

Island Life: Reef Fishing

The coral reef surrounding Amami Oshima is teeming with sea life, and has been a source of sustenance for the islanders for centuries. The shallow sea from the coast to the edge of the reef is called *ino*, and at low tide men and women flock there to collect many kinds of seafood. Local residents know that *izari*, (night harvesting) brings the best results—with the peak during winter, when the night tides are at their lowest. According to local custom, the best time for *izari* is marked by the arrival of migrating raptors from Siberia, and lasts from November to February.

Tools of the Trade

The standard equipment consists of a windbreaker, warm clothes, a powerful flashlight, a long-handled spear, and thick-soled boots to walk on the uneven coral and rock. People devise their own tools based on their experience and skills, but one standard is a traditional bamboo basket (*ibiraku* or *teiru*) that can be carried like a backpack to hold the day's catch.

The Catch

The rocks and tide pools are rich with the ocean's bounty. Many of the reef's inhabitants are conveniently nocturnal, while others are asleep and slow to react, making them easier to catch. Turban shells, sea urchins, and crabs are plucked from crevices. Fish that are unable to escape to the sea are caught with spears. A wide range of people take part in this traditional method of fishing, from farmers taking a break from their sugarcane harvesting to families looking to stock their refrigerators or share their catch with friends and neighbors. The sight of their lights bobbing in the darkness off the coast is a memorable Amami Oshima scene.