

## **Okunoshima Island**

Okunoshima is a small island in the Seto Inland Sea, about 20 minutes by ferry from the port of Takehara. The island is only 4 kilometers in circumference but is home to a thousand wild rabbits. Okunoshima is affectionately called Usagi Shima (Rabbit Island).

The rabbits inhabiting the island roam freely in the forests and fields, much to the delight of visitors. They thrive in the natural environment, where there are no predators such as cats or dogs. To protect the rabbits, no pets are allowed on Okunoshima. The rabbits are not afraid to approach visitors in the hope of receiving food.

For centuries, Okunoshima supported a peaceful farming and fishing community. The former agricultural island was fortified during the Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895) and Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905) 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.

Today, the abandoned buildings and ruins convey some of the history of the island. After World War II, Okunoshima was developed into a Kyukamura National Park Resort, part of a chain of vacation villages established in scenic spots and national parks.

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.

Visitors can enjoy outdoor activities, such as renting a bicycle to explore the island. There is also a swimming beach, an outdoor swimming pool, tennis courts, and a campsite along the shore. Okunoshima also has a network of walking trails across the island, leading to places of interest and scenic views.

On the southern tip of the island is a lighthouse with ocean views. The island also has the tallest electricity pylon in Japan. The 226-meter transmission tower is part of the Omishima branch line that connects Shikoku to Honshu.

In 1950, Okunoshima was added to Setonaikai (Seto Inland Sea) National Park, one of the first national parks designated 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 a nature spot popular for sightseeing and peace education.