natural elevations above sea level rise a little more than the height of your average pro basketball player.)

My wife and I decided to check out the islands for a week in December 2019 after the rainy season (June-July), but also well into the pricey high

source). Just don't taxi into Velana International Airport and expect to wing it. You'll pay through your nose.

The country is comprised of just under 1,200 islands or atolls (island clusters), with only about 200 inhabited. Total population: 450,000 with Male (capital city and central hub) home to about 150,000. Weather is warm, yet never scorching hot (25-30 degrees C. year-round), so weather-wise anytime is good other than the rainy season. What follows (below) is that of a budget-minded itinerary; no luxury resort settings detailed here.



### Island Time

We spent most of our time in Hulhumale, a man-made island northeast of Male and adjoined by the recently constructed Chinese-Maldives Friendship Bridge. (Chinese investment is pronounced in the country.) Our hotel manager and tour guide ("Shattu"), who spoke excellent English (decent English is widely spoken), picked us up late at night at the airport and drove us for about 20 minutes to his hotel on the east side of the island, saving us about 40 rufiyaa: their national currency. (About 15 rufiyaa = \$1. Change currency while at the airport; currency exchange elsewhere can be inconvenient.) We spent about \$130/day; rooms were small, though accommodations adequate. Our TV never worked (we mainly used the room only to sleep), but at least the A/C did. Hulhumale is a great place to stay: close to Male, yet far enough away from its noise and congestion. Just remember to stay on the eastern side; that's where the great pearl-white



beaches are, some of the finest in the world.

Hospitality service is slow throughout the islands. By the end of the following day, my wife was remarking, "You have to get used to the slow customer service. Everywhere. Reminds me of life in the Philippines." Expect to s-l-o-w your inner clock while waiting on food, drink, etc., in commercial establishments. Must be that universal tropical island culture. Everywhere.

First off, the Maldives has been a Muslim country since 1193, although a liberal one. Second off, remember that, except for restaurants, everything closes down on Friday, the Muslim holy day. Conservative dress codes, especially on beaches, are strictly enforced. Exceptions are only made for foreign tourists at the luxury resorts' so-called "bikini beaches." There, women are allowed to swim scantily dressed--just not too scantily. Topless bathing, of course, is strictly prohibited. Elsewhere, beach dress-code signs are posted, many only in English. (Maldivians don't have to be reminded.) Men are also advised to wear T-shirts.

Everywhere expect to see myriad cats, mostly strays. Though always hungry, most look well-fed; locals and tourists alike toss them scraps. But dogs? Being a Muslim country, we never saw a single one. An occasional chicken with her chicks can be spotted strutting around, especially in vacant lots undergoing construction. Lots under construction are omnipresent, and often overflow with leftover debris, in effect becoming trash dumps and havens for these meandering cats and chicks. Don't be surprised to find loads of litter dotting the landscape in these abandoned lots alongside pristine guest-houses. You'll get used to it.

### Time in the capital

Next up: The capital, Male. It has the greatest concentration of diverse tourist attractions, a half-dozen total. Something suitable for everybody. You can take them all in within a half-day. Male is accessible by bus, taxi, or ferry. Supposedly there are private car rental agencies as well, though we didn't see any. Also, motorized scooters are rentable at diverse prices (\$20/day), but, driving is far too dangerous. Skip them; go by bus, taxi, ferry, or foot. Once you get to central Male, you'll think you're trapped inside a Mad Max movie. Streets explode with racing, gas-belching scooters. Utter anarchy. Miracle upon miracle riders

are not sent to the hospital—or morgue—in droves. Pedestrians scurry across streets at their own peril.

Its name may tire the tongue, yet it's an easy walk to the Masjid-Al Sultan Muhammad Thakurufaanu Al-Auzam and Islamic Centre (note the influence of British spelling), also known simply as Grand Friday Mosque. It's probably the most imposing building in the country, and considered one of the most beautiful mosques in the world, noted for its humble yet arrestingly white majestic façade. Shattu led my wife and me over to the front entrance. Two Muslim men, a custodian and a visiting Sri Lankan Shattu later told us, intercepted our advance. The two argued heatedly whether to allow me, a non-Muslim man, permission to enter shoeless inside the chamber. (Being a woman, my wife had already been summarily ejected.) Shattu tried to intervene. To defuse the debate I declined to enter.

There are other, though not all that many, sights to take in around central Male. We would return the next day. Before heading back to the hotel, the three of us decided to try out one of the many splendid cafes (alcohol is

not served: Muslim country, remember?) to scarf down one of the islands' unique tropical drinks, whose name escapes me. Doesn't matter. Menus are replete with drinks and accompanying colorful photos; be adventurous and order. Plenty of oddball fruity concoctions to wolf down as well like "Seagull Hut" (no kidding): vanilla ice cream laden with choco-chips, hazelnuts, pistachios, chopped chocolate and pineapple slices topped off with a fat maraschino cherry. All for only 120 rufiyaa.

Back in Hulhumale there were several excellent Indian and Pakistani restaurants near the hotel. We dined at the nearest. Maldives is host to especially good Indian and Pakistani eateries; they're reported to be among the finest found anywhere, given their cost. Later, I went by myself for a beat-down: a 60-minute Thai massage for \$36, plus token tip. The wife stayed behind. Bruises easily. Ticklish, too.

Next morning I was up early to jog the beach in a drizzle and headwind. Inclement weather canceled our submarine tour in Male yet again. Though the wet season may be long over, expect rain anytime.

But don't worry: Weather can change in a Maldives minute, and often does. The tour would wait. An eatery across the street served the traditional Maldivian breakfast of mas huni: chopped tuna with grated coconut, onions, and chili. It has a near-unique flavor, anything but typical. It's best eaten with baked roshi bread and plenty of black pepper, and is often served with sweet hot tea. I chose coffee. Try it.

### Visiting a museum

Next stop: central Male. Again. This time the wife and I hopped on a local bus to the Male Bus Station. Buses are clean, convenient, and cheap. Fare was only 20 rufiyaa, about \$1.25. Heads-up: Pay attention to your surroundings in public transportation hubs. I almost mistook the men's central prayer room for the men's public latrine. The signs can easily be misidentified, especially when you're inattentive and in a hurry.

We walked to the two-story National Museum. Admission: 100 rufiyaa/adult. Outside is a commemorative plaque, again a testimony to China's growing influence in the country: "This Building was donated by the People's Republic



Roasting marshmallows on the beach.



Villingili (island) woman roasting coconut shells.



Inside the Islamic Center.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14





Outside the National Museum.



Museum display of Longman's Beaked Whale.

## CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

of China to the People of the Republic of Maldives." Inside there's an interesting and colorful stamp collection on the first floor complete with a World Heritage five-minute video exhibiting the history of Maldives' stamps.

A don't-miss. It takes only 45-50 minutes to see the entire museum, but get there early; it closes by 4 pm. Also included is a section devoted to the history of the Maldivian police dating to their inception (1933). I sought to make a joke to a tough-looking male attendant that judging from the photos of a few of the past police commissioners they looked like street criminals themselves. He cracked a wan smile. At least he had a sense of humor. It was a joke I should've kept to myself. Upstairs the entire second floor is devoted to miscellaneous historical artifacts, particularly those pertaining to the Maldives' seafaring culture. It was closing time. We headed outside for the closest café ....

While polishing off another oddball tropical dessert, one of many torrential downpours hit. Expect to get soused and doused while visiting the Maldives at any time. After ordering an extra coffee as an excuse to loiter, we finally went outside when the rain subsided and made a beeline for the nearest supermarket to load up on snacks to munch on back at the hotel. (Food is not cheap here). Later, trying to flag down a taxi for Hulhumale was an ordeal. Word of Advice: Taxis are difficult to find in Male, particularly when people get off work. Allot yourself extra time. A lot of extra time.

### Emergency room

More rain welcomed us early Friday morning. Everything was closed, so Shattu drove us to Male ferry terminal to explore nearby island of Villingili. Cost: 6.5 rufiyaa (for two), or about \$.25 per rider, not bad for a one-way, 10-minute choppy ride. Within 10 minutes of arrival, my wife, a kind-hearted soul, spied a few street cats, and took out a snack from my pack to feed them. One of the bigger, greedier cats, in an attempt to swipe away food from another,

swiped my wife's finger instead. A local police car happened to be going by; we got free taxi service to Villimale Hospital. After a freshly applied dressing in the emergency room, we were on our way after I had coughed up 200 rufiyaa for "Casualty 41." As I went outside, I got hit with another 20 rufiyaa for the dressing for 220 rufiyaa (total) or about \$15.

### Hammocks and (no) tattoos

While strolling the islands, you'll see the famous weird-looking Maldivian hammock.

Like the stray cats, they're everywhere. Goofy-looking contraptions (netting sewed or tied around steely frames), they are, nevertheless, comfortable. Some are perched on overhead branches; others are set up on the ground. Try them. You'll be lulled to sleep and snoring like a sailor in no time. Yet there's one thing you won't find on the

beaches, at least not among the locals: tattoos. For most Muslims they're haram (Arabic word for "forbidden," and hence against Islamic principles). As stated earlier, the Maldives may be liberal, but it's still officially an Islamic republic. Later, we made our way to a beach, never far away, and were greeted by a family that offered us roasted marshmallows cooked over a pit of burning coconut shells. Delicious. Soon it was time to ferry back to Male and then taxi to our hotel.

The next morning it was raining, though our submarine tour was still on. Our predesignated pick-up guide was nowhere to be seen come our mutually agreed-upon pick-up time to the submarine pier in Male. Word of caution: As happened so many times, the locals often don't follow through on their promises. We called a pick-up taxi instead and, though the driver said he knew our destination, took us to the international airport instead, result of a silly misunderstanding between him and one of our hotel employees. Ultimately it didn't matter: The sub tour had just been canceled again because of the weather. Ah, stuck again—this time at the airport where we hung out to do essentially nothing before grabbing a taxi back

to Hulhumale to stop by the island's sole movie theater only to discover there was really nothing for us to see. We then meandered around in the rain, soon-to-be drizzle, stopping by a super-market to buy unnecessary odds and ends, and made our way back to the hotel where I drank hot tea and my wife dressed for the beach. She took a dip, then, protected by an oversized umbrella, we both napped under a gentle drizzle before returning to the hotel restaurant for another delicious spicy tandoori chicken pizza and relaxation. Our room TV still wasn't fixed, and would remain that way for the remainder of the trip. I went out by myself to get beat up again at the local Thai massage parlor. Even on a tropical island paradise every day can't be all that exciting.

### Submarine ride

On our last day, we woke up to sunshine (finally), and were soon on our way to the long-awaited submarine tour in Male. A 20-minute boat ride takes you out to the mini-sub floating a few kilometers from shore. Price: \$95/adult. Submersion lasts about 45 minutes, and descent is down to 115 feet, showcasing behind thick glass a panoramic view of swarms of multi-colored fishes and—surprise—an underwater diver who pops up right in front of your glass window. The sub, no more than six feet high inside, makes for a tight, but manageable, seating arrangement. Considering the short time allotted, it's a rather expensive ride, but worth it.

Afterward we walked to a café in downtown Male for drinks, then taxied back to the hotel for a quick snooze and to hit the beach for a final jog, swim, and last-minute elusive sunshine. Dinner was at the hotel, and I had a one-for-the-road beat-down again at the Thai parlor.

Our bags already packed, Shattu soon drove us to the airport. We got out at the terminal entrance. Though a Muslim, he wasn't shy about hugging my better half—and giving me a hug as well. It would be a fitting farewell to time spent in the Maldives: the Indian Ocean's tropical island escape.

—Ron Roman has taught English and the humanities for the University of Maryland Global Campus (UMGC – Asia) all over the Pacific until the COVID-19 crisis earlier last year. His thriller novel "Of Ashes and Dust" is scheduled for release in the fall of 2022 by Addison & Highsmith.



One of Many Exotic Desserts



“You won’t find many roads that lead to it or well-worn trails. The only other people we saw out this far were local fishermen taking advantage of fishing during low tide.”

## The Lost Beach of Okinawa

Story and photos by  
**ALLIE WHALEN**



Okinawa is well-known for having more places to hike than you can shake a stick at. A lot of Okinawa's famous hikes are through dense jungles and mountainous regions. If you'd prefer to hike along a beach rather than a mountain path, then The Lost Beach in northern Okinawa is perfect for you! You'll hike past The Shrine Ruins of Lost Beach, roads leading to nowhere, beautiful tide pools, and huge boulders. If you explore The Lost Beach during late spring and early summer you'll even find sea turtle nests, and if you get really lucky, you'll find sea turtle tracks through the sand.

The Lost Beach is located in the northern part of the island on the East Coast. It is just south of Hedo Point and is a very remote stretch of beach. You won't find many roads that lead to it or well-worn trails. The only other people we saw out this far were local fishermen taking advantage of fishing during low tide.

Since The Lost Beach is so remote you'll want to make sure that you are prepared for this hike. A comfortable pair of hiking shoes that you don't mind getting wet will help on the rocks, but we made it work with sandals and flip flops. My personal favorite shoes for this type of hike are Luna Sandals. You'll also want enough water for each person for at least 4 hours of exploring. You won't find any vending machines or convenience stores within 20 minutes of this part of the island so pack whatever food or medical supplies you might need. I never go on a hike without a fully charged phone and camera battery either! Sun protection is always a good idea too, since there isn't much shade along the coast.

This water filter came in handy!



### Speakin' Japanese

Let's go to the beach!.....Beach (biichi) ni ikou!

Which beach do you recommend?.....Dono biichi ga osusume desuka? ("dono" = which, "osusume" = something you would recommend, "desuka?" = do you~/ is it~)

I want to try parasailing and surfing.....Parasailing to surfing (saafin) ni chousen shitai deusu. ("chousen" = challenge, "shitai deusu" = I want to do ~!)



There are two places you can start this hike. We started from Oku Beach and hiked north, but you can also start from this parking area near the Okinawa Rail Observation Deck and hike south. The road down to Oku Beach is a narrow switchback. Take it slow since lots of people use this road to access the parking area at the end for fishing. Once you park at Oku Beach and start the hike out it is about 1.5 miles to the Triangle Tunnel. We originally were just aiming to make it to The Shrine Ruins of Lost Beach but, once you make it that far, the beach opens up to a huge and beautiful section of coast line that was so much fun to explore!

### Morning start

We timed the hike to start in the morning when the tide was going out. I would really recommend this, especially if you have kids. When you make the return hike you will be able to walk back through the tide pools. Once you leave Oku Beach and continue north along the coast it is a very rocky hike. We slowly scrambled up and down huge boulders with our kids ages, 10, 8, and 4. We often had to tell our two older kids to slow down and wait. This was the hardest and slowest part of the hike.

Just before you reach The Shrine Ruins of Lost Beach there is a rope for scaling down the largest boulder. My two older kids and husband gladly chose the rope while I waded through waist-deep water with my youngest son. I'm not a lover of heights but my kids loved the rope and wanted to do it again!

As you round the corner after the rope portion of the hike, you will begin to see the ruins. To put it lightly, they definitely look like ruins. My kids were a little disappointed while I was

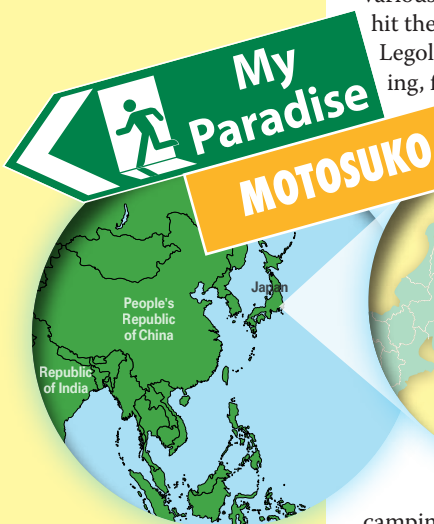
CONTINUED ON PAGE 17



“We began researching various areas to go camping. I did my research, and my spouse did his research. We both exclaimed that we had found the perfect spot. Low and behold, we had both chosen the same campground: Kouan Campground.”

## Camping in style in Japan

Story and photos by  
**CINDY BIRCH**



Throughout the last 10 years, my family and I have traveled to 23 countries. We lived in the USA, Europe and now Japan. Our lavish adventures included trips to Egypt, Italy, Tenerife, France, Cypress, Greece, Spain, Turkey and the Philippines, to name a few. Then, everything came to a halt as the COVID restrictions came into play. We followed all protective health measures, wearing masks, social distancing and followed all protocols to protect ourselves and others. As various areas began to open, we immediately hit the road. We went to Shimoda Beach, Legoland, Tama Hills Recreation Area, hiking, fishing, picnicking and camping within Japan. We also traveled to Okinawa. We still practiced protective measures and followed PHE (Public Health Emergency) recommendations, but it was nice to fulfill the travel bug once again! We have enjoyed camping for the past 15 years of our marriage,

and as children, we both went camping with our families. We now enjoy taking our son camping. When we knew it was going to be limited on what we could do, we began researching various areas to go camping. I did my research, and my spouse did his research. We both exclaimed that we had found the perfect spot. Low and behold, we had both chosen the same campground: Kouan Campground.

Our piece of paradise is camping at Kouan Campground at Lake Motosuko, Japan. Mount Fuji is across the lake. If you look on the back the 1,000 yen bill, the same image reflects across the lake early in the morning and different parts of the day. It is such a beautiful landscape, placid lake and care-free campground.

Now, we like to camp in style. We have a huge tent that sleeps 12; although, we only have 3 in our family, plus 2 dogs. We sleep in -25 degree sleeping bags, cots, and air mattresses, depending on the time of the year. Our amazing camping gear also includes a canopy, table, camping chairs, kitchen area with a sink, shower, changing area pop-up tent, and a portable toilet. We always say, “We take everything and the kitchen sink!”

We take our portable grill. In addition, we have drinks, snacks and an ice-chest full of







breakfast, lunch and dinner cuisine. We grill Wagyu, chicken kebabs, ribeyes, hamburgers and hot dogs. We also have side dishes. We never forget Jiffy Pop Popcorn and S'mores!

The scenery is breathtaking. The views of Mount Fuji are incredible. We camp in the wooded areas; however, many others prefer right on the beach. Camping at Kouan has been our paradise "go to" several times. We enjoy fishing, and we have caught some good size trout. We bring our raft, T-Rex and Penguin floats and enjoy the clear, blue lake. Our dogs enjoy swimming, too.

If you decide to camp in the wooded areas, you can build your own campfire. We often take our own firewood, and sit by the blazing fire. There is a small store for firewood, too. It keeps you warm during cold evenings, or it is nice to have in order to get your marshmallows just right! You can also do small

fireworks, which is always a joy for children and adults!

The drive from Yokota AB to Kouan Campground is about 90 minutes. The tolls cost approximately 4,300 yen. The camping fees are very reasonable, along with rental costs of kayaks, canoes, SUP (stand up paddle boards), and life jackets. Fishing licenses are available for purchase. Showers are available for those who do not carry their own portable showers. If you need other items, the drive back to the nearest town is about 25 minutes. If you desire the best peaches during peach season, there are road-side farmers' markets that sell different fruits, vegetables and the like.

If you have not enjoyed this breathtaking campground, check it out! They also have a bath, sink clean-up area, toilets and showers near the beach camp sites. They offer a

restaurant and cabins for those who prefer enclosed camping and eating out. You can also take your pets as long as they remain on a leash. We will be happy to share our piece of paradise with you!

When I chose to share our little piece of paradise, I could have easily chosen our memories of riding camels in Egypt, or snorkeling in the Red Sea or even basking on the beaches of Spain. However, I wanted to share this location in Japan. We occasionally see a few Americans, but the Japanese enjoy camping as much as we do. You will be very impressed with their set-ups, too!

See <https://kouan-motosuko.com/en/> and get your camping on!

## CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15

intrigued thinking about the history of the old shrine. There is not much left of it except a lot of fallen wood and the outline of the old structure. I haven't been able to find any information about it, but would guess that the large wooden supports were hand hewn.

After the shrine ruins, you will see the remainder of a bridge from an old road that once hugged this part of the coastline. You can still see a large portion of the bridge, and after heavy rains, there is a river that runs under it. It is an old culvert that would have allowed the water to flow under the road. The stone bridge is beautiful and is pieced together in a herringbone pattern.

After the shrine and the bridge, the coastline opens up into one of the widest and largest sections of beach I have seen on Okinawa! By this point in the hike the tide was out, so the kids had more beach to explore than they knew what to do with. We could have stayed and explored in this area all day long. It was on this section of the beach that we saw the sea

turtle tracks and nests, it was truly incredible to stumble upon. We had seen sea turtle nests on the beaches up north before but never the sea turtle tracks!

### Turtles and trash

Sadly we also saw the most trash on the beaches here. There was a bit of everything including the largest buoy I've ever seen, old beach towels, thousands of pieces of plastic, and enough old boots to make several matching pairs. It was a bittersweet moment where I was ecstatic and in disbelief that I got to photograph sea turtle tracks leading to their nests while sadly taking in the state of the beach. The majority of the trash was not intentionally left by visitors but it was depressing to see what what new obstacles washed up only to have sea turtles navigate over them to lay their nest. One might assume there are no beach clean-ups due to the difficult-to-reach nature of this beach.

On the return hike, the tide was low enough that we didn't have to scramble over the huge boulders. We were able to wade through the water all the way back to Oku Beach. We gingerly walked through tide pools, amazed at the sea life we were seeing. We saw all of the "usual suspects" including brittle sea stars, sea cucumbers and sea urchins. But we also saw some creatures that we had only seen pictures of before! We saw a juvenile sea snake slithering through the tide pools and we

saw several nudibranchs clinging to the side of coral. The highlight of the tidepools was seeing an octopus quickly swim away and squirt ink. It was all an amazing science lesson and gave us lots of things to research when we got home.

As with most things in Okinawa, I often wonder about the history behind the area. Thankfully I am part of a Facebook group called "Hike Okinawa" and it is run by the very knowledgeable Rob Oechsle. Rob has also hiked The Lost Beach and shared what he knows about the old road and history behind this part of Okinawa. In his post Rob shares the following information:

"For almost 3 years from 1941 to 1944, a thousand Okinawans labored to build a two-lane 'super highway' between Hedo Point and the Village of Oku. Besides massive retaining walls along the whole length, 10 concrete arch-bridges were constructed over small springs, creeks, and washes. In the middle of the long stretch of road was The Triangle Tunnel, about 7 meters wide at the base, blasted through solid rock. The road is now gone but here and there along the way you will catch bits and pieces of the road they once built."

Our hike along The Lost Beach was not one we will quickly forget!

More from Allie Whalen:  
[www.alliemwhalen.com/](http://www.alliemwhalen.com/)



“Calling it a ferry is a misnomer as ocean-going ferries are more inter-island freight vessels with passenger service on the side. It’s more akin to a cargo ship than the little boats which cross rivers and bays that come to mind when you say ferry.”

## Seeing Japan's tropical paradises by ferry

Story and photos by  
**DAVID KRIGBAUM,**

Recently my wife and I PCSed from Sasebo to Okinawa. We decided to end our time in Kyushu in style and road-tripped our way to the island. That’s right, we drove to Okinawa.

Our 10-day trip culminated in an ocean-going ferry ride from Kagoshima City to Okinawa with stops along the way to see the Amami Islands.

The Amami Islands are an archipelago partway between Kyushu and Okinawa. These little islands are what you’re looking for in a tropical getaway—they’re lightly populated yet geared for tourists with beautiful landscapes of sea, jungle and mountains, historic ruins and plenty of outdoor adventures. Traffic is nonexistent, lodging and food are very affordable and the people are among the friendliest we’ve ever encountered in Japan.

It is possible to fly to all four of the Amami Islands the ferry stops at, but for us, driving with the car we will use in Okinawa made sense. Compared with flying taking the ferry is easier, cheaper, requires far less inappropriate touching by security personnel, plus, there’s no unpleasantness because they felt the one-inch nail file on my toenail clippers was “threatening.” (Both true stories.) There’s also a certain adventurousness that comes with arriving via ship to a freight terminal on a remote island.

Calling it a ferry is a misnomer as ocean-going ferries are more inter-island freight vessels with passenger service on the side. It’s more akin to a cargo ship than the little boats which cross rivers and bays that come to mind when you say “ferry.”

Two ferry companies service the same routes on alternate days, A Line (“Maru A”) and Marix. There is little difference between them in

either service or cost and we used both during our trip. A full trip from Kyushu to Okinawa takes about 25 hours. They run on a constant loop, so there is one stop at each destination every day by one of the two companies.

Arranging for a trip was easy but requires a Japanese speaker for easy navigation if dealing with the company. My wife called ahead of time to check the schedule and though we didn’t

make reservations we were

able to show up an hour before boarding to purchase tickets.

By calling ahead you can also see what special deals are available, such as unlimited stops during a set period. (Think bumming between islands for a week whenever you feel like.) An alternate choice is going online and buying tickets through an English-language ferry website like [aferry.com](http://aferry.com).

Since we brought a car we had to wait on the pier at Kagoshima’s Shinkoku Port in our vehicle until it was time to drive aboard. We repeated this process two more times with no trouble at our two stops when we had to get back on. Sakurajima, Kagoshima’s friendly neighborhood active volcano had been smoking for a few

days and our car got covered in a fine layer of ash while waiting. The first leg of our trip to Amami Os-



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hima was overnight, so the ferry boarded around 5 p.m. and took off about an hour later when it was dark.

Price-wise, bringing a vehicle is only viable compared to flying when PCSing. Renting a vehicle once you arrive on an island is a better option if you're on holiday. From Kagoshima to Naha the ferry is less than \$150 a person if traveling on foot, tickets between islands can be as low as \$15. Bringing a car adds several hundred dollars to the equation.

The ferries offer three classes of accommodations for visitors which correspond only to sleeping arrangements; all passenger areas are open to everyone. 1st Class is a private cabin, 2nd Class is a shared cabin and 3rd Class is Japanese style on the floor in a large open bay.

The trips were smooth with the ocean only gently rolling us in a sleep-inducing and lackadaisical manner. Only on the overnight trip to Amami Oshima did we choose 2nd class accommodations, which entailed a rack in a cabin for eight. It's pretty similar to a navy berthing minus about 100 people and that odor. (You know the one.) There's an open shelf for your bag and the ship also has smaller lockers for valuables that anyone can use.

For our day cruises, Amami-Okinoerabujima and Okinoerabujima-Motobu (Okinawa), we chose 3rd Class accommodations as sleep wasn't that relevant though we did nap at one point. Dropping off cargo and passengers on schedule for these ferries means pre-dawn

pitch black departures and us having to arrive an hour early for that. The mat and small pillow weren't bad for the short rests.

All ferries had open lounges and vending machines for food and drink, including alcohol. Each ferry has a cafeteria for hot meals, but these only operate during meal hours. It's not the Titanic so don't expect fine dining but the food here is still better than you'd get on certain commercial airlines. A small gift shop also carries snacks and souvenirs. I spent most of our trips sitting at a table reading H.P. Lovecraft, which in retrospect is not the best author for an open ocean voyage, and eating Japanese snacks I'd brought with me.

We stopped and spent days on Amami Oshima and Okinoerabujima, two islands with histories related to Saigo Takamori, the man who inspired "The Last Samurai." On each island we had only 24 hours to see the Saigo-related historic sites and museums, take in the tropical countryside and learn a little about what made each island unique. On Amami Oshima we tried local black sugar-based shochu at a brewery and on Okinoerabujima, we explored the ruins of an ancient Ryukyuan castle overrun by the jungle.

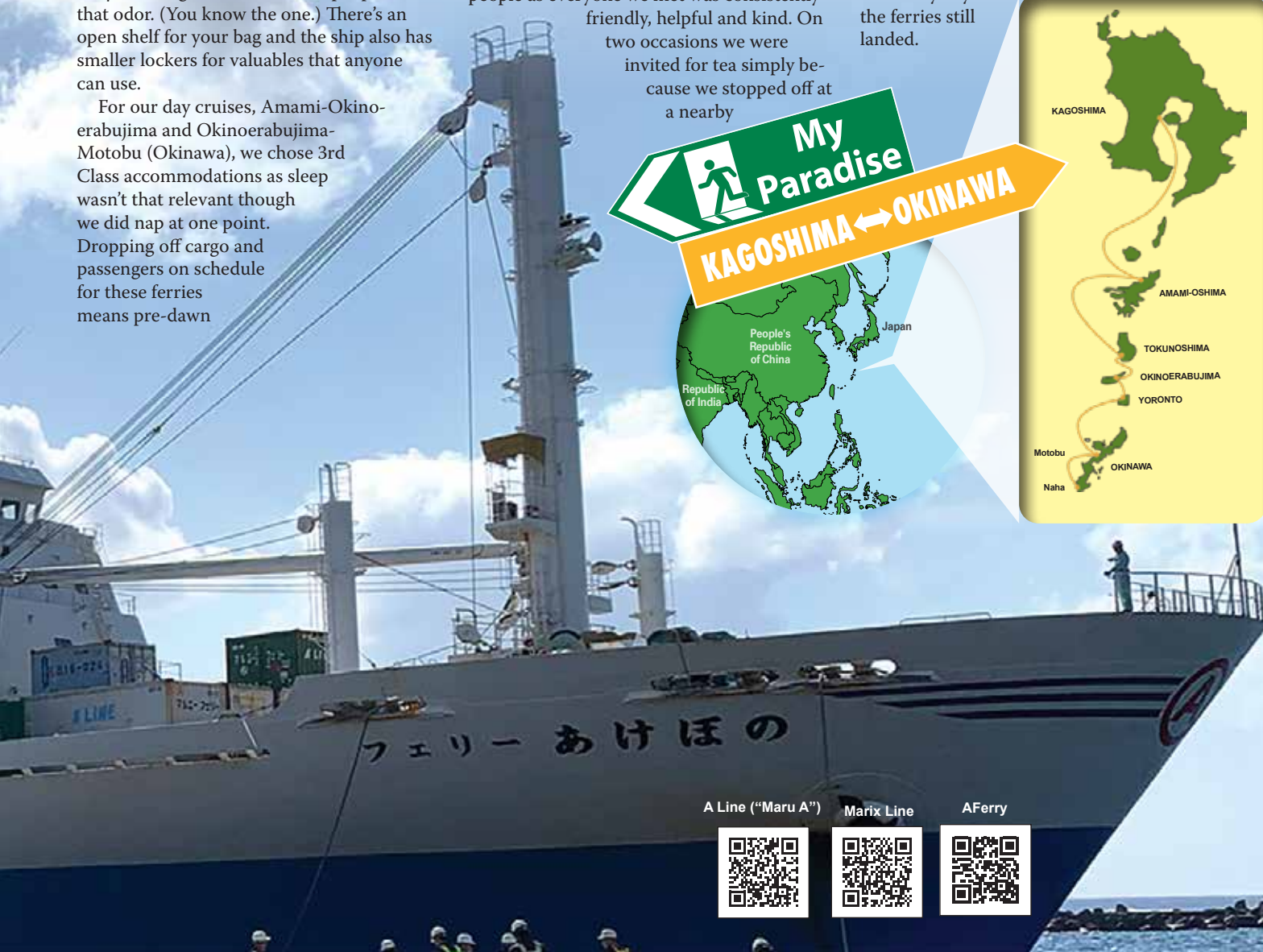
What the islands had in common were the people as everyone we met was consistently friendly, helpful and kind. On two occasions we were invited for tea simply because we stopped off at a nearby

historic site. Another time we stopped by a museum that was closed due to the owner being out of town for a month, so the nearby local goods shop/minimart clerk sat us down for her homemade lemongrass tea, along with generous servings of their local sweets and a fresh papaya.

And then when our 24 hours was up, off we'd go on the ferry to our next little adventure.

Depending on when you plan to travel, typhoons need to be kept in mind as from June to November they may affect ferry service. A very late season typhoon began developing while we were in Kagoshima so we pushed back our trip by a day to see how the weather would play out. The ferries were running but having endured rough seas on a submarine tender inching toward Hong Kong years ago, I'd rather wait a day than experience that unpleasantness again.

Rough seas at the island of debarkation may also make it impossible to get off and instead you'll be taken to the next island. We were given a warning the seas may be too rough to land at Okinoerabujima, but our hotel on Amami Oshima told us that the ferry lines had been telling people that every day for a week and every day the ferries still landed.



A Line ("Maru A")

Marix Line

AFerry





# LET'S TAKE A VIRTUAL VACATION



For many of us, the coronavirus pandemic meant canceled flights and postponing our travel plans. 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 island beaches, go for a swing over the rice paddies in Bali, or enjoy a nice cup of Vietnamese coffee in Ho Chi Minh City— all from the comfort (and safety) of your home. Join us, take notes, and don't pack your bags, we're going on a Virtual Vacation!



## Vietnam

Here in the Pacific, Vietnam may be one of the spots on the top of your vacation wish list. Ho Chi Minh City is a great spot to consider when travel is safe again. Until then, let's go on a virtual trip to explore what this beautiful city has in store for us. Here you'll find French colonial architecture, and food and culture with an East-meets-West charm. We visit Dong Khoi Street for a stroll through "Petit Paris" and to Chua Vinh Nghiem, one of the largest Buddhist temples in the country. Don't forget to take a break to grab a banh mi sandwich and a delicious cup of Vietnamese coffee.



VIEW VIDEO!

## Philippines



VIEW VIDEO!

In this virtual vacation, we head to El Nido in the Philippines. This tropical paradise is only about a one-hour flight from Manila and is made up of about 50 small limestone islands. Do you enjoy diving, kayaking, swimming and other marine activities? Then, this trip is one you'll want to take notes on. We visit the area lagoons for a swim in the emerald waters, the Cudugnon Cave and the Puerto Princesa Underground River for some exploring. This trip has something for everyone, so don't pack a bag and join us!





## Taiwan



Come along as we travel to exciting Taiwan for majestic mountains, pristine beaches, cheerful people and delicious cuisine. Here you'll see traditional architecture comingle with cutting-edge skyscrapers. Our trip will take us to Chiufen Town, the inspiration for Hayao Miyazaki's "Spirited Away" animated film, and for some shopping at the 111-year-old Shilin Night Market. We also make sure to grab some Paigu Chaofan, a pork sparerib and fried rice dish. Tasty!



VIEW VIDEO!

## Singapore



VIEW VIDEO!

Perhaps after watching the Hollywood movie "Crazy Rich Asians," Singapore has been on your mind as a great place to vacation. This small island country is where old-meets-new and where influences of European, Chinese, Malayan, and other cultures collide. This virtual vacation will take you to the Raffles Landing Site for some Instagram-worthy pics, to the equally-photogenic Marina Area for a glimpse at a future-oriented cityscape. If you're hungry you'll want to try the Hainanese chicken rice, a well-seasoned

steamed and chopped chicken on rice that is also steamed in chicken soup, topped with ginger and chili sauce. The flavorful dish will have you wanting more.



## Australia



Join us for a trip down under to the Australian Gold Coast. This area is rich in natural beauty, aboriginal culture, arts and delicious cuisine. We'll shop 'til we drop at Surfers Paradise, a coastal suburb with a wide sand surf beach, plenty of stores and a vibrant nightlife. A visit to Australia wouldn't be complete without cuddling with a koala. Let's make some new furry friends at the Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary which is home to one of the largest collections of the country's native species.



VIEW VIDEO!

## Hawaii



VIEW VIDEO!

Get ready for some aloha time with a quick virtual trip to Hawaii. There is a lot to see and do here so get ready as we head out a beach day at Waikiki, a look at island history at the tribute to King Kamehameha in front of the State Supreme Court, and some hiking at Diamond Head. Hungry? That's great, because we're also going to Ewa Beach for some tender and juicy Kahlua Pork and a show!







## Bali

Let's visit a spot that's on many vacation bucketlists. Bali is a tropical paradise and is a great spot for delicious food and beach-hopping. Among the stops we'll make on this virtual trip is Uluwatu Temple, Indonesia's top religious and cultural landmark. The 1,000-year-old temple also hosts local traditional Kecak fire dancers in the evening. We'll also go for a swing over the Jatiluwih rice terraces, a UNESCO Cultural Heritage Site candidate.



VIEW VIDEO!

## Miyako Island



VIEW VIDEO!

Delicious mango, great diving and sandy beaches await at Miyako Island. This unique location offers great shopping and activities perfect for couples and families. On this virtual journey we visit Sunaama Beach, Higashihennazaki, a cape with a stunning view unlike anything you'll find in Okinawa and Tooriike, a great dive spot accessible nearby. Catch up, we have a lot of exploring to do!



## Okinawa

Let's travel to one of Okinawa's remote island paradises— Ie Island. Here ocean meets sky in breathtaking hues of blue. We'll stop for the view at GI Beach and Wajee. Then, we'll climb Gusukuyama, a 172-meter-high mountain, for some exercise, fresh air and a bird's eye view. This island is also rich in history and the monument to Ernie Pyle here is one you'll want to check out.



VIEW VIDEO!



## Kobe



VIEW VIDEO!

You may think beef when you hear the name Kobe, but this port city has much more than juicy steak. We'll go to Kitano Ijinkan Street known for its charming European architecture with cobblestone streets and picturesque buildings. Enjoy a look at the iconic Kobe Port Tower with its intricate lattice design which was the country's first illuminated building. Get a spectacular view from the observation deck and take the pedestrian overpass to the Kobe Maritime Museum for some history on the 100-plus-year history of the city.





## Kyoto



**I**s a trip to Japan's old capital on your bucketlist? Let's plan ahead with a quick virtual trip to Kyoto. We'll take you to a few of the area's UNESCO World Heritage sites like Kiyomizu Temple dating back over 1,200 years. Nearby we'll check out Gion District known for geisha and then visit Arashiyama's wooden bridge and bamboo grove. These are great photo ops you won't want to miss. We'll also try yatsuhashi, a soft, mochi-like sweet filled with bean paste—delicious!



VIEW VIDEO!

## Busan



VIEW VIDEO!

**O**n this trip to Busan, we hope on the Songdo cable car for visits around the city. We visit the Gamcheon Culture Village for a look at the colorful architecture on the foot of the mountain and Haedong Yonggosa Temple, which boasts a magnificent ocean view. We also grab a bit at Nampodong BIFF square for the unique atmosphere and tasty Korean street food.



## Jeonju



**T**his quick getaway to Jeonju includes a stop at the Hanok Village home to over 800 traditional Korean houses for a walk among Korean history. We visit the Jeondong Catholic Church dating back to 1914 with unique Byzantine and Romanesque architectural styles, which make it one of the most beautiful Catholic churches on the peninsula. A visit to Jeonju isn't complete without trying the local bibimbap, a Korean rice bowl topped with an array of vegetables and meat and served with a gochujang.



VIEW VIDEO!



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“I chose Lantau Island after seeing two incredible images on Instagram. The first was of the Tian Tan Buddha and the other was from the Ngong Ping cable car.”

## Spend a Day on Lantau Island

Story and photos by  
**JOELY SANTIAGO**



**L**antau Island is Hong Kong's largest surrounding island. Hong Kong actually has 250 little islands off its coast; most of them are uninhabited. Many of them have beautiful beaches and are occupied with bars, restaurants, and shops. While planning my very short trip to Hong Kong, I knew I'd only have time for one. After a bit of research, I decided it'd be Lantau. The gorgeous terrain and temples made the choice easy. And while I haven't been to any of the other islands, this one is without a doubt worth your time. I chose exploring the island over visiting Hong Kong Disneyland (which is actually also on Lantau) and have no regrets about my choice.

### Ngong Ping 360

I chose Lantau Island after seeing two incredible images on Instagram. The first was of the Tian Tan Buddha and the other was of the incredible views from the Ngong Ping cable car. I don't have nearly as many photos as I'd like from our visit, but I hope the ones I do have show you exactly why I felt this was an experience I couldn't miss out on. The car gives you 360-degree views of the ride, during which you can see the magnificent, lush, green mountains and turquoise waters.

The cable car is great for two reasons. It not only gives you the opportunity to take in the spectacular views, but it's also a really quick and easy way to get to Lantau Island. You catch it from Tung Chung, which you can get to via the metro.

There are three options when it comes to the cable car. You can choose to take a private cabin,



a crystal cabin, or a standard one. With a standard fare, you can choose a one way or round trip ticket. You still get a 360-degree view. You just share it with other island-goers. The crystal cabin is the same as the standard, except it has a glass floor, so you can experience a complete bird's eye view. The private cabin is booked as a round trip ticket and comes with admission to Walking With Buddha.

The ride is about 25 minutes long, with amazing views the whole ride through. The car starts running at 1000, and the last ride back is at 1730.

### Ngong Ping Village

Ngong Ping village is where the cable car lands, and it's a great little area to spend some time. It's full of shops, eateries and fun things to do. During my visit, there was a cool drum demonstration. Walking with Buddha is a popular attraction





pictures. The view from the mile-long stroll is also really beautiful.

### Tai O Village

Tai O Village was the second place I went to Lantau to experience. I saw a mesmerizing photo of the village and decided that was a place I just had to go to. Getting to Tai O is super simple. From Ngong Ping Village, you can take a bus. I didn't want to wait because I wanted to catch the cable car back to Hong Kong and we were on a time crunch. So instead, we grabbed a cab.

We arrived at Tai O at around 1500. It seemed like the perfect time, because it wasn't overly crowded or super busy. It's a really picturesque town built on top of tidal flats. There are lots of little channels that connect the village, and little boats float and glide along the water carrying fishermen and tourists. Tai O smells like the sea, and has fantastic views of water and mountains and hundreds of little buildings on top of stilts. There are a bunch of tiny shops that sell spices, crustaceans, and other wares, and eateries litter the narrow alleys, filling the air with savory, fishy and sugary smells. I really enjoyed the egg waffles and fish cakes.

Boat tours of the village are available. We opted not take one because we were short on time, but they seem like a really cool way to see and experience Tai O.

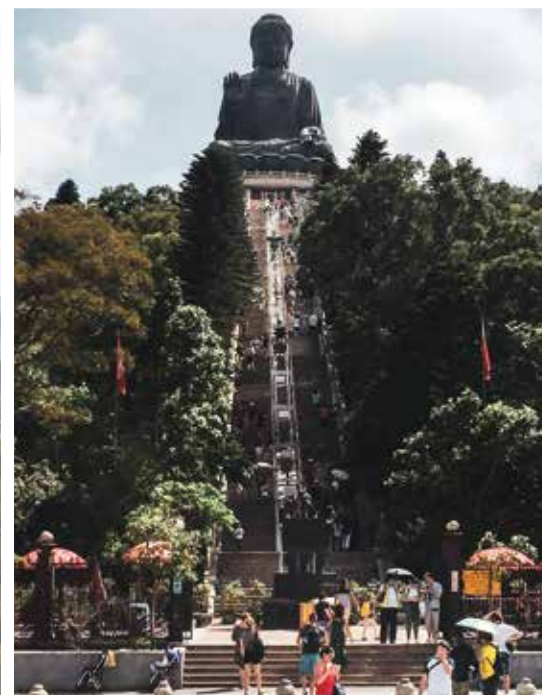
### Other attractions

There are quite a few other things you can check out on Tai O if some of these things aren't for you. Some of the things I wanted to do but didn't get to are spending some time at the beach, hiking a bit of Lantau Trail, and checking out Discovery Bay.

### Getting to Lantau

Taking the cable car is on of a few ways to get to Lantau Island. Taxis are always an option. We missed the cable car back and ended up taking the bus, which is an inexpensive, scenic alternative. The drive was really beautiful, but it did take a REALLY long time. You can also book your visit with a tour group and charters your transport.

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or about five American ones. The line to get to get to the Buddha wasn't very long when we went. But it was busy; there were a lot of people walking in and around the area.

Tian Tan is currently undergoing renovations and the buddha and its surrounding area is closed to tourist. If you're planning a trip to Lantau and want to see the buddha, make sure to check that it will be open when you go.

### Po Lin Monastery

The Po Lin Monastery is right next to the Tian Tan Buddha, so I went just because it was right next door. But I'm super glad I did. I really enjoy visiting temples and observing people in their faith.

You get the first glimpse of this as you walk up to the complex. Actually, you smell before you see it. The distinct, powerful smell of incense fills the air. Worshipers light them along the walkway before you even reach the temple gates.

This complex has several structures and temples. All of them are impressive and full of detail. Beautiful artwork hangs from the walls and ceilings and gorgeous sculptures of deities and buddhas fill the buildings. If you're into these kinds of things, you'll really enjoy Po Lin.

### Wisdom Path

Wisdom Path is not far from Po Lin and Big Buddha (maybe another ten minutes walking), and is another popular place to visit while on Lantau. It's a short trail located on a hill that's lined with wooden pillars. The route forms a figure eight, which also represents infinity. The columns are engraved with the verses of the Heart Sutra, a popular buddhist scripture about emptiness.

I was really in the moment here too, so I didn't take any



for kids; it's a cute cartoon that tells the story of the man who became buddha. This area is also full of instagrammable photo spots.

### Tian Tan Buddha

For me, the top reason to visit Lantau Island is to visit Tian Tan Buddha. I have a thing for buddhas and temples. They are so special and this was, for me, was a must-see. At 112 feet tall, Tian Tan is one of the biggest seated buddha statues in the world.

Big Buddha is only a short walk from Ngong Ping Village and right next to the Po Lin Monastery (another place worth checking out). It sits atop 268 steps and faces the north. The view from up there is absolutely phenomenal. I was so in the moment I didn't take any photos, so you'll have to take my word for it.

The cost to get in was 40 Hong Kong dollars,



*“Once we were given the approval to play, I was awarded the opportunity to enjoy many courses in and around the Iwakuni and Hiroshima areas.”*



Hiroshima Nishi Country Club

## A golfing adventure in and around Iwakuni

Story and photos by  
**WILLIAM S. BYERS**

P.G. Wodehouse, a widely read humorist of the 20th century wrote, “To find a man’s true character, play golf with him.” Personally, I have found that playing golf calls upon your ability to accept what has happened, focus on the next shot and find a way to persevere when you are haven’t hit your best shot. This translates to life and is a great way to build character. I have found that golf not only builds character, but is a great way to get exercise and to get out of your quarters while spending time with friends. During the recent pandemic many sports were not allowed, however due to the nature of the sport and the fact that it is played outdoors, many were able to resume playing golf once the CDC posted the “Back2Golf” social distancing guidelines. While stationed in Iwakuni, Japan, once we were given the approval to play, I was awarded the opportunity to enjoy many courses in and around the Iwakuni and Hiroshima areas. I also have appreciated the unique way that golf is enjoyed in this wonderful country.

Many service members who enjoy the sport have played golf in the United States where we make a tee time, pay our money and show our receipt to the starter to tee off. At the turn we grab a hot dog, or something else quick to eat, and immediately head to the tenth tee to begin our journey on the back nine. This ritual, and the way

the game is largely enjoyed in America, is a lot like life for many of us who are constantly on the go.

### Enjoy the game

In Japan, the game is meant to be enjoyed at an overall slower pace and includes sitting for a meal at the turn. Many golfers will also sit in an Onsen, a hot bath a lot like a hot tub, after their round.

Once you arrive at the course you are greeted by friendly staff who take your clubs from your car and will have them transported to your golf cart. Remember to offer a good morning greeting, bow and remove your shoes from the bag to prevent having to lug two pair during the round. After parking your car all players must check in at a front desk where each will receive a small card case that is stamped with an assigned number and contains the scorecard for the day.

The number is used to charge anything that is purchased while in the golf club for the day and is shown to







Iwakuni Century Golf Club



Unimat Yamaguchi Golf Club

restaurant server at lunch. All meals are included in the price of the round. After checking in and receiving your card, you walk out to the golf carts where club staff will offer you a start time that coincides with your tee time reservation and you are shown to your cart.

Once you embark on your round it is important to note that most courses are very serious about pace of play and have out of bounds rules with designated drop areas to prevent slow play. Also, all Japanese courses are cart path only and require you to stay on the designated cart paths. Believe me, you will get plenty of exercise as most of the courses are undulating through the hills of the Iwakuni/Hiroshima area. Yanai Country Club, Iwakuni Century Golf Club, Miwa Golf Club and Waki Golf Club all have gas engine carts that require you to return to physically drive it forward. Hiroshima Nishi Country Club and Unimat Yamaguchi Golf Club have remote controlled electric carts. You are provided a remote control which allows you to remotely drive the cart forward to the green.



It is expected that you take your clubs with you, your irons, wedges and putter and use the remote driving capability to increase your pace of play. It is also pretty cool.

#### Time for lunch

When you finish your front nine holes, you are provided a back nine tee time and are expected to sit for lunch, which is included in the price. All of the courses offer a splendid array of Japanese dishes that you can choose for lunch. It is a great way to try dishes that you otherwise would not have an opportunity to try. The lunch period is usually 45 minutes to an hour depending on the day which is plenty of time to eat and even get in a few putts prior to teeing off on the back nine. When you finish your round some courses require you to inspect your clubs and sign that you are pleased and have them all. The attendants then transport your clubs to the front of the club where you can pick them up on the way out. You present your numbered card to the front desk where you can use your credit or debit card to pay for

### Speakin' Japanese

**Let's go golfing!**..... Gorufu ni iki masho!  
("gorufu" = golf, "ni iki masho" = let's go .. ing)

**Nice shot!**..... Naisu shotto.

**What a beautiful course!**..... Kireina koosu desune!  
(".. na .. desune!" = what a .. is!)

**Fore!**..... Kiwo tsukete!  
("kiwo tsukete" = watch your head/foot)

the day. The price of golf in Japan can be more expensive than the usual round in the U.S. but keep in mind that you are also paying for one or two meals and use of the practice facility. It is important to inquire about the price prior to playing as the cost is usually more than one hundred U.S. dollars.

Have a wonderful time exploring Japan and other areas in the pacific region during your assignment. Golf can be a way to enhance that experience, build character, get some exercise and spend time with friends all while observing proper social distancing guidelines. Hit 'em straight!!



Hiroshima Nishi Country Club



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“The futuristic city, with its modern buildings and cityscapes, also keeps its old-time charm in the form of older enduring buildings, shrines, and parks.”

## Tokyo my happy place

Story and photos by  
**JEROME S. BAQUILAR**

### Speakin' Japanese

I love Tokyo!.....Tokyo ga daisuki desu. ("daisuki" = love)  
Let's wear a Kimono. .... Kimono wo ki masho.  
("wo.. masho" = let's..)  
So many places to eat. .... Taberu tokoro ga ippai arimasu.  
("taberu tokoro" = eatery/restaurant, "ippai" = many,  
".. ga arimasu" = there are..)  
Let's watch a baseball game. .... Yakyu no shiai wo mi masho!  
("yakyu" = baseball, "no" = of, "shiai" = game,  
"mi" = watch, "masho" = let's)



Perhaps the world's biggest city, population-wise, doesn't fit into most people's idea of a paradise. Even for the people of Japan, Tokyo is not everyone's cup of tea.

Crowded trains, streets, expensive shops/restaurants, and noise everywhere. Or so they say. I don't notice it at all (well, maybe the trains I can't help but notice occasionally when my

face is pressed against the door during rush hour) because, well, I'm in my happy place when I'm in Tokyo. Since my first visit in 2006 and every time after, I'm in my personal paradise when in Tokyo. I'm grateful to live and work at Camp Zama, a nice place in itself, which is a relatively short trip away from the world's finest city. And in that city with so many people, there is literally something, multiple things, for anyone to enjoy in Tokyo.

Whether you're an old soul, young at heart and/or in body, and everything in between, how can you not love Tokyo? The futuristic city, with its modern buildings and cityscapes, also keeps

its old-time charm in the form of older enduring buildings, shrines, and parks. I'll dare to say that Tokyo is probably the only city in the world where you would regularly see people dressed in modern fashionable clothes, walk past people dressed in fashion from centuries past (notably the Japanese kimono, and yukata) and both would not think anything strange of each other.

Speaking of the kimono, or its warmer weather counterpart, the yukata, wearing the traditional outfit while in modern Tokyo is an amazing experience. Whether you're in old town Asakusa, glitzy modern Shibuya, or among the natural elements at Ueno Park,

the feeling of becoming part of the historic fabric of Japan is unparalleled. And the photos of you and your companions are guaranteed to be amazing and memorable! As a person who loves photography, the kimono adds another dimension to my enjoyment of the hobby.

Speaking of hobbies, no matter what your interest, opportunities to pursue a pastime, or simply enjoy entertainment, are seemingly infinite. Personally, my fa-







favorite hobby (currently) is photography. There are photography studios and cafes, and many camera shops in Tokyo where I can indulge and enjoy my hobby, as well as develop my skills further.

If you're a sports fan like me, there's professional baseball, basketball, soccer, and sumo, among other sports well represented in the greater Tokyo area. My favorite team in the area is the Tokyo Yakult Swallows, and I'm a frequent stadium goer as well as a fan club member.

Do you love animals? Aside from the zoos, there are very unique experiences awaiting you in various parts of the metro Tokyo area. You can walk into a café featuring animals such as dogs, cats, owls, hedgehogs, penguins, and others.

Japan's events/conventions, especially the big ones such as Tokyo Motor Show, Comic Market (a.k.a. Comiket), Tokyo Game Show, etc., will do even more to get you immersed in your hobbies/interests, as well as show you how Tokyo does the art of a "show" better than any other place outside of Las Vegas.

And, on a personal note, Tokyo Comic Con was where I first entered the world of cosplay like the rest of the Tokyo-ites at a public event.

From that point, I've joined the ranks of the biggest cosplay event of Comiket as well!

Another artistic interest/passion of mine is the art of dance. Not that I'm a professional or anything close to it; I just enjoy it, especially at night at the end of the week. There is just something that appeals to me about joining with others, both familiar and unfamiliar, on a common floor and moving about, draining our souls of the stresses of the work week, and enjoying the moment with movement to music. And in Tokyo, there's a lot of other people who share the same passion, and a lot of places to join in this ritual.

And perhaps a combination of love of the art, and the friends I have, have blessed me with the opportunity to dance a more structured and traditional form of dance at two of the most famous festivals in Tokyo: Koenji Awaodori, and Furusato Matsuri at the Tokyo Dome.

If food is one of your passions, both Japanese and foreign food are abundantly represented among the 60,000-plus restaurants in Tokyo. Some cuisines are strongly represented in some parts of Tokyo. For example, the Shin-Okubo area is known as Koreatown and, of course, has a lot of Korean restaurants. Roppongi, with its relatively diverse foreigner population, has a particularly international feel to it with many representatives of cuisine around the world.

My own food tastes, though, run pretty simple. I love ramen, and especially Tenkaippin ramen! There isn't a convenient location near Camp Zama, so I often find myself enjoying lunch or dinner at Tenkaippin whenever I'm in Tokyo. The thick broth and tasty noodles of Tenkaippin's "Kotteri" ramen keeps me coming back without fail, and usually with family and friends.

Speaking of friends, my best friends ever happen to be Tokyo-ites. And some of them, to this day, barely are able to speak any English and need to communicate with me with a smartphone app at times! Though the language barrier still stands between us, it doesn't get in the way of communicating, and having fun. Or actually, it does at times, but it

has proven to be beneficial in that we learn from each other in this manner; they learn a little more English and I learn a little more Nihongo to overcome the language barrier.

And with my Tokyo friends come the most fun of times. They've helped me along when I was lost in a strange, big city, and showed me the beauty, fun and adventures of Tokyo that couldn't be found on the internet.

So, there you have it! My paradise has fun, food, friends, and photos. It's probably not like most others' perception of paradise, but there's no other place I'd rather be. That in itself defines Tokyo as my own paradise.



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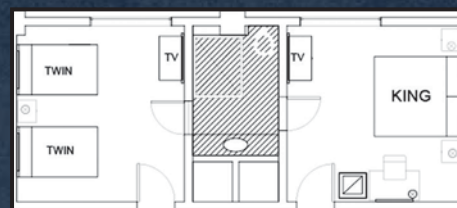
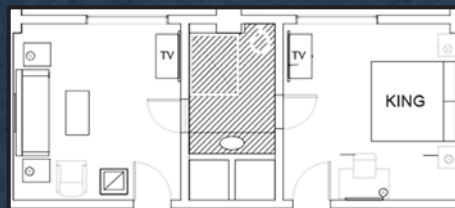


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