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Photo by Carlos Vazquez, Stars and Stripes



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Mental Notes with Hilary Valdez

Resolving conflict

BY HILARY VALDEZ,
STRIPES OKINAWA

In today's busy and competitive world, conflict resolution techniques are critical for every day life. When I worked for the Justice Department, we needed real life solutions for successful negotiations and simply staying alive. Chasing bad guys required self-reliance and emotional stability, which are key factors for personal success, but it takes time develop those attributes. When I started, I had the shakes. I learned the goal was



to stay calm, increase my psychological hardening skills and strengthen my mental toughness. With practice, this came to be. I was inexperienced when I finished school, but I had to challenge my irrational beliefs, increase my optimism and self-regulate my behavioral responses.

My father once said, "You're a smart guy, but you're not thinking." I said, "Huh?" Justice Department training helped me to understand the how and why people start arguing and fussing about small stuff, which can lead big problems. Life is one huge on-going negotiation, and often times the negotiating environment is filled with high-emotional content and tension.

As an investigator, I was at a community meeting one night trying to resolve

a dispute between two motorcycle gangs. The main issue between the two gangs was the color of the scarves that could be worn by the opposing clubs. Unfortunately, this led to three members being shot.

Conflicts don't have to end in violence. The focus is to elicit opinions and clarify issues, not examine or criticize the person. Disapproval ends a discussion; disagreement stimulates it. Statements such as: "We're not ready for that."; "It's not in the budget."; "Put it in writing." "It's never been tried before."; etc., stop ideas and creative action.

When reducing conflict, avoid irrational actions, reduce social anxiety, and resolve problems. Don't create problems. Or yell, "Hey idiot!" These are fighting words and some people don't fight fair.

In most cases, people are adaptive and willing to make social adjustments for success. Most of the time, people will do what is asked of them, providing they know what is expected of them. The critical insight is being attentive to the expectations we put on people who lack skills or fundamental levels of insight to make sudden or logical changes.

Life is a journey. No person lives free from inner or outer conflict. Life has no end of difficulties. A critical insight is the ability to harmonize with people and deal with them at their level of functioning.

I was raised in New York City, where yelling led to shoving, and shoving led to punching. Stay away from physical fighting. Especially if you can't fight. I was in a fight and one of the guys yelled, "Stop! I can't fight!" I yelled back, "Too late!"

So, how do you increase your ability to respond to stress? Well, learn to handle criticism.

Learn detached concern and care for others, but don't assume their stress.

Here's a key critical insight: Develop your own communications style. Speak with candor and directness. When speaking to others, encourage an open exchange of ideas. But, pay attention to the impact, emotions, and feelings of the other person: observe them for a moment.

Wait-Think-Respond. Don't rush to respond. The Justice Department taught me to not tell a suspect: "You have three minutes to come out or else!" What if he doesn't come out? Then what?

I was taught that waiting helps with thinking and formulating a correct response to a situation. Adjust your tone and temperament according to the people you are speaking with; especially with older people, your superiors, or gangsters. These aren't your homies, so be careful. Just find the balance between being blatantly open and selectively open.





Openness must have a purpose beyond just being open. A person is open because they care enough about improving a relationship. Openness breed trust. Being closed leads to mistrust and suspicion. The other person has to be willing to be open, otherwise openness becomes coercive.

When feelings are shared, the other person feels trusted and positive. I was conducting a de-brief with Navy divers after one of their EOD divers died during a sensitive



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'They bring a lot to the table'

New girls in Scouts set pace with 'seamless' integration on Okinawa

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE,
STARS AND STRIPES
Published: December 20, 2019

CAMP COURTNEY — In years past the leader who called Scouts BSA Troop 110 to order Wednesday on Camp Courtney may have elicited surprise, even disapproval, from some old-school Boy Scouts.

"It's very important that you are accountable for your responsibilities," said assistant senior patrol leader Melanie Alejandra Varon Golden, addressing the group about the possibility of becoming leaders themselves. "You have to be willing to put in 100% effort because other Scouts rely on you."

The 17-year-old Star Scout — scouting's third highest rank — joined the 109-year-old civic organization for 11- to 17-year-olds in March, one month after the Scouts opened their ranks to girls.

Varon Golden and her male and female counterparts said integration had not only been seamless but highly successful on Okinawa, improving Troop 110 and pushing Scouts of both genders to greater heights.

"Coming in, I was a bit nervous," Varon Golden said after the meeting. "Even though society has these things that are more so for men, I think it's been a great opportunity that we are able to be a part of Scouts



Kaelin Planteen, right, a member of Scouts BSA Troop 110, gathers with other scouts for a meeting at Camp Courtney, Okinawa, Wednesday, Dec. 18, 2019. Photos by Carlos Vazquez, Stars and Stripes

BSA and are treated equally." Troop 110 is one of eight on the Japanese island of Okinawa, according to the Boy Scouts of America Far East Council website. Troops are spread across Japan and Korea.

Troop 110 is about 30 years old, said assistant Scoutmaster Ryan Gutzwiller. Since adding girls in February, it now operates as two separate gender-specific troops under the same umbrella. The Scouts decide what they

want to do together or separately, and those events just sort of happen organically, the troop's scoutmasters said. Many activities, like meetings, hikes and certain camping trips, are done jointly.

Four girls joined in February, Gutzwiller said. That number has grown to 10. The girls are thus far so motivated to achieve, that they have spurred their male counterparts to keep up, he said.

No issues have arisen due to having both genders in the

troop, scoutmasters said. Scout Chett Huff, 15, said he knows the girls from school, so welcoming them into the fold was easy. Huff is a Life Scout, scouting's second highest rank.

"They bring a lot to the table," he said.

Assistant Scoutmaster Jeff Planteen, who achieved scouting's top rank of Eagle Scout, has been overjoyed watching his daughter Kaelin, 11, carry on enthusiastically in his footsteps, he said. She took part in a wilderness survival campout and scaled 12,389-foot-high Mount Fuji.

"I've definitely seen confidence, her ability to speak up and say, 'Hey, I know how to do that,' or 'I can show you how to do that,' which is something I don't think she really had before," Planteen said. "She's having a blast."

"The people here are awesome, and they've been welcoming," said the soft-spoken Kaelin Planteen. "We go on really fun adventures."

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mission. That was emotionally tough for me and the other divers. When I returned to base, I had two psychologists debrief me. My emotions were off the chart, I cried. Don't be afraid to talk, especially under stress. Don't be Mr. MACHO. Talk to express, not impress.

Every time you open your mouth, your brain is on parade. But every heart is the key to the heart of other people. Heart talks to heart, soul speaks to soul. Criticism, indifference and pessimism close the door of the heart. But, if two hearts become one, it is very difficult to disunite them. The critical insight is to put a layer of understanding on top of subjective or gut feelings. The heart is the path to wisdom and the road to intelligence.

Instant Insight: Be true to your own nature.

Hilary Valdez is a retiree living in Japan. He is an experienced Mental Health professional and Resiliency Trainer. Valdez is a former Marine and has worked with the military most of his career and most recently worked at Camp Zama as a Master Resiliency Trainer. Valdez now has a private practice and publishes books on social and psychological issues. His books are available on Amazon and for Kindle. Learn more about Valdez and contact him at www.hilaryvaldez.com or at InstantInsights@hotmail.com

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Ian Clingan, a Life Scout with the Scouts BSA Troop 110, does the Scout Sign during a meeting at Camp Courtney.



Mark Clingan, scoutmaster of the Scouts BSA Troop 110, meets with Scouts at Camp Courtney.

Happo-One

Photos courtesy of Hakuba.com



HAKUBA VALLEY

A SKIER'S PARADISE

BY JOHN BLAGYS,
HAKUBA.COM

Interested in hitting the slopes in Japan this season? Before you do, check out this guide which has everything you need to know for planning your ski trip to the Hakuba Valley this winter.

The Hakuba Valley

The Hakuba Valley hosted the 1998 Winter Olympics and has since become an international destination for ski enthusiasts. Thanks to an incredible variety of terrain, 33 feet of annual powder snow, and the allure of Japan's unique culture, Hakuba has exploded in popularity. In fact, this year the Valley was added to the prestigious Epic Pass, a collection of 55 amazing resorts from around the world. Epic Pass holders can now ski the Hakuba Valley for five days for free.

How to access Hakuba

■ **CAR:** Hakuba sits 170 miles west of downtown Tokyo and can be reached within four hours by car. Many accommodations have car parking for guests and the resorts have accessible parking lots.

■ **SHINKANSEN & BUS:** From Tokyo Station take the Shinkansen to Nagano Station then take a bus to Hakuba Station. The journey takes about three hours and costs ¥9,800.

■ **JR AZUSA:** Departing from Shinjuku Station and

Tachikawa Station, this train runs directly to Hakuba Station and is slightly cheaper than the Shinkansen option at ¥7,900. The total journey takes about four hours.

Mountain overview

There are 11 resorts in the Hakuba Valley providing incredible variety of terrain, runs, and experiences. Here are our suggestions for newbies, intermediates, families, and advanced skiers.

■ FIRST TIMER'S AND INTERMEDIATES: Happo-One

The largest resort in the Valley, Happo-One hosted several different events during the 1998 Olympics including the alpine skiing downhill, the super giant slalom, and the ski jumping. While the mountain is quite steep, 50% of the runs are suitable for intermediate riders and the views from Happo-One may be the best in the entire Valley. Beginners can find their balance on one of the more mellow green runs, such as Sakka. Many of the international ski schools operate out of this resort making it a good option for first timers. The main village also sits at the foot of Happo-One which opens your options nicely for drinks and dinner after skiing.

Iwatake



■ **INSIDER TIPS:** On a clear sky day, take the gondola up to the Corona Terrace at the top of the mountain. Stop for a drink or snack and enjoy the magical views right up the Hakuba Valley.

■ FAMILIES: Iwatake

A great option for families or groups, Iwatake has terrain for all abilities. Just 10 minutes from Hakuba Station, it is easily accessible from Happo Village.

Once beginners build confidence, take the gondola to the top of the mountain all the way. There are challenging intermediate routes to enjoy. Advanced skiers can stay busy as well with powder skiing and a terrain park.

■ **INSIDER TIPS:** After you're done skiing, enjoy a delicious ramen at one of the best spots. Head out from the gondola entrance and stop at a snack shack with skis and snowboards on hand. Don't be disappointed.

■ ADVANCED: Cortina

Cortina receives the highest snowfall in the Valley, getting twice as much snow as the nearest resort.



Cortina

Snow Monkeys in Hakuba

VALLEY DISE



head
of the
x with
a Valley.

groups with a mix of
every ability level.
tion, the resort is eas-

ce, they can take an easy run from
y to the base; there are also more
hat branch off from this run. Ad-
well as there are high speed runs,

skiing, relax with a beer and some
restaurants in the Valley. Come
l cross the road to a wooden
at the front. You will not be

ow fall in the valley and typically
ghoring resorts. If you love back-
ntry skiing, perfectly placed tree
runs, and unmatched sidecoun-
try skiing then visit Cortina!
There are only 13 on-piste
runs at Cortina, but the
resort is interlinked with
neighboring Norikura
Resort and the Cortina
lift pass gets you ac-
cess to all 25 combined
runs. The iconic Green
Plaza hotel sits at the
base of Cortina and is a

great place for drinks and dinner after skiing Cortina.
INSIDER TIPS: Go here on a powder day! You'll be able to ski waste
deep in fresh powder snow. Make sure to arrive early as other
powder enthusiasts will certainly be visiting Cortina as well.

Lift tickets / gear

RESORT	FULL-DAY	HALF-DAY	NIGHT
Cortina	¥4,200	¥3,200	¥1,500
Norikura	¥4,100	¥3,200	N/A
Tsugaike Kogen	¥5,400	¥4,300	¥2,400
Iwatake	¥4,600	¥3,600	N/A
Happo-One	¥5,500	¥4,600	¥2,100
Hakuba 47	¥5,500	¥4,500	N/A
Hakuba Goryu	¥5,500	¥4,500	¥2,500

You can also purchase an "All Valley Pass" which allows pass
holders access to every resort within the Valley. These passes cost
¥6,101 per day and can be purchased at [hakuba.com/plan-your-trip/
lift-passes/](http://hakuba.com/plan-your-trip/lift-passes/).

■ **RENTALS:** There are a handful of English-speaking rental
shops in Hakuba. Prices will vary slightly between shops, but the

following prices are approximately what you will pay for rentals
per day.

- **ADULT STANDARD SKI OR SNOWBOARD SET:** ¥4,350
- **BOOTS:** ¥2,600
- **JACKET & PANTS:** ¥1,600
- **HELMET:** ¥1,100

Where to stay

The best places to stay are Happo-Village, Echoland, or Wadano
as these areas boast plenty of nightlife options and are centrally
located making every resort easily accessible. Hakuba has accom-
modations at every price point - from youth hostels to jaw dropping
luxury. One great midrange hotel is the Hakuba Springs Hotel. Lo-
cated five minutes from the gondola, the hotel houses probably the
best sushi in all of Hakuba Valley as well as a great late-night sports
bar.

Day trips

There are loads of great day trips and off-mountain activities in
the area, but the world-famous snow monkeys are by far the most
popular option among visitors. You can access them by car in two
hours, by public transit in three, or on a full day guided tour. Which-
ever option you choose, the monkeys are worth a visit!

EXCLUSIVE NEWS FROM:
STARS AND STRIPES
www.stripes.com

Little Greek Kitchen serves up food from scratch, fantastic view on Okinawa

STORY AND PHOTOS BY AYA ICHIHASHI,
STARS AND STRIPES
Published: October 24, 2019

Five years ago, I discovered a lovely Greek restaurant housed in an old metal shipping container on Ikei Island, part of a small island chain on the east side of Okinawa.

It was a rainy but warm fall day and Pamela Ann, the owner and chef,

was wearing rain boots and greeting her hungry customers in Japanese and English.

My friend and I were astonished by her delicious homemade Greek cuisine and fell in love with her feta cheese. The restaurant is always packed.

Pamela, 54, is originally from California but lived in the green tea capital of Japan's Shizuoka prefecture for 15 years before moving to Greece for four years. After moving back to the U.S. for two years, she decided to move to Okinawa.

As her business on Ikei Island grew, she opened the Little Greek Kitchen — an eatery and in-house cheese workshop — at Yomitan in December 2016.

"I love Okinawa; it reminds me of slow life in Greece," she said. "I know there are mixed feelings between the locals and the U.S. military, but I feel like I can be a bridge between the locals and Americans with my food."

She was right. When I went on a recent Thursday, the restaurant was packed with Americans, locals and tourists from mainland Japan, all of them smiling and enjoying their food in Pamela's company.

Pamela's big dream is to expand her cheese production.

"I want to build a bigger factory to comply with demands, as my cheeses got silver and bronze awards at Japan-wide competitions last year," she said. "I get more business from mainland Japan now."

She also recently received a diploma from Aristotle University of Thessaloniki in Greece after completing a 144-hour cheese-making seminar to brush up her cheese-crafting skills.

The Little Greek Kitchen has a simple policy: everything is made from scratch, even the pita bread.

The lunch meze, a selection of small plates, is 2,484 yen (about \$23) and dinner meze is 3,780 yen (about \$35) including salad, a main platter with variety of dishes, dessert and coffee.

No worries if you are a vegan, vegetarian or on a gluten-free diet. Just let Pamela know in advance and she can prepare your meal accordingly for an additional 108 yen for lunch.

I was excited to eat my Greek salad topped with her special "tyri" (feta) cheese. Crunchy cucumbers, olives and tomatoes are even more delicious with the cheese.

Once everyone receives the plates, Pamela explains what's on the dish in Japanese and English.

She suggests eating with her special tzatziki yogurt sauce, which is made from real Greek yogurt and is surely delicious and refreshing.

Her yogurt is made in-house with no additives or preservatives. She pasteurizes the milk, adds culture and allows it to ferment in a terracotta pot in the traditional Greek way.

I dipped my piece of grilled chicken into the tzatziki, and it was delightful, and so were the catfish fries. I submerged my mutton sausage in the sauce, and it was heavenly. It takes away some of the mutton's punchy taste and adds more depth with creamy garlic and citrusy flavor.



Reservations are a must to dine in this cozy and relaxing eatery.

ADDRESS: 1189-3-B Nagahama Yomitan, Okinawa 904-0324

HOURS: Open for lunch Thursday through Monday from noon to 2 p.m., Romantic date-night dinners are offered for adults only starting at 6 p.m. on Friday and Saturday

COST: Lunch meze 2,484 yen; dinner meze, 3,780 yen. Greek wine is available from 3,500 yen a bottle.

ONLINE: littlegreekkitchen.com or [facebook.com/littlegreekkitchenokinawa](https://www.facebook.com/littlegreekkitchenokinawa)

INFORMATION: 080-8566-0802

NOTE: Reservation only. Free parking available. Major credit cards accepted.

The frozen Greek yogurt with home-made raspberry sauce was a refreshing dessert after the hearty lunch. Pamela's Greek yogurt isn't sour at all, yet it has great texture and tastes like whipped cream cheese and a raspberry sauce accompanied it very well.

If you are lucky, you may get to order her special goat yogurt, which is great for someone who suffers lactose intolerance. I finished my meal with a delicious frappe (Greek ice cafe latte) and I could not ask for more.

"I had been searching my goat milk for six years and recently I finally found one locally!," Pamela said. "I can drink their raw goat milk because it is super smooth and delicious."

The Little Greek Kitchen has a fantastic view of the East China Sea from the restaurant; it is very cozy and relaxing. Reservations are a must for lunch and dinner; however, Pamela is planning to expand the opening hours starting in November because of the high demand from her

hungry customers.

"I may start to deliver my famous souvlaki (Greek gyros) to the near bases soon," she said.

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Little Greek Kitchen chef and owner Pamela Ann shows her real Greek yogurt, which she makes with raw milk from a local farm that she pasteurizes herself.

Ann said she recently received a diploma from Aristotle University of Thessaloniki in Greece after completing a 144-hour cheese-making seminar to brush up her cheese-crafting skills.

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Stripes Sports Trivia

SAY MY NAME! After my fourth-string quarterback gig didn't work out so well, I decided it was time for a career change and began working at a local grocery store for \$5.50 an hour. Eventually, I returned to quarterbackin' and worked my way back into the NFL. After some tears were shed, I figured things out, went to three Super Bowls and put together a Hall of Fame resume – grocery store stocker and all. Who am I?

Answer

Kurt Warner

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The Weekly Crossword

by Margie E. Burke

ACROSS

- 1 Come across as
- 5 Trailer's place
- 9 Legend maker
- 14 Moneyed one
- 15 Comply with
- 16 Food on a stick
- 17 Kind of ID
- 18 Hearty laugh
- 19 Came up
- 20 Schwarzenegger role in 1984
- 23 ___ to rest
- 24 Joystick wielder
- 25 Be theatrical
- 27 Improvise a speech
- 29 "The Black ___" (2006 film)
- 32 One in charge
- 34 Edifice
- 38 Hospital unit
- 39 Sundae topping
- 41 Salon goo
- 42 ___ Cup, in yachting
- 44 Setting for Disney's "The Aristocats"
- 46 Step off
- 48 Came to
- 49 Shade of black
- 51 Track competitor
- 53 Hindu wrap
- 54 Bargain hunter's stop
- 59 Birdbrain
- 61 Au ___
- 62 Skip over
- 63 Cotton thread
- 64 Something to build on
- 65 Touse, as hair
- 66 Marketing tactic
- 67 Ultimatum word
- 68 Catch sight of

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66						67			68			

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- 4 Ariel, for one
- 5 Greene of "Bonanza"
- 6 On the train
- 7 Bicycle part
- 8 Newbie
- 9 Alias preceder
- 10 Four in a Focus, say
- 11 Vessel featured in the 1957 film "The Enemy Below"
- 12 Iconic riveter
- 13 Still sleeping
- 21 Dolt
- 22 Type of pitcher
- 26 Waterwheel's channel
- 27 Jessica of "Fantastic Four"
- 28 Regard
- 30 Embarrass
- 31 Droning sound
- 33 Del Mar activity
- 35 Complete idiot
- 36 Violin part
- 37 Merriment
- 40 Cleaning need
- 43 Filled pasta
- 45 More than cool
- 47 Personality features
- 49 Two make a diameter
- 50 Develop
- 52 See eye to eye
- 53 River sediment
- 55 Abbey area
- 56 Pool table part
- 57 Speak like Sylvester
- 58 Crafty e-tailer
- 60 Gymnast's goal

Answers to Last Week's Crossword:

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

DID YOU KNOW?



Becoming an adult is an important milestone in most cultures, and in Japan, it is celebrated on Seijin-no-Hi, or Coming-of-Age Day. This day falls on the second Monday of every January. In Japan, age 20 is when someone becomes a legal adult. At age 20, Japanese young men and women can legally vote, drink, smoke and get married without parental consent. They also become subject to the laws and social responsibilities that bind adults. However, running for public office requires a few more years. The minimum age to run for congress or mayor is 25 and it is 30 to run for senate or to be governor.

Kanji of the week

涙

namida or rui (Tear)

Language Lesson

You're all right.

Daijoubu desu.



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STARS AND STRIPES

SUDOKU

Difficulty: Medium

Edited by Margie E. Burke

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.

Answers to Last Week's Sudoku:

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

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Yoron Island is famous for the Yurigahama sandbank, which appears for a few hours at low tide.



The must-see-before-you-die views of Yurigahama are just a ferry ride away



Snorklers can spot anemone fish, sea turtles and beautiful coral around Yoron Island.



Lucky beachgoers may find a floating glass ball.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY AYA ICHIHASHI, STARS AND STRIPES
Published: November 27, 2019

Yoron Island, a part of the Amami archipelago of Kagoshima prefecture, is a slice of Greece just two hours by ferry from Motobu Port in northern Okinawa.

Many buildings on Yoron are painted in the iconic blue and white reminiscent of the Greek island of Mykonos. In fact, Yoron and Mykonos have been sister cities since 1984.

Yoron, population about 5,000, is but 14 miles from Okinawa. The island is famous for the Yurigahama sandbank, which appears for a few hours at low tide and lasts only until the tide rises again.

The phenomenon occurs around a new moon or full moon, when the tide is lower than usual.

Yurigahama, also known as “phantom beach,” was nominated by the Zekkei Project in 2014 as one of 50 places to see in Japan before you die. The best time to spot the sandbank is from March through September.

Summer visitors may find a boat or personal watercraft at Oganeku Beach for the half-mile trip to Yurigahama for 3,000 yen (about \$28).

The island provides countless photo ops to back up your vacation brags to friends back home. After 12 years of looking, I even found a floating glass ball on the beach; I couldn't believe I found one on Yoron.

The island is overstocked with natural beauty. Its emerald green and blue waters seemed to have flowed from freshly opened buckets of paint. Up close, the waters near the sandbank are crystal clear. Photography is rampant as visitors vie for that “must-see-before-you-die” shot.

Snorkelers may take a tour to spot anemone fish and sea turtles for 4,500 yen or rent a stand-up paddleboard and SUP around for 3,000 yen. Tours include a trip to the sandbank.

Yoron is also a great place to enjoy the starry skies. I was told by friends that



Yoron Station is a great spot to take photos. It is not an actual train station, just a setting for photo ops, but it is certainly a great location.

The station's sign says, “Milky Way Galaxy Main Line,” and it is very true. At 8 p.m. a night sky full of stars and the sweep of the Milky Way were clearly visible. If you plan on making a successful photo, bring a tripod, and plan your trip around the new moon.

One of the highest points of my Yoron stay was keihan, or chicken rice, a popular Amami regional dish that I had heard is super delicious and healthy.

I topped my white steamed rice with shredded chicken, eggs, shitake mushroom, scallions, green chili pepper paste with yuzu and nori seaweed, then over it I poured the chicken broth.

I was so excited to eat my first bite. It was absolutely



Keihan, a popular dish in Japan's Amami archipelago, means “chicken rice.”

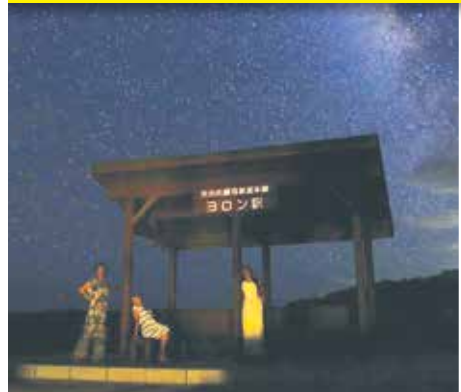
delightful. I recommend a trip to the Yoronto Village Tara hotel restaurant for its keihan, 1,300 yen, for lunch.

I went there twice during my stay and thinking about the meal makes my mouth water. We requested an extra bowl of rice and broth, too.

Camp sites are available near Oganeku Beach for 500 yen per person or rent a cottage for 5,000 yen a night.

Most of the “minshuku” lodges are available from 5,500 yen with breakfast. The ferry fare is heavily discounted till further notice, so take advantage and see the breathtaking Yoron blues!

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Yoron Station on the “Milky Way Galaxy Main Line” is a great spot to visit. It is not an actual train station, just a setting for photo ops.



Yoron Island, part of the Amami archipelago in Japan's Kagoshima prefecture, is just two hours by ferry from Motobu Port in northern Okinawa.