

Ochaen Observatory (for website)

Naruto Park's Ochaen observation point is a tranquil spot from which to take in the panorama encompassing the Naruto Strait and its famed whirlpools; the magnificent Onaruto Bridge and Awaji Island beyond; the tiny, wild island of Tobishima; green hills that roll toward the city of Naruto; and more. Though modest in size, Ochaen is deeply entwined with the past few centuries of Japan's fascinating history.

The story of this place begins with the lords of the Hachisuka family, who ruled the Tokushima domain from 1585 to 1871. Their lands encompassed present-day Tokushima Prefecture in addition to Awaji Island, which was incorporated in 1615. Successive Hachisuka daimyo would travel by ship from Tokushima Castle in order to enjoy the timeless spectacle of the Naruto whirlpools here. They built various temporary structures—including the tea houses from which Ochaen (meaning “tea garden”) gets its name—took pleasure from fishing, and established a pasture for their horses nearby. But when the aristocrats were away, common folk would flock to Ochaen to view the whirlpools. In the late Edo period (ca. 1800–1867), wealthy merchants and literati would often hire boats to take them even closer to the natural spectacle, which they described in poems, paintings, and travel journals.

Following the Meiji Restoration of 1868, samurai rule ended and power returned to the emperor. The capital was moved from Kyoto to Tokyo, and Japan embarked on a program of accelerated Western-style modernization. Although the Naruto Strait was fortified for military use, the hill was kept open for visitors drawn by the famous whirlpools.

The area surrounding Ochaen remained a military installation until the end of World War II in 1945. Subsequent decades of peace and prosperity, accompanied by the exponential growth of domestic and international tourism, have made Ochaen far more accessible. The observation deck now grants a view worthy of a samurai lord to all who make their way here.