

## **Okunoshima Island**

Okunoshima Island in the Seto Inland Sea is only 4 kilometers in circumference, but it is home to a thousand wild rabbits. To protect the rabbits, no pets are allowed on the island. Although they are wild, the rabbits often approach visitors in the hope of receiving food. Okunoshima has come to be known as Usagi Shima (Rabbit Island).

The abandoned buildings and ivy-covered ruins of old forts convey some of the history of the island. For centuries, Okunoshima supported a peaceful farming and fishing community, but during the Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895) and the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905), the island was fortified to protect the area around the Seto Inland Sea from attack. Three artillery batteries were built on the island during this time.

In 1929, the Imperial Japanese Army built a secret military facility for chemical research and production on Okunoshima. The island was selected for its secluded location, hidden from the mainland and far from Tokyo. In 1932, the military erased it from maps of the area to hide its location.

After World War II, Okunoshima was developed into a Kyukamura National Park Resort, one of a chain of vacation villages throughout Japan established in scenic spots and national parks. Visitors can enjoy outdoor activities such as cycling, tennis, camping, swimming, and hiking. You can also explore the nearby islands and ocean by making a cruise reservation from Okunoshima. A popular activity is to rent a bicycle to explore the island, which takes about 30 minutes to circumnavigate at a leisurely pace.

The Visitor Center, located close to the port, has a large model of the island on display beneath a glass floor, with information about tourist destinations and hiking trails. There are also exhibits detailing the plants and animals found on the island. The Visitor Information Center offers hands-on experiences in local crafts.

Okunoshima has the tallest electricity pylon in Japan at a height of 226 meters. The transmission tower is part of the Omishima branch line that connects Shikoku to Honshu. On the island's southern tip is a lighthouse with ocean views.

In 1950, Okunoshima became part of Setonaikai (Seto Inland Sea) National Park, one of the first national parks established in Japan, in 1934. It is Japan's largest national park, extending over 11 prefectures and covering some 900,000 hectares, including the sea.

Okunoshima is only about 20 minutes by ferry from the port of Takehara. You can also access Okunoshima from ferry terminals at the ports of Tadanoumi, Sakari, and Mihara.