

WEEKLY UPDATE

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Higashi Village has a reputation to have the most delicious pineapples on the island, and arguably in all Japan. Higashi Village is the number one producer of pineapples in Japan. You might also want to try snack-pineapples from which pieces can be torn off by hand without using a knife. They may be hard to find and quite pricey, but surely worth it!



Low: 19°C		
Fri	Sat	Sun
40% 20/16	20% 21/15	30% 23/17



¥150

Fantastic Okinawa

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Higashi Village: blessed with nature and scenery



Higashi Azalea Festival is an annual event in Higashi Eco Park where over 50,000 azalea bushes bloom every March.

By Natalie Nakamatsu

Higashi Village is well known in northern Okinawa for its scenic beauty, fresh air and abundant nature. It's also the home to Okinawa's best known professional lady golfer, Ai Miyazato.

It is located in the northeastern part of Okinawa's main island along its Pacific coast, bordering Nago City to the south, Ogimi Village to the west and Kunigami Village to the north. The village is consists of six districts although most businesses and the Village Office is centered in Taira.

Visiting the village from densely pop-

ulated southern Okinawa would be a whole day excursion, as it is a long drive by Okinawan standards. After getting off the expressway in Kyoda, Nago, continue straight on Highway 58, and turn right across the island at Ogimi. All in all it's about 1.5-hour drive from Okinawa City.

Although Okinawa is famous as an



Higashi Village fields produce some of the sweetest pineapples but almost all go for sale in Tokyo and other big cities.



Gesashi Mangrove Park.

island with much of nature's richness, the scale differs a bit in this village. With a population of only 1,900, the village has much to offer to those who enjoy camping, kayaking, fishing, BBQ, trekking and an extravagant night sky that will take your breath away. The village has several rivers

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Higashi Museum focuses on nature, humans and history



Higashi Museum has life-size dioramas of local wildlife on display.

Higashi Museum is not your usual museum as it has a library where one can enjoy a book as if the in the calmness of a forest. It has Internet access and a study hall to hold exhibitions from time to time.

The museum is open from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., and closed on Mondays and national holidays. Admission for adults and college students is ¥200, for elementary, junior and high school students the entrance costs ¥100.

"Learn from nature, humans and history" is the theme of the museum's exhibition room that is filled with a variety of pictures and documents related to Higashi Village's history. It gives detailed information on the origins of the village, how its people lived in the past, and its exchanges and relationship between the southern part of Okinawa.

There's information on how trade was conducted in the old times, and also a number of items and tools people used that give a visitor a taste of how the people lived back in the day.

But that is not all. There is also an exhibition of actual size replica dioramas of fish living in the Fukuji Dam, habu and Ryukyu odd-tooth snake.

Surrounding the museum there is playground equipment, and a huge park where you can watch birds. A 15-minute walk from the museum takes you to the village's natural treasure; the Sakishima Suo-no-ki, plus the lush nature of Higashi Village is the museum of nature itself.



Old farm tools bring the human aspect to the museum displays.

Fukuji Dam keeps water flowing



A view from the top of Fukuji Dam's 92-meter-high embankment.

Fukuji Dam is a rock-fill embankment dam, the largest on Okinawa and even in the whole nation.

The dam was built for the purpose of water supply and flood control, because despite rather heavy precipitation on Okinawa each year, most of the rainwater flows right into the ocean. Before Fukuji and other dams were constructed on Okinawa, water shortage was almost an annual occurrence forcing rationing that

lasted sometimes for weeks.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers began construction of the dam in 1969 under the supervision of the Ryukyu Domestic Water Corporation. After Okinawa's reversion to Japan in 1972, the construction became responsibility of the Japanese government. The dam was completed in 1972 and the auxiliary spillway in December 1974. The dam was later raised to accommodate an improved intake and add an additional 2.4 meters in water elevation. This additional work was completed in 1991.

The dam has a 92-meter-tall and 260-meter-long rock-fill embankment. It contains up to 1,622,000 cubic meters of water, and has a crest elevation of 90 meters. The spillway helps drain the reservoir during flooding and is directly connected to the Pacific Ocean.

Fukuji Dam has a park area that is a popular sightseeing destination. There are canoes that people can rent for paddling on the dam, and a boat ride that takes visitors on 50-minute trips around the dam. The boat runs three times a day at 10 a.m., 1 p.m. and 3 p.m. Boarding costs ¥1,000 for adults and ¥800 for children. Admission to and parking at the park are free.

Azaleas nearly in full bloom in Higashi



Higashi Azalea Festival has food for both body and soul.

A bit of welcome rain, and abundant sunshine, are doing their part to bring Higashi Village azaleas to full bloom, just in time for everyone to enjoy the 32nd Higashi Village Azalea Festival.

The festival officially began nearly two weeks ago, but the vivid blooms are just now coming into their own, with this weekend marking the start of the most scenic time. The festival runs until

March 23rd. There is an entry fee to the flower gardens, with adults and high school students paying a modest ¥300. Junior high school age students and younger are free for the festival, which runs daily 9 a.m. ~ 6 p.m.

This weekend features entertainment in the form of a magic show with Magician Kina and a performance by Maruke. The program runs 1:30 p.m. ~ 2:50 pm. Next

weekend take in Higashi Village street dance, Okinawa dances and karate on Friday from 12:30 p.m. ~ 3 p.m. Saturday showcases the Meio University Eisa Group performance, another by Okinawa International University Eisa Group, and Nago Sakura Taiko. The performances run 1 p.m. ~ 3:10 p.m. Sunday the 23rd from 10 a.m. ~ 3 p.m. it is the Tsutsuji Festival Karaoke Contest.

Next weekend will also feature workshops on Azalea growing.



Entrance to the Azalea Park costs ¥300 during the festival.

Higashi Village

Continued from page 1

and mountains within its borders that provide many trekking routes and paths for those who enjoy a good walk. Plus, the air is one so pure and clean, you might feel a shock when returning back to the crowded south.

In addition to the abundant nature, there are some products that Higashi Village is famous for, such as pineapples which are some of the sweetest and juiciest one can find anywhere, but rarely found in Okinawan stores because most are exported to mainland Japan. However, they are available in the village. Another product would be the tea. Tea can only be cultivated in areas where the water is rich and pure, making Higashi Village one the best places for tea to grow.

As with every location in Okinawa, Higashi Village has special products to offer and memorable places to visit to create memories that you can cherish the rest of your life after your visit.

Gesashi mangrove forest brings visitors close to nature

There are many places on Okinawa where mangroves grow, and one of the largest mangrove forests is at the mouth of Gesashi River in Higashi Village.

The mangroves stretch about one kilometer up both sides of the river, spreading about 200 meters wide. The mangrove area covers

about 10 hectares in total, and is the largest mangrove area on Okinawa's main island.

Most of the mangrove that grows at Gesashi is the *Kandelia obovata*. The riverbanks are covered with red mangroves, and on the upper stream there are black mangroves.

A large variety of creatures typically living

in mangrove areas are also seen in and out of the river including crabs, shellfish, various types of gobies, plus river cicada and snipes.

The mangrove area in Gesashi is long considered to be one of the most diverse and valuable natural environments on Okinawa, and on Dec. 6th, 1959, the Ryukyu Government designated it as one of Okinawa's Natural Monuments, and on May 15, 1972, after Okinawa was returned to Japan, the central government in Tokyo confirmed its status, and it became officially one of Japan's Designated Natural Treasures.

However, it has not been easy for the environment of the area. In 1973 during the filtration between Fukuji and Kushi Dam, it suffered



Visitors can rent canoes to paddle along the mangroves for a close look.

some sediment inflow, and to this day inflows from pineapple fields in the surrounding area are still suspected of causing some damage. Before, tourists visiting the area caused damage by wading into the swamp on foot. Since then observation decks have been constructed on the swamp

that allow visitors to take a close look without causing damage.

In the eco park there are canoes for rent that visitors can use to venture up the river and out onto the Gesashi Bay. Overnight accommodations are available, and parking in the area is free.



Gesashi River mangroves stretch 200 meters wide on both sides about one kilometer upstream.

*Population 1,900, including foreign residents. (6) (2014, February)

JAPAN UPDATE

Introducing Okinawa's 41 municipalities

Vol.05

HIGASHI Village



After getting off at the end of the expressway at Kyoda, continue straight through Nago on Hwy 58 about 30 min. then turn right at a sign to Higashi at Ogimi.

東村

Higashi Village consists of following districts:
Arume • Kawata • Gesashi • Taira • Takae • Miyagi

ClickOkinawa.com



① Azalea (Tsutsuji) Eco Park

Although Higashi Azalea Eco Park is best known for its annual festival, the park also offers camping grounds for tents and wooden cottages accommodating 4, 6 or 8 adults are available for rent at reasonable prices all year around. BBQ set is available for rent as are all necessary accessories and even BBQ meals. Advance reservation is required. There is a variety of hiking trails through the woods including a guided tour (in Japanese only) to observe and learn about the lush nature of the area. The various hiking trails are graded according to their difficulty. A restaurant on the premises serves simple Okinawan-style meals. For more information, call 0980-43-3300 (in Japanese). Their address is 766-1 Taira, Higashi Village.



② Sakishima Suo-no ki (Sakishima Sappanwood Tree)

The Sakishima Sappanwood tree belongs to the family of the Chinese parasol-tree. It's growing on islands south from Amami Oshima. This particular tree grows on the bank Fukuji River and is one of Higashi Village's natural monuments and said to be the largest of its kind on Okinawa main island. The tree is about 18 meters tall, and has a circumference of nearly three meters at 1.5 meters above the ground. Its most remarkable feature is its vertically flat roots that curl about above the ground. The tree is located about 800 meters from the mouth of the Fukuji River.



④ Sunrise Higashi

At the Sunrise Higashi road station you can find many of Higashi Village's products and a restaurant. It is right on the beach and a great place to enjoy a meal while enjoying the ocean view. If you're visiting from the southern part of Okinawa and on your way up north, this is the last store on the west coast before Oku near



Hedo Point at the northernmost tip of the island, which might be useful to keep in mind before continuing to the north.

③ Fukuji Park

Fukuji Park is located right behind the Higashi Museum. It offers great nature and breathtaking hills. While adults enjoy a time in the museum, children can have a great time in nature, completely away from the city life of Okinawa.



Access Higashi Village Spot Map here!
<http://goo.gl/ul6MH8>



⑥ Okinawa Kaguya Hime

Okinawa Kaguya Hime is the only one of its kind on Okinawa that has both a rose and hibiscus garden. Many other varieties of flowers also bloom there according to seasons. Wooden cottages and space for camping are available as well. It is an ultimate spot in nature to relax and loosen up. Open all year from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Admission to the park for adults is ¥500, and ¥250 for school age children. Kids under elementary school age are free of charge.



⑦ Uppama Beach

"Uppama" means big in Okinawa dialect. And it really does justice to its name, as the beach is very big and beautiful. The beach has toilets but no showers. The season runs from April through September.

⑤ Minatogawa Farm

Minatogawa Farm is one of the few farms on Okinawa to offer strawberry picking. All farm produce is grown using special type of water and manure, which is both safe and healthy. Strawberry picking is normally available from January 15th through mid-June. Reservations are required and the farm is closed on Mondays and Fridays. You can also try your hand in the harvest of Chinese white radish from mid-January through May. Tomato picking takes place from March through May. Hours are from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Address is 382 Gesashi, Higashi Village, Kunigami District. 0980-43-2542.

