



## OKINAWA ANNOUNCES TWO NEW CRAFT FACILITIES FOR 2022, FURTHER BOOSTING ITS AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCE OFFERING



*From L-R: Coral dyeing experience, traditional Okinawan clothing and Shisa painting experience*

**February 2022.** Okinawa, Japan's southernmost prefecture, is set to welcome two new craft-related facilities in 2022, further cementing the stunning archipelago's reputation for offering visitors a truly authentic experience during their stay: Kogeino Mori and suikara. Currently both under construction, the new facilities will promote the beautiful traditions handed down since the days of the Ryukyu Kingdom.

Kogeino Mori (located next to one of the best places in Okinawa to experience karate [Karate Kaikan](#)), will be an official administrative centre of promotion of traditional crafts and boast an exhibit area and workshops for visitors. suikara (located nearby the iconic [Shurijo Castle](#) and other historic sites) will focus on traditional textile dyeing and weaving experiences, aiming to connect visitors and local artists and artisans engaged in traditional arts and crafts.

With an array of authentic experiences already available, here Visit Okinawa shares its top tips on must-try activities for an introduction to Okinawa's traditions and crafts for travellers looking for a culture rich break in 2022.

### **Get creative with 'guardian lions'**

*Shisa* figures, also referred to as 'guardian lions', are an iconic part of Okinawa's unique history and heritage and can be found on rooftops, roadsides, in restaurants and in workplaces. Visitors wanting to learn more about these popular talismans can join one of the *shisa* making workshops available from JPY 1,540 (approx. £10) at [Naha City Traditional Arts & Craft Center](#) or alternatively [Ryukyu Mura](#) and [Okinawa World](#) both offer colouring experiences. The latter not only being a fun option for those travelling with children, but a great way to create original souvenirs to take home.

### **Time to get musical**

A traditional three-stringed instrument used in the royal court during the Ryukyu Kingdom, the *sanshin* continues to be played widely throughout Okinawa nowadays. The [Okinawan Traditional Lifestyle Experience](#) at the native village of Motobu offers travellers an immersive hands-on encounter with this cherished element of Okinawan culture, as well as local life, with elderly villagers welcoming visitors and teaching them how to play the magical instrument for free!

### **Strike a pose wearing traditional Okinawan clothing**

Centrally located in the capital, visitors will find [veni](#), a studio with traditional attires called *ryuso* (*uchina-asugai* in Okinawan) available for rental. Dating back to the Ryukyu Kingdom and designed for Okinawa's subtropical climate, visitors can enjoy a professional photography session wearing the colourful garments either at the studio or an outside location. Once the photography session is complete, the outfit can be leased for rest of the day. Alternatively, the studio also offers a one day (from 10:00 am to 6:30pm) rental only plan perfect for those wanting to take their own pictures and explore the city wearing the traditional clothing from JPY 3,900 (approx. £ 26) per person.

### **Taste centuries of tradition through Okinawa's cuisine**

Okinawa's food culture stretches back centuries to the Ryukyu Kingdom and food is considered by locals in the prefecture 'kusuimun' meaning 'medicine'. An authentic place to enjoy Ryukyuan cuisine is [Ryukyu Cuisine MIE](#) in Naha, serving the finest dishes enjoyed by Baron Sho Jun, the 4<sup>th</sup> son of the last king of the Ryukyu Kingdom, King Sho Tai. More than an experience for the taste buds, a visit to Ryukyu Cuisine MIE can also mean getting an unforgettable insight into the traditions and culture of the Ryukyus as classical Ryukyu performing arts can be booked pre-visit. Additionally, [Matsumoto Cooking School](#) is great for those looking not only to taste the delicious Okinawan's flavours, but learn how to cook the delicious dishes as well. Classes are available from JPY 3,150 (approx. £21) per person.

### **Make your own purple sweet potato treats**

The purple sweet potato with its vivid colour and delicious sweetness is a crop used in many traditional Okinawan dishes. Known locally as *beni-imo*, sweet potato confectionery is one of the most popular souvenirs in Okinawa. From JPY 1,568 (approx. £11) the [Beni-imo Tart Making Experience](#) is perfect for travellers looking to have a go at making their very own colourful treats, whilst taking in beautiful emerald green sea vistas. The facility where the one-hour workshop takes place boasts a seafront location on the Onna coastline - Okinawa's premier beach resort destination.

### **Try traditional dyeing textiles**

Okinawa is home to a number of traditional crafts whose origins date back to the time of the Ryukyu Kingdom including dyeing textiles and goods. Believed to have originated between the 14th and 15th centuries, *bingata* is the collective term used to refer to Okinawan resist dyeing. Visitors can try their hand at [Shuri Ryusen](#) in Naha, well known for its use of coral dyeing techniques, which evolved independently from the traditional techniques of *bingata*. From JYP 3,300 (approx. £22), visitors pick their favourite shape of coral fossil to be placed under a T-shirt or wrapping cloth on which the dye is rubbed to bring out the pattern of the coral. Additionally, [Aikaze Okinawa](#) offers experiences such as *tenugui* (traditional Japanese cloth) dyeing, scarf dyeing and eco bag dyeing starting from JPY 3,000 (approx. £20) using rare Ryukyu indigo leaves grown and harvested locally... plus the property boasts a beautiful café and a shop for refuelling and relaxing after the class!

#### Image credits:

1. Coral dyeing experience image: OCVB
2. Traditional Okinawan clothing image: ©veni ryuso rental
3. Shisa painting experience image: Okinawa World

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**About Okinawa:**

Japan's southernmost prefecture, Okinawa, comprises 160 subtropical islands boasting a year-round warm climate comparable to Hawaii, Miami and Cancun. Just 3 hours by air from Tokyo and blessed with incredible natural beauty, from lush forests to crystal blue waters with abundant coral and golden sands, Okinawa is perfect for beach lovers and sport enthusiasts alike whilst still appealing to culture seekers thanks to its unique history and heritage.

Using the bountiful fresh produce its natural environment produces, Okinawa's culinary culture is also unique and is believed to be a key factor in Okinawa's status as one of five longevity hotspots in the world.

*For further media information and images contact:*

*Be Okinawa – UK & Ireland Representative, Laura Boo E: [laura@humewhitehead.co.uk](mailto:laura@humewhitehead.co.uk) /*

*T: +44 (0) 203 375 4056*