



Issue 3, August 2017

# UCHINA MENSOREE

AN INFORMAL NEWSLETTER SHARING TID-BITS OF OKINAWAN CULTURE, EVENTS AND HISTORY

## THIS MONTH IN OKINAWA

In Okinawa, the month of August is characterized by *essentially constant* daily high temperatures, with daily highs around 88°F throughout the month, rarely exceeding 92°F or dropping below 85°F.

*Precipitation* – a wet day is one with at least 0.04 inches of liquid or liquid-equivalent precipitation. In Okinawa, the chance of a wet day over the course of August is *essentially constant*, remaining around 37% throughout.

*Sun* – over the course of August in Okinawa, the length of the day is decreasing. From the start to the end of the month, the length of the day decreases by 40 minutes, implying an average daily decrease of 1 minute, 20 seconds, and a weekly decrease of 9 minutes, 21 seconds. The shortest day of the month is August 31, with 12 hours, 42 minutes of daylight, whilst the longest day is August 1 with 13 hours, 22 minutes of daylight.

## OKINAWAN CULTURE

### SHURIJO CASTLE

**A World Heritage Site, where the day starts with the sound of a bronze bell**

Shurijo Castle, located 30 minutes away by monorail from Naha Airport, stands on top of a hill overlooking Shuri, the ancient capital of Okinawa. It was the center of the politics, diplomacy and culture of the Ryukyu Kingdom that lasted for around 450 years from the 15th century.



southwest tip of Japan, went through a period in the 14th century when three powers of the northern, central and southern parts competed and a

unified kingdom, “the Ryukyu Kingdom”, was created in 1429.

The Ryukyu Kingdom flourished through commerce with China, Korea, Southeast Asia as well as mainland Japan, which greatly influenced the Kingdom creating a unique culture where diverse cultures blend. Shurijo Castle, the World Heritage Site, is the symbol of this.



# OKINAWAN CULTURE



## SHURIJO CASTLE

A World Heritage Site, where the day starts with the sound of a bronze bell

Leaving early in the morning is recommended for the tour of Shurijo Castle. After the bronze bell is hit rhythmically at 8:25 am, the door of Hoshinmon Gate that leads to Una (square) in front of Seiden (main hall) of Shurijo Castle is opened with the shout of “Ukejo”.

This is a special moment in the morning when the classical music of the Ryukyu Kingdom is played.



([Click here](#) for a video of the gate opening)

After you walk through Hoshinmon Gate, you see a square called “Una”, which is surrounded by buildings on

both sides with Seiden (main hall) in the middle.



This is where important events were held including a ceremony to welcome “Sapposhi”, a messenger from a Chinese Emperor.

Okushoin, or inner drawing room, where the King rested during the break in his government business, is a Japanese style building with tatami mats.



The style of the construction of the castle where Chinese and

Japanese styles coexist is also a highlight not to miss.

In “Sasunoma”, which was a waiting room of the prince, the heir of the Kingdom, you can enjoy four types of popular sweets of Okinawa including Chinsuko and Sanpin tea (Jasmin tea) (for a fee).



You also cannot miss the seven gates and the garden of Shurijo Castle. The graceful curved line of the Ryukyu lime stone walls that lead to the gates shows the sophisticated architectural technology used.



## WORDS OF WISDOM

*Kutubaa. Jin chikee.* – Spend words as efficiently as money.  
*Okinawan Proverb*



# OKINAWAN CUISINE



## Flavors Developed from a Unique History

The traditional cuisine of Okinawa was developed during the Great Trade era of the 14th century through 16th century in the Ryukyu Kingdom to cater to Chinese envoys dispatched by the Chinese emperor, and it has since continued to evolve with influences from Japan and China among other Asian countries.

The dishes are devised to be nutritionally balanced, combining the essence of ingredients rich in vitamins, such as bitter melon and loofah, with pork that has been carefully prepared to break up the fat over a long period of time. The wisdom of ancestors who ate well and lived healthy



lives remain in spirit in the traditional cuisine of Okinawa. After the war, American food culture, represented in the “canned pork,” made its way into the diet and continues to be cherished to this day.

Okinawan food culture openly accepted the influences brought upon by the changing times and is today a unique food culture that has created a variety of dishes.

## Pork – the Ingredient that Okinawans Cherish

Okinawans are known to use every part the pig for cooking; in fact, there is even a saying that goes, “everything but its cry is eaten.”

The most common cooking method is to stew it over an extended period of time, and it is traditionally prepared by

boiling it for long hours to break down the fat for a healthy meal.

In recent years, the black pig known as “Agu,” a native species of Ryukyu, is increasingly becoming popular.





# OKINAWAN CUISINE

## Okinawa Soba – Soul Food of the Okinawans

Okinawa soba uses noodles made with 100% flour and contains no buckwheat, which is surprising as the word *soba* typically refers to buckwheat noodles. The color, thickness, and crimp of the noodles vary by region. The soup is made with a combination of pig bone and bonito stock, seasoned with salt or *konbu* (edible seaweed), *katsubushi* flakes and pork.

The dish is served with a variety of toppings, the most common ones being *soki* (boneless pork ribs), *kamaboko* (fish cake), a thick slice of stewed *san-mai niku* (pork belly; lit. “three-layer meat”), stir fried vegetables and sliced scallion. The dish is usually garnished with *beni shōga* (pickled ginger).

For extra spice, diners can add a few drops of *kōrēgūsu*, which consists of chile peppers soaked in awamori rice liquor (see next article).

As mentioned earlier, *soba* means buckwheat and particularly refers to buckwheat noodles; but Okinawa soba contains no buckwheat because it is extremely rare there. In

Japan, soba was standardized to ensure the noodles contained “at least 30% buckwheat.” When Okinawa was returned to Japan in 1972 this caused a problem because Okinawa’s soba didn’t conform to the regulation. Following negotiations between the Okinawa Noodle Manufacturing Co-Op and the Fair Trade Commission, an exception was granted, provided it was called Okinawa Soba.

The first known documented reference to Okinawa soba is from 1902 when it was known as *Shina soba* (Chinese soba). There is also evidence of several soba restaurants running in Naha during the Taishō period (1912-1926). It is believed these restaurants had close links with the red light district!

Many soba restaurants were destroyed during the US attacks during the Battle of Okinawa, although it was still cooked in the internment camps where wheat rations were supplied.

The introduction of noodle making machines popularized

the dish and made it accessible to home cooks instead of just restaurants. The mainland custom of eating soba on New Year’s Eve was introduced to Okinawa in 1968 although the Okinawans continued to use their preferred wheat noodles instead of the Japanese buckwheat.

Today, Okinawa soba is considered to be a vital part of Okinawan traditions and culture, although the folklorist Nishimura Hidemi has argued that it was an invented tradition.

There is evidence that suggests 150,000 to 160,000 meals of Okinawa soba are consumed every day, so, invented tradition or not, it is no exaggeration to say that it is soul food for the people of Okinawa.



# OKINAWAN CUISINE



## The Surprising Evolution of Soy Sauce

Soy sauce is immensely popular as a condiment for Japanese food. How many of you, however, really know its properties and versatility? Today we are going to explain why soy sauce is good for you as well as introduce some variations and alternative ways to taste it.

**Often confined to a supporting role, soy sauce has many underrated properties**

Most of us know soy sauce as the black, salty and distinctive-tasting sauce that we dip sushi



in. While soy sauce would seem to have only a secondary role, it has, in fact, plenty of amazing properties.

For example, a few drops of this sauce can mitigate the smell of certain ingredients or bring out the sweetness of others. When used for marinating food, it

slows down the decaying process. Not to mention its nutritional value.

In addition to vitamin B2 and B6, soy sauce is also rich in essential vitamins and minerals of which are hard to get an adequate intake, such as magnesium, potassium, zinc and more. (However, being high in salt content, you should be careful not to overuse it.)

## Awamori – Okinawan Liquor with Rich Aroma and Deep Flavor

Ask people to name a Japanese drink and I guarantee most will say “sake”, and they’d be right. But sake is not the only rice liquor out there. Allow me to introduce *Awamori*. This alcoholic spirit is indigenous and unique to Okinawa.

Made from long grain indica rice from Thailand, unlike sake it is not a direct product of brewing, but rather from distillation. Unlike Japanese *shochu* which has two fermentations and uses white, black or yellow *koji* mold spores, awamori has a single fermentation process and uses only black *koji* mold, indigenous to the prefecture.

Awamori is thought to get its name from the bubbles (*awa*) that rise and swell (*mori*) during its distillation.

When awamori is aged for three years or more, it is called *kusu* meaning “old liquor”. This pronunciation is unique to Okinawa. Awamori is aged underground in clay pots or vases. Containers of awamori can be found in the caves of Okinawa. Before the Battle of Okinawa in WWII, 200- and even 300-year old *kusu* existed but all were lost in the battle. Today, several attempts are being made to produce these *kusu* again.

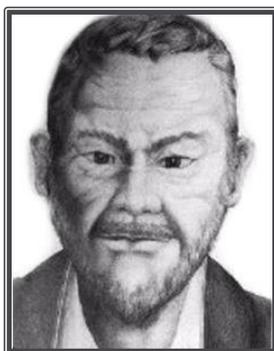
Typically, awamori is drunk with water and ice, although it can be taken straight, on the rocks or in [cocktails](#). Traditionally, it was served in a small earthen vessel (*kara-kara*) which contained a clay marble. The marble would make a distinctive sound when the vessel was empty as it was considered rude to serve your guests from an empty vessel.



## KARATE CORNER



Each month a different karate master from Okinawa will be featured. The one selected for August is....



**ANKO AZATO**

Okinawan Karate Master, governor, military chief. Also known by the name Tonochi, Anko Azato or Azato Yasutsune in Japanese, 1827-1906) was an Okinawan master of karate.

He trained under Sokon "Bushi" Matsumura. Instruction under that taskmaster was always conducted early in the morning before dawn until the sun came up, without change or observation of holidays. During these times, Azato Sensei was also studying at the National school where he was peerless. Particularly, in the study of the Chinese classics, Azato was an honour student and received financial scholarship amounting to more than his tuition."

Although he excelled in archery and swordsmanship, Anko Azato was also accredited with bringing even the best swordsman (carrying katana) down with his bare hands.

Azato also contributed to the education of Master Gichin Funakoshi, the founder of modern karate-do. Anko Azato and Anko Itosu were the two main karate masters who taught Gichin Funakoshi, the founder of Shotokan-ryu karate. Funakoshi appears to be the source of most of the information available on Asato. Many articles contain information about Asato, but the relevant parts are clearly based on Funakoshi's descriptions of him.

Anko Azato advised Funakoshi to "turn your hands and feet into swords". He drilled him unmercifully in kata. Funakoshi was required to practice a single kata for months before being allowed to move onto another kata. Azato told his student "the secret of victory is to know yourself and your opponent through careful preparation and

observation." This way you will never be caught off guard.

Funakoshi first met Asato when he was a schoolmate of Asato's son; he called Asato "one of Okinawa's greatest experts in the art of karate." According to Funakoshi, Asato's family belonged to the Tonochi class (hereditary town and village chiefs), and held authority in the village of Asato, halfway between Shuri and Naha, and he was not only a master of karate, but also skilled at riding horses, which he studied under Megata Sensei, the trainer who groomed the Meiji Emperor himself.

He also studied Jigen-ryu (swordsmanship) directly under the noted Japanese instructor Ishun Yashichiro, and archery under Master Sekiguchi.

