

## **Environment Levy**

### **A Tax to Keep the Keramas Beautiful**

#### **Life and Taxes**

All visitors to the Keramas have to pay a ¥100 environmental levy. The levy, which is automatically added to your ferry or plane fare, is known as the “Beautiful Island Tax” for the Zamami Island Group and the “Environment Support Tax” for Tokashiki. As the name suggests, the funds it generates are used for the conservation, maintenance, and repair of tourist facilities. That means planting flowers and shrubs, mowing the grass around the islands’ observation decks, cleaning public restrooms, and keeping harbors and beaches clean.

#### **Marine Plastics**

Idyllic as the Keramas are, they are not free from the curse of marine plastics. The world’s oceans contain an estimated 150 million tons of plastic waste, a quantity which is increasing by a further eight million tons annually. Plastic accounts for four-fifths of all marine debris, harming marine life (plastics have been found in 100 percent of sea turtles, for example) and ultimately making its way into the human food chain. Plastic waste on the beaches of the Keramas interferes with the sea turtles’ ability to lay their eggs.

You can do your part by collecting any plastic bottles that you encounter on beaches in the Keramas or by participating in the clean-up days organized by the local authorities. The plastic needs to be removed before the effects of sun and sea have broken it down into tiny pieces of microplastic (less than 5 mm long) or nanoplastic (less than 100 nm long). The authorities in the Keramas are trying to take a proactive stance on plastic waste and are exploring how to do away with single-use plastic bottles. You can contribute by bringing a reusable bottle for drinking water to the islands.

Marine plastics are not the only environmental problem on the Keramas. The islands also face a chronic shortage of water, so try to use a minimum amount of water when showering or washing your diving equipment.

#### **Treat Coral with Respect**

The coral reefs are what make the Keramas such a special place. Coral is a living creature. Step on it or kick it and you will kill it. If you are snorkeling with diving fins, remember that your legs are longer than you are used to and you may make inadvertent contact with coral. Take particular care when swimming near the surface above coral. For people who like

taking photographs—particularly selfies—please try to be aware of your surroundings and select a safe, coral-free spot to stand **before** you take your picture.

#### **Photos**

1. Ferry on the sea
2. Plastic bottles on a beach
3. Clean-up day
4. Kicked/trod-on dead coral