

Tokashiki

Pacific War Trail

A chronological journey through six sites linked to the 1945 American invasion of the Keramas

Route: Mt. Nishiyama – Tokashiki Village
Distance: N/A
Time: 2 hours
Level: N/A

Overview

During World War II, the Americans advanced toward the Japanese main islands using an island-hopping strategy, conquering one group at a time. They invaded Iwo Jima on February 19, 1945 and Okinawa on April 1. In between, they captured the Keramas, landing on the Zamami cluster of islands on March 26; followed by Tokashiki on March 27.

This itinerary covers a number of key war-related sites in the north of Tokashiki in chronological order. While it is possible to walk up Mt. Nishiyama, where the itinerary starts, most visitors will prefer to get there by scooter or by car as the road is quite steep and exposed. Essentially, there are three sites clustered together in the grounds of the National Okinawa Youth Friendship Center on the summit of Mt. Nishiyama, one on its present location, halfway back to Tokashiki, and two in Tokashiki Village.

The itinerary

Getting to the starting point

To get to the National Okinawa Youth Friendship Center on the summit of Mt. Nishiyama take the Sondo Seinen no Ie Road south out of Tokashiki. Drop into the reception area, just to let them know you are there. Use the Tokashiki Island Map to orient yourself on Mt. Nishiyama and in Tokashiki Village.

1. The Invasion Begins

Once you're inside the National Okinawa Youth Friendship Center, make your way to the **Mt. Nishiyama Viewpoint**. From here you get a panoramic view encompassing the islands of the Zamami cluster to the west of Tokashiki: Zamami, Amuro, Aka, Geruma, and Fukaji, as well as Tonaki, Aguni, and Kume. The assault began with an aerial and naval bombardment of the Zamami islands on March 23; troops landed on Zamami on March 26.

2. Site of Civilian Mass Suicide

The Americans invaded Tokashiki on March 27, landing at Tokashiku on the west of the island. Many of the island's residents, who had taken refuge in the jungle, elected to take their own lives rather than fall into the hands of the enemy. You can visit the **site of one of the mass suicides**, where several hundred civilians killed themselves on March 28, the day after the Americans landed. Pass through a gate beside an old U.S. military storehouse, go around the monument, and follow some steps down into the mountain forest until you reach a fenced-in clearing. This is the mass-suicide site. On your way back, pause to read the panels behind the monument: reprinted articles from contemporary American newspapers detailing the invaders' horror at the suicides they had unwittingly provoked.

3. The Battle of Okinawa

Now make your way across to the **Eastern Viewpoint**. From here, you can see Kuroshima (to the northeast), Maejima (directly in front of you), the Keise Islands (three small islands to the west of Maejima), and Okinawa. With organized resistance on the Keramas having collapsed by March 29, the Americans quickly moved on, overpowering Maejima and Kamiyama (one of the Keise Islands) on March 31, before landing on Okinawa on April 1.

The Battle of Okinawa officially lasted 82 days until June 22 (though low-level conflict continued until September). It was a horribly bloody campaign, with around 12,500 American soldiers, 94,000 Japanese soldiers, and an unknown number of Okinawan civilians (some estimates are as high as half the 300,000-strong population) losing their lives.

4. Memorial to the Dead of the Keramas

To reach the next site, you will need to get back in your car and follow the road two-thirds of the way back down to Tokashiki. Just past the heliport, you will see signs for the **Shiratama no To War Memorial**. This monument was originally erected on March 28, 1951, exactly six years after the invasion, and commemorates island residents, Japanese soldiers, civilian employees of the military, and defense corps members. It originally stood at the actual mass suicide site on Mt. Nishiyama but was moved to its present location in 1962 after the Americans expropriated Nishiyama for military purposes.

5. Bullet-pocked Limestone Wall

The next stop is the massive limestone walls of the **Nemoto House** not far from Tokashiki Shrine in Tokashiki Village. A substantial house of a prosperous sea captain once stood here, but it was destroyed in the war, leaving only the walls standing. See if you can find the shrapnel marks in the limestone walls. The larger pockmarks were caused by the machine

guns mounted on fighter aircraft, while the smaller ones come from handheld weapons. The eastern corner of the exterior wall is of a different color, as this section was destroyed in World War II and has been rebuilt.

6. Internment Camp for Ie Islanders

The final site in Tokashiki Village is the **Monument to the Interned Villagers of Ie**. When the Americans decided to build a base for launching attacks on the Japanese homeland on the island of Ie (70 kilometers north), about 1,700 Ie villagers were relocated here to Tokashiki. Some of them were able to move into the few houses and outbuildings still standing after the American bombardment, but many had to live in tents. When the local inhabitants who had fled deep into the mountains returned from hiding after Japan's surrender on August 15, 1945, the Tokashiki natives and interned Ie islanders were forced to live cheek by jowl. This situation persisted for around two years until the Americans allowed the people of Ie to return to their island home.

Other war-related sites on Tokashiki

Suicide Attack Boat Bunker (Tokashiku Beach)

Sensekihi Memorial (Sondo Aharen Road)

Akamatsu Company Headquarters (National Okinawa Youth Friendship Center)

SUGGESTED PHOTO(S)

1. Mt. Nishiyama
2. Western viewpoint
3. Suicide site
4. Monument & signs
5. Eastern viewpoint
6. Shiratama no To
7. Nemoto House Wall
8. Ie Villager Monument