

Overview of Tourism Management on Amami-Oshima Island, Tokunoshima Island, and the Northern Part of Okinawa Island

1. Northern Part of Okinawa Island

(1) Current state and issues of tourism

With regard to the state of tourism use of the northern part of Okinawa Island, the annual numbers of visitors to major tourist facilities and popular spots are individually counted at each facility etc., but no statistical figures are available to show the change in number of visitors to the entire region. It is necessary to discuss how to obtain data in the future that can be used as indicators to monitor tourism trends in the northern part of Okinawa Island accurately.

The table below shows the major points of tourism use, both within and outside the World Heritage property area (hereinafter referred to as “heritage area”) in the northern part of Okinawa Island, for which the status of tourism use has been obtained; the status of tourism use in 2019^{*1}, before the impact of the spread of COVID-19, is shown. Since 2020, the number of visitors has declined significantly due to COVID-19, but it is necessary to continue the current work and keep track of the trends, since the number of visitors may increase after COVID-19.

In the northern part of Okinawa Island, the number of users is considered to be at a low level, because there are not many points of tourism use within the heritage area at present. However, there are not enough data on the actual status of tourism use when it comes to the extensive heritage area covering three villages in the northern part of Okinawa Island; it is necessary to establish a system that can accurately ascertain the number of visitors, mainly at the existing points of tourism use. Particular attention should be paid to the relative ease of access to forest roads and the possibility of vehicles use off public roads.

Table: Status of tourism use in the northern part of Okinawa Island in 2019^{*1}

Entire region	Inside the heritage area	Outside the heritage area	
*How to monitor the tourism use trends of the entire region is an issue.	[1] Mt. Yonaha (about 2,500 people)	[1] Cape Hedomisaki (380,424 people)	
	[2] Mt. Ibu (about 500 people)	[2] Kunigami-son Shinrin-koen Park (14,032 people)	
	[3] Mt. Tamatsuji (* not counted; installation of counters under preparation)		[3] Hiji Otaki Waterfall (31,047 people)
			[4] Yambaru kuina Ecology Exhibition and Learning Facility (19,801 people)
		[5] Okuyambaru no Sato (4,226 people)	
		[6] Yambaru Manabi no Mori (Forest of Learning in Yambaru) (18,894 people)	
		[7] Yambaru Wildlife Conservation Center (11,702 people)	
		[8] Yambaru Forest Visitor Center (*counted from FY2020, as tourism use started in February 2020)	
		[9] Ta Falls (33,989 people)	
		[10] Museum of Mountain and Water Life (12,401 people)	
		[11] Villagers' Forest Azalea Eco Park (51,024 people)	
		[12] Fukujigawa Seaside Park (15,934 people)	
		[13] Fureai Hirugi Park (88,009 people)	

(2) Basic policy on tourism management

In the northern part of Okinawa Island, the Master Plan of the Northern Part of Okinawa Island Sustainable Tourism was formulated in February 2020 by the Northern Part of Okinawa Island Sub-local Meeting, based on the basic policy of “formulating a tourism management plan that takes into account the actual situation of tourism in each region”, which was set forth in the comprehensive management plan.

In the northern part of Okinawa Island, multi-faceted efforts are currently being made in accordance with the basic policy of the plan as described below. In particular, visitor management based on zoning of the heritage area, buffer zone, and surrounding management area is being implemented in accordance with the policies described in [3] and [4].

○ Basic policy on tourism management in the Master Plan for Sustainable Tourism in the Northern Part of Okinawa Island

- [1] Fostering local residents’ understanding of sustainable tourism
- [2] Creating a system in which World Heritage inscription contributes to sustainable development of the local economy and resolution of local community issues
- [3] **Realizing appropriate visitor management in heritage areas and buffer zones centering on Yambaru Forest Tourism**
- [4] Providing **planned guidance for sightseeing and three village excursions focusing on the surrounding management area**
- [5] Developing human resources to promote sustainable tourism and strengthen the general management and tourism management capacities of organizations (tourism associations etc.)

So far, visitor management in the heritage area and buffer zone has been conducted based on the Yambaru Forest Tourism Promotion Plan as a Whole formulated by the Yambaru Three Village World Natural Heritage Promotion Council in March 2019. However, it is now necessary to revise its content partly in light of the policy change regarding the guide system and the inscription as a World Natural Heritage property.

With regard to the guide system, work to revise it is already underway in consideration of operation under the specific circumstances of the individual villages under the common rules that apply to the three villages. In Kunigami Village, the Ordinance for Promotion of Use of Official Guide of Kunigami Village was enacted in FY2020, and it has been enforced since FY2021. Ogimi Village and Higashi Village are also examining their own institutionalization.

After the World Natural Heritage inscription, the name of the body that formulated this plan was changed to the Yambaru Three Village World Natural Heritage Council in May 2022; at the same time, the Forest Tourism Subcommittee, which implements this plan, also changed its structure, so that the Yambaru Three Village Tourism Council works as the secretariat.

In light of the aforementioned situation, the Forest Tourism Subcommittee began in June 2022 to review and reorganize the fields of use, based on the data from survey on the actual status of tourism use, and re-examine an effective visitor management system according to the zoning of the heritage area, buffer zone, and surrounding management area, with a view to reflecting the current status of the guide system in the plan and taking into consideration the possible increase in the number of visitors and changes in the style of use that are anticipated to occur once COVID-19 has settled down.

(3) Major actions

[1] Control and optimization of tourism use in the heritage area and buffer zone (by the three villages in coordination)

- Study on the proper use of night roads
Verify the effectiveness of nighttime road closures on forest roads conducted in the previous years and study the methods and operation of nighttime road closures to implement more effective anti-poaching and roadkill measures etc.
- Review of the Yambaru Forest Tourism Promotion Plan as a Whole
The Forest Tourism Subcommittee will review the Yambaru Forest Tourism Promotion Plan as a Whole with a view to reconstructing the guide system and effective visitor management system in line with the zoning and actual status of tourism use after World Heritage inscription.
- Implementation of surveys to ascertain the actual status of tourism use
The Yambaru Three Village World Natural Heritage Council will conduct surveys to ascertain the actual status of tourism use, mainly in the heritage area and buffer zone, taking into consideration the possible increase in the number of visitors and changes in the style of tourism use that might occur once COVID-19 has settled down.
- Model project to enhance sustainable tourism content
With the aim of deterring and preventing poaching and illegal excavation, forest road patrols and biological surveys have been continuously carried out by local volunteers of the three villages in the northern part of Okinawa Island and the Kunigami Village Forest Association in coordination and cooperation with the Ministry of the Environment. These activities will be provided to visitors as new tourism content, thereby linking tourism to forest conservation activities.

[2] Guide system and guide training (by the individual villages)

- Kunigami Village: Enforcement of the Ordinance for Promotion of Use of Official Guide of Kunigami Village.
Continual implementation of registration, accreditation and training of guides under the 2021 ordinance.
- Ogimi Village: Consideration of preparation and certification of the Ogimi Village Ecotourism Promotion Plan as a Whole.
Establishment of rules for use, including restrictions on the number of people entering Ta Falls, where users are concentrated, and establishment of a system to ensure compliance with the rules.
Promotion of the Ogimi Village Kuganinchu Project
Creation of a human resource development system for guides who interpret the value of natural and cultural resources that exist in Ogimi Village
- Higashi Village: Consideration of the enactment of the Higashi Village Guide Ordinance (provisional name)
Examination of a registration and certification system for guides in Higashi Village, aiming to pass the ordinance by the end of FY2022.

[3] Encouraging the tourism use of the surrounding management areas (by the three villages in coordination + by the individual villages)

- World Natural Heritage Branding Project
 - Kunigami Village: Development of SDGs-compatible experience as tourist products targeting vacation rental users and their expansion to Ogimi Village and Higashi Village; outreach to schools outside the prefecture for school trips.
 - Ogimi Village: Development of guidance methods that make use of tourism resources

that exist in the Yambaru area, learning from good examples of more experienced places, and tools to guide visitors to the surrounding areas.

- Higashi Village: Development of digital brochures to encourage visitors to move around the three villages

2. Amami-Oshima Island and Tokunoshima Island

(1) Current state and issues of tourism

The table below shows the major points of tourism use, both within and outside the heritage area on Amami-Oshima Island and Tokunoshima Island, for which the status of tourism use has been obtained; the status of tourism use in 2019^{※1}, before the impact of the spread of COVID-19, is shown. Although the number of visitors to the whole region increased from 2015 to 2019, efforts are being made to reduce the load of tourism use on the natural environment and to disperse tourism use in accordance with the Master Plan of the Amami Island Group Sustainable Tourism (Page 204 of the nomination dossier, Annex 5-40).

Since 2020, the number of visitors has decreased significantly due to COVID-19, but we will continue the current work and monitor the trends, since the number of visitors might increase after COVID-19.

Table: Status of tourism use on Amami-Oshima Island in 2019^{※1}

Entire region	Inside the heritage area	Outside the heritage area
<p>The number of visitors increased approximately 1.3 times between 2015 and 2019. (Approximately 423,000 to 530,000)</p> <p>*314,000 visitors in 2020</p>	<p>[1] Yuwandake (*Less than 3,000 *Total of the Yamato Village side and Uken Village side. Data partially missing.)</p> <p>[2] Kinsakubaru (1,185 vehicles *April to December)</p> <p>[3] Setouchi Chuo Line (* not counted; installation of counters under preparation.)</p>	<p>[1] Cape Ayamaru (89,309 people)</p> <p>[2] Amami Park (129,000 people)</p> <p>[3] Amami Nature Observation Forest (19,041 people)</p> <p>[4] Ohama Seaside Park (62,333 people *2019^{※2} figures)</p> <p>[5] Amami Wildlife Conservation Center (10,484 people)</p> <p>[6] Amami Forestpolis (14,711 people)</p> <p>[7] Kuroshio Forest Mangrove Park (91,931 people)</p>

Table: Status of tourism use on Tokunoshima Island in 2019^{※1}

Entire region	Inside the heritage area	Outside the heritage area
<p>The number of visitors increased 1.1 times between 2015 and 2019 (from approximately 130,000 to approximately 144,000).</p> <p>*The number of visitors in 2020 was approximately 81,000.</p>	<p>[1] The Yamakubiri Line of the forest road (143 vehicles *May 2019 to March 2020. Night only.)</p> <p>[2] Mt. Inokawa</p> <p>[3] Mt. Amagi (visitors of [2] and [3] are not counted yet. *Counter installed in December 2020.)</p>	<p>Amami rabbit observation hut (209 people)</p>

(2) Basic policy on tourism management

For Amami-Oshima Island and Tokunoshima Island, the national government, Kagoshima Prefecture, municipalities, private organizations, etc. are working in coordination to implement measures for sustainable tourism, such as the enforcement of tourism use rules and improvement of facilities, based on the Master Plan of the Amami Island Group Sustainable Tourism developed by Kagoshima Prefecture in March 2016.

The master plan aims at “systematically guiding utilization according to the characteristics of each sightseeing spot”, “spreading the effect of World Heritage inscription to the Amami Island Group”, and “realizing high-quality tourism and improving visitor satisfaction”. The master plan was conceived to create a planned flow of tourists by properly directing them to tourist spots according to the carrying capacities and the state of the natural environment to avoid the negative impacts of the expected increase in the number of tourists.

Currently, based on the master plan, work is underway to develop and enforce the tourism use rules for areas that are important for the protection of Amami-Oshima Island and Tokunoshima Island, as is explained later. In addition, outside the heritage area, various efforts are being made to ensure proper use and decentralization of tourism use, such as the installation and utilization of facilities that can be used by a large number of people and long trails. Along with these efforts, the monitoring of the status of tourism use has been done and will be continued in the future. Based on the results, further necessary measures will be considered.

(3) Major actions

[1] Control and optimization of tourism use in the heritage area and buffer zone

In areas that are important for protection of Amami-Oshima Island and Tokunoshima Island, tourism use rules have been developed and provisionally enforced to reduce the load of tourism use by a large number of people on the natural environment and to provide high-quality nature experiences. The tourism use rules have been discussed and decided by the meetings of the relevant local government organizations, private organizations, etc. (Amami-Oshima Island: Kinsakubaru (formulated by the Amami-Oshima Utilization Optimization Liaison Conference; enforcement since February 2019), areas around the Santaro Line (formulated by the Liaison Conference for the Optimization of Night-time Use around the Amami-Oshima Santaro Line; enforcement since October 2020), Mt. Yuwandake (enforcement scheduled to start within FY2022); Tokunoshima Island: the Yamakubiri Line of the forest road (formulated by the Tokunoshima Utilization Optimization Liaison Conference; enforcement since July 2019), the Mt. Hage forest road and the Sankyo forest road (agreement signed by the Forestry Agency, Amagi Town, and the Tokunoshima Eco-Tour Guide Liaison Council; enforcement since April 2019.)) The tourism use rules include, depending on the specific local conditions, the requirement that tourists should be accompanied by certified eco-tour guides and the restriction of the number of vehicles that can be used in the same time period. Even after their enforcement started, they have been discussed periodically at the utilization optimization liaison conference etc., to revise and strengthen the content of the tourism use rules in light of the status of tourism use. The status of tourism use is monitored, based on the counting devices, on-site investigation, etc.

To raise the public awareness of the tourism use rules, awareness-raising activities for the tourism use rules are conducted, providing information on websites and distributing flyers etc., with the cooperation of tourism associations, travel agencies, and rental car companies.

Moreover, recently on Tokunoshima Island, to reduce the environmental load, such as roadkill, walk events are organized aiming at changing the style of night tours from vehicle rides to walking.

[2] Training of guides

For Amami-Oshima Island and Tokunoshima Island, the General Concept for Promotion of Ecotourism on the Amami Islands was adopted based on the Ecotourism Promotion Act in 2017; the operation of the Amami Islands ecotourism guide certification system started in the same year. The Amami Islands Ecotourism Promotion Council, consisting of the national government, Kagoshima Prefecture, and local municipalities, certifies eco-tour guides who have deep knowledge and philosophy about the nature and culture of the Amami Islands, provide safe and high-quality experiences to visitors, and are responsible for environmental conservation in the region. Since April 2020, to improve the skills, the certified eco-tour guides have been required to take a renewal training course in the third year after certification and meet certain requirements to get their certification renewed. They not only guide tourists but also work in coordination with related organizations to enforce the tourism use rules and raise public awareness for environmental conservation. Ninety-one guides on Amami-Oshima Island and 19 guides on Tokunoshima Island have been certified as of April 2022.

In addition, in accordance with the Amami Islands Local Licensed Guide Interpreters Training Program based on the amended Licensed Guide Interpreters Act, training has been provided since 2015 to Amami Islands local licensed guide interpreters, who will receive tourists from other countries. As of April 2022, 114 licensed guide interpreters have been registered (English 87, Chinese 27).

[3] Encouraging the tourism use of the surrounding management areas

To reduce the load of tourism use on the natural environment and disperse the use, measures are taken to install tourist centers.

Specifically, outside the heritage area, “World Heritage Centers” have been set up as the central facilities for awareness raising of tourist users, tourism management, and environmental conservation (Amami-Oshima Island: open since July 2022; Tokunoshima Island: under construction since FY2023 to open in FY2024 or later), and the Amami Nature Observation Forest has been renewed as a place where people can enjoy nature experiences casually (open since October 2022).

In addition, long-distance nature trails named the World Natural Heritage Amami Trail have been set up on inhabited islands of the Amami islands, such as Amami-Oshima Island and Tokunoshima Island (the entire section opened in January 2021). On Amami-Oshima Island and Tokunoshima Island, the trails basically run outside the heritage area. The trails have been routed in such manner that visitors can experience the unique nature of the Amami Islands and the culture of the harmonious relationship between people and nature. They are used for sightseeing and also local walking events in different places.