

Taboos on Okinoshima

Local residents call Okinoshima by various names, such as “the island where gods dwell,” “island of mystery,” and “the unspoken one.” The taboos enforced on Okinoshima have undoubtedly helped maintain both the island’s mystery and kept its archaeological sites intact. In ancient times, the island was an important site of worship, as evidenced by the tens of thousands of votive objects discovered on the island.

Today it is still forbidden for members of the public to visit Okinoshima. As with other important sacred sites in Japan, upholding the purity of Okinoshima is a priority, literally and symbolically. For example, besides maintaining the island’s pristine environment by prohibiting the removal of any object from the island, those permitted to visit are obliged to purify their bodies by bathing naked in the sea in a ritual called *misogi*. They must also swear an oath of total secrecy regarding their activities on the island.