

# Nakijin Village: Brimming with Good Old Okinawan Ambience

In the past the village of Nakijin in Okinawa had a castle, the ruins of which still exist today. Nakijin is a tranquil place, where the pristine scenery of good old Okinawa can be seen at every turn and the warmth and kindness of the local people can be felt.

Recently, in 2000 the Nakijin Castle ruins were registered as part of a World Heritage site, and in 2005 the Kouri Ohashi bridge linking Yagajishima and Kourijima islands was completed. This bridge made Kourijima accessible by land from the main island of Okinawa, and as a result many tourists began to visit to see the island's magnificent blue sea and nature. This summer Kourijima's fame was further stimulated by a television commercial featuring a popular boys' group that showed the island's Heart Rocks, and the number of sightseers visiting Nakijin has spiraled. Let's take a look at the attractions of Nakijin and some sights that are likely to become popular from now on.



Warumi Strait



## Love at First Sight with the Scenery of Warumi Strait

My first thought when I stood at the observation area at Rikarika Warumi, a roadside station by Warumi Ohashi bridge in Nakijin, was that I wanted to build a house here. The emerald green sea and deep green forest spread out before your eyes, and in the distance you can see the Yagajishima-Kourijima Ohashi bridge. “Spectacular” is the only word to describe this panoramic view.

The Rikarika Warumi roadside station displays and sells many special products of Nakijin, including Awamori (distilled liquor) and just-harvested fresh vegetables and fruit piled up in a narrow space. In the restaurant you can enjoy Okinawan cuisine using the matured beef and fresh fish of Nakijin. The spectacular view of Warumi Strait will certainly not disappoint you.



Rikarika Warumi roadside station



Pineapples on sale at Rikarika Warumi

Rikarika Warumi roadside station <http://rikarikawarumi.web.fc2.com/> (Japanese)

## Romantic and Mystical Kourijima Island

Legend has it that in the past there were a man and woman, named Uminai and Unai, living happily on the island of Kourijima. One day, feelings of doubt and desire awakened in them, and as a result they had to experience the hardship of labor. However, they were permitted by god to leave offspring, and soon the island became full of the laughing voices of children. Eventually these descendants spread out over the Ryukyu islands. This legend is the Okinawan version of the biblical story of Adam and Eve. The Heart Rocks (rocks shaped like hearts) on Teenu Beach in the north of the island do indeed put visitors in a romantic mood.

The tranquil island of Kourijima, which measures about 8 km in circumference and is covered by sugarcane and purple sweet potato fields, has another place with magnificent scenery---the area where an elementary school once stood. It makes you so envious of the youngsters brought up in such a wonderful environment!





**Heart Rocks**



**The magnificent view  
from a hill on Kourijima island**

## **The Pristine Scenery of Okinawa in the Imadomari district of Nakijin**

If you want to see the pristine scenery of Okinawa, I recommend you to take a stroll in the Imadomari district of Nakijin, which has an old-timey townscape with traditional houses still standing. A narrow avenue lined by *fukugi* (tall evergreen trees) safeguards the local people from the fury of nature, easing the scorching heat of summer and providing protection against the raging winds of typhoons. For some reason this avenue of *fukugi* trees is nostalgic and gently atmospheric.

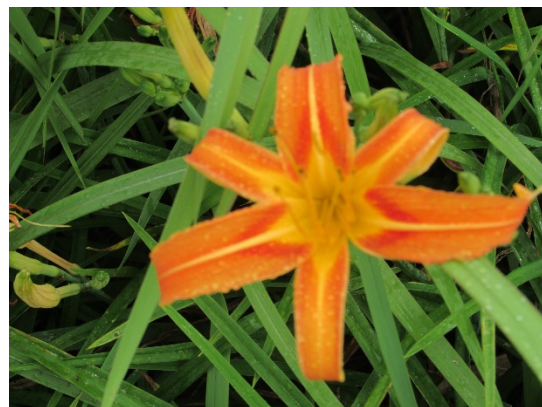
Recently traditional Okinawan bamboo fences have been erected along the avenue of *fukugi* to preserve and utilize the village. By all means visit the Imadomari district and get a taste of the real Okinawan ambience.



**The avenue of *fukugi* trees  
in the Imadomari district**



**The traditional Okinawan bamboo fences  
along the avenue of *fukugi* trees**



**Kwanso flowers**

## Relaxing *Kwanso*

Before my eyes spread a field of orange blossoms. “These are called *kwanso* [daylily], one of Okinawa’s traditional vegetables,” explained Mr. Eita Zamami of Nakijin Zamami Farm. “In Okinawa since long ago it has been said that they induce sleep and have a relaxing effect. *Kwanso* has been used in medicinal cooking. Old folk fry or boil the buds together with pork and drink tea made from the dried leaves.”



Mr. Eita Zamami of Nakijin Zamami Farm



The shop at Nakijin Zamami Farm

Mr. Zamami told me that *kwanso* tea could be sampled at the farm shop adjacent to the field, so I went along and had a cup. It was very easy to drink, with a smooth feel and slightly sweet taste. He told me that *kwanso* was effective in reducing stress and irritation, so I put a packet of *kwanso* tea and some Chinsuko biscuits baked using *kwanso* powder into my shopping basket. That’s right, Okinawa is a veritable treasure chest of medicinal herbs.



Kwanso tea



Chinsuko biscuits baked using *kwanso* powder

Nakijin Zamami Farm <http://zamamifarm.com/> (Japanese)



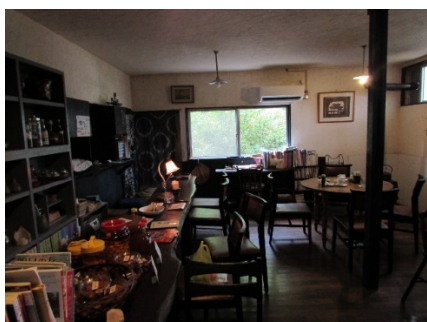


**Farmhouse Nakijin café**

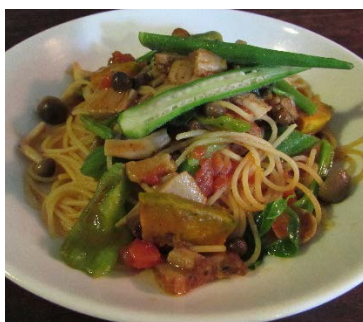
## A Homely, Relaxing Café

The Farmhouse Nakijin café is situated in a secluded spot in a forest along a side road off National Highway No. 505. The ivy-covered, rather mystical building blends harmoniously with the surrounding nature. Originally it opened in 1992 as a lodge for travelers, but in 2009 the owner, for physical reasons brought on by age, closed the second-floor guest rooms and opened a café on the ground floor.

“When we ran the lodge, a lot of Western backpackers used to come and stay here. They would be drenched in sweat after walking 20 minutes up the hilly road from the bus stop,” recalled the owner, Mr. Hidenobu Igei, somewhat nostalgically. “We didn’t do any advertising as such, but people would exchange information with others traveling around Japan and fax or phone us to make reservations. We didn’t speak much English, but we managed somehow!” In other words, both now and in the past, word of mouth is the best form of advertising. The antique tables and chairs in the café create a nostalgic and relaxing atmosphere.



**Ground floor café**



**Tomato-based pasta**



**Mulberry jam cake**



The café serves dishes using plenty of local vegetables harvested from Mr. Igei's field. I had a tomato-based pasta with *shimeji* mushrooms, *goya* (bitter melon), *tsurumurasaki* (Indian spinach, a vine vegetable), and other ingredients and homemade mulberry jam cake for dessert. The flavor of each ingredient came over loud and clear. Delicious!

I recommend you to drop by, but please remember to inquire beforehand, because the café is closed three days a week due to the necessity of farm work.

Farmhouse Nakijin <http://nakijinon.jp/farmhouse/> (Japanese)



Mr. Hiroaki Uema, owner of Hibiscus Inn

## Attracting Foreigners with the Showa Look

Wait a moment, what is this sense of nostalgia? The wooden inn evoked a fragrance of the Showa period (1926–1989). Mr. Hiroaki Uema, the owner of Hibiscus Inn in Nakijin, came out to greet me with a smiling face.

“We opened the inn five years ago,” he told me, “rebuilding our former home into a lodging. Of the four guestrooms, one is a Japanese-style room modeled on a traditional Okinawan house, and we soon got lots of bookings for it. Because of the reasonable price of ¥3,500 for one night's stay without meals, some people stay for several nights. We have an economical plan for booking all the rooms together as well, so friends can have a good time

staying here together.”

In the common space there is a dining room with kitchenette facilities, so guests can bring and prepare whatever they want to eat. That’s very convenient for families with young children.

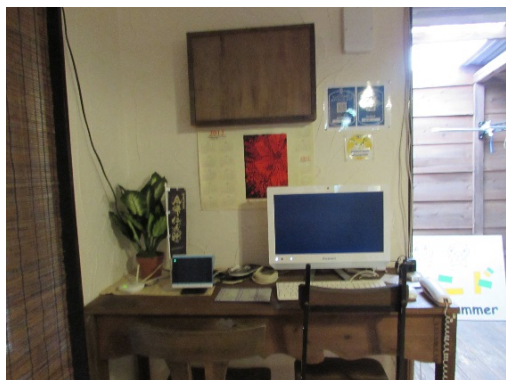
“These days around 40% of our guests are foreigners,” explained Mr. Uema. “We hope to further increase that ratio, so we are improving facilities so that foreigners can enjoy a comfortable stay here too.” At Hibiscus Inn there is a female staff member who used to work for a foreign airline and knows all about international hospitality, so English is no problem at all.



Traditional Okinawa-style room (for four guests)



Twin Western-style room (for two guests)



Computer corner



Dining room/kitchenette in the common space

Hibiscus Inn <http://haibisu.com/english.html> (English)

Adjacent to the Hibiscus Inn is the Kitayama Shokudo, a Showa-style izakaya with a row of local Orion Beer lanterns hanging under its eaves. Inside, the simple tables and chairs are like those used in cheap eating places in the 1950s and 1960s, and the large box-shaped stereo, probably manufactured in the late 1960s or early 1970s, was playing tunes by such singers as Hibari Misora, the queen of *enka* (bluesy ballad) in the Showa period.

My eye was caught by the taps installed at each table. When you receive a cock and twist the tap, out pours Awamori-with-water. It’s hard to keep your hands off the tap! But don’t worry, because even if you drink too much, the cost is the same---¥1,000 for all-you-can-drink in three hours. The affable local people like to come here for a drink as well, so it is a good chance to have a chat with them while enjoying Okinawan cuisine like *goya chanpuru* (stir-fried bitter



melon with tofu, pork, and egg). People- and wallet-friendly Kitayama Shokudo is a good place to spend an evening in Okinawa.



The Showa-style Kitayama Shokudo izakaya



The tables with Awamori taps

## Nothing to Speak of but . . .

There is nothing in particular, but the atmosphere of the place, the scenery, and the contact with the local people are wonderful. The Okinawan dialect has an expression *nun-nen-shiga*, which means “Nothing to speak of, but . . .” Yes, that describes Nakijin perfectly!

Nakijin Tourist Association

<http://nakijinson.jp/> (Japanese)

Nakijin Chamber of Commerce and Industry

<http://www.nakijin.or.jp/> (Japanese)