

## **Swords to Plowshares**

Standing on the summit of Mt. Nishiyama in northeastern Tokashiki, this group of white buildings nestled among pine-studded lawns is a residential study facility. Students of all ages, teachers, civil servants, and groups from private companies, as well as families from throughout Japan, can come here for everything from intensive baseball practice to the study of ocean life—or just a relaxing holiday. The site, which was an American base for 12 years beginning in 1960, was converted to its present peaceful use in 1972, after the Americans returned it to Japan leading up to the 1973 reversion of Okinawa.

The entire facility is surrounded by a wall with a protruding outer lip that prevents the entry of poisonous snakes. After getting permission to go outside the wall, you can visit the actual site of one of the forced mass civilian suicides that took place in March 1945. Pass through a gate beside an old US military storehouse, go around a monument, and follow the steps down into the jungle until you come to a fenced-in clearing. Near the monument are panels with excerpts from contemporary American newspapers detailing the invaders' horror at the mass suicides.

There are also two viewpoints here, with views west to the Keramas and east to the main island of Okinawa, which are well worth making a stop at. If you're lucky, in winter you might catch sight of a whale or two, so bring your binoculars.