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UCHINA MENSOREE

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

THIS MONTH IN OKINAWA

In Okinawa, the month of July is characterized by *essentially constant* daily high temperatures, with daily highs around *89°F* throughout the month, rarely exceeding *92°F* or dropping below *84°F*. The highest daily average high temperature is *89°F* on *July 21*. Daily low temperatures are around *80°F*, rarely falling below *77°F* or exceeding *83°F*.

The average sliding 31-day rainfall during July in Okinawa is *gradually decreasing*, starting the month at *5.4 inches*, when it rarely exceeds *10.3 inches* or falls below *1.3 inches*, and ending the month at *5.1 inches*, when it rarely exceeds *10.8 inches* or falls below *1.2 inches*.

CURRENT EVENTS

TANABATA: The Star Festival

Tanabata takes place on July 07, 2017. Tanabata (meaning "Evening of the seventh") is a Japanese star festival, originating from the Chinese Qixi Festival. It celebrates the meeting of the deities Orihime and Hikoboshi. According to legend, the Milky Way separates these lovers, and they are allowed to meet only once a year on the seventh day of the seventh lunar month of the lunisolar calendar.



The date of Tanabata varies by region of the country, but the first festivities begin on July 7 of the Gregorian calendar. The celebration is held at various days between July and August. The original Tanabata date was based on the Japanese lunisolar calendar, which is about a

month behind the Gregorian calendar.

In present-day Japan, people generally celebrate this day by writing wishes, sometimes in the form of poetry, on tanzaku, small pieces of paper, and hanging them on bamboo, sometimes with other decorations. The bamboo and decorations are often set afloat on a river or burned after the festival, around midnight or on the next day. This resembles the custom of floating paper ships and candles on rivers during Obon. The text "[Tanabata](http://www.cute-calendar.com)" has been taken from www.cute-calendar.com





OKINAWAN CULTURE

SHISA

The Traditional Okinawan Guardian of the House

A typical sight in Okinawa is that of a shisa sitting on a red tile roof against the bright blue sky. Shisa are placed not only on the roofs and at the front doors of houses, but also at the entrances to villages and buildings throughout the island.

In the late 17th century the village of Kochinda, located in the southern part of the island, was the victim of continuous fires. Since placing shisa at the entrance to the village, there

hasn't been a single fire in the village. As shown in this story, shisa, used as a talisman against evil spirits, are an indispensable element in the lives of Okinawans and are highly revered on the island, the religion of which is based on nature worship.

A pair of shisa is very much like the Nioh, the two guardian god statues standing on either side of the gate of some Buddhist temples. The male shisa, with an

open mouth, wards off evil spirits, and the one with a closed mouth, a female, keeps good spirits in.



ISHIGANTO STONES

Along with shisa, ishiganto are famous Okinawan talismans used to ward off evil spirits. Ishiganto stone monuments and plates are commonly found on the walls outside many houses and buildings as well as at T-junctions and forked roads to guard against evil. It's believed that evil spirits travel in straight lines and that they are smashed to pieces when they hit Ishiganto stones.



In this image you can see both the Ishiganto stones and Shisa for sale on a market stall



In this image you can see the Ishiganto stone in place on the front of a building



THE ART OF THE OKINAWAN DANCE



The History of Ryukyuan Dance and Kumi-odori

While Noh, a traditional Japanese theatrical form, is well known as Japanese-style opera, Okinawa also possesses a type of classical drama, Ryukyuan dance, which features dance, music and dialogue and is often compared to Western opera. Advantageously positioned amongst China, Southeast Asia and Japan, the Ryukyu Kingdom flourished in its day. Absorbing the best elements of those cultures it encountered, Ryukyu itself gave birth to a rich culture based on its own sensibilities and aesthetics. The symbol of said culture is undoubtedly traditional performing arts — particularly



Ryukyuan dance. Okinawan dance is divided into four styles: court dancing known as Koten-buyo (classical dance); Zo-udui (mixed dance), which appeared in the latter half of the 18th century depicting the

experiences of the common people; Sosaku-buyo (created dance), choreographed by modern dancers; and Minzoku-buyo (folk dance), locally passed from one generation to the next.

Yotsutake

Yotsutake is the most important classical dance in Okinawa. A woman dancing in a bingata kimono and a large red lotus hat is exactly what most Okinawans imagine when they think of Ryukyu dance. An integral part of classical women's dances, an extravagance of color and intricate designs serve as a symbol of Ryukyu culture.

Yotsutake and other modern choreographies are relatively easy to see at places such as Shurijo Castle Park and also at local festivals and events, but Kumiodori is seen only at the National Theatre Okinawa, which is expected to become a traditional culture hub for the Asia/Pacific region, or at the Shurijo Castle Mid-Autumn Celebration, held annually in September. Through the music

and dances, you will be able to catch a glimpse of the Okinawan soul.



[Click here](#) to see an example of the Yotsutake dance



OKINAWAN CUISINE



Diversity of Flavor

Local Okinawan dishes are famous for being unique among the cuisine of the many prefectures of Japan. This is due to the distinctness of Okinawa's food and the use of ingredients harvested on the island as well as Okinawa's history as an independent kingdom prior to the Meiji era.

Okinawan cuisine can be divided into two types: the food served to the royal family, and the home cooking eaten by the rest of the population. Palace cuisine was created for the pleasure of Chinese envoys



visiting Ryukyu, while the commoners prepared their meals using Okinawan herbs and ingredients gathered from the island's abundant natural wealth. And it's this home cooking from which today's Okinawan cuisine, known as a key to the people's longevity, is derived.

Including specialty marine products such as mozuku and umibudo seaweed, seafood dishes, premier meats like Ishigaki beef and aguu pork, champuru (stir fry) dishes and Okinawa soba, which is considered Okinawan "soul food," a wide variety of tasty delights awaits you in Okinawa. Dishes prepared with goat meat or irabu (smoked sea snake) are also available for culinary adventurers. Since local dishes vary by district, an eating tour of the island is highly recommended

Smoked Snake



Okinawan Market



Champuru



Irabu Soup

Irabu soup was a dish in Ryukyuan palace cuisine that was reserved for special occasions. Irabu soup is prepared by simmering irabu, or sea snake, with its skin in kombu (kelp) broth for hours. The skin can easily be removed

as you eat. Despite its unusual appearance, irabu's simple flavor is reminiscent of white fish meat. Irabu soup is a tonic type of food that represents the idea of ishoku dogen. Eating a bowl of irabu soup will be sure to make you feel full of energy.



KARATE CORNER



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



ANKŌ ITOSU

Ankō Itosu's teachings are legendary in world martial arts. Along with his Master, Sokon 'Bushi' Matsumura, he was instrumental in the development of the Shuri-te style of Okinawan karate.

Itosu can be said to be the first person to practice what would closely resemble the type of Shotokan karate that is practiced today, and was responsible for taking the martial art from being a secretive, behind closed doors art, to being spread to the general public in Okinawa.

The Early Life of Itosu
Born in 1830 in the city of Shuri in Okinawa, Itosu is believed to have had a rough childhood, often being beaten and abused by his father. It is said that his father would tie him up and continually poke

him with a stick in order to teach him fighting spirit.

This would be reflected later in the teachings of Itosu, as many of the kata he is thought to have invented and influenced have moves that are designed to disarm a would-be attacker brandishing a stick.

At the age of 16 he started leaning karate from Master Matsumura and by the time he grew up, Itosu was a well-educated man and worked as King Sho Tai's personal secretary, whom he served for thirty years. For Itosu and the rest of the inhabitants of the island, everything changed in 1879 as the Japanese ended the Royal dynasty of Okinawa, sending the king into exile.

Most of the karate masters had worked for the King so as a result of his fall from grace

many, including Itosu, suddenly found themselves living in abject poverty even though they were of the higher social class.

Ankō Itosu and his Legendary Fighting Prowess - Tomoyose
When Itosu was a young man, he built up a reputation by winning several fights and there are a number of legends about his endeavours that have been handed down to us from an oral tradition.

One story tells of how he challenged an obnoxious bully named Tomoyose who was criticizing the Shuri-te style, calling it "parlour karate". Itosu was then attacked by Tomoyose's gang but he quickly dispatched three of them using one knockout blow for each. Tomoyose then decided to attack himself and was also subdued in a similar fashion, being rendered unconscious by Itosu.





ANKŌ ITOSU

While it can be difficult to know where true karate history ends and myths and legends begin, both these stories illustrate why Anko Itosu's teachings are so important to karate history. It was him that popularised and possibly brought in the concept of finishing an opponent off with one blow, which is often delivered when the opponents begins their opening attack.

Previously karateka, much like kung Fu practitioners, would attempt to overwhelm their opponents with less powerful rapid-fire techniques, use grappling moves or lighter strikes to vulnerable areas such as pressure points, the eyes or the groin. For this reason, the master's karate is said to be the first that closely resembles what is practiced in Shotokan karate today, leading many to see

Itosu as the Grandfather of Modern Day Karate.

Another major contribution made by Sensei Itosu was to take the art out of secrecy and get it taught in Okinawan schools. This would start a chain of events that would lead to his karate being popularized throughout the world and become one of the most practiced martial arts there is.



WORDS OF WISDOM

Miinai chichi nai. – We learn by watching and listening.
Okinawan Proverb

