

Amami Oshima's Complex Coastline

The distinctive coastline of Amami Oshima has been shaped by the island repeatedly separating from and connecting with mainland Asia and Japan during tectonic shifts that occurred between 10 million and 2 million years ago. These shifts have created a shoreline characterized by numerous deep inlets and mountainous slopes that extend down to the ocean. Most of the island is encircled by coral reefs that support many species of marine creatures. Sea turtles, for example, can often be spotted at Ohama Beach.

Protecting the Island's Coral

More than 200 species of coral have been identified in the seas around the Amami island chain. Coral reefs are rich ecosystems of great biodiversity and are home to a quarter of all marine species. However, the reefs are also fragile and susceptible to pollution and changes in water temperature. Much of the coastline and waters surrounding Amami Oshima has been designated part of Amami Gunto National Park, which was established in 2017 to help protect the islands' unique ecosystems and culture. The Kohama protected coral area, which has a particularly bountiful section of reef where snorkeling is permitted, is a 10-minute walk north along the headland from Ohama Seaside Park. The spot is not accessible by car.

Scenic Shoreline Drive

The road heading southwest from Ohama Seaside Park mostly hugs the craggy coastline, providing an opportunity for visitors to experience the island's varied scenery. As flat land in Amami Oshima is scarce, human settlements tend to concentrate on the shoreline, with many villages built in inlets surrounded by forested mountain slopes. A drive along the coast will take visitors through many such villages, including Kuninao, which is about 20 minutes by car from the park. The village has a beach and some of the few eateries available on this stretch of shoreline.