

Okinawa, Japan: a Tropical Paradise, an Outdoor Playground

January 12th, 2012



Renaissance Resort (Marriott) beach on the southern area of the main island of Okinawa.
(Courtesy of Okinawa Convention & Visitors Bureau)

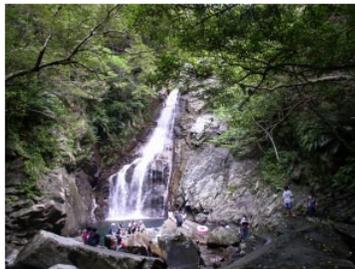
By [Allan D. Kissam](#)

[Okinawa, Japan, is a vacation resort island](#) that is unknown by many Americans. Not at all like Tokyo (a busy and more familiar image of Japan,) but instead peppered with beautiful beaches, aquatic sanctuaries with remarkable coral; great food, and inland natural jungle trails to hike through. Being situated near Taiwan and the Philippines, the tropical climate governs.

This place is a beautiful resort island today, but a generation ago, ferocious assaults by American armed forces defeated Japanese forces resisting until the last man. After stumbling upon many memorials and displays of war artifacts from 1945, it was a constant theme, one of regret for the loss of life. From the airfield here and on neighboring islands were launched suicide airplane attacks against the invasion ships. The timeline for Okinawa include domination by China, then domination by Japan in the late 1800's, invasion in which 25% of the Okinawans were killed, control by American forces from 1945 to 1972, return of control to Japan, and now local control as an important prefecture of Japan. The island and people went through an historical wringer but Americans are welcome here, English is spoken by many, and this place is truly fantastic.

So, here's my take on the experiences that gave me the utmost enjoyment in Okinawa...

I hiked the jungle trail to the Hiji Waterfalls. The dense jungle on either side of the trail is the natural island before roads or cities. The hike requires going up and down, but it is facilitated by wooden stairs and suspension bridges over the valley below. There are pleasant resting places along the path. *Cautionary note: I advise those needing assistance to not attempt the activity.*



Hiji Waterfall is worth the jungle path hike.

Driving around the northern part of the main island there are beautiful marine areas to see and visit. Kayaking, diving, or sitting on a beautiful beach are all around. The main island is one stop and the tourism website describes features of

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Hiji Waterfall is in the valley below this pedestrian bridge.

the surrounding, smaller islands. This is much like Hawaii, where each of a group of islands offer a different experience.

Decorations and cultural art can be found all over the islands in local citizenry areas beyond the hotels. I turned up a small road and came upon a group of people stopped at a café for lunch.

Fortunately for me, I ventured into a local favorite not on the tourist path. Here I had a view of the sea and could rest in a unique

Okinawan garden. This café is the **Natural Café** ([Google Maps](#)). To get directions, ask locals how to get to this address –

Natural cafe haru

Address:731-1 Gushiken, Motobu
Okinawa, Japan
Tel:0980-48-2700
Open:11:00- 19:00
Close:Monday, Tuesday



Natural Cafe ocean view, artful garden, and walks with inlaid seashells.

Watchful of the local lifestyle, I stopped at a local park to watch the locals play a game of croquet. The park has a shed for storage of supplies and I could not see any locks or hasps; the fact that I notice “no locks” causes me to pause and think about my lifestyle in comparison.

Since I am driving on the *wrong side of the road* (the left side,) giving my full attention to turns and entrances is necessary. A picture of “Suicide Alley” is provided to warn anyone making this trip that this is not long-and-wide Cadillac or SUV territory. I never saw crushed fenders on cars, but then I wasn’t there long enough to add my California driving habits to the mix.



Okinawa's "Suicide Alley"