It is not just craftsmanship but also the hope for posterity that we have inherited and carry on.

Okinawa Prefecture has developed a unique culture, one that lives and breathes in the performing arts with their elaborate costumes and music, craftwork of dyed fabrics and pottery refined through trade with neighboring countries. Okinawa karate perfected as the island’s ancient martial arts fused with Chinese martial arts, foods as eating is the sustenance of life, as well as many other various forms. Kumiodori, the Okinawan equivalent of opera, was inscribed as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2010. These works have received high acclaim both inside and outside Japan.
CRAFTS

TRADITION & CULTURE

1312

PERFORMING

Sanshin, an Okinawan stringed (musical) instrument
Crafted Ryukyu glass
Shuri Ori, a woven Okinawan textile
Shiisa, crafted using Yachimun techniques

Okinawan Yachimun pottery
Singata, a traditional stenciled dyeing technique

Kumiodori is a musical theater performance combining recitation, music and dance. It dates back 300 years. /Ritsuo Tetsushi

Mekarushi (Master Mekaru)/Kumiodori
Chima-munu-garu (The Madwoman)/Kumiodori
Tumai Abashir/Okinawan Play

Ryukyuan Dance
Classical Ryukyuan music
Stick fighting /Folk entertainment

Okinawan Play

Sanshin, an Okinawan stringed (musical) instrument
Crafted Ryukyu glass
Shuri Ori, a woven Okinawan textile

Shiisa crafted using Yachimun techniques

Kumiodori is a musical theater performance combining recitation, music and dance. It dates back 300 years. /Ritsuo Tetsushi
Children’s karate performance

International competition held in Okinawa

Okinawa Karate Kaikan conveys to the world that Okinawa is the birthplace of karate

Okinawa Karate striving for inscription as UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage

Showcasing that Okinawa is where karate originated

Prefectural Fish: Banana Fish (Takasago, locally known as Gurukun)

All Okinawans love Okinawa soba

Awamori, the favorite local sake since the Ryukyu Kingdom era

Chinese investiture envoys

Court cuisine served when entertaining

Chiruso is a traditional Okinawan sweet

Mangoes ripe under the Okinawa sun

Pineapple, the quintessential Okinawan fruit

Tebichi (boiled pig foot) is a delicacy

Goya champuru is a family favorite

Sea grapes have the texture of little bubbles bursting in your mouth

Taco rice is the Okinawa variation of tacos

Farmer growing beni imo (sweet potato)

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Where the history and prosperity of the Ryukyu Kingdom can be experienced

Okinawa Prefecture was formerly the Ryukyu Kingdom with its seat of power at Shuri for roughly 450 years beginning in the mid-15th century. The Gusuku Sites and Related Properties of the Kingdom of Ryukyu, which were inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage in 2000, provide a glimpse into the Ryukyu Kingdom’s culture, which evolved and developed distinctively as an island nation with influence from Asia and Japan. In addition, the castle sites and architectural styles indicate not only expert craftsmanship, but also provide a glimpse into the history and wisdom of the time.

Shuri-Jo Castle, the Ryukyuan kings’ residence, was the center from which politics, economics, and culture emanated. It allows us a view into building techniques employed in Japan and China.

※ In October 2019, a fire destroyed eight buildings, including the Seiden (State Chamber). The government has set a target of rebuilding the structures by 2026.
Kyoda I.C.
Naha I.C.
Okinawa Expressway
Nakijin-jô Site (Nakijin village)
Zakimi-jô Site (Yomitan village)
Katsuren-jô Site (Uruma city)
Nakagusuku-jô Site (Nakagusuku Vill.
Kita-nakagusuku vill.)
Seifa-Utaki (nanjyo city)
Shuri-jô Castle Site
Sonohyan-Utaki-Ishimon (Stone Gate)
Tamaudun
Shikinaen
Shikinaen
Nakagusuku-jô Site
Gosamaru, who built Zakimi Castle, was lord of Nakagusuku Castle. The castle sits on high ground along Nakagusuku bay, affording visitors an impressive view of the sea from the fortress walls.

With the aim of building momentum for restoration of Shuri Castle, prefecture residents have been volunteering their time to remove mortar from damaged roof tiles so that they may be reused, and have also taken mortar from damaged tiles and put it to use making shisa dogs. The largest projection map ever in Okinawa Prefecture was produced and displayed at Shuri Castle. Banner performances have also been held in cooperation with local communities. The people of Okinawa are expressing their hopes for Shuri Castle in many tangible ways and creating opportunities for everyone to play their part in the castle’s reconstruction.

The five gusuku and four related properties arranged throughout Okinawa Prefecture convey to us today the islands’ history from time immemorial.

Zakimi-jô Site
This stone gate is built of Ryukyu limestone. At the time of the Ryukyu Kingdom, this gate was a site where the royal family would gather to pray for safe journey whenever the king would leave the castle.

Zakimi-jô was constructed in the early 15th century by the military commander Gosamaru. The castle is an excellent example of exquisite stonemasonry with the oldest remaining arched stone gates in Okinawa.

Gosamaru, who built Zakimi Castle, was lord of Nakagusuku Castle. The castle sits on high ground along Nakagusuku bay, affording visitors an impressive view of the sea from the fortress walls.

Numerous events express the Okinawan people’s hope that Shuri Castle be restored to its former glory.

With the aim of building momentum for restoration of Shuri Castle, prefecture residents have been volunteering their time to remove mortar from damaged roof tiles so that they may be reused, and have also taken mortar from damaged tiles and put it to use making shisa dogs. The largest projection map ever in Okinawa Prefecture was produced and displayed at Shuri Castle. Banner performances have also been held in cooperation with local communities. The people of Okinawa are expressing their hopes for Shuri Castle in many tangible ways and creating opportunities for everyone to play their part in the castle’s reconstruction.
In Okinawa, seasonal events and festivals have been held and handed down over the years in communities. Families welcome their ancestors back during the Bon Festival held according to the lunar calendar. There are also many other rites and festivals, such as prayers for a bountiful harvest and safe travel at sea as well as to expel pestilence, that are very rich in local flavor. Old-fashioned traditional festivals are honored and carried on as are highly entertaining festival performances incorporating colorful and showy elements. Residents of Okinawa Prefecture as well as tourists from around Japan as well as the world find these rites and festivals endlessly appealing.
Lion dance performed to the accompaniment of drums and Sanshin

Traditional performance art. Eisa is a powerful dance performed in remembrance of our ancestors.

Miyako Island’s Paantu festival, where mask-wearing supernatural beings ward off misfortune.

Eisa is a powerful dance performed in remembrance of our ancestors.

Miyako Island’s Paantu festival, where mask-wearing supernatural beings ward off misfortune.

Great Naha tug-of-war represents a prayer for good health and prosperity of our descendants (rope is the largest in the world).

Ogimi Village’s Ungami (Sea God Festival) held to pray for good health and bountiful harvest.

Dance performed to give thanks to our ancestors and the gods, and to pray for the prosperity of our community and health of our families.

“Hachigatsu Odori” of Tarama Island to pray for abundant harvests.

“Hachigatsu Odori” of Tarama Island to pray for abundant harvests.

Lion dance performed to the accompaniment of drums and Sanshin.

Ogimi Village’s Ungami (Sea God Festival) held to pray for good health and bountiful harvest.
Embracing different cultures to develop further

Okinawa Prefecture is a mature fusion of many diverse cultures. These islands have embraced the good of different cultures in each age to form and develop a distinctive culture. Okinawa Prefecture has expanded networks of human relationships, the center pillar of which is the Worldwide Uchinanchu Network comprising people of Okinawan heritage in countries around the world. The Okinawa Prefectural Government has also promoted exchange in tourism, economic engagement, cultural affairs, and other areas.

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COLUMN

World Uchinanchu Day

At the 6th World Uchinanchu Festival in 2016, October 30 was proclaimed “World Uchinanchu Day.” Every year on this day, events and activities are held in Okinawa Prefecture and wherever Uchinanchus gather around the world.