

# TOURIST ATTRACTIONS

During your assignment to Okinawa, take advantage of the many beautiful and historic and cultural sites. The following are a few of the most popular attractions:

**Naha Dragon Boat Race:** "Golden Week," the first week in May, is one of Japan's biggest holidays. The Naha dragon boat races are held at Aja Port, Naha, to coincide with the start of the annual tourist season. These races began in China around 278 B.C. and were imported to Okinawa in the 14th Century. Each year, male and female teams from the U.S. forces on Okinawa compete against Okinawan teams and each other.

**Okinawa City International Festival:** Every year in late summer or early fall, Okinawa City hosts its annual international festival and tug-o-war. One hundred children line up against Okinawans and enjoy the spirit of friendly competition using a huge rope. Many base members also march in the local parade.

**Memorial Park:** On Memorial Park, next to quiet cliffs overlooking the Pacific Ocean, you will find 90 monuments erected by various prefectures and cities within the park. These tombs are memorials honoring the men who lost their lives during World War II's Pacific Islands campaign. The cliffs are known to some Americans as "Suicide Cliff," because Japanese Lt. Gen. Mitsuru Ushijima, commanding general of the 32nd Imperial Japanese Army, performed "seppuku" or "harakiri" here. You will find Okinawa's Peace Memorial Hall just north of the cliffs. The hall houses the Peace Buddha Statue and other war artifacts.

**Okinawa City Children's Zoo:** The Okinawa City Children's Zoo offers the entire family a place to enjoy animals and the outdoors. Although the zoo is relatively small, it provides plenty to hold children's attention, including an amusement park with a merry-go-round, train and is decorated with millions of lights during the Christmas season.

**Shuri Castle:** Shuri Castle offers an opportunity to rediscover the Ryukyuan Kingdom. Shuri, the capital city during the Ryukyu dynasty, was used as the king's office and hall for ceremonies in the Ryukyu Dynasty. The castle represents a refined Ryukyu style, developed through incorporation of Chinese and Japanese styles.

**Japanese Naval Underground Headquarters:** After World War II, only a few structures on Okinawa remained intact. The Japanese Naval Underground Headquarters, honeycombed beneath the hills above Naha, was one structure which stood solid during constant U.S. military bombardment. Visitors can tour down the long narrow hallways and rooms of this structure which Japanese soldiers carved into the earth with picks and shovels. Visitors will also find a museum located above the headquarters displaying many articles used by the troops during the Battle of Okinawa.

**Expo Park/Aquarium:** Expo Park is dedicated to man's relationship with the sea and its animals. The park features an indoor aquarium, dolphin shows, a museum, foreign pavilions, playgrounds, game rooms, picnic areas, a large amusement park and a white sand beach. The park is located on the Motobu Peninsula.

**Bullfighting:** Bullfighting has been a part of Okinawan culture for centuries. Unlike the traditional bullfights in Spain and South America, Okinawan bullfighters developed their own style. Instead of a man fighting a bull, two bulls battle each other under the close supervision of trainers.

**Ryukyu Folk Village:** The Ryukyu Folk Village features numerous exhibits depicting traditional Okinawan homes and customs. Most buildings are filled with Okinawan antiques. Weaving, bingata and pottery demonstrations show Okinawan life from yesteryear. The village is in Yomitan north of Kadena Air Base.

**Okinawa World (Gyokusendo):** Okinawa World is Okinawa Prefecture's foremost theme park and presents the local history, culture and nature all in one location. The park's main attraction is *Gyokusendo*, a 5000 meter long cave that was formed approximately 300,000 years ago. It offers an 890-meter promenade to the public. Next-door is the *Habu* Park, a center that has no secrets about Okinawa's venomous snake. There is also a scenic village of old time Okinawa and workshops that allow experiencing Okinawa's traditional industrial heritage and local folk craft such as glass blowing and pottery. In between, the traditional performance plaza offers high-spirited "*Eisa*", or traditional dancing with drums, dances popular and other popular attractions. It is located in the southern part of the island in Tamagusuku village.