

A Shisa, lion-dog, statue

evident in everyday life.

Australian press occasionally.

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the term 'Ryukyu' is widely used to refer to Okinawa and its culture. For example, the name of Okinawa's largest public university is the 'University of the Ryukyus'.

The Okinawan islands were the domain of the Ryukyu

The cultural exchange that came with these trade ties can still be seen. For example, bingata is a type of Okinawan

The Ryukyu Kingdom

Kingdom for several centuries until it was formally annexed by Japan as a prefecture in 1879. From the late 1100s, various smaller provinces consolidated and by 1429 the main island of Okinawa was under the rule of one king. The Ryukyu area prospered as a trading nation, trading between China (with which it had a tributary relationship since 1372), Japan and other south-east Asian countries. It dealt in swords and copper from Japan, raw silk, silk textiles and ceramics from China, and pepper, sappanwood, turmeric, sugar and other commodities from south-east Asia. From 1609 it came under the control of the Satsuma lord from Kvushu but the kingdom maintained its independence so that the trade from the tributary relationship with China could continue.

textile that was worn by the royal and warrior classes on formal occasion during the Ryukyu period. Still manufactured today, the textile is thought to have its

origins in Indian, Javanese and Chinese dyeing techniques, and its colours are reminiscent of Chinese designs. The Okinawan instrument called the sanshin, a three stringed lute, was based on a Chinese instrument; the sanshin or jamisen spread to mainland Japan and became the basis of the shamisen that is used today. In reverse. Okinawa is now famous for its Eisa dance festivals and this dance evolved from the mainland precursor of the bon odori danced at summer festivals throughout Japan.

Okinawa is also considered the home of karate- a mix of

Chinese kung-fu and local Okinawan techniques.

The Ryukyu era and its distinctive culture and history are today recognised internationally by the designation of nine sites and ruins known as 'Gusuku sites and related Properties of the Kingdom of Ryukyu' as UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

Okinawa is off the normal tourist trail for international visitors, but particularly if you've been to Japan before, why not consider somewhere a little different?







Taketomi Island

Making sanshin

Traditional costumes using bingata textiles

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For more

www.okinawastory.jp

The Okinawa Convention and Visitors Bureau official **Okinawa Story** site has many travel ideas and information on Okinawa's culture and history, including the World Heritage sites.

information on Okinawa:

www.jnto.go.jp/eng/location/regional/okinawa/

The Japan National Tourist Organisation (JNTO) website

New South Wales students in Okinawa



Subtropical islands are not the

image of Japan that comes to

prefecture—beautiful balmy

most people's minds, but this is

Okinawa, Japan's most southerly

islands with white beaches set of

by glorious blue or emerald seas.

It's no surprise the prefecture is a

popular holiday destination for

not just the environment that makes it so attractive to visit.

The pace of life is more relaxed, and thanks to its location

Okinawa is a 1,200km chain of islands that stretches from

the bottom of Kyushu down in a westward arc towards

Taiwan and the Asian continent. Its strategic location still

The name of this archipelago is the Ryukyu Islands, and

influences national affairs today as is even reported in the

and history, Okinawa enjoys a distinctive culture still

Japanese domestic tourists. It is

Sally Gorman & Tim Mann on the steps of Shuri Castle

In August this year, Okinawa hosted the Asian Youth Exchange Program. Among the participants from 16 different countries were two St Columba's High School students. St Columba's in Springwood was invited by the Embassy of Japan in Canberra to select

When Tim and I were first travelling to the AYEPO (Asian Youth Exchange Program in Okinawa) conference, I was extremely nervous. This was the first time I had been to Japan, and I had only travelled overseas once previously. Yet the experience was more than I could have ever imagined. Making friends with participants and tutors from the 15 other Asia-Pacific countries, and learning about pressing water issues from the leading scientists of Japan seemed almost surreal at times. The lectures we participated in were inspiring, and through this inspiration, we, the participants of AYEPO 2010, created a declaration to

achieve our world vision for 2030. We were exposed to the unique Okinawan culture, and the home stay we experienced on lejima Island thrust us into the thick of the Japanese lifestyle. Although I spoke very little (and very poor) Japanese, my host family were extremely kind to me, and demonstrated the compassion and support that I really needed. From my stay in Okinawa, and through participating in this wonderful program, I have gained a greater awareness of the preciousness of water and have a greater scope on our global society and the wonders of our world. One of the most valuable lessons that I learnt during my stay in Japan was taught to us in Japanese, and is something that I will never forget. The phrase 'ichareba cho de' in the Okinawan dialect means that 'once we meet, we are brothers and sisters'. I will never forget my brothers and sisters of Asia. There is no doubt in my mind that I'll be back to Japan in the near future.

Sally Gorman

two students to represent Australia on the program. Sally **Gorman** and **Tim Mann** were the two year 11 students chosen.

The Asian Youth Exchange Program in Okinawa (AYEPO) is a Japanese Government project that aims to develop people who will lead innovation in the future

[see www.ayepo.go.jp]. Students from 15 countries and the host nation studied and discussed water issues and participated in cultural experiences.

Here Sally and Tim tell us a little about their 21/2 weeks in Japan.

I had never been to Japan before and had been counting down the days from months away, waiting to experience the new culture. I was going for a program known as the Asian Youth Exchange Program in Okinawa (AYEPO). This program was definitely the best experience of my life. It was an opportunity to meet people from many different countries and gain an understanding of the cultures and lifestyles of the people of Japan and those from other countries in our Asian region. The twin highlights of the program for me were the very moving visit to the Peace Memorial Museum, where I read the stories of the effect of WWII on people's lives. In contrast was the Churaumi Aquarium, where I could watch in awe as a whale shark slowly cruised over my head.

The program's main focus was on developing the interest from youth around the world to finding solutions to environmental issues and to promote working together towards better management of global resources. The outcomes of this program in this sense were the participants worked together to find a common goal in what we wish the "perfect world" to be, and from this we endeavoured to find actions that ourselves, businesses, communities and governments can take to eradicate all water issues.

The culture of Japan and in particular Okinawa is unlike anything I have experienced before. I saw many performances of Eisa as well as had the opportunity to take part in karate and sanshin lessons. At my home stay experience on an Island known as "le Island", it was eye-opening. The way of life of my host family was so different from that of my own, and they showed me around the island, pointing out at every historically significant feature. They lived a much more laid back life than me, and I enjoyed learning how others around the world live.

Because this experience was so amazing, I am already saving to go back to Japan, and hopefully I will return to Okinawa within the next 2 years.

Tim Mann

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