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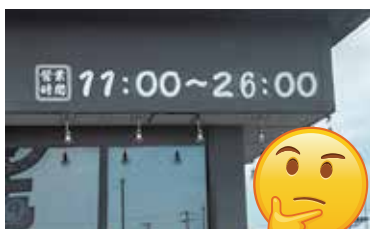
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EXPLORE WITH US

Our community products are geared toward giving you the tools to make the most of your time while stationed in the Pacific.

Whether you are in mainland Japan, Okinawa, Korea or Guam, we're going to help you get off base and explore. We'll help you find that tasty restaurant, eye-popping day trip or fun festival that really lets you dive into the local culture.

And don't worry, we'll take it step by step. We'll show you how to get on a train, bus or taxi. Or, if you are driving, we'll show you where and how to park. Seriously,

we're here to hold your hand, help you take some baby steps and then set you free, with the knowledge that if you ever get lost or are looking for some travel tips, destinations or anything else, all you need to do is pick up this paper, one of our magazines or special supplements, or click on one of our community websites or Facebook and Instagram pages to get all the free information you seek.

So how do we compile the thousands of stories that are at your fingertips? Well, besides partnering with dozens of outside organizations from around the world, we

also count on you, our military community, to submit stories. And you always come through! Hey, like we fond of saying, "We're going to make you famous!"

And then there's our team: writers Hyemin Lee (Korea), Shoji Kudaka (Okinawa), Takahiro Takiguchi and Luis Samayoa (mainland Japan) and their editor, Denisse Rauda (mainland Japan). Yes, that's an illustration of them on front page. And they love what they do. You see, for us to do our job properly, we go out and experience

SEE EXPLORE ON PAGE 8

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FRESH FISH OF THE DAY

Spectacular seafood, more at Yomitan fish market

STORY AND PHOTOS BY PETER LIN,
JAPAN TRAVEL

Uminchu Shokudo is a cafeteria style seafood restaurant located in the Yomitan Village Fishermen's Cooperative Store. Located in Yomitan near Toya Port, this seaside store sells a huge variety of fresh seafood including sashimi, made to order tempura, and fresh whole fish. Upstairs, there is a cafeteria style restaurant (Uminchu Shokudo) that serves excellent seafood dishes including rice bowls with various seafood toppings and seafood soups. The food is simple but delicious and the atmosphere very authentic.

Orders are placed through a ticket machine and then the tickets given to the cooks who prepare the meal. Everything is made fresh. A restaurant favorite is the fried tuna rice bowl. Another unusual but satisfying dish is the squid ink soup, a black colored soup with tender pieces of squid. The seafood kaisendon is a colorful dish with a generous amount of umibudo, tuna, ikura, shrimp, and other fresh sashimi.

There are English translations of the items on the menu as well as in the store in general. The more popular dishes



The Yomitan Village Fishermen's Cooperative Store is next to the port.



Abundant seafood in the fish market.



Seafood kaisendon, a beautiful mixture of seafood on rice.

can be purchased on the first floor to go. Tempura can also be ordered to go or taken upstairs to eat in the cafeteria with the other dishes.

Prices are very reasonable with no dish costing more than 2000 yen. The

seating is either at tables inside the restaurant or outside on the patio. Sitting on the patio with the sun and ocean breeze eating fresh seafood is a wonderful experience.

Uminchu Shokudo is open from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. daily. It is closest

to the Toya Fishing Port. There is a parking lot in the port for visitors. Toya Port offers many activities including fishing boat tours and a whale shark snorkeling and diving expedition tour. Stop by at this restaurant on your way to the Yachimun pottery stores in Yomitan or the Cape Zanpa lighthouse.

Uminchu Shokudo

Uminchu Shokudo is located in the Yomitan Village Fishermen's Cooperative Store building at the Toya fishing port.

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District 904-0305

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A day of exploration on Yagaji Beach

STORY AND PHOTOS BY SHOJI KUDAKA,
STRIPES OKINAWA

Yagaji Beach is located by Route 110, which connects the northwest coast of Okinawa's main island and Yagaji Island. I passed by this beach when I toured the Motobu Peninsula by bike back in February. Its peaceful waters looked beautiful and soothing.

Several months after that, the view still lingered on my mind. So, I decided to go back there. According to the beach's website, people can enjoy camping, BBQ, and kayaking there. For me, BBQ was the top priority because it had been a while since I enjoyed grilling on the beach.

Because I don't own a grill, I made a reservation to rent one on-site. I also pre-ordered food (beef, sausage, chicken on a stick, and vegetables) so I could just go there without too much preparation.

Renting a grill set cost me 3,000 yen (approx. \$20), and a total of 2,200 yen (this price is now raised to 2,500 yen) was charged for food. Plus, I rented a pop-up shade for 1,000 yen.

Paying 500 yen for the admission fee at the entrance, I drove into a camping site, which was a long stretch of lawn that ran along the coast. The lush green area was well maintained and comfortable. I pulled into a spot facing a small islet that floats not far from the shore.

The barbecue grill I rented was compact and easy to handle. As soon as I lit the charcoal, my appetite began to grow. I decided to cook up the vegetables first. I am sure there are proper ways to grill vegetables, but every time I barbecue, that curiosity doesn't last long because of my appetite for beef. And this day was no exception. As soon as the edge of cabbages and onions turned brown, I took them off the grill to make room for the main dish.

Sizzling on the grill under the hot sun, the red beef looked even more appetizing than usual. As I grilled the beef and sausages, the aroma kept me tipsy, even without alcohol.

When I was done with grilling, it was around 12:30 p.m. I seated myself on a log with a plate full of grilled food in my hands, facing the ocean and the islet. I certainly felt tired after cooking in the strong sunshine. Still, with one bite of the beef, the fatigue was off my mind. While enjoying the grilled food

and ocean view, I thought back to my childhood when my family camped out by the ocean and enjoyed the same food.

Once my stomach was full, I was ready to explore the ocean, which looked very enticing.

It was around 1 p.m. The tide was low, and a line of sand was exposed above the water, connecting the shore to that islet. According to the beach's staff, this natural bridge is commonly called "pure road" and is believed to bring happiness if visitors cross it to the small island. If they happen to be couples, the trip can bring romance, at least that's what the beach's website says. Although I was alone on that day, a walk on the sandy bridge to the islet seemed like the thing to do, even if it didn't bring some luck for love.

The distance to the islet was about 150 meters. The sandy road felt a little bumpy under my beach sandals. Up close, the islet looked enormous.

Just like many other rocks and islets around Okinawa, this one has a skinny bottom, making it look like a giant mushroom. The top was covered with shrubs and trees. The huge structure was composed of two parts: one big rock and a small one lining up horizontally to the shore. There was a gap between the two, through which I could see two more islets floating in the distance. There were a few people around those islets. They must have walked through the low tide to get there. So, I decided to follow their

steps.

As I left the first islet and headed to the second, the water remained shallow. At times the surface of water reached my thighs, but it soon subsided back to below my knees. Here and there, small fish were swimming by. There were also sea cucumbers lying at the bottom.

After going more than 200 meters, I came close to the second islet. There was also another one about 50 meters away. The one close to me had a cave that ran from the front to its back. Out of curiosity and also looking for some shade, I decided to explore the cave.

Inside, the grotto was low-lit by the sunlight bounced off some puddles of water. In the dusky space, I could see several crabs hiding themselves in between cracks on the rocks. I was



not sure what other creatures were lurking, but I didn't feel any danger.

I just sat there for several minutes, enjoying the view of the shore through the mouth of the cave. The waters around the islet cast blue light into the cave, creating a relaxing atmosphere.

When I left the islet with a cave after 10 minutes or so, I spotted a possible danger for the first time. As was I walking to the other islet, there was something transparent floating on the surface of the water and less than a meter from me. It took me several seconds to realize it was a jellyfish. Although I was not sure if it was a box jellyfish, the idea of encountering potentially dangerous life forms made me nervous.

Recently I heard several news reports where locals or tourists were stung by this marine creature with toxic venom. So, I quickly left the area. Fortunately, the waters remained shallow and posed no difficulties. The last islet I visited looked similar to the first one. As I walked around, I spotted another jellyfish waiting for me. Taking it as a sign of a point of no return, I decided to head back.

By the time I was back on the shore, the tide was getting high. I spent some time just watching the natural bridge gradually disappear.

In total, I probably walked about 1 kilometer in the water. Exploring such a distance in the ocean without swimming was something I had never experienced in Okinawa. I felt tired for sure, but also very much satisfied with my time on Yagaji Beach.

kudaka.shoji@stripes.com



View video!

GPS COORDINATES: N 26.647958, E 128.033799

ADMISSION (single day trip): 500 yen for middle school age and above, 300 yen for between elementary school age and three years of age.

*During busy season such as Golden Week, the above fees are adjusted to 750 yen and 450 yen respectively.

HOURS: 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. (for a day trip)

*You can also spend the night camping or staying at an on-site lodge. In that case, the admission fees will be 1,000 yen for middle school age and above, 600 yen for between elementary school age and three years of age.

*Reservation recommended.

*Reservations for BBQ need to be made by noon on the previous day. BBQ Ingredients sets costs 1,500 yen or more.

*The beach's office says their swimming season ends in October. It will be at your own responsibility to get in the water during winter time. You can enjoy BBQ there with no problem.

*For more information, contact Yagaji Beach Office at 0980-52-8123 or info@yagaji-beach.com.



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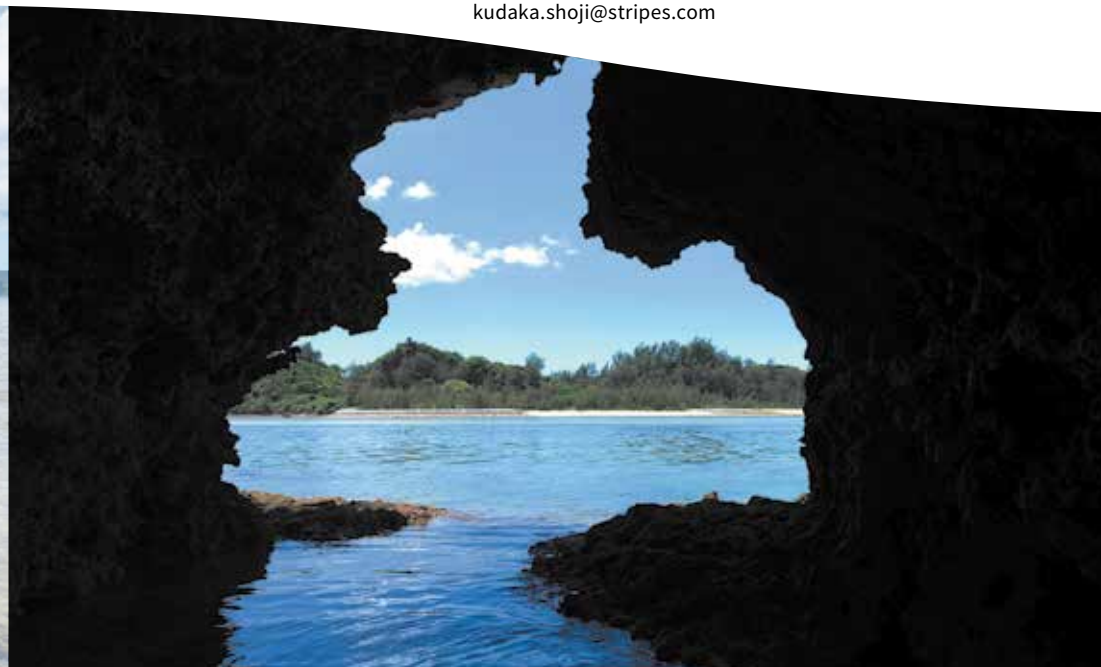




Photo by Luis Samayoa, Stripes Japan

Japan's 30-hour clock explained

BY AUSTIN HOWTON,
STRIPE OKINAWA

The clock does not always stop at midnight in Japan. Those up late at night might notice a curious 30-hour timekeeping system used in Japan. Rather than resetting the day at 00:00, midnight, the 30-hour clock continues counting through the early morning hours. A show listed at 25:00 airs at 1 a.m. A train leaving at 27:00 departs at 3 a.m. This system of timekeeping stretches as far as 30:00, or 6 a.m., before the next business day begins.

This unusual timekeeping format started in Japanese astronomy pre-WWII for researchers keeping logs overnight. By extending the day beyond 24 hours, astronomers avoided confusion caused by switching dates in the middle of their shift.

The practice soon spread beyond astronomy, however.

After World War II, Japan's railways adopted the system in printed timetables published by Kotsu Shimbunsha. These overnight train departure times were listed as 24:00 and beyond, keeping schedules tied to the day the journey began. A Thursday night departure at 25:30 was understood as Thursday's last train, not Friday morning's first train.

In the 1960s, this practice moved to broadcast. Radio stations began filling the wee hours with music and talk. In 1967, Nippon Broadcasting System, Inc. launched "All Night Nippon," a late-night radio show that proudly ran from 25:00 to 27:00.

When television expanded into the late-night slots, it followed suit. TV guides nationwide printed programs using the 30-hour clock, cementing the clock as part of Japanese pop culture.

In Okinawa, the 30-hour clock is used throughout the prefecture, particularly among broadcast stations and businesses open into the early morning hours.

The Ryukyu Broadcasting Corporation (RBC) uses the extended clock format for its programming day with a 28-hour clock for both radio and television broadcasting. The RBC starts its programming

day at 4 a.m. and ends the day at 28:00 or 3 a.m.

In the United States, the clock does not extend beyond 24 hours, but the concept of early morning hour programming belonging to the previous day is similar.

For instance, "Saturday Night Live" airs live at roughly 11:30 p.m. Eastern Time. The program is 90 minutes with a majority of the program airing on Sunday morning, yet the show is associated with Saturday because the early hours of Sunday morning are still widely viewed as Saturday night by the American public.

The Naha International Airport lists its parking lot hours as open from 06:00 to 24:00, noting plane delays can cause the lot's operating hours to extend beyond 24:00. Rollup Burrito in Koza is open until 25:00 on Friday (Saturday at 1 a.m.) and 26:00 on Saturday (Sunday at 2 a.m.).

In these cases, the time goes beyond the traditional 24-hour clock to avoid ambiguity caused by the traditional 24-hour clock.

Since the Naha International Airport closes at night, any delay that causes workers to stay later than midnight and the parking lot to remain open is part of the previous business day, not the ensuing day.

Likewise, this applies to customers. A customer grabbing a meal at 1 a.m. after a day out would consider their meal the last meal of the previous day, not a current-day breakfast.

Although many Japanese associate early morning hours with the previous day, this usage does not extend to ordinary conversation.

When asked how Okinawans would say that they were going to a restaurant at 25:00, Okinawa native Daisuke Tsuchiya said, "we will say 1 [a.m.]."

In Japan, time does not stop at midnight, it just keeps going.

Austin Howton is a U.S. Air Force Contracting Officer and licensed attorney that has been stationed at Kadena since November of 2023. He enjoys reading, travelling, and exploring the intersections of law, government and global affairs.

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Time : 10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.
Location: Tropical Dream Center (Chura-Shima Botanical Garden)
Admission: Adults (high school age and older) : ¥760
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MUSCLE MEMORY

Testing body, mind at Look Rock Bouldering Park near Kadena AB

STORY AND PHOTOS BY SHOJI KUDAKA,
STRIPES OKINAWA

Before trying my hand at bouldering, climbing a wall like Spiderman seemed to be something only talented athletes could do. After an hour testing my grip strength and stamina at a local rock gym, I left with a different impression of the sport.

Look Rock Bouldering Park provides space for both beginners and experienced boulderers to practice their skills in

Okinawa. The gym is only three minutes away from Gate 3 of Kadena Air Base and the main gate of Camp Shields.

If you are new to the sport like I am, you may wonder what the difference is between bouldering and rock climbing.

Rock climbing can have a broad meaning, but one key element referenced by many sources is the use of gear. According to Avec Sport, a UK sport gear brand, rock climbing typically “uses safety gear such as ropes, harnesses and helmets,” whereas bouldering is “done at lower heights, and does not include the use of ropes or harnesses.”

Look Rock Bouldering Park is geared to bouldering. Although you don’t use safety gear, a soft ground runs side by side the walls for climbers to land without getting injured.

During my visit, owner Chihiro Iwami and staff member Hiroto Uechi guided me through my introduction to bouldering, which went way beyond just hopping on the rock-shaped grips and pulling up.

It’s a sport that challenges your body and mind.

According to Iwami, each wall has its own rule. The wall I was working on required climbers to only ascend using the holds of the same color. The starting point was indicated with an S mark and the goal at the top was marked with a G mark.

This wall for beginners and kids was 3.5 meters high, which was one meter shy of the wall for advanced bouldering. Peppered with holds of several shapes and colors, the wall reminded me of Tetris. Climbing felt like playing a video game in real life.

“When you start, you need to grip the starting hold with both of your hands and your legs should not touch the ground,” Iwami said.

“When you reach the goal, you need to

Things to know

GPS COORDINATES: 26.35987, 127.80088 (behind Sun-sea DIY store)

HOURS: 1 – 8 p.m. (Mon. – Fri.), 10 a.m. – 10 p.m. (Sat., Sun., holidays) *Closed on Wed

FEES: One-hour session costs 700 yen (approx. \$4.76). Two-hour session: 1,200 yen for adults (15 years old and above) and 1,000 yen for children (under the age of 15).

*Rental shoes are available for 500 yen.

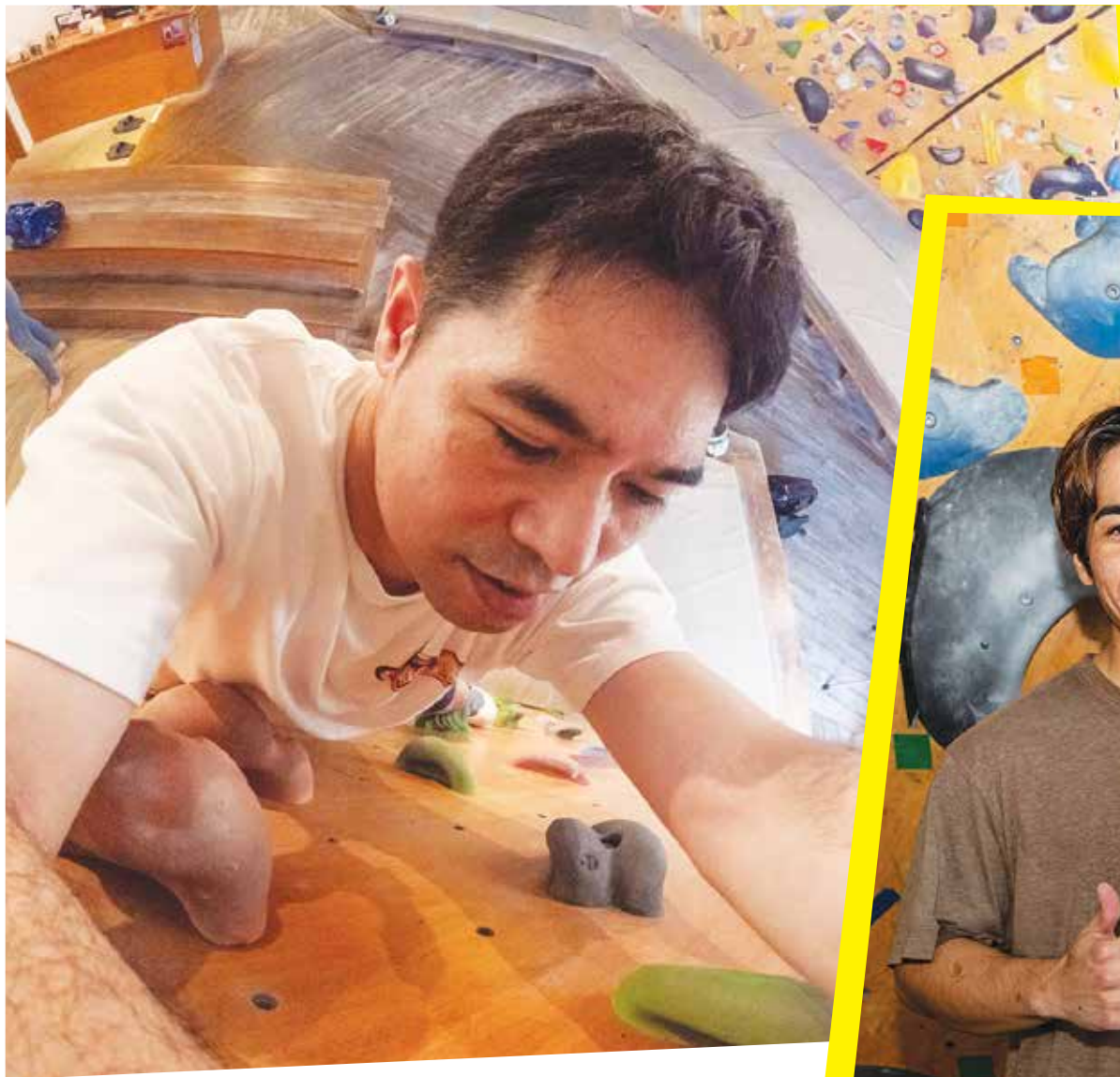


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Staff member Hiroto Uechi shows an example of how to conquer a complicated route.



View video!



Owner Chihiro Iwami (right) and staff member Hiroto Uechi (left) help customers by giving advice.

keep the position for three seconds,” he continued. “You can use holds of whichever color hold when you come back down. Just make sure you come down safely and avoid jumping off the wall.”

With all the basic introductory rules, I took a stab at climbing.

I chose yellow, the easiest beginner color as identified by a wall chart posted near the wall. There’s also a grade conversion chart indicating what level each color corresponds to in the American grade system.

The yellow holds did not pose any serious challenge and took about 20 seconds to reach the goal.

When I moved onto the blue holds, which were the second easiest next to yellow, however, it all changed suddenly. There were some differences in the shape between yellow holds and blue holds, the blue ones were either more round or smaller, making them harder to grab. But what really set them apart from the yellow was the position of each.

Even to lift myself past the initial point

was a struggle. As I reached for the next hold, I lost my balance and my body was torn between the first and second holds. It seemed that these blue holds were positioned in a way that required some guessing to conquer.

After several failed attempts, Iwami stepped in and gave me a hint.

“At first, this is more of a game to test your balance. To move up, your hand needs to let go of a hold. So, you need to consider how you can keep yourself in balance, grabbing a hold with only one hand. One thing I say to folks is to form a triangle. Keeping yourself on the wall by three contact points is crucial,” he said, advising me to try putting my weight at the center of the triangle’s base.

Iwami also shared another trick, which is to use the side or the surface of the wall as a hold. By hooking my foot on the side of the wall, I could finally lift my body.

As I hung on the wall, a revelation dawned on me: The game was physically demanding, but finding the right route took

a lot of thinking, making it feel like a puzzle as well.

Thanks to Iwami’s advice, I managed to complete three routes.

Toward the end of my session, I felt confident trying the taller, advanced wall. This one looked a lot bigger and was packed more densely with colorful holds of all shapes and sizes. The wall also had varying degrees of climbing space, including a slight tilt forward and a section with an overhang to mimic what a climber might find in a cave or off a cliff.

After working the wall for beginners, I was losing grip strength and my feet were aching. But somehow, my hands grabbed hold with much less difficulty. It felt like my muscle memory kicked in.

After several attempts, I managed to complete a blue course on the

vertical wall, but had nothing left in the tank to continue after that.

Iwami said that the first attempt at bouldering can be difficult, but that climbers do it smoothly the second time around.

With all my grip strength pretty much gone, I listened to Iwami and my hands could still feel the grip of each of those blue and yellow holds.

Spending an hour at the gym turned out to be quite refreshing physically and mentally. Now I’m thinking about doing it again.

kudaka.shoji@stripes.com

Salt ramen perfect post-climb meal

To replenish my energy, I made a stop at Menya Shuntaku, a five-minute drive away from Look Rock Bouldering Park.

This ramen joint is known for serving up ramen with salt broth, which is not so common in Okinawa. I tried the signature menu item shio (salt) ramen (1000 yen) because I wanted something light flavored after the intense exercise.

The delicate sweetness of the broth went very well with thin noodles and savory green onions on top. The thin pork slices added a nice texture and a

different kind of sweetness.

Lucky for me, the ramen came with a side of takikomi gohan (seasoned rice), which you could eat as much as you wanted for free until 3 p.m.

Normally, I might go for Menya Shuntaku’s shoyu ramen for 1000 yen or noukou tonkotsu (rich pork bone broth) ramen for 1,100 yen. But on this day, the salt ramen was the perfect choice for me.

- Shoji Kudaka

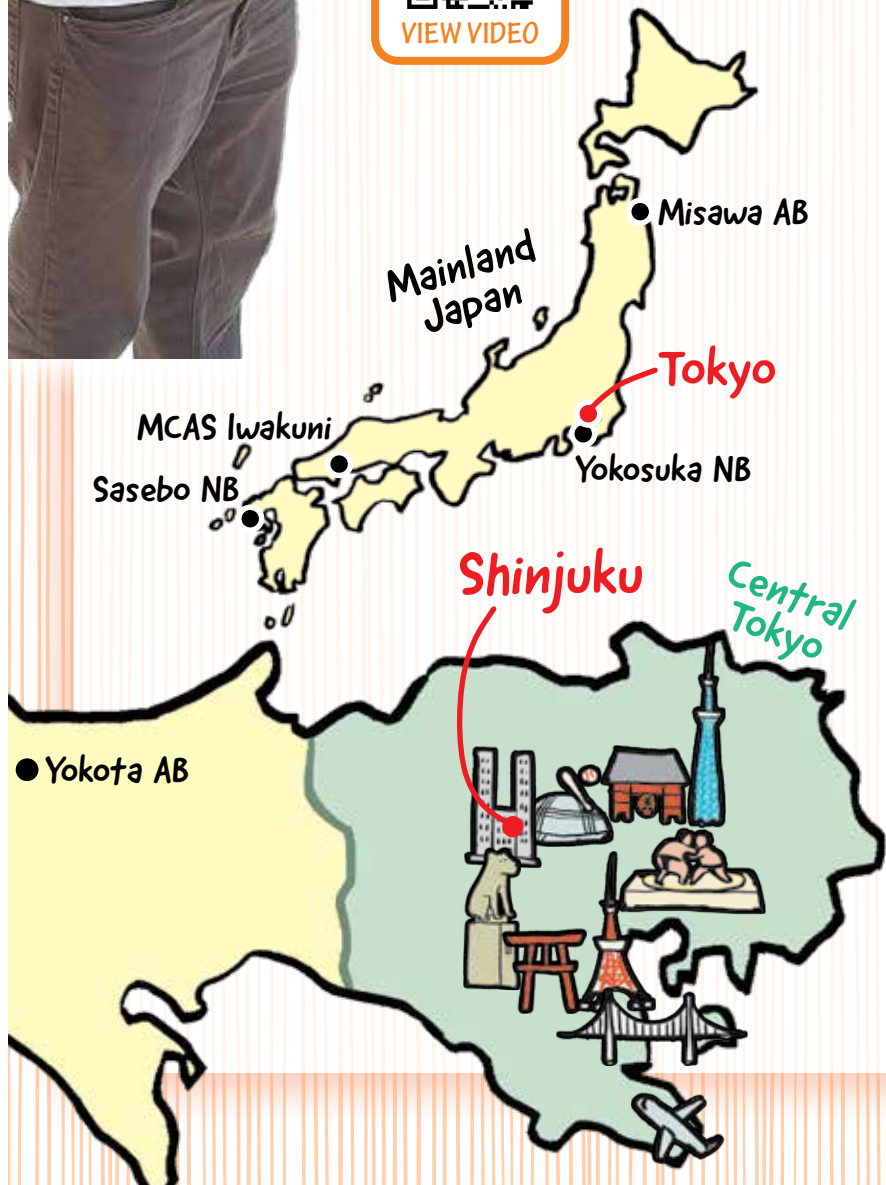


Menya Shuntaku

GPS COORDINATES: 26.35640, 127.80482
HOURS: 11 a.m. – 10 p.m. (last order at 9:45 p.m.)



INSTAGRAM



SHINJUKU

On the hunt for daytime fun in Tokyo's nightlife central

Shinjuku, a city known for its neon lights and nightlife, is filled with many seedy alleyways and people from all around the world trying to check out this red-light district. I always wondered if there was more to do here than just its well-documented night scene, so with my co-worker from Okinawa, Shoji, we took a daytime trip there.

My first thought when walking through the city in the light of day was how empty the walkway was. Perfect for introverted people like me.

For those into shopping, Takashimaya Mall, NewoMan and Lumine fit the bill. If you are searching for a luxury brand and don't want to deal with the crowds, coming to the city in the daytime is a great option.

We found it easy to watch the 3D Calico Cat billboard do its thing every 15 minutes on the big monitor outside the East Exit of Shinjuku Station and get a closeup view of Godzilla's head on the Kabukicho strip. In the evening, these areas are packed with people taking photos and videos.

We also enjoyed the fact that dining establishments are not packed like they are in the evening, allowing you to walk in and grab a table. We managed to try a delicious Taiwanese restaurant during our stop. No

wait and the food was great. We also had an absolute blast swinging the baseball bat in some batting cages and visiting Gyoen Park during our daytime visit to this night-life city.

Disclaimer: The night still lingers on in some places.

Although coming to Shinjuku in the daytime is relaxing – less crowds, no lines and space to roam freely – there is still some seediness lurking. There were times it reeked like the bathroom or something very pungent, but that can be expected in a red-light district.

The shop signs were much easier to examine in the day. Bars and clubs with the occasional love hotel in between. As a married man who no longer drinks, I have no interest in coming to these types of places. (Reminder: Under USFJ policy, entering off-limit establishments or paying for prostitution is against the rules for Military, Civilian contractors and dependents.)

Shoji and I set out to explore Shinjuku in search of things that didn't include drinking. We accomplished that mission and are excited to share our findings with you.

– Luis Samayoa

EXPLORE: We do it for you!

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

things first-hand so we can tell you about it, offer tips and give you directions. During a 5-day gathering at our headquarters in Tokyo, our writers, page designers and web team joined forces to brainstorm story ideas and discuss how to best display and tell the tales of our adventures.

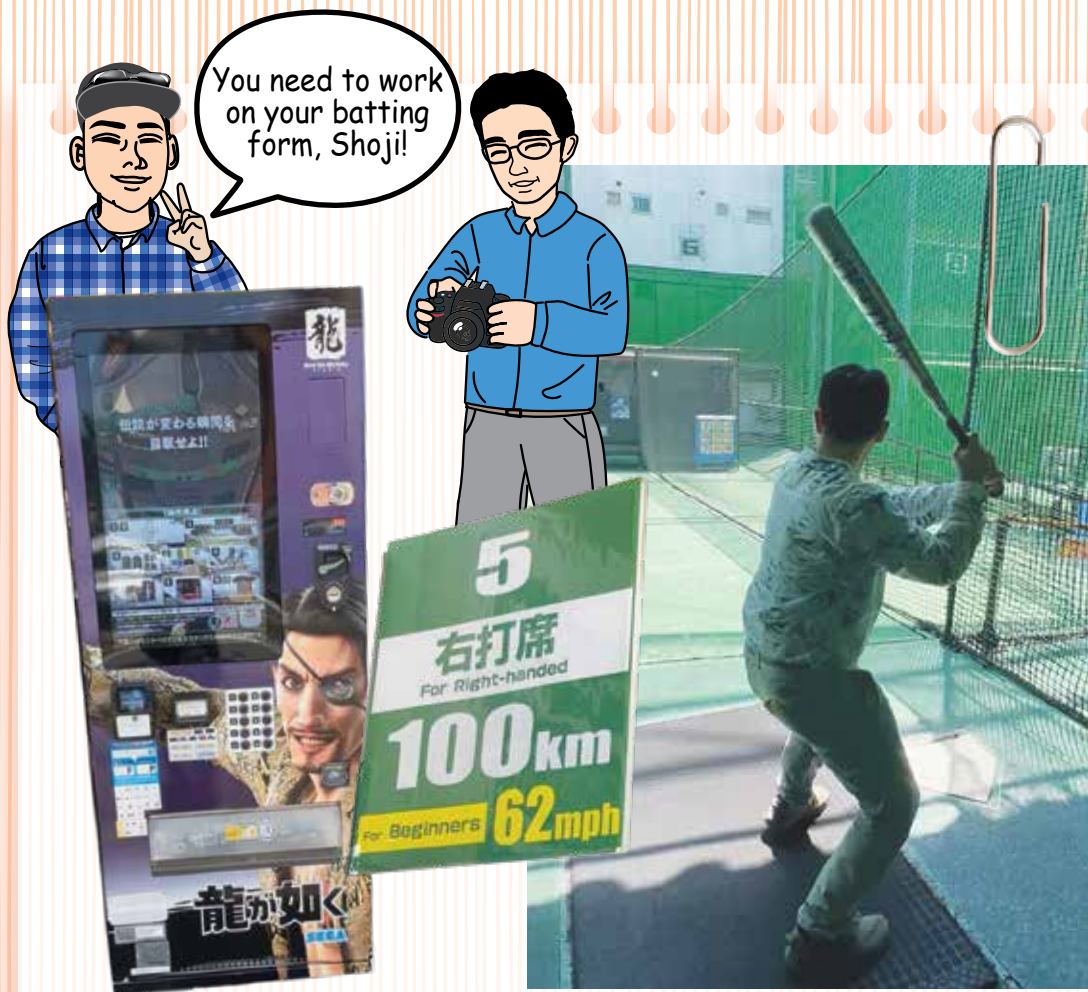
And it was a week for them to do some team reporting. And what better way to do that than take a day trip? But unlike years' past when they hit the road to explore Kamakura, Enoshima, Yamanashi and Shizuoka, they decided to be city slickers and explore Tokyo, hopping on trains, buses and taxis, or just letting their legs do the work. When we planned the trip, we considered our Okinawan, Shoji, and what his tropical paradise-influenced take might be on city life, especially since he lived in Tokyo for a while decades ago. And, of course, we were also excited to get Hyemin's point of view on things as a Korean, just like she did two years ago during her

first trip to Japan.

To explore as much of the city as possible, Shoji and Luis paired up, as did Hiro and Hyemin. As for Denisse, she split her day between the two pairs.

The five of them, a motley crew from different generations, cultures, backgrounds and interests, hit the streets to explore Tokyo. In the next four editions, you'll read all about their excursions, what they learned, what they liked and what they would probably skip next time. So, sit down, and let our crew tell you about themselves and show you how to enjoy a day of window shopping, visiting temples, shrines and museums, hitting the batting cages (you need to work on your swing, Luis), touring a beer brewery (Hiro's favorite pastime), eating local cuisine, picture-taking, lots of walking ... and plenty of laughs. Yes, they have a tough job, but they do it for you.

– Chris Carlson,
Publishing and Media Design Manager



Hitting the batting cages

I've seen many anime shows where there's a batting cage scene, which has always fascinated me. I took my swings in the cages before when I was stationed in Korea, but strawberry soju kind of makes it a blur. I decided to give this very affordable and fun activity to try in Shinjuku sober to see what it's like.

I found two batting cages in the area, one is called Tokyo Batting Cage, which looks new on Google Maps and the other is the retro Shinjuku Batting Center. We decided to kick it old-school and visit Shinjuku Batting Center, a 15-minute walk from Shinjuku Station.

When Shoji and I arrived, we noticed a cool vending machine that sold Yakuza video

game franchise items. It was a bit on the pricey side, so I skipped it. If you are a fan of the franchise, you can buy merch here. But I was there for baseball, not souvenirs.

Walking in, everything had a retro-like feel to it. They had coin slot arcade games like Time Splitters 4 and Streetfighter.

Although all the games are in Japanese, the instructions

to use the batting cages are in English, so I quickly grabbed a cage to start getting my swings in. You will need to bring yen to exchange for 100-yen coins to play. Each cage has descriptions like the speed of the ball pitched or left-handed or right-handed. If the cage is empty, it's yours to grab. If not, you may have to wait in line or play some arcade games.

After depositing 400 yen into the machine to start, the baseballs started coming my way, one after another, so be prepared. To be honest, I was a bit worried at first because I'm a bit thrashed up physically by active duty, but this activity didn't really cause too much strain on Uncle Sam's property.

Shoji and I took turns swinging the bat and had a great time, even though we might have missed more balls than we connected on. As I was swinging, I kept focused on the ball and tried to forget about life's problems. It was a mental refresher and a cool experience to do sober. When I was in Korea, those drunk times in the batting cage didn't make the experience as memorable as it was today. Time flew by so quickly, yet it was incredibly fun.

To those who are in the city and don't fancy a drink, I would recommend coming down to the batting cages and swinging for the fences. It's easy to do and a great way to spend time in this red-light district.

– Luis Samayoa

Things to know

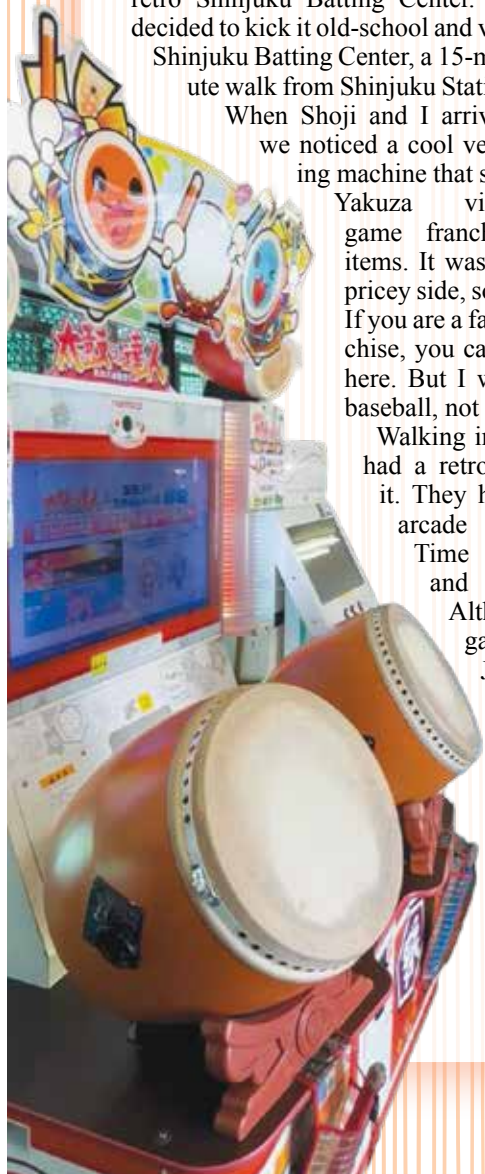
ADDRESS: Shinjuku Batting Center: 2-21-13 Kabukicho, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo 160-0021, Tokyo Batting Cage: 2-34-5 Kabukicho, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo 160-0021

HOURS: 10 a.m. – 4 a.m., 7 days a week

OTHER INFO: Paid parking is available nearby; taking the train is more ideal. They don't have an ATM, so bring yen.



SHINJUKU
BATTING
CENTER
WEBSITE

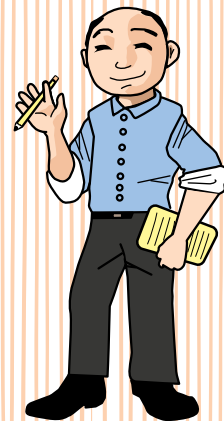


Denisse

I'm Denisse Rauda from El Paso, Texas, but now living in Tokyo. I have been with Stripes for 12 years. My interests include binge-watching TV shows, karaoke, tennis and exploring Tokyo. Nice to meet you!

Soy Denisse Rauda de El Paso, Texas, pero ahora vivo en Tokio. He trabajado en Stripes por doce años. Mis intereses incluyen maratones de series de televisión, karaoke, tenis y explorar Tokio. ¡Encantada de conocerle!

rauda.denisse@stripes.com



Hiro

I'm Takahiro Takiguchi from Yokosuka City in mainland Japan. I have been with Stripes for 13 years. My interests include food, drinks, travel and music. Nice to meet you!

神奈川県横須賀市在住の滝口隆弘です。星条旗新聞でのライター歴13年。趣味は旅行、食べ歩きに飲み歩き、それに音楽です。よろしくお願いします!

takiguchi.takahiro@stripes.com

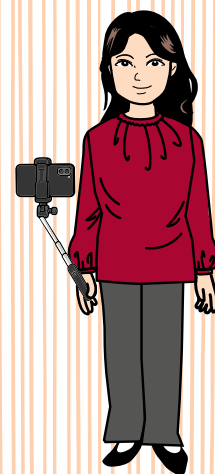
Shoji

I'm Shoji Kudaka from Okinawa. I have been with Stripes for 10 years.

My interests include travel, sports, movies, photography, TV shows, cats and dogs. Nice to meet you!

沖縄県在住の久高将司です。ストライプスに在籍して10年になります。トラベル、スポーツ、映画、写真、テレビ、犬や猫に興味があります。よろしくお願いします!

kudaka.shoji@stripes.com



Hyemin

Hi, I'm Hyemin Lee, a Seoul native based in Pyeongtaek. I've been with Stripes for 4 years. I love sharing Korea's destinations, culture, history, local tips and fun things to know with the U.S. military community. Nice to meet you!

안녕하세요. 저는 이혜민입니다. 스타스앤스트라이프와 함께한 지는 4년 정도 됐어요. 미군 커뮤니티에 한국의 여행지, 문화, 역사, 현지 팁, 알아두면 재미있는 이야기들을 소개하는걸 좋아해요. 만나서 반가워요!

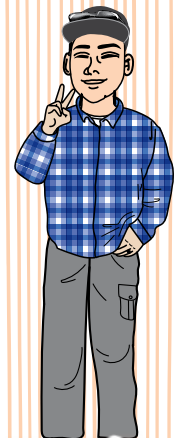
lee.hyemin@stripes.com

Luis

Hi, I'm Luis Samayoa, from San Diego, California. This is my 3rd and last year with Stars and Stripes as their military staffer. My interests are traveling, eating, exploring Japan and collecting souvenirs like Sake and Milk Bottles everywhere I go. Nice to meet you!

パグ・ライフ

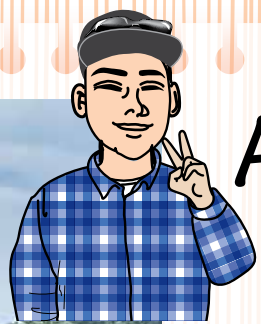
samayoa.luis@stripes.com



Illustrations by Yukiyo Oda

SEE MORE SHINJUKU
ON PAGE 10





A blissful escape at Shinjuku Gyoen National Park



You can spend the entire day in Shinjuku roaming the alleyways, or you can spend some time relaxing in the Gyoen National Garden surrounded by nature in this gigantic park a short walk from the Kabukicho district.

This garden is massive, covering over 145 acres (about 54 football fields), with plenty of open space to sit down and relax away from heavy crowds. It's about a 10-minute walk from the train station and quite easy to find once you place it on navigation. When Shoji and I arrived, we paid our admission fee of 500 yen each and proceeded to walk right in.

Just to throw it out there, there's a Starbucks in the East Area, in case you'd like a caffeine buzz with your dose of nature. We skipped the coffee because it was too hot and just went on a nice stroll.

The park was a great escape from Shinjuku's main strip. I enjoyed walking aimlessly as I took in the beautiful scenery. The park is large with multiple walking paths, so it's easy to get lost, which to me isn't a bad thing. But if you have reservations for an event or restaurant after visiting, make sure you know beforehand what exit you need to use.

There is a lot to see at this park and if you are on a time crunch like we were, you won't be able to see it all. But that's okay because we were able to relax and unwind a bit, get a view of the Taiwan Pavillion from a distance and cross the beautiful bridges in the upper pond on the park's east side.

There is plenty more to see, including the Old Imperial Rest House, Shinjuku Gyoen Museum, Formal Garden and the cherry blossom trees section. I recommend taking half a day to just lounge around and visit all the sections. It can make you forget about the hustle and bustle of work and big city life, even if just for a little bit.

I will admit coming by foot may not have been the best idea, but I have no regrets about visiting this park. I never really thought about what Tokyo had to offer since it only feels like skyscrapers and narrow roads. It's also great to see the pride Japan takes in maintaining their gardens and parks.

I plan on visiting this park again, but will take the train to the nearest entrance instead of walking. And I'll also stay a lot longer.

– Luis Samayoa



Near Shinjuku-Gyoemmae Station

■ THINGS TO KNOW

ADDRESS: 11 Naitomachi, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo, 160-0014

HOURS: Open daily from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Closed Mondays and Thursdays.

OTHER INFO: Payment can be made with yen, Suica or credit card. There is no parking available here, it's best to take the train when visiting.



WEBSITE



Speakin' Japanese

Let's go to Shinjuku!

Shinjuku is a big city with many spots to explore. Use the phrase below and have fun without getting lost!

“Shinjuku niwa dou ikeba iidesuka?”

= Do you know how to get to Shinjuku Station?
 (“niwa” = to; “dou” = how; “ikeba” = go/get there; iidesuka = should I ~)

“deguchi wa doko-desuka?” = Where is deguchi exit?
 (“deguchi” = exit; “wa” = a particle to indicate a subject; “doko-desuka?” = where is ~)

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.

“**Chuo/Higashi/Nishi/Minami Deguchi.**” = Central/East/West/South Exit.
 (“chuo” = center; “higashi” = east; “nishi” = west; “minami” = south)

“**Shinjuku atari wo sanpo surunoga yoidesu.**” = A stroll around Shinjuku Gyoen sounds nice.
 (“Atari” = around; “sanpo” = strolling/walking; “surunoga” = doing something; “yoidesu” = is good)

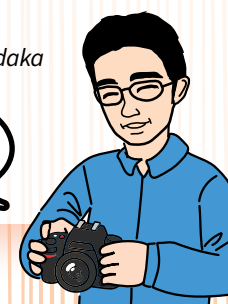
“**Onaka ga suite imasuka?**” = Are you hungry?
 (“onaka” = stomach; “ga” = a particle to indicate a subject; “suite iru/suite imasuka” = is empty/is empty?)

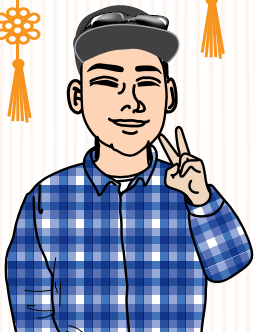
“**Resutoran wa doko desuka?**” = Where is the restaurant?
 (“resutoran” = restaurant; “wa” = a particle to indicate a subject; “doko desuka?” = where is?)

“**Kaimono wo shimasho.**” = Let's do some shopping.
 (“kaimono” = shopping; “wo” = a particle to indicate an object; “shimasho” = let's do)

– Shoji Kudaka

Time to learn a little Japanese!





Taking a break for Taiwanese food near Shinjuku Station

We arrived at Shinjuku Station at 11 a.m. and headed out to a small restaurant called Taiwan Ten Café. This café opens at 11:30 and there is no need to make a reservation, so coming on time or a bit after isn't an issue.

After we were seated, the server told us we could order through the QR code at the table or the LINE app on our phones. I tried the LINE app, but it was difficult since the menu was all in Japanese. Fortunately, ordering at the counter is also an option, so I went up and placed my order without hassle.

I picked the 3-piece shrimp dumplings, one beef noodle bowl and jasmine tea for 2,430 yen (about \$15). It was an affordable meal compared to the big city prices for similar meals in the big city.

It took a few minutes for my meal to arrive, so I sat just admiring this small restaurant and its aesthetics of bright red Taiwanese lanterns, photos and designs. The music in the background was a bit of Japanese pop and the whole restaurant was just relaxing.

When my order arrived, I decided to try out the Taiwanese dumplings first and to my surprise, they

were absolutely amazing. Each bite was mouthful and the dumplings disappeared in minutes. The beef noodle broth was equally delicious. The broth, thick noodles and beef chunks were unique but towards the end, it started to get a bit heavy. For a day trip, I would recommend this but at the end of the day to just crash out with a full stomach.

All in all, I had a great time coming here. I like Taiwanese food and it's always a delight to grab a bite when I can. I would recommend this small restaurant since there is no reservation needed and it's affordable.

– Luis Samayoa



WEBSITE

■ Taiwan Ten Café

ADDRESS: 3-36-10 Shinjuku, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo, Ainz and Tulpe Shinjuku East Exit store, 2F
HOURS: 11 a.m - 8 p.m. 7 days a week.
OTHER INFO: Yen and card accepted.



Near Shinjuku Station Central East Exit



– Shoji Kudaka

Although my travel buddy Luis picked Taiwan Ten Café, I ended up quite liking it!

The café had a casual but slick design that reminded me of Gongcha the Taiwanese tapioca tea chain. Adorned with red lanterns and colorful illustrations, it had a fun interior.

Their menu items included beef noodle soup, braised pork rice, taro balls, and Taiwanese castella cakes.

I went with a boiled shrimp dumpling set for 1,180 yen (approx. \$7.28), which came with seven pieces of dumplings, almond jelly, and Chinese soup. The dumplings were quite hearty, with a whole piece of shrimp filling the dumpling wrappers. I also liked the delicate sweetness of the almond jelly and the tapioca pearls that were also in there. Washing down the big dumplings with mango juice (medium size for 620 yen) helped me recover from our long walk around Yanaka Ginza.



Near Shinjuku Station East Exit

■ 3D Cat Billboard

ADDRESS: 3-23-18 Cross Shinjuku Building 1F-2F, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo 160-0022

■ Godzilla head

ADDRESS: 1 Chome-19-1 Kabukicho, Shinjuku City, Tokyo 160-0021



3D cat, iconic Godzilla landmarks a sight for sore eyes

I really was happy to finally have the chance to visit the iconic 3D Cat billboard and Godzilla head in Shinjuku. Before, I came at night with my wife, it was cool to see it then but the crowds of other tourists pushing, shoving and blocking the view kind of ruined the experience.

Coming in the afternoon for this day trip, you can stand by the walkway or afar and see the billboard monitor without any distractions. The 3D Calico Cat comes every 15 minutes, so if you come early or late, there is no need to push and shove. You can relax your feet from walking and just wait a little while.

At Kabukicho, the crowds were just the same as the billboard. There were a few people posing to take pictures on the



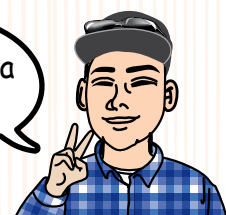
VIEW VIDEO

walkway but not as many compared to the night. We stopped by for a few minutes to look at both sites and not once did we have to squeeze through to get by.

If you have kids or family visiting and you don't want to stay out late to visit iconic spots, you can always stop by during the day when it's less crowded and go shopping or have some fun.

– Luis Samayoa

I saw Godzilla in Tokyo!



Check the next edition for Part 2: Yanaka Ginza!

Pokémon GO in real life with themed manhole covers

STORY AND PHOTOS BY SHOJI KUDAKA,
STRIPES OKINAWA

In Japan, Pokémon fans have many opportunities to “catch ‘em’ all.”

Among them are the growing numbers of Pokémon-themed manhole covers around the mainland and Okinawa.

Last year, American Village in Chatan Town was one of the latest to get the animation treatment with the addition of a Growlithe manhole cover. According to the Pokémon Wiki site, Growlithe is a fire-type Pokémon from the first generation.

The design on the new manhole cover features an illustration of the “puppy Pokémon” barking at fireworks in the shape of Pikachu and a Pokémon capsule in the night sky.

In Japan, fun designs spotlighting the local area’s attractions don mancovers and have, in recent years, garnered a sort of following to see how many you can spot. Merchandise and trading cards featuring some of the more famous ones are also sold in souvenir shops around the country.

The Pokémon manhole covers known as “Poké Futa” are part of Pokémon Local Acts, a project promoting local communities’ products and tourism with the help of beloved franchise characters.

As of August 2025, a total of

422 Pokémon-themed manhole covers can be found in 41 of Japan’s 47 prefectures.

Interestingly, prefectures known for being rich in nature tend to have more Pokémon lids than those with big cities. Hokkaido leads the way with 42, to be followed by Miyagi with 35. Okinawa ranks tenth with 17.

“Oshi (fave) Pokémon” or “Ouen (cheerleading) Pokémon” is assigned to each of the 41 prefectures. The selection is made in a way that allows the characteristics of a chosen Pokémon to match those of the specific prefecture.

For example, Alolan Vulpix and Vulpix, the fox-type Pokémons, are the Oshi Pokémon for Hokkaido. While Alolan Vulpix lives on snow-clad mountains and can freeze various items, Vulpix can make you feel warm when you hold it.

In the case of Okinawa, Growlithe was picked because its brave

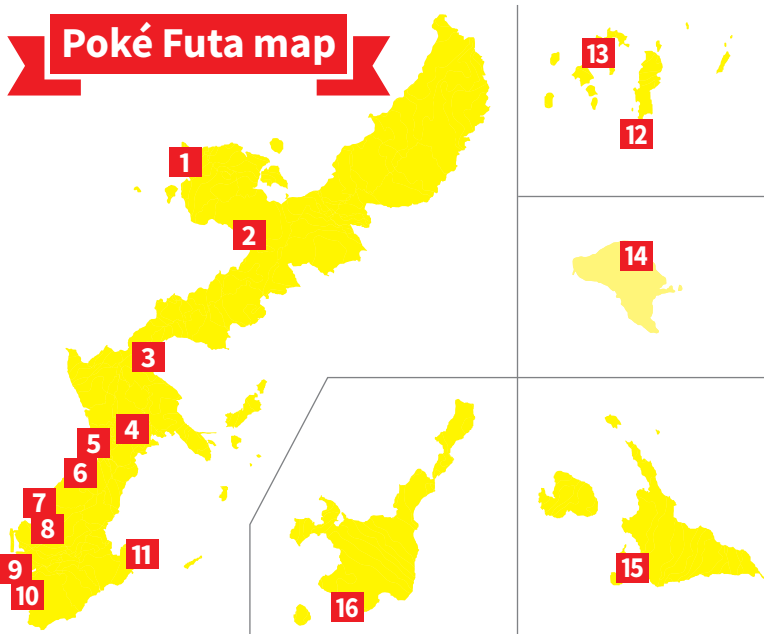
and fearless nature corresponds with the image of Okinawa, according to the Pokémon Local Acts website.

The Growlithe cover joins the likes of Zangoose (cat ferret), Wartortle (turtle), Corsola (coral) manhole lids around Okinawa.

Though my experience with Pokémon does not extend past Pikachu, the famous yellow pocket monster that exalts with a “Pika! Pika” and glowing red cheeks, searching for manhole covers with the characters was fun. Some are in secluded spots, emulating searching for characters like players do in the franchise’s hit mobile game “Pokémon GO” but in real life.

Catch as many Pokémon manhole covers as you can! And you’ll be surprised to find many have other colorful themes of famous characters or famous attractions, too.

kudaka.shoji@stripes.com



- 1 Wailord (Motobu)
- 2 Emolga & Pikipik (Nago)
- 3 Tauros (Uruma)
- 4 Thwackey & Lurantia (Okinawa City)
- 5 Growlithe (Chatan)
- 6 Corsola & Luvdisc (Ginowan)
- 7 Solrock & Skiploom (Urasoe)
- 8 Arcanine (Naha)
- 9 Axew & Jangmo-o (Tomigusuku)
- 10 Wartortle & Sandygast (Itoman)

- 11 Seviper & Zangoose (Nanjo)
- 12 Growlithe & Azurill & Salandit (Tokashiki in Kerama islands)
- 13 Growlithe & Wailmer (Zamami)
- 14 Growlithe & Clauncher (Kumejima)
- 15 Kyogre (Miyakojima)
- 16 Mantine & Remoraid (Ishigaki)



GET Poké Futa map



©Pokémon. ©Nintendo/Creatures Inc./GAME FREAK inc.



Long before opening Dos Manos, Kohei Suzuki spent years traveling throughout Mexico, learning its culture one meal at a time.
Photo by Ryan M. Breeden, Stars and Stripes



Beef corn quesadillas from Dos Manos. Photo by Ryan M. Breeden, Stars and Stripes

Short trip to Mexico at Dos Manos near Kadena

BY RYAN BREEDEN AND KEISHI KOJA,
STARS AND STRIPES
Published: August 27, 2026

Long before opening Dos Manos near Kadena Air Base, Okinawa, Kohei Suzuki spent years traveling throughout Mexico, learning its culture one meal at a time.

The 49-year-old chef grew up around Mexican food while helping at his parents' restaurant in Japan. His curiosity eventually led him to explore Mexico from time to time while sampling dishes from various regions. His longest stay was a year in Oaxaca, where he worked at a local restaurant in 2004 developing his craft.

"I lived among the locals, learning about their culture and language," Suzuki said in a recent email to Stars and Stripes. "I observed firsthand how they live,

what they enjoy and how they dine."

Kohei and his wife, Chikako, opened Dos Manos near Gate 2 in 2011 before relocating to a larger location in April. Today, it has become a popular stop for both Okinawans and U.S. military personnel looking for authentic Mexican cuisine.

Colorful walls and music create the feeling of dining in an actual restaurant in Mexico. Small decorations in the windows and on the walls add to the atmosphere.

"Okinawa is pretty far away from Mexico and it's not easy to go there, so I want customers to feel that they are in Mexico," Suzuki said.

Unlike the walls and decorations, re-creating authentic Mexican flavors is not always easy.

"The biggest challenge is obtaining the ingredients," Suzuki

said. "There are many items that aren't consistently available. I make do by getting creative with what I can actually obtain."

Dos Manos is also welcoming to Americans by offering English menus. For Suzuki, serving military families stationed far from home has become one of the most rewarding parts of operating the restaurant.

"We know that living far away from home can be challenging, so we hope this place serves as a comforting retreat where they can feel a connection to home during their stay," he said.

Asked what first-time visitors should order, Suzuki didn't hesitate.

"My recommendation is the carnitas tacos," he said. "They are simple, but I think you'll get the

true taste of Mexico if you have them topped with plenty of salsa."

As Suzuki said, the tacos were exquisite, with just the right amount of spice to make them taste authentic. Two regular tacos start at 900 yen, or about \$5.70, for chicken to 1,080 yen for lamb.

Other options include beef, pork, tripe and beef tongue.

Although Okinawa sits thousands of miles from Mexico, Suzuki hopes every meal offers customers a small glimpse into the country that inspired his life's work.

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koja.keishi@stripes.com
@KeishiRKOja

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

THINGS TO KNOW

ADDRESS: 55GE GOYA 201, 2 Chome-2-2, Goya 904-0021
DIRECTIONS: Less than a mile from Kadena Air Base's Gate 2.
HOURS: Open 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., Monday to Friday; and 5:30 p.m. to 8 p.m., Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday
PRICES: Expect to pay between 900 yen and 2,000 yen per person
DRESS: Casual



WEBSITE

(We are open this month please check our website for September business hours and details.)

Open 9:00-17:30 (Last entry 16:15)
Tel. 098-965-3400
961-30 Ishikawa Kadekaru
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www.bios-hill.co.jp
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🌐 www.tuj.ac.jp/ug

Spotlight on Japan's viral cold-water instant noodles



METROPOLIS MAGAZINE

If you've seen Japanese food videos flooding your feed lately, there's a good chance they feature a cup of instant ramen made without a kettle. That's Nissin's Hiyashi Cup Noodle ("hiyashi" means "chilled") — the first Cup Noodle in the brand's history designed to be prepared entirely with cold water instead of boiling water.



Nissin invented instant noodles back in 1958 and Cup Noodle itself in 1971, so a cold-water version is a genuinely new category for the 55-year-old product line — and it's exactly the kind of "wait, that actually works?" novelty that spreads fast on social media.

Why are they going viral?

A few reasons this trend caught fire across Japanese social media and beyond:

■ The 'no kettle needed' hook

Instant noodles have relied on boiling water for almost 70 years. Pouring cold water into a cup and getting real ramen five minutes later feels like a magic trick — perfect short-video material.

■ Perfect summer timing

The product launched July 20, 2026 in the middle of one of Japan's most severe heatwaves, making a no-heat meal genuinely useful, not just a gimmick.

■ Scarcity fueled hype

Nissin expected its initial stock to last one to two months. It sold out in about a week, and "I finally found it" unboxing videos became their own subgenre of content.

■ Built-in food-science curiosity.

The noodles use a newly patented "Cold Rehydrate" process developed over five years specifically to let noodles soften in cold water — a detail that taste-test and ASMR-style food creators love to explain on camera.

■ Two shareable flavors

Spicy Kimchi and Chicken Salt Lemon — both visually distinct and bold enough to react to on video.

The bigger picture: A new category for instant food

Beyond the viral moment, food industry watchers see Hiyashi Cup Noodle as a genuine format shift, not just a summer limited edition:

- It opens up **heat-free eating occasions** — commuting, hiking, camping, office desks, and emergency stockpiles — where boiling water isn't always available.
- Nissin holds nearly half of Japan's instant noodle market, and rivals like Toyo Suisan and Sanyo Foods are expected to respond with their own cold-water formats.
- The launch coincided with **Cup Noodle's 55th anniversary**, positioning it as a legacy-brand reinvention rather than a one-off gimmick.

FAQ

■ What flavors does Hiyashi Cup Noodle come in?

Spicy Kimchi and Chicken Salt Lemon.

■ How much does it cost?

Around 285–307 yen (roughly \$1.90–\$2 USD) per cup.

■ Is it good for emergency food kits?

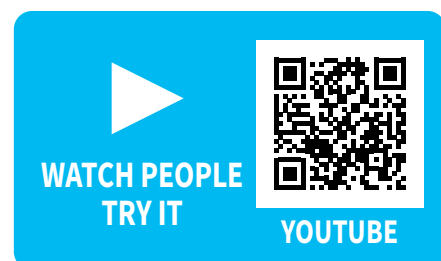
Yes — because it needs only cold water, it's being highlighted as a practical addition to disaster-preparedness and outdoor kits.

■ Can I buy it outside Japan?

As of its 2026 launch, it's a Japan-only release; availability elsewhere hasn't been announced.

■ Does it taste like regular Cup Noodle?

Taste testers reported it tastes recognizably like Cup Noodle, with a springy texture and slightly more bite than the hot-water version.



How to make Hiyashi Cup noodle (No stove required)

1. Peel back the lid to the fill line.
2. Add cold water straight from the tap or fridge.
3. Reseal the lid and wait about 5 minutes (slightly longer than the 3 minutes for a regular hot-water Cup Noodle).
4. Stir and eat — no boiling, no waiting for a kettle.



Reviewers who tested it noted the noodles stayed springy with a slight extra bite rather than turning mushy or undercooked, which is the main skepticism people have before trying it on camera.



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Answer

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DID YOU KNOW?

Japan is made up of 6,800 islands, with the four main ones being Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku and Kyushu. Among the 6,800 islands, only 400 are actually inhabited. So, the next time you're in the market for your own private island, you might want to keep one of Japan's in mind. There probably won't be much competition!

Kanji of the week

ta(-beru)/shoku [eat]

Language Lesson

Look at that.

Are wo mite kudasai.

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Crossword

by Margie E. Burke

ACROSS

1 Male deer

5 Hose shade

10 Czech or Serb

14 Entice

15 "Li'l" comics guy

16 "La Boheme" heroine

17 Tues., for Tuesday

18 Accounts

20 "Missing You" singer John

22 It may follow a dot

23 Colleague of Ketanji

24 Slow flow

26 Imparts

27 David of "CSI: Miami"

29 Twelfth Hebrew letter

31 Dump-truck filler

32 Dance move

33 Resort

36 Rabbit ears

38 Addict's accomplice

40 Wallace of "E.T."

41 Barnyard cacklers

43 Unbending

44 Cousin of a raccoon

45 Stew pieces

46 Drink accessory

49 Eager, so to speak

51 Windy City airport

52 Batman and Robin, e.g.

53 Labor leader Chavez

56 MDF, for one

59 Drive-_____

60 Flower with a bulb

61 Aquatic mammal

62 Burial chamber

63 Tallies

64 Michelob and Molson, e.g.

DOWN

1 Cole _____

2 Orchestral heavyweight

3 Act as a go-between

4 Writer Stein

5 Go for the bronze?

6 Taken _____

7 Opens, as a sleeping bag

8 Spread throughout

9 Memorable time

10 Lit up the room, maybe

11 Add pep to, with "up"

12 Change, as a bill

13 Some charge cards

19 Blessed with ESP

21 1950s president

25 Eye part

65 Online crafts shop

27 Iron follower

28 Top-notch

30 Upstanding guy

33 Goliath's undoing

34 Film legend Gregory

35 Word after martial or performing

37 Poison remedy

39 Clairol choice

42 Put into place

44 Affectionate touch

46 Vergara of "Modern Family"

47 Bronze finish?

48 Fanatical

50 Kitchen gadget

54 Battle needs

55 Like Dorothy's slippers

57 Go up and down

58 E.R. workers

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Answers to Previous Crossword:

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

SUDOKU

Difficulty: Easy

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.

Answer to Previous Sudoku:

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

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