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STARS AND STRIPES®

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# OKINAWA

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# Don't mind education gap, but do understand it

## The Meat and Potatoes of Life

Lisa Smith Molinari



As I filled my résumé gap with various volunteer gigs I'd had through the years, I tsked. How is a milspouse supposed to convince an employer that she is capable of a challenging job because managing an active duty military family IS her "work experience"?

Despite the bonbons-and-soap-operas stereotype for stay-at-home parents, any milspouse who has successfully managed a full household through stateside and overseas moves, lengthy deployments and various TDYs, broken hot water heaters, clogged gutters, HHG damage claims, Scout meetings, soccer tournaments, EFMP paperwork, orthodontist appointments and parent-teacher conferences -- is most definitely worthy of gainful employment.

I resisted the urge to add the cutesy moniker "Domestic Engineer" in hopes that potential employers would respect me for putting my own career aside to help my husband serve his country. Instead, under the heading "REMARKS," I wrote, "Despite gaps in my job history, I have always exemplified hard work and dedication, whether as a lawyer, writer, volunteer, mother or military spouse," pounding the period button with a self-righteous poke.

A few years later, I gave up my job search because each promising lead had ended in final-round rejections due to "lack of work experience." Instead, I co-founded a military nonprofit, Orion Military Scholarships, and created my own dream job, helping military children find stable educational experiences.

Frankly, I'd grown tired of "mil-splaining" the impact that active duty Navy life had on my career to civilian employers who would never understand what I knew — that military life requires higher-level competence, determination, selflessness, work ethic and executive problem-solving skills.

Employers, when considering a military spouse, don't mind the gap. Being frequently moved to new locations, managing complex circumstances and shepherding a family through constant unknowns gives milspouses the gritty "must-do/can-do/will-do" mentality that you'd do well to appreciate.

Read more of Lisa Smith Molinari's columns at: [themeatandpotatoesoflife.com](http://themeatandpotatoesoflife.com) and in Lisa's book, *The Meat and Potatoes of Life: My True Lit Com*  
Email: [meatandpotatoesoflife@gmail.com](mailto:meatandpotatoesoflife@gmail.com)

A million years ago, I was a litigation attorney with a bright professional future and significant earning potential. That was before I married a Navy man and began moving to U.S. states and foreign countries where my law licenses weren't worth the paper on which they were printed. Despite these challenges, I maintained hope that one day, I'd rekindle my law career. However, military family life marched on, and it wasn't until our youngest entered high school after our ninth move that I drafted a new résumé.

That day, I dropped the kids at school, then grabbed the only available table at Starbucks -- next to the restrooms. When I had something important to do, I couldn't start until I spent a requisite amount of time dawdling. So, I removed crumpled gum wrappers from my purse, checked email and people-watched.

Finally, I opened a blank document, sighed dramatically and thought, "The kids are old enough now. It's time to find a paying job."

"RESUME [return] ... Lisa Smith Molinari," I keyed onto the top of the page. I picked up steam, quickly tapping out my address, phone number and email, adding aesthetically pleasing fonts, underlining and bold. After a few thumps on the return key, I typed "EDUCATION" and enjoyed a trip down memory lane to the ivy-tangled architecture of Miami of Ohio, and the endless racks of thick casebooks at Thomas Cooley Law School in Michigan.

I added "law review" and "cum laude," feeling a surge of confidence.

But, no sooner did I type "WORK EXPERIENCE" when my hands began to tremble. "It's just the caffeine," I thought, and strained to recall the details of my last paying job.

"Hmm ... was it 1995? When I worked for that law firm in California while Francis was assigned to the Naval Postgraduate School? I can't put a job from two decades ago on my résumé ... I'll be a laughingstock!" I realized that, since marrying my Navy husband in 1993, I had no paid "work" experience except a few short-lived legal jobs between military moves. Recognizing that my skinny vanilla latte had nothing to do with my shaking hands, I pressed on, trying my best to make 25 years as a stay-at-home military mom read like a thriving professional career.

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# My faves Okinawan ‘snack bread’

STORY AND PHOTOS BY SHOJI KUDAKA,  
STRIPES OKINAWA

**K**ashi pan or “菓子パン” is a word that means “snack bread” in Japanese.

It refers to bread with various toppings, ranging from fruit jam to cream to butter. Some of them even contain sausage, noodles or curry sauce.

Kashi pan can be consumed literally as a snack, or it can be part of breakfast or lunch.

For me, it is often my go-to food to fill my stomach quickly.

There are so many kinds of kashi pan to choose from, and I love to explore new flavors. However, there are some that I go back to, especially the ones specific to Okinawa.

Listed below are some of the Okinawan breads that I have been familiar with since my childhood.

The popularity of “Gotouchi pan (local bread)” is surging across the country and are often featured by TV shows, many gaining nationwide name recognition.

These breads are commonly available at local supermarkets and convenience stores for reasonable prices.

Why not try these tastes of Okinawa for a quick culinary adventure?

\*The prices indicated below include tax.

## ■ Snack Pan (346 yen approx. \$2.39)

This was my all-time favorite kashi-pan. Its crispy but soft texture and delicate sweetness are quite addictive, and I often devour all seven sticks in the package without stopping. This bread has a variation that includes chocolate chips as well.

## ■ Ultra Melon Choco (265 yen)

Melon pan is a snack bread topped with a crispy, cookie-like texture. There are several theories as to the source of the unique name, one of them refers to the similarity between the looks of the bread and the fruit.

It is now loved by foreigners and Japanese consumers. Especially in Asakusa, Tokyo, you will see many tourists flocking to bakery shops known for their delicious “melon pan.”

I’m sure those bakeries’ melon pans taste good, but to me, those sold at local supermarkets remain my first choice. Among them, Ultra melon choco is my favorite for the combination of its sweet skin and salty margarine inside. Plus, its exceptional size with 889kcal is quite filling.

## ■ Zebra Pan (260 yen)

This is arguably the most famous and popular Okinawan bread. Its unique name comes from the fact that its profile looks like a zebra’s skin thanks to layers of peanut cream and brown sugar paste. This is a no-brainer for those who like peanuts.

## ■ Nakayoshi pan (400 yen)

This big bread is loved by many for its fluffy coco-flavored dough and sweet white cream inside. Nakayoshi means “good friends” in Japanese. The name comes from the hope that consumers share this bread with friends. A frog character called “Shuichi-kun” is drawn on each package. It was named after the bakery’s founder.

## ■ Uzumaki Sand (189 yen)

The name says it all. “Uzumaki” means spiral in Japanese. This is, in a sense, a slice of rolled cake packaged as bread. But there are some differences.

First, the size is much bigger than a sliced rolled cake. Plus, sandwiched between each part of the spiral are sweet but grainy white creams that contain many particles of sugar.

The contrast between the soft texture of the bread and the grainy cream is quite addictive.

kudaka.shoji@stripes.com



*These breads are commonly available at local supermarkets and convenience stores for reasonable prices.*





STORY AND PHOTOS BY SHOJI KUDAKA,  
STRIPES OKINAWA

**B**urritos are not common in Japan. To top that, putting one together can prove a challenge.

Former Third Eye Blind bassist Leo Kremer (who is also a co-founder of his own burrito chain) once compared making one to “making one car.”

Beans, guacamole, sour cream, cheese, lettuce, and more – the options for the inner workings of a great burrito are endless. Burritos are complicated and are defined by

the preferences of the person making it and the person who will eat it.

In Okinawa, Roll Up Burritos is taking the challenge and giving its customers options to customize a masterpiece of their creation rolled into a tasty tortilla.

Located in a compact orange building along the Sunabe Seawall and about a five-minute drive from Gate 1 of Kadena Air Base, Roll Up Burrito really draws a crowd for lunch.

The joint looks like a beachfront food shack in the U.S. Its interior walls are adorned with menu items printed in chalk on blackboard,

colorful photos of burritos and side dishes, plus T-shirts with the shop’s logo, exuding a fun and fashionable mood.

If you see customers filling out what looks like a horse-race slip, don’t worry, it’s actually an order form to pick all of the delicious fillings you want in your burrito.

First, decide between a burrito bowl or two sizes of burritos: 9-inch or 12-inch. Then, choose from the 10 burrito bases offered, like vegetable, taco, teriyaki chicken, sausage and egg, just to name a few. Now here comes the fun part – customize your burrito with the many different

### Things to know

**ADDRESS:** 2-198 Miyagi, Chatan-cho, Okinawa Pref.  
**GPS COORDINATES:** N 26.330373, E 127.743413  
**HOURS:** 8 a.m. – 8 p.m. (- 9 p.m. from Jun. through Oct.)  
**TEL:** 098-926-5068

\*Extra toppings are subject to fees.  
\*Burritos are available as either nine- or 12-inch rolls or bowls.

topping options the shop offers, from different types of rice and vegetables to cheese and salsa.

With many options on the slip, first-time customers may find it hard to decide what to choose. But the employees are friendly and can assist you in deciding on right ingredients to fit you taste.

As a Mexican-food newbie, I asked Mari Nagano, one of the employees, for advice. At her suggestion, I ordered the 9-inch shrimp and guacamole burrito and a 9-inch steak burrito (950 yen, about \$6.63 each), which, she noted, are popular among servicemembers.

Nagano helped me with the customization, and my slip for shrimp and guacamole burrito got check marks for beans, Mexican rice, Mexican dressing, shredded cheese, lettuce, green tomato salsa, and cilantro. For the steak burrito, I checked guacamole, hash brown, garlic rice, steak sauce, melted cheese, lettuce, salsa, and fresh vegetables.

As for side dishes, Roll Up offers quesadillas, nachos, spicy chicken, hash browns, salt chips, fries and more. My stomach, however, did not have room for sides, so I just

stuck with the burritos.

At first taste, my shrimp and avocado burrito had a fruity taste, which stimulated my appetite a lot. The texture of the beans, cheese and other toppings together was great.

The surprise was when I bit into my steak burrito. The garlic rice and chopped steak ensemble created an addictive sweet and spicy taste I was not expecting.

The burritos went well beyond the size of a meal I would normally eat, but it didn’t not take me long to finish every last bite of these two Mexican delights. Not once during this meal were my taste buds bored, and the depth in flavor and textures made a robust eater out of me.

I washed down these masterpieces with Roll Up’s original lemonade. It deserves equal credit because its delicate sweetness and distinct sourness cooled me down and set me up for one bite after another of the burritos.

Whether you are die-hard Mexican food enthusiast or newbie like me, Roll Up Burrito is worth a visit. Fill out the slip and get ready to be wowed by their burrito offerings.

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# 7 ways to soak in Japan's rainy season traditions

BY SHOJI KUDAKA AND  
TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI,  
STRIPES OKINAWA

Constant gray skies and gloomy showers can only mean one thing in the so-called Land of the Rising Sun: The rainy season. It starts to fall on Okinawa in mid-May followed by mainland Japan and Kyushu Island in early June. Cold northerly and warm southerly air masses collide to create 45 to 50 days of a continuous dreary weather front of clouds dropping anything from drizzle to torrential downpours. But there's no reason to let the bad weather get you down. Look on the bright side. The rainy season is cheerily referred to as "tsuyu," or plum rain,

in Japan, as it coincides with the seasonal ripening of this luscious fruit. And with southern to central temperatures in the mid to high 70s (the high 60s farther north), Japan offers more seasonal outdoor activities than you can shake an umbrella at. For starters, it's one of the best times of the year to visit the northern island of **Hokkaido**. Chances are you may not even need that umbrella. Since Hokkaido is barely affected by this weather front, many locals travel there during the rainy season to escape the stifling humidity often visited upon the rest of Japan. If you can't make it that far north there's still no need to resort to long weekends indoors with **video games** or TV. It may be the rainy season but it actually does not rain every day. (For example, the average number of rainy days in June is only 12 on the Kanto Plain, according to Japan Meteorological Agency.)

Even if it does rain, it will add a certain ambiance to your strolls along the streets of **old towns** and quaint neighborhoods. The rain makes old temples, gardens and traditional houses seem all the more elegant. While out, look for cute small white ghost-like dolls

made from single piece of cloth or tissue hanging from the eaves or on the windows of houses. Often children, and even some adults, make these little "teruteru bozu," or sunshine monks, to ward off bad weather for the next day when a fieldtrip or other outdoor event is planned. In fact, why not make your own **teruteru bozu**? Also, don't miss the opportunity to take in the beauty of seasonal foliage. With plenty of water falling amid the early summer warmth, several pretty **flowers** are also in bloom this time of year. Both hydrangeas ("ajisai") and irises ("shobu") are in full bloom in mainland Japan, while irises and shell ginger ("gettou") are in bloom on Okinawa. Flowering shell ginger heralds the rainy season on the southern islands; hydrangeas embody the season on the mainland. The hydrangea's original colors can vary from white, pink, violet and blue, and they gradually shift to different colors. Some change from pink to purple, and others from blue to violet or fade in intensity throughout the course of the 4- to 6-week season. Peak flower viewing season on Okinawa is mid-May to the end of June, while it runs from mid-June to early July on the mainland. In Japan's central regions firefly viewing, or "**hotaru gari**," (literally firefly hunting) is another favorite rainy season pastime. Lightning bugs are active at riverside, ponds, bushes or rice fields in the humid evenings, right after it rains on windless nights without moonlight.

Countless slowly moving tiny lights filling the air and drifting from one leaf to another make a spectacular sight. But don't catch them, as the endangered bug's life lasts only seven to 10 days. Like **fireworks** festivals in Japan, "yukata" (summer kimono) and an "uchiwa" (fan) are appropriate attire for this traditional pastime. On Okinawa, rainy season usually begins just after the Golden Week holidays that take place around late April to the first week of May, and that means dragon boat races galore. Dragon boat races are held in fishing communities throughout Okinawa. These "hari" are also known as "kaijin-sai" (unjami) or fishermen festivals; they are a way to give thanks to the sea god and pray for safe and prosperous fishing. Memorial services on Okinawa Memorial Day (June 23) is another important event during the rainy season. Okinawans commemorate the end of the Battle of Okinawa during a big memorial service for the war dead at Itoman Peace Memorial Park every year. So take up your umbrella and enjoy the rainy season outdoors. By walking in the rain, perhaps while singing, you just might discover attractions that are only available during this time of year.



Iris



Hydrangea



Photo by Aya Ichihashi

## Hydrangeas lighten up rainy season

If you would like to lighten up your rainy season, Yohena Ajisaien should be on the list of your next destinations. About a 90-minute drive from Camp Foster takes you to this flower garden with 300,000 hydrangea flowers and other beautiful and colorful plants and flowers. According to the staff at Yohena Ajisaien, now is the best time to view the hydrangeas. Although the flowers are expected to be enjoyed through the month of June, it depends on the weather.

**Yohena Ajisaien**  
(Hydrangea Flower Park)  
**ADMISSION FEE:** 500 yen for adults, 200 yen for students  
**HOURS:** 9 a.m. – 6 p.m. (Subject to change)  
**\*Free Parking**  
**GPS COORDINATE:**  
N 26.647309,  
E 127.945379



WEBSITE

You can bring your pets. Just make sure that you pick up after them.

Photo by Aya Ichihashi

## Speakin' Japanese

## "Tsuyu" Talk

June is the rainy season in Japan. While making your way around town, try using some of the following Japanese words and phrases to talk about it.

- "Tsuyu" = Rainy season
- "Tenki" = (Nice) weather
- "Ame" = Rain
- "Mushimasu" = Humid
- "Suberiyasui" = Slippery
- "Nureteru" or "Bisha-bisha" = Wet (object)
- "Zubunure" = Dripping wet (person)

- "Kasa" = Umbrella
- "Tsuyu wa itsu akemasuka?" = When will the rainy season end?
- "Tenki ga yokunai desu-ne?" = The weather is bad, isn't it?
- "Kyo wa mushimasu-ne?" = Today it is humid, isn't it?

- Stripes Okinawa

Pronunciation key: "A" is short (like "ah"); "E" is short (like "get"); "I" is short (like "it"); "O" is long (like "old"); "U" is long (like "tube"); and "AI" is a long "I" (like "hike"). Most words are pronounced with equal emphasis on each syllable, but "OU" is a long "O" with emphasis on that syllable.

# Kick the rainy-day blues with fun places to stay dry

STORY AND PHOTOS BY  
SHOJI KUDAKA,  
STRIPES OKINAWA

Every year, the rainy season arrives early in Okinawa. This year, the Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA) is expected to announce the arrival of the season in Okinawa during the week of May 18.

If you are new to the island, you may be let down to hear that dismal weather will most likely continue over the next month and a half. However, there is no need to be disappointed. There are places where you can have fun under an umbrella or while taking shelter from the rain!

kudaka.shoji@stripes.com



## Enagic Sports World Southern Hill

This sports/amusement complex is the only place on the subtropical island where you can enjoy a wintertime favorite— ice skating. Take a break from the heat and hit the ice on the 28-meter-wide, 58-meter-long rink which is also used for ice hockey.

GPS COORDINATES: N 26.20806, E 127.72836



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## DMM Kariyushi Aquarium

Since its debut in May 2020, the DMM Kariyushi Aquarium in the southern part of the island has become a popular spot. Enjoy the aquatic life displays enhanced with VR technology. Meet some penguins or walk over a huge tank to look down through the glass at the circling sharks and gliding manta rays in the water below.

GPS COORDINATES: N 26.156288, E 127.650801



WEBSITE

## Round 1 Stadium (Arcade)

Just about 15 minutes away from MCAS Futenma, this is one of the largest arcades on the island. In addition to video games, you can bowl, get behind the wheel of a go-kart, enjoy karaoke, and more.

GPS COORDINATES: N 26.275893, E 127.731040



WEBSITE

## Chatan Sports Center

This sports area is in the same neighborhood as Kadena Air Base and Camp Foster. Go here for some homers at the batting cages or work on your swing on the golf range or on the tennis courts.

GPS COORDINATES: N 26.325135, E 127.763439



WEBSITE

## Yohena Hydrangea Garden

Enjoy over 300,000 hydrangeas at this expansive flower garden in the mountainous area in Motobu Town. During the rainy season, Yohena Hydrangea Garden becomes a hotspot for visitors looking for beauty in the soggy weather. Depending on your location, getting there is about a little more than an hour drive away. Grab your umbrella and head to this beautiful spot.

GPS COORDINATES: N 26.646998, E 127.945460



WEBSITE

## Cooking Studio Kae Project

If you are one of those folks that took to the kitchen during the stay-home period, why not continue learning and step up your culinary skills? Kae Project is a cooking school friendly to English speakers. Try your hand at Okinawan dishes such as goya champloo (bitter melon stir fry) and rafte (braised pork rib). Reservation required.

GPS COORDINATES: N 26.37476, E 127.75570



WEBSITE

## Kinjo-Cho Ishidatami Michi (stone-paved road)

This is another outdoor location worth visiting during the rainy season. The geometric shapes of the Ryukyu Sekkaigan limestones are contrasted with greenery growing around each stone. When the stones are wet, the contrast becomes even clearer. The north end of the road is a 10-minute walk from Shuri Castle. It starts with a straight stretch that goes through a tunnel of trees before winding downslope with moderate curves.

GPS COORDINATES: N 26.217130, E 127.716753 (North-end)

\* Paid parking available near Shuri Castle.



# Smooth sailing in Okinawa Windsurfing on Senaga

STORY AND PHOTOS BY SHOJI KUDAKA,  
STRIPES OKINAWA

Looking for something to make the most of the beautiful warm March weather, I sought out a new sport I'd never tried before, windsurfing.

After some digging online, I found Blahav151, a windsurf shop on Senaga Island near Naha Airport.

With a circumference of about 1.5 kilometers, Senaga Island is tiny, but it's still a popular destination for tourists. According to Umikaji Terrace, a shopping complex on the island, it draws about 3.3 million visitors a year.

The waters around the island are relatively shallow, suitable for beginner windsurfers like me. At Blahav151, instructor Kai Shimabukuro welcomed me with a smile and congratulated me for what he said was the right choice.

Thanks to the airport's runway, Shimabukuro explained, the beach is protected from high waves, making it an ideal location to learn to windsurf.

Before I could take to the water, Shimabukuro briefed me on the basics and four technical steps to mastering the activity.

First step would be to climb onto the board from the side and stand parallel with feet to the left and right.

Next, the sail is pulled using the rope attached to it, then hold the sail's vertical pole with either hand depending on the direction in which the surfer is going to sail. Left to go left and right to go right.

After that, the surfer must turn their body into the direction of progression and scoot feet forward behind the sail while holding the sail's horizontal pole with the right hand.

In the fourth step, the surfer should turn their body diagonally forward in relation to the direction of progression. I would turn my face left if I were to go to the left of my position at the beginning.

Got it? Good! I did too, but I felt a little awkward.

With a mind, and body, full of jitters, I reluctantly followed the instructor as he carried my board to the shoreline. Once I reached the water, the shallowness soothed my anxiety some. I also noticed there weren't many rocks around, so I didn't have to worry too much about potential injuries.

We waded into the water about 20 to 30 meters from the shore. It was time to test my meager understanding of the four simple steps Shimabukuro



## Kodakara Iwa (Child Blessing Rock)



This landmark standing at the southern shore of the island is a replication of a rock that used to be worshipped by locals during the pre-war days.

According to a description posted on the site, a local legend has it that throwing a stone into either of the holes lined up vertically on the rock would reward one with having a baby: the top for a boy, the bottom for a girl.

After it was destroyed during the Battle of Okinawa in 1945, it was brought back to life in 2015, according to a report by the local newspaper Ryukyu Shimpo.

Following the tradition, I approached the rock with the idea of throwing a stone at it. On this day, however, there were many tourists taking photos around it. So, I just stayed behind them, looking at the two holes filled with pebbles and stones.

**GPS COORDINATES:** N 26.173740, E 127.641902

\*To visit Kodakara Iwa and the locations described below, I parked my car at a free parking space nearby (N 26.174904, E 127.645662), and took a walk. There are free parking slots by Umikaji Terrace as well, but they are often taken.

BLAHAV151

**GPS COORDINATES:** N 26.17654, E 127.64418  
**HOURS:** 9 a.m. – 6:30 p.m. Closed on Tue.  
**PRICES:** One hour course, including a 15-minute brief, costs 4,950 yen (approx. \$33)  
**EMAIL:** umiashibi@blahav151.com  
\*Showers and lockers are available for free at the shop.  
\*Free parking space available at (N 26.175549, E 127.644023)



Windsurfing  
Video!

# Island's calm waters

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taught me.

I climbed on the board without any issues, a good first sign.

Step two, drawing the rope, also not a challenge.

Step three, however, was not so easy. I turned and reached for the horizontal bar, lost my balance and fell into the water. Back to step one.

There were several failed attempts to move past step two, so Shimabukuro suggested I keep the vertical pole upright.

Stabilized finally, the next challenge was to position my feet correctly. They were either too far from the sail or too close to the side of the board. Too add to that, I had to guess without looking down or else I'd lose my balance. It was an awkward feeling, and I was shakier than I was supposed to be given how peaceful the waters were.

Nonetheless, after 10 minutes, I gradually learned to stay on the board longer than before. Soon, my sail began to catch the breeze, and my board slowly floated forward with me still on it. I felt myself finally start to relax, cruising along and enjoying the view.

Commercial planes took off from the airport and flew over us in the sky, but the water was unmoved by the movement above. Fortunately, the tourists on

the shore lined up to take photos of the planes, were too busy to pay attention to the clumsy windsurfing beginner.

I was finally having fun and comfortable enough on the board to try a U-turn before the end of the one-hour course. Following Shimabukuro's advice, I put the sail down while holding its rope. Then I drew the top of the sail close to the rear end of the board. This worked like a rudder, helping the board curl away from its direction of progression.

Pulling up and down the sail was quite the arm workout. After making a few successful U-turns, I was exhausted, and I was thankful that it was time for the session to end.

Though the shop doesn't offer lessons in English, Shimabukuro said he does get American customers and foreign tourists wanting to try windsurfing. Reservations are required and lessons are not private, so each instructor can have up to five students. Kids must be 12 years old and above to participate.

Shimabukuro said winter is the best season for windsurfing as that is when the winds pick up in Okinawa. For a novice like me, however, I'll stick to the calm, warm spring breeze.

kudaka.shoji@stripes.com



Umikaji Terrace

Pirates Okinawa  
GPS COORDINATES: N 26.17602,  
E 127.64060 (shop No. 5 of  
Umikaji Terrace)  
HOURS: 11 a.m. – 9 p.m.



WEBSITE

Pirates Okinawa



After visiting the Child Blessing Rock, I swung by Umikaji Terrace, a dining and shopping complex sitting on the side of a hill overlooking the west coast of the island. Surrounded by white walls and corridors, this location has a Mediterranean vibe.

In my case, a visit to this location brought me back to the days I spent in South Florida about 20 years ago. Lucky for me, I found Pirates Okinawa, which was serving up various Cuban Sandwiches.

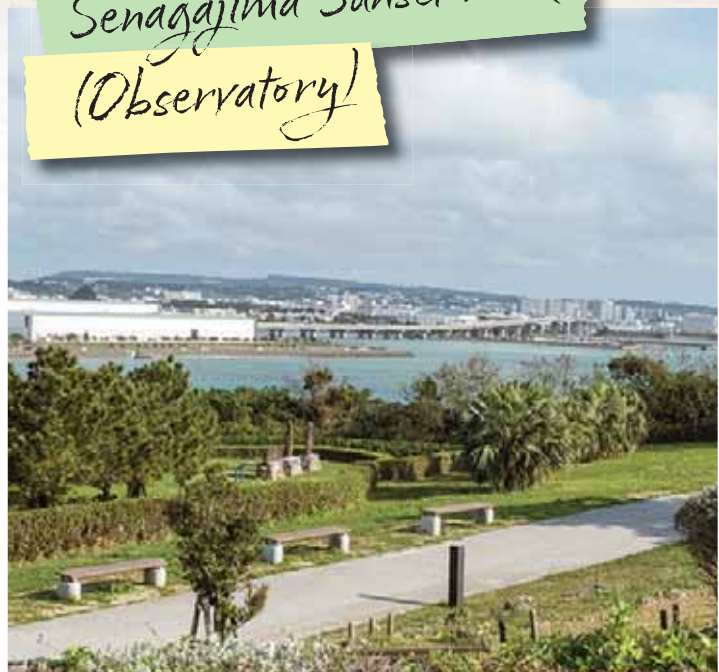
I picked a pork sandwich for 1,800 yen (approx. \$12.16), which came with fried potatoes and orange juice.

Having a thick sandwich with lots of cheese, pork and pickles was satisfying. Spicing it up with Tabasco made it even better.



Video for these spots!

Senagajima Sunset Park (Observatory)



GPS COORDINATES: N 26.174607, E 127.642660  
\* Free parking spaces available.

To close my time on the island, I stopped by this park sitting on the top of the island.

While I enjoyed a nice view of Senaga Beach and the west coast from the height of 33 meters, I thought back about the time I spent at sea,

If I had stayed a couple of hours longer, I could have caught the sunset, but I saved it for another time and made my way home.

# Oita

## Onsen capital known for nature, sustainable culture

STORY AND PHOTOS BY TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI,  
STRIPES OKINAWA

**J**apan's Oita Prefecture, on the westernmost main island of Kyushu, is a scenic marvel and home to hot springs, rich history and traditional arts and culture. Beyond the surface, Oita is also the center of sustainable geothermal energy.

Visiting Oita is relatively easy. It takes about a 3-to-4 hour drive from Sasebo Naval Base or MCAS Iwakuni. If you're visiting from other cities in Japan, there are plenty of budget airline options to get you there within two hours.

### Capital of onsen

You've probably heard of Oita as it is home to some of the most famous hot spring sites in the country. As of 2021, the prefecture has a whopping 5,102 onsen hot springs brimming with hot mineral waters. These healing waters attract foreign and domestic travelers every year. Prior to the pandemic, 7.9 million people visited the prefecture to soak in the hot springs every year, according to an Oita

Prefecture official.

In addition to the many foreign tourists Oita Prefecture gets, it hosts a large population of foreign students every year. These students make the prefecture more diverse and foreigner-friendly, former Oita Governor Katusada Hirose said.

Below are some of the many activities and must-see attractions in historical and beautiful Oita Prefecture. Whether you're into relaxing hot springs, interested in rich history or want to experience some amazing food and practice some ecotourism, Oita has all of it and more. Your visit will definitely be one you'll never forget!

takiguchi.takahiro@stripes.com



Let's travel virtually  
through the video!



## Myoban Onsen Beppu City

### Traditional thatch huts producing therapeutic sinter for 300 years

Myoban Yunosato is a unique hot spring resort in the center of Beppu, Oita Prefecture. Beppu itself is known as a hot spring capital and is a popular destination for soaking in the steaming mineral waters. The resort is home to myoban alum hot springs and thatch-roofed huts known as "yunohanagoya," or sinter huts.

Myoban Yunosato has been producing its own yunohana, onsen mineral powder essence, since 1725. The therapeutic yunohana is made from alum steam and blue clay crystalized under the huts with straw, cogon grass, bamboo and timber. According to Satomi Iikura, president of Myoban Onsen Yunosato, the sinter helps keeping your body warm after bathing and relieving shoulder stiffness, back pain and skin disorders.

In the resort, you can soak in the outdoor pool with milky white onsen water while enjoying a nice view of the Oita mountains. The restaurant and souvenir shop offer local delicacies and yunohana products and cosmetics. Though I didn't get to try the hot springs, I did enjoy a yunohama pack back in my hotel bathtub. The 10-minute soak was enough to warm me up and make my skin soft.

If you visit, don't forget to try the steamed eggs, pudding and dumplings cooked with onsen steam.

Myoban Onsen is an unforgettable experience and only a 3.5-hour drive from Sasebo Naval Base!

### Check it out

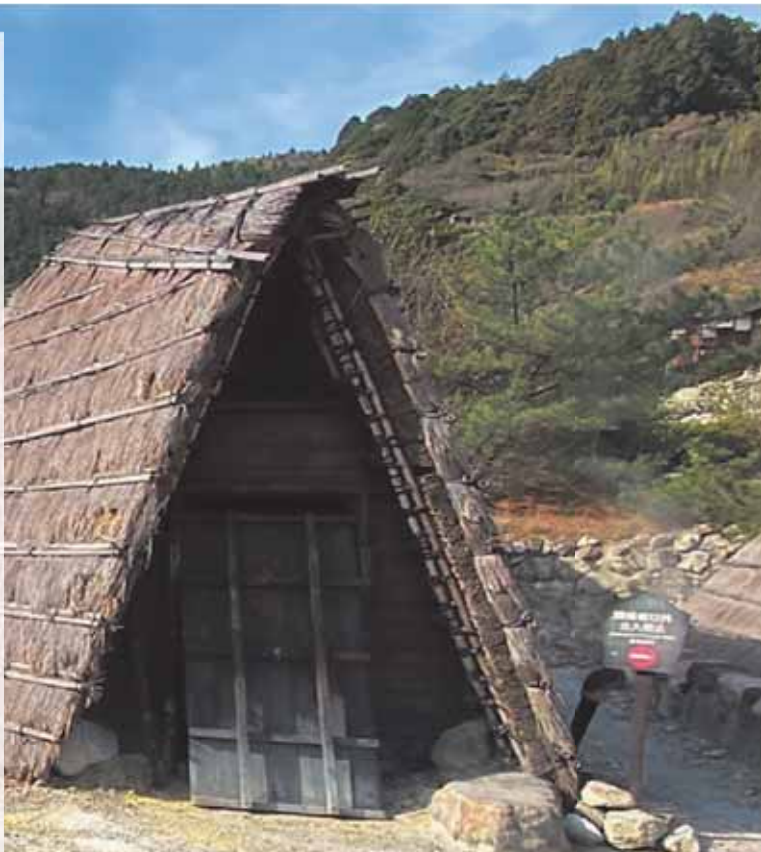
**LOCATION:** 6-kumi, Myoban-onson, Beppu City, Oita Pref.  
**TEL:** 0977-66-8166



VIEW VIDEO



Myoban Onsen  
Yunosato



### Must-go onsens in Beppu

#### Hell-hopping

"Jigoku Meguri," or hell-hopping, is a famous tourist attraction made up of seven "hells" or multicolored volcanic springs. You can enjoy impressive views of springs of different colors, shapes, and smells while hopping from pond to pond while taking short rests at foot spa spots in the area.





## Getting to Kyushu a breeze from Haneda



VIEW VIDEO

Haneda Airport is only a 30-minute train ride from Hardy Barracks and easily accessible from other military bases in the Kanto Plain. Traveling through this airport is a quick and easy way to get you to any of the domestic destinations you've been wanting to see while stationed in Japan.

Within about a two-hour flight from Haneda, you can find yourself freezing in Hokkaido, sailing off the coast of Kyushu or even sun-bathing in Okinawa.

A recent flight to Kyushu-area airports took about 105 minutes to Oita (803 kilometer) and 110 minutes to Miyazaki (1,023 kilometer).

Even getting to Osaka is about a 1-hour flight from Haneda.

Entering vacation mode via plane is worthwhile when you compare it to a 5-plus-hour drive or 3-hour Shinkansen bullet train ride.

To get to Haneda, it's a straight shot on the Keikyu Express Train departing from Shinagawa Station in Tokyo, Yokohama Station in Kanagawa (if you're departing from Camp Zama or NAF Atsugi) or Yokosuka Chuo Station (if you're departing from Yokosuka Naval Base). The direct express train will take you to Haneda in 15 minutes from Shinagawa Station, 25 minutes from Yokohama Station and 50 minutes from Yokosuka Chuo station.

The train stops at both the international terminal and the domestic terminals, so check ahead to know which is your stop!

Next time you're planning your trip, check to see if Haneda Airport offers flights to your domestic destination. It will save you some time and maybe even some money!



Haneda Airport



## Kannawa District Cooking in 'steam of hell'

The onsen is a great place to soak and relax, but another treat is great food made with hot spring water.

In Beppu City, there is a district specializing in a century's-old traditional cooking method called Jigokumushi, or steam of hell. Head to Kannawa District to enjoy various dishes cooked with the natural hot steam rising from below ground.

### Hyotan Onsen

Beppu City

Hyotan Onsen is a three-star Michelin-rated bathing and restaurant facility in Kannawa District serving up Jigokumushi dishes for you to enjoy.

To cook ingredients with Jigokumushi, meat, seafood and vegetables are placed in a bamboo basket. Then, the basket is placed inside of a large stone contraption that looks like a barbecue grill or oven. When the glass lid is closed with the ingredients inside, hot steam gushes through the stone enclosure flash-cooking the meal. This quick process allows the ingredients to retain their fresh flavors and vibrant colors. One taste and you'll think the flavors are too heavenly to be steamed by hell!



VIEW VIDEO



Hyotan Onsen

Kur Park Nagayu



Another unique onsen in Oita!

### Nagayu Onsen

Taketa City

After a soak and a steamy meal, Taketa City, an hour away, offers another unique onsen experience you'll enjoy. Nagayu Onsen offers a rare carbonated hot spring experience you've got to try.

The city is also home to Kur Park Nagayu, a health promotion complex designed by Shigeru Ban, a famous Japanese architect. The facility was constructed in 2019 and has cottages for overnight stays, onsen for bathing and exercise and various restaurants.

At a restaurant, I sampled a homemade lunch set made from only seasonal local ingredients. It was a delicious, healthy meal that was only tastier thanks to the carbonated spring water used to cook it.

You may have tried soaking in the hot springs in Japan and possibly had a onsen egg, but elevate your experience with a soak and devilishly delicious, steamed food in Oita!



Kur Park Nagayu



Kur Park Nagayu

## Other popular attractions in the area



Yufuin City

### Yufuin and Lake Kinrin

Yufuin is a popular hot spring resort where you'll find various museums, shops, restaurants and inns. The lush landscape around the area includes impressive mountains, pristine rice paddies and traditional farmhouses. Lake Kinrin is a misty wonder which provides Yufuin a mystical ambiance.



Usa City

### Usa Jingu and Matama Beach

Usa Jingu is a Shinto shrine built in the 8th century as the head of thousands of shrines across Japan dedicated to the "god of archery and war." Check out the main hall as it is a designated national treasure for the prototype of unique shrine architecture.

Matama Beach, one of the 100 most beautiful locations to catch Japan's sunset, is near the shrine. Here you'll experience breathtaking views of the golden horizon.

CONTINUED  
ON PAGE 12

# Oita

CONTINUED  
FROM PAGE 11

## Drum Tao Kuju Kogen heights, Taketa City

### Otherworldly beats in celestial heights

High on a hill inside Oita Prefecture's Aso Kuju National Park, the rumbling of wadaiko drums draws in visitors seeking a unique and lively Japanese experience. Tao no Oka is the home of Drum Tao, a group of world-renowned taiko drummers known for their stunning performances, amazing costumes, and pitch-perfect percussion.

Drum Tao was created in 1993 with the aim to bring Japan's wadaiko drumming to the world. Since then, the group has grown to 40 members split into three sub-groups, which perform at 150 concerts globally each year. According to Maki Morifuji, a spokesperson for Drum Tao, the group has performed for over 9 million people in 26 countries since 1993. What makes Drum Tao popular is the performers melding traditional wadaiko drums with modern elements and sounds. It's this old-meets-new fusion that has led to the international success of the group, Morifuji added.

Tao no Oka, an 80-minute drive from Oita City, a performance complex complete with an outdoor theater, café, shop and museum, opened in 2020. Inside the museum space, I was able to appreciate the elaborate costumes Drum Tao wears, which are designed by Junko Koshino, a famous Japanese designer. I was also able to enjoy a performance by the group at the Nature Theater, an open-air theater overlooking the Oita Mountains.

The drummers' rumbling and the breathtaking views of the surrounding landscape created an almost sacred experience. It was an enjoyable performance, and I could see why Drum Tao has garnered so many fans worldwide. A visit to Oita truly isn't complete without Drum Tao's impeccable beats.

VIEW VIDEO

### "Tao no Oka" Drum Tao Nature Theater

**LOCATION:** 7571-2 Shiratanji Itaki, Kujumachi, Taketa City, Oita Pref.

**OPEN:** March-June, Noon - 4 p.m., July-August, 2 - 6 p.m., October-November, 12:30 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.

**LIVE STAGE SCHEDULE:** Fri, Sat, Sun, Mon and holidays, 2 p.m. (45 minutes)

**ADMISSION (TAO HOUSE):** Age 13 and older, 500 yen (\$3.50), ages 4-12, 300 yen

**TICKETS (NATURE THEATER):** Age 13 and older, 4,500 yen, ages 4 - 12, 2,500 yen

**TEL:** 0974-76-0950

Tao Nature Theater

## Usuki Castle town Usuki City

### Traditional center with unique gastronomy

VIEW VIDEO

Though Usuki in Oita Prefecture may seem like a tiny city with a modest population of 35,000, its grandeur lies in its rich history, beautiful streets and unique foods.

From the majestic Usuki Castle facing the Bungo Channel, transport to the olden times with a view of Nioza District's narrow cobblestone-paved roads. The district is home to many Buddhist temples and traditional wooden houses, creating a quaint ambiance worthy of recognition as one of the 100 most scenic Japanese towns by the Japanese government in 1993.

The former international port town still has symbols of this history in its Portuguese-style architecture and blue "Azulejo Mural" wall paintings nestled among traditional Japanese buildings.

In the 17th Century, the fermentation industry arrived in Usuki and thus started a unique food culture here. Here you'll find plenty of fermented dishes, organic farm products, and sake. The quality of the fermenting and brewing skills in Usuki have even garnered international recognition with a UNESCO designation as Creative City of Gastronomy in 2021.

Drop by Kani Shoyu, a miso and soy sauce brewery established in 1600, and the Kotegawa Shuzo sake and shochu brewery founded in 1855 to sample their quality fermented products unchanged for hundreds of years.

Another vintage craft from Usaki is Usukiyaki pottery from the former Usuki Domain dating back 200 years. The simple, understated white pottery makes the local foods shine when served on it. Visit Usukiyaki Lab pottery workshop off the old district to learn how the workshop revived the "lost pottery style" and has transformed it for today's use.

Nioza District

Kani Shoyu Brewery

Kotegawa Shuzo Brewery

Usukiyaki Lab



# Geothermal energy plants

A promise for clean energy

Kokonoe Town

Oita Prefecture in Kyushu is home to 5,102 hot springs and is known as the onsen capital of Japan. Here you can enjoy this geographic feature with therapeutic baths and even sample some delectable dishes steamed using the heat from below ground. But did you know Oita's hot waters also contribute to clean energy?

In Oita, geothermal energy is being harnessed for power and hydrogen. Kyushu Electric Power Company's Hatchobaru Geothermal Power Plant in Kokonoe Town generates 110,000 kilowatts of electricity per hour, which is enough to power around 37,000 homes for one year.

The plant's use of geothermal does not emit carbon dioxide into the atmosphere and saves Japan from consuming 200,000 kiloliters of oil for power generation every year, according to Kyushu Electric Power Company.

The Hatchobaru plant also offers guided tours and lectures at its museum so you can learn more about its operations and renewable energy.

Another plant using geothermal energy is Obayashi Corporation's hydrogen plant in Kokonoe Town. This plant produces "green hydrogen," which is hydrogen created without emitting carbon dioxide in the production process.

Hydrogen is considered a next-generation portable energy because it can be stored in canisters and transferred to local hydrogen fuel stations. According to the company, the plant can produce one kilogram of hydrogen per hour, which is enough for a fuel-cell vehicle (FCV) to drive 130 kilometers.

Oita's spring waters are not only a source of relaxation, but also a source of clean, sustainable energy. So, next time you're in the area, enjoy the hot springs and check out the impressive ways these waters are being used to save the environment and preserve natural resources.



VIEW VIDEO



## Kyushu Electric Power Company Hatchobaru Geothermal Power Plant

LOCATION: 601 Hatchobaru, Yutsubo, Kokonoe Town, Kusu-gun, Oita Pref.

### Museum

HOURS: 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.

ADMISSION: Free

TEL: 0973-79-2853

## Obayashi Corporation green hydrogen production plant

LOCATION: Kokonoe Town, Kusu-gun, Oita Pref.



Kyushu Electric



Obayashi Corporation



# Bungo Sakaba

Local foods, tasty sake

Oita City

On my trip to Oita City, I worked up an appetite while checking out the sights near Oita Station. I headed into Bungo Sakaba, which was recommended by the manager at my hotel for a sampling of the local fish and fare.

Bungo Sakaba is an izakaya-style restaurant inside the Amu Plaza Oita shopping complex inside Oita Station. The menu has many Oita specialty dishes, sushi, sashimi and other delicious local fish dishes.

I ordered Bungo Ichioshi Mori, a sushi set using locally caught fish for 1,300 yen (about \$9), along with ryukyu for 110 yen. Ryukyu is Oita's soul food and consists of horse mackerel or yellow tail sashimi that is well-marinated in a soy sauce-based broth with sesame and ginger.

Since this is an izakaya-style eatery, not checking out their premium sake and alcohol list would be a shame. I chose a glass of locally brewed sake Nishinoseki for 650 yen.

The sake paired well with the flavorful horse mackerel ryukyu soaked in mirin and ginger.

The sushi set was extensive and included a sampling of all the Oita fish that was in season at the time. In the set were hand-shaped sushi with both fatty and lean tuna, squid, octopus, conger, shrimp, mackerel, sea bream, gizzard shad and egg, and more. I was pleased with my choices and couldn't help but have another refill of the premium Nishinoseki sake to finish off the meal.

In case you are not a fan of raw fish, the restaurant also serves various yakitori (grilled chicken on a skewer) and kushikatsu (deep-fried cutlets on a skewer) available for around 130 to 200 yen.

Bungo Sakaba is a great spot to try some of the amazing food Oita has to offer. The prices are excellent for the high quality and central location, so make sure to stop in for a delicious meal during your stay.



### Check it out

LOCATION: 1-1 Kanamemachi, Oita City, Oita Pref.

HOURS: 11 a.m. – midnight

TEL: 097-513-1180



Bungo Sakaba





## Japan Tip of the Day

# 7-Eleven Japan smoothies a great way to eat, drink your fruits, veggies

STORY AND PHOTOS BY LUIS SAMAYOA,  
STRIPES OKINAWA

**D**id you know most 7-Eleven stores in Japan offer blended fruit and latte smoothies?

These are lifesavers when you're craving something a little healthier and don't feel like hunting for a nearby smoothie shop.

Compared to the U.S. stores, 7-Eleven convenience stores in Japan offer so much more specifically to make life... well, more convenient! In addition to bill payment and shipping services, you can also get concert and theme park tickets or make photocopies and postcards, too. The stores also have a variety of prepared foods and an amazing drink selection. Best of all, enjoying a meal at 7-Eleven won't upset your stomach or your wallet!

The 7-Eleven smoothies are a great way to get some fruits, vegetables (depending on the flavor) and vitamins in a pinch.

### How to get a smoothie:

Depending on the 7-Eleven you visit, you'll find clear cups in the freezer section filled with frozen smoothie ingredients. Check the label to see what flavors are in stock.

So far, I've tried some of the flavors like acai, blueberry and strawberry.

They also have other flavors like sweet potato or green juice. Soon, the chain convenience stores will release a café latte flavor. Pick your favorite then head to the register to pay. Each smoothie costs around 350 yen (about \$1.75)

Next, go to the smoothie blenders usually near the entrance. Scan the barcode on the lid of the cup. This will unlock the door of the machine. Peel off the lid and place the cup with the ingredients inside and close the door.

Once you push the start button, it takes about a minute or two for the machine to blend up a fresh smoothie. There are lids and straws at the station, so don't forget those when the machine releases your cup.

You'll love the fresh smoothies so much, you'll probably want to try as many as I have. Check them out next time you visit the conbinni!

samayoa.luis@stripes.com



## Recycling PET bottles at grocery stores

STORY AND PHOTOS BY LUIS SAMAYOA,  
STRIPES OKINAWA

**S**ince my move to Japan, I have found many things to love, but also a few things that stress me out. One of those is off-base recycling.

If you live off base, you may be familiar with the trash and recycling pick up schedule, so you know when and where they pick up certain items. Where I live, PET bottles, which are what most drinks and waters are packaged in, are picked up once every two weeks and require special bags only available for purchase at conbinnis or grocery stores in the same city.

The strict requirements mean PET bottles pile up and can quickly overtake my home if I'm not prepared or I forget to put them out before pick-up day.

Believe me, bottle-filled bags can quickly become a nightmare. Fortunately, there's a nice way to avoid this problem!

In Japan, many large supermarkets offer recycling services for cardboard, PET bottles and even old clothes. If you're like me, buried under PET bottles, you might want to check to see if your neighborhood grocer provides this convenient service.



Near Yokota Air Base, where I'm stationed, super-store Joyful Honda offers a free ECO card, which allows customers access to recycling aluminum cans and PET bottles.

### How to recycle at Joyful Honda:

First, scan your ECO card. Then you can begin the drop off.

For PET bottles, make sure the caps and labels are removed. There is a small cap disposal there, too.

Place label-less and capless bottles one at a time onto the conveyor belt. Aluminum cans are collected next to the PET bottle machine. Before you start inserting cans, make sure to scan the ECO card.

The card at Joyful Honda gives customers points for recycling. Each item earns .02 points. Obtain 500 points and receive a 500-yen (about \$3.36) off coupon for use inside the store.

Though it may take a while to collect the required 500 points, the cost savings from not waiting every two weeks for collection and not having to buy special city bags for PET bottles is priceless.

Check your nearby grocery store to see if they offer their own recycling benefit program.

samayoa.luis@stripes.com

More on trash and recycling



READ THE STORY

CAP COLLECTION BOX



### Things to know

**JOYFUL HONDA**  
(NEAR YOKOTA AIR BASE)  
ADDRESS: 442 Tonogaya, Mizuho,  
Nishitama District, Tokyo  
190-1212



WEBSITE

# Stripes Sports Trivia

Who is the Liverpool forward that won the EPL Player of the Season Award in 2018?

**Answer**  
*Mohamed Salah*

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### DID YOU KNOW?

Recent genomic analysis showed that Okinawans and locals in Hokkaido have a lot in common. Ryukyu-jin and Ainu, indigenous people in Okinawa and Hokkaido, are thought to be of descent of Jomon man or Jomonjin, the first ethnic group of Japanese that lived in Japan. While Jomonjin moved to Japan, coming from Southeast Asia, the second group Yayoijin or Yayoi person, came from Northeast Asia.

### Kanji of the week

本  
Hon [Book]

### Language Lesson

Would you please write it down?

Kaite itadake masenka?

### Crossword

by Margie E. Burke

ACROSS

- 1 It may be slipped
- 5 Island greeting
- 10 Everett or Lowe
- 14 Hang \_\_\_\_ (keep)
- 15 Constrain
- 16 Latvia's capital
- 17 "It's \_\_\_\_ real!"
- 18 Like some milk
- 20 Fellow church-goers
- 22 Aristocratic bunch
- 23 "Baby Blue" singer George
- 24 Out-of-date
- 25 Loads, as software
- 28 Reuben's bread
- 31 Mere
- 34 Annulment of slavery
- 36 Away from the wind
- 37 Like Liberace
- 38 No walk in the park
- 39 Written account
- 41 Beds on base
- 42 Angsty music genre
- 43 Skilled boater
- 45 Puppeteer Lewis
- 47 Does an IRS job
- 51 Tariff target
- 53 CDC worry
- 55 Like some garden paths
- 57 Word after "cut" or "second"
- 58 Walk the floor
- 59 Verso's opposite
- 60 Alaska's first governor
- 61 Downhill racer
- 62 Web destinations
- 63 Bodywork target

DOWN

- 1 Former newsman Lou
- 2 Type of gas
- 3 Animal in a roundup
- 4 Tupperware product
- 5 Gives a heads-up
- 6 As it happens
- 7 Middle Eastern gulf
- 8 Cheer starter
- 9 Without much harmony
- 10 Shore dinner entree
- 11 Nazi-like
- 12 "The Morning Watch" writer James
- 13 A&W competitor
- 19 Mantegna's "Criminal Minds" role
- 21 Touch
- 24 One who works on snow days
- 26 South Pacific island
- 27 Overhead
- 29 Famed WWII sergeant
- 30 Concludes
- 31 All there
- 32 Happy as a \_\_\_\_
- 33 Lockheed Martin field
- 35 Roared deeply
- 37 First-string players
- 40 Oscar or Tony
- 41 Modern measure
- 44 Tropical fruits
- 46 Sharpened
- 48 Mirror \_\_\_\_
- 49 Nashville NFLer
- 50 Candle feature
- 51 Little devils
- 52 Dinner, eg.
- 53 Ancient Celt
- 54 Feed the kitty
- 56 Outdoor gear brand

Answers to Previous Crossword:

C	A	S	T	E	S	U	B	S	C	H	A	P
A	L	C	O	A	O	P	I	E	H	A	L	L
M	A	R	E	S	C	O	N	T	R	A	L	T
P	R	E	F	I	X	I	N	G	A	L	L	A
A	L	E	X	A	T	I	L	E	R	S		
P	A	M	S	I	L	I	C	A	T	E		
A	L	E	R	T	I	C	E	L	A	N	D	I
C	O	R	E	O	Z	O	N	E	G	I	G	O
T	E	S	T	A	M	E	N	T	A	E	S	O
A	S	T	E	R	N	P	E	A	C	E		
P	L	E	A	T	G	R	E	E	T	I	N	G
S	U	S	T	A	I	N	E	D	O	N	S	E
I	S	L	E	C	A	N	E	L	E	E	R	Y
S	H	A	D	E	W	E	S	E	S	S	E	X

### SUDOKU

Difficulty: Easy

				3		6		
	2			7		5	4	
	8					1		
	4				8			5
1								
			5			4		7
	6				9			8
9		3						
			7	2		3		

HOW TO SOLVE:  
Each row must contain the numbers 1 to 9; each column must contain the numbers 1 to 9; and each set of 3 by 3 boxes must contain the numbers 1 to 9.

Answer to Previous Sudoku:

4	5	1	6	9	2	8	7	3
2	8	6	7	3	4	5	9	1
9	7	3	5	1	8	2	6	4
5	6	8	3	4	9	7	1	2
3	4	2	1	8	7	9	5	6
1	9	7	2	6	5	4	3	8
6	2	4	9	5	1	3	8	7
7	1	9	8	2	3	6	4	5
8	3	5	4	7	6	1	2	9

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# Fly like a superhero at Moon Beach

BY SHOJI KUDAKA,  
STRIPES OKINAWA

When instructor Keiko Sasamoto cued me by saying, “Start!” I straightened my body upright under the water, putting strength into my legs, ready to be launched by a big thrash coming from underneath. The moment I felt the impact on my soles, my body became tight, trying to stay on top of the great force. Lifting gradually, all I cared was not to be tossed off into the ocean. As the upper half of my body passed the surface of the water, the jitters crept up on me even more. When my feet left the surface, and I was completely airborne, my mind went blank. Next thing I knew, I fell solidly into the water, appreciating the fact that I wore a helmet and lifejacket.

This is what happened once I finally succeeded in hovering in the air on a Flyboard only for a few seconds.

Leading up to this point, I had embarrassed myself like a failed human cannon for nearly 20 minutes.

Flyboarding is supposed to be a cool sport that allows a regular guy like me to easily hover or fly in the air like a superhero. During a “preflight” briefing, the instructor described the appeal of the sport by saying, “Thrilling and exhilarating feelings that you cannot get from any other sports.” And my expectations were high after seeing Sasamoto cruise high in the air for her demonstration flight. But my initial experience was far from such thrill or exhilaration. To me, it was more like a rodeo; the water jet was hard to harness like a bronco. Almost every effort I made against the thrashing water was rejected, leaving me off balance in no time.

All the failure that preceded made it that much sweeter when I finally got a glimpse of what it would be like to fly like Ironman. I can say that the joy of floating in the air is worth the time I spent beating up myself in the water.

It was at Moon Beach, a resort just a 30-minute drive from Gate 1 of Kadena Air Base, that I gave my first shot at this unique marine sport. Known as one of the best beaches on Okinawa, this is a popular spot for many tourists and locals who enjoy jet skiing, sea kayaking, diving or just taking it easy on the sandy shore.

Flyboard is one of the newest additions that this place has to offer.

“You can enjoy a variety of marine sports here, but Flyboard is what I recommend the most,” Sasamoto said. “Recently, we had a group of Americans who came here for the sport as well. They were really excited when they succeeded in hovering in the air.”

The popularity of the sport was clear. Before I set off for my first launch, I could see people having fun with the water jet. I saw some very skilled tourists flying through the air like the Silver Surfer in a freeze-frame.

When it was my turn, I put on a helmet and a life-jacket before going into the water to put on shoes fixed on a board. Attached on the other side of the board was a thick black hose at the center with two nozzles at each end. The hose was connected to a jet ski driven by Sasamoto, who controlled the accelerator for the water jet.

Following her instructions, I floated face up, pointing my feet to the shore so the water jet could propel me away from land. From time to time, I bent either my left or right knee to make a turn following instructions. When I got far enough away from the shore, I rotated my body to float on my stomach, to prepare for being launched. As soon as the final cue “Start!” came, the 20 minutes of struggle began.

I don’t remember how many times I threw myself into the sea, but every time I failed spectacularly, I was looking for another shot. It was challenging but fun at the same time.

When I finally stayed on top of the water jet long enough and went above the water surface, the feeling was hard to describe. In part, it felt like skiing or snowboarding. I had my feet locked by the shoes, which restrained my ankles from moving. I had to rely on my thighs and hamstrings to keep me in balance and tame the big force.

And what I saw during a few seconds I had above the water, made me feel like a superhero. Having the same point of view as Ironman felt great, even if only for a few seconds.

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## Things to know

**FEES:** • 8,800 yen for 30 minutes (includes 10 minute briefing)  
• 6,600 yen for 20 minutes (for repeat customers)

\* Customers need to be between the ages 12 and 59, and weigh 88 lbs. or more.

**WEBSITE:** <https://www.moonbeach.co.jp/en/>

\*Reservation required



**WEBSITE**

