



青のゆるる館

Ao no Yukuru Kan

Keramashoto National Park

Visitor Center

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English



Ministry of the Environment



National
Parks
of Japan

Welcome to Ao no Yukuru-Kan



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The décor of Ao no Yukuru Kan

Naming

Ao no Yukuru Kan

For the blue color that embodies the Kerama Blue

To take it slow while time passes you by on the island

The “Kerama Blue” symbolizes the beautiful sea of the Keramas. The living creatures that dwell on these islands and its seas. As well as the history and culture created by the people living there. This facility was established to raise awareness of these diverse natural and cultural assets, thus creating new discoveries for visitors. In addition to fostering deeper understanding and action for the importance of protecting the natural environment and passing it on to future generations.

Named “**Ao no Yukuru Kan**” in the hopes that visitors spend leisurely time and fully enjoy the World of Kerama Blue.

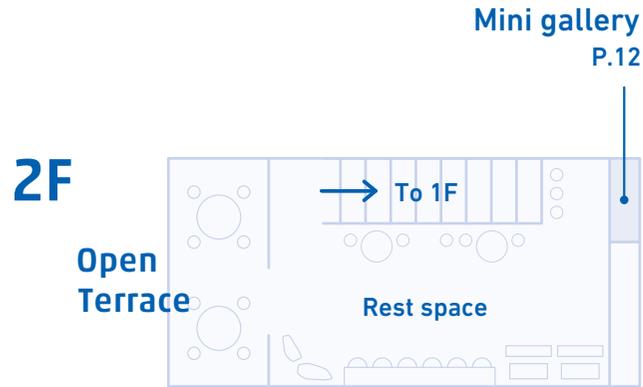
Symbol



Sea turtle nesting in coral

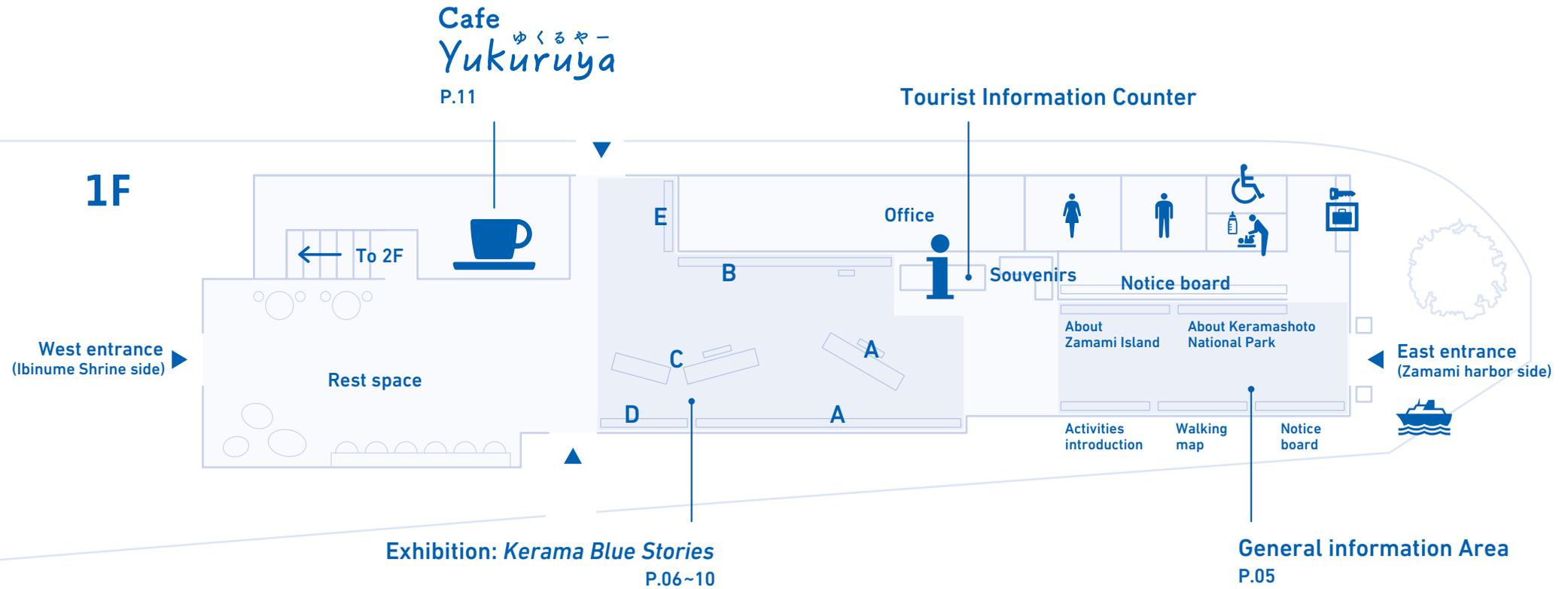
The symbol represents the coral that creates the Kerama Blue sea and the sea creatures that dwell within it. The depiction of sea turtle carefully embracing the coral was used to entice interest and understanding of nature when visiting Ao no Yukuru Kan, leading to conservation efforts.

Map



Exhibition: *Kerama Blue Stories*

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Information

Visitors are greeted by guardian deities known as *Shisa* at the east entrance. Upon entering, general information about Keramashoto National Park is posted on either wall, including an introduction to the islands in the national park, rules, as well as boat and bus schedules.

The *Zamami Island Overview* has information about observation decks and beaches, handy for planning a day on the island.

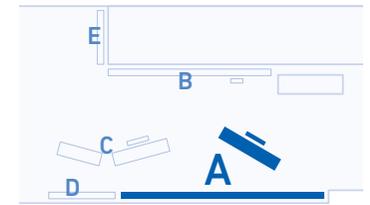


Take a stroll through the hamlets or join a tour activity with a guide to get the most out of your time on the island. The *Zamami Walking Map* is conveniently divided into categories, and you can discover a wide range of activities using the touchscreen panel to help you get started. There is also an information counter with tourism pamphlets and knowledgeable staff to answer your questions. Stop by the souvenir corner where you will exclusive items you will only find at the Ao no Yukuru Kan Visitor Center.

Exhibition

The exhibition space is divided into five “stories”, A to E, designed to let visitors touch and feel all that makes the Keramashoto National Park a special place. After watching the exhibits, we hope Kerama’s nature, and the living things will feel that much closer and familiar.

A The Secret of Kerama Blue

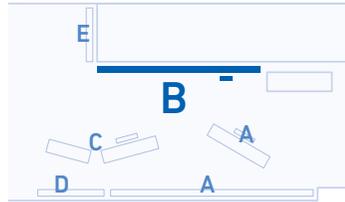


Let’s discover the secrets of this beautiful sea we call “Kerama Blue”. Through this “story”, you will be able to answer questions such as “why is the ocean blue?” “what are corals?” and even learn the names of sea creatures that dwell within. In addition, footage shot using the only 12K 360-degree VR filming system in the world will let you experience colorful underwater scenery and surround yourself with lively fish. Use the touch panel to explore various places.

Experience the “World of Kerama Blue” through the world’s only 12K 360-degree underwater footage!!

B

The Animals of the Keramas

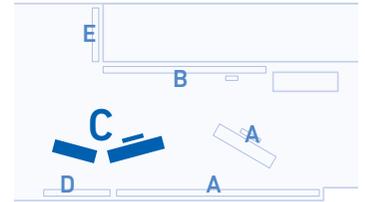


The Keramashoto National Park is home to many rare land and sea creatures. Look around closely, you may see tiny footprints on the beach of hermit crabs. Listen closely and depending on the season, you may hear all kinds of wild birds. You may even hear rustling sounds of creatures in the bushes when taking a stroll by the road. In this "story", you will be introduced to the habitat and ecology of 21 creatures through the seasons, divided into sky, land, sea, all via a large-screen monitor.



C

An Archipelago Ringed by Coral Reefs

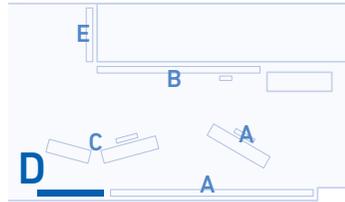


The sea and the over 30 islands are characterized by deep underwater terrain, lush coral reefs, white sand beaches, sheer cliffs and grasslands, and the bay where the waves are calm even on windy days. Ever wondered how all of this came to be? Through this "story", you will be introduced to the origins of the Kerama islands, and the secrets and points of interest hidden behind each scenery. You can even touch and feel the rocks that form these islands.



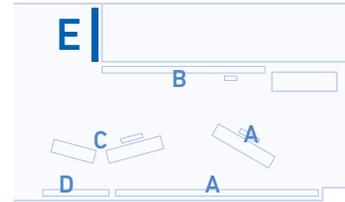
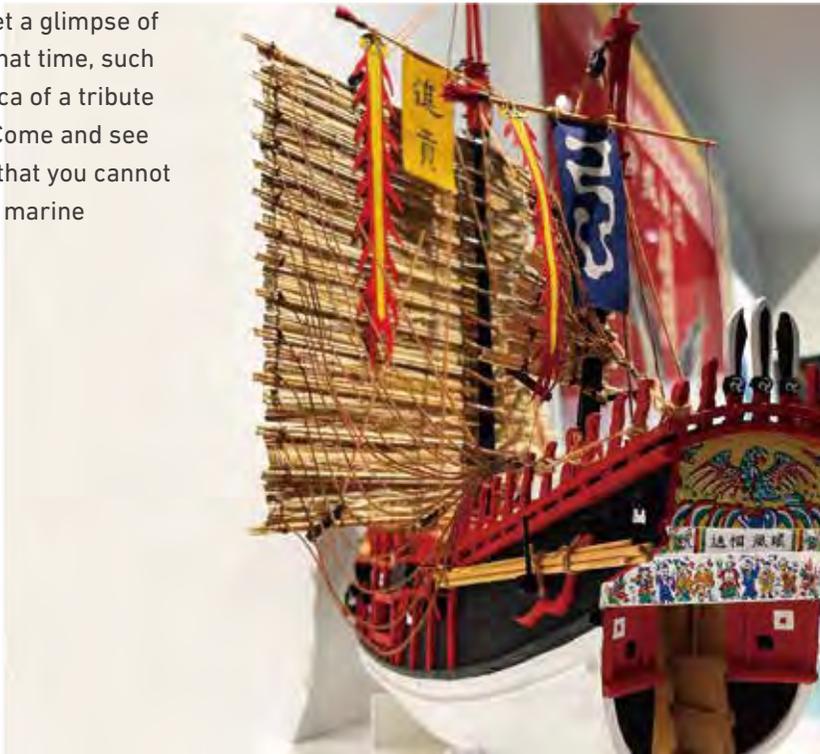
D

The People and the Sea



Their prominence as skilled seafarers during the Ryukyu kingdom era, the way blessing from the sea was used for sustenance and building material, to the current tourism industry, the relationship between the people of Kerama and the sea evolved with the times. Nevertheless, to this day, respect for the sea continues to be passed on to future generations in the form of traditional events and rituals.

This “story” has several items on display for you to get a glimpse of what it was like at that time, such as a miniature replica of a tribute ship and old tools. Come and see the side of Kerama that you cannot experience through marine activities.



Traditional festivities and events have always been part of Okinawa’s culture as well as in Zamami Island, where changing seasons and the lunar cycle marks important dates. Photos from a different facet of island life are presented alongside nature and animals through the seasons. There is always something to see and do on Zamami Island. Come and discover your very own favorite season, places, and living things.

E

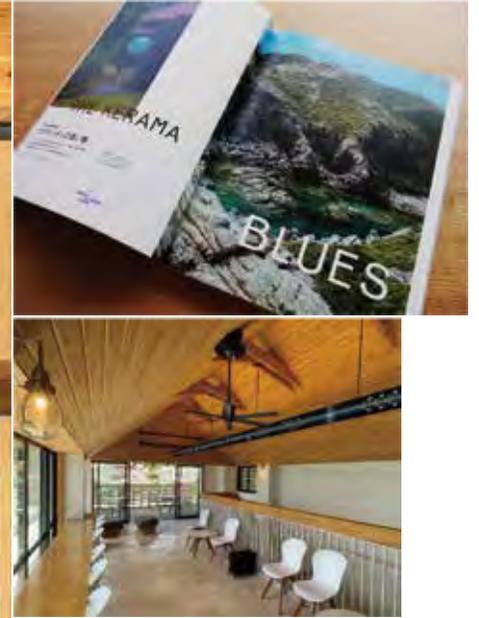
Living with the seasons





At Café Yukuruya, you can enjoy fresh coffee, hibiscus juice, *sata andagii* (Okinawan donuts) among other items. Have a cup of coffee while enjoying the view of the harbor or read one of the hundreds of books available at the second floor rest space.

*Bringing in alcoholic beverages is not allowed



In the resting space on the second floor, you will find a wide variety of books such as magazines related to tourism, illustrated books of animals and plants, picture books, and specialized books on Okinawan culture and architecture.

*Reading materials are for reading in the visitor center. Please refrain from taking it home.



Omoi – Hopes and Thoughts

of the 7 people involved in the project

- 01** Architectural design **Yohei Kawai**
- 02** Landscaping design **Hiomasa Yairo**
- 03** Symbols & sign design **Hiromi Kamada**
- 04** Video production **Tatsuya Nieda**
- 05** Video production **Yuji Ohgami**
- 06** Exhibition production
TSUMURA ENTERPRISE CO., LTD
TSUMURA KOGEI CO., LTD
- 07** Construction **Sadaharu Uno**



01



Architectural design

WAKUWAKU Design LCC

Yohei Kawai



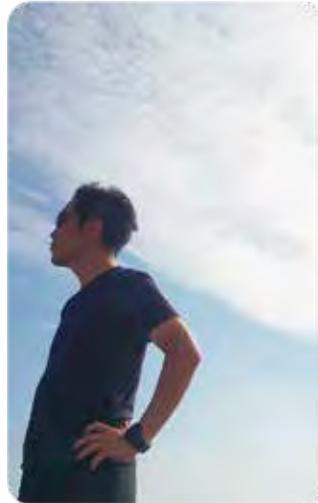
Designed to serve as a type of base for both **retreat for visitors** and a center for **nature conservation efforts**, the idea for this facility was conceived with the goal of creating a **world-class sustainable national park**.

The facility aims to serve as a catalyst for action as well as a retreat that allows visitors to feel at home to enhance the enjoyment of the national park. I hope that it will be a place where visitors can feel the atmosphere of life on the island, and a place where locals can casually drop in and relax.

The exterior consists of a red tile roof with Ryukyu limestone plaster to better serve as the face of Zamami Island. The *tomoe* (Japanese heraldic design) on the eaves is engraved with patterns inspired by the sea of Zamami. Look closely and you may find the two distinct patterns.

The interior was inspired by the nature of Zamami and the information counter is Ryukyu limestone-clad to evoke the image of a sandy beach. The café counter is made of layered wooden boards that elicit the look of the stratum that makes up the cliff sides. The Ryukyu glass lighting is inspired by the transparent sea of Kerama Blue, while the indigo border lights and dyed *noren* (split curtain) evoke the images of the nature of Zamami. The pillar by the café and the board behind the information counter are blackboard painted to hopefully send lively messages indicative to Zamami to visitors.

02



At the Ao no Yukuru Kan, I was involved in site planning, exhibitions, landscape design, and construction supervision. Zamami is blessed by a rich sea nurtured by corals and lush subtropical nature. In designing the landscape, I made it my mission to put emphasis on the nature of the island and be in harmony with the surrounding village. Specifically, Ryukyu limestone found throughout the village is used for stonework and signages. Sandstone from the Keramas is used as decorative stones and coral fragments left over from the soil were sorted and washed to use as mulching material. It was difficult to procure the plants while making sure that animals and plants would not be brought in from other areas, but everything, including the soil, was to be from the island. Tropical almond (*Terminalia catappa*) at the entrance, a shrub-sized plants include Parasol leaf tree (*Macaranga tanarius*), Buxus bodinieri, and Beach Cabbage (*Scaevola taccada*). Ground cover plants include Shell ginger (*Alpinia zerumbet*), and Ajuga pygmaea can be found around the premises. Growing in planters inside, you will find bird's-nest ferns (*Asplenium antiquum*) and night-scented lily (*Alocasia odora*). They are few in numbers and vary in shapes and sizes since these are not readily available commercial plants but, I hope that the people of the island will watch over them as they grow. I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to everyone on the island who provided the plants, and to those that have supported us from the initial research to construction.

03

Symbols & sign design

GK Sekkei Incorporated

Hiromi Kamada

I was responsible for designing the sea turtle and coral symbol for the visitor center along with various signs that display the symbol, such as at the main entrance and information signs.

Sea turtle was chosen for the symbol design as it is the creature that is most indicative of Keramas and to invoke a feeling of familiarity with the islanders. The round design keeps it simple and easy to remember. If you look closely, instead of being round, the turtle's eye is slightly skewed. I wanted to express not only its lovable expression but also the strength of living beings in nature.

While keeping the design simplistic was the main goal, I also wanted to include the kind of small details that you would notice upon closer look, such as the glistening texture reminiscent of the Kerama Blue sea, the turtle that blends into the symbol, and the fishes that stretches across the symbols, among other details. There are new discoveries and encounters to be had every season in the Keramas. Stay still for a moment, listen closely, and look down the ground... My hope is that this facility will catalyze discovery for visitors. I sincerely hope that the Ao no Yukuru Kan will be a place that is loved by everyone for a long time to come.

04



Video production

CHIYODA RAFT CORPORATION

Tatsuya Nieda



The most important aspect I tried to convey when creating the nature footage of the Keramas is for people to learn about the abundant nature of these islands. By capturing nature as dramatically as possible, instead of just wondering “what kind of creatures live in this environment?” as if flipping through a reference book, I want people to think “How do all these different creatures thrive in the environment of the Keramas?” As I filmed the footage, I kept reminding myself to stay curious. Wondering “Why is that fish hiding beneath the coral?” and “why are those fishes fighting?” made me want to film the answer to those questions. There is always a reason for the behavior of the creatures being filmed. By imagining those reasons and learning about their ecology and habits, you start to truly appreciate the drama that unfolds in nature. Nature is full of mysteries that we have yet to discover. Everyone should keep a curious mind when diving or going on a stroll. Unraveling those questions will enhance your enjoyment of Kerama’s nature. I hope that the footage that we captured can be the catalyst for discoveries.

05



Video production

NHK Enterprises, Inc.

Yuji Ohgami



I vividly remember the shock I felt when I first landed on Zamami Island. To witness the “Kerama Blue” firsthand and at the same time thinking “how will I be able to convey this beauty?” as I felt a heavy sense of responsibility. At NHK Enterprise, we have produced many nature programs including “*Darwin ga kita!*” on NHK. For this project, we formed a team specializing in nature footage production and filmed the natural landscape of the Kerama islands and the bustling creatures, from the sky, sea, and forests throughout the four seasons. Of particular note is the VR diving footage shot using the world’s only 12K 360°underwater camera. You can control which way you’re facing via the touch panel and start to feel like you’re diving in the ocean. Please try it for yourself. Lastly, my favorite footage of an animal is that of the *Kerama Sawagani* (Kerama freshwater crab). It is a tiny living creature that you may not even notice at a glance but every creature living on these islands are precious. I think this footage will make you feel that there is a whole universe beneath our feet. I hope that many people come and have their own experiences when watching the footage available at the Ao no Yukuru Kan.

06

Exhibition production

TSUMURA ENTERPRISECO., LTD

TSUMURA KOGEI CO., LTD

Toshiki Sato

Katsumi Fujimura, Kohei Maki,
Shiina Tashiro, Shuto Kanazawa

We were mainly in charge of exhibition production. We spent countless hours discussing the accuracy of the information, ease of understanding, and attractiveness of each exhibit display. We especially put a great amount of effort into creating the replicas. For example, in Story B, the color of the Okinawan blueberry hermit crab varies slightly depending on the body part so we comb through reference books and footage many times to color it accurately. The finished piece features small details like the hair and hair bundles on its body. Please use this replica as a reference when looking for the real one. Because the body figure of the *Goniurosaurus kuroiwae sengokui* (ground gecko endemic to the Keramas) does not differ greatly from that of a common lizard, we put a lot of effort into replicating its unique pattern and texture of its skin. For the *Shinkosen* (tribute-sending ships) in Story D, we used historical photos and existing models as a reference to replicate even the small details such as how the sail ropes are strung. Pay special attention to the minute details depicted on the picture of the stern as it is all made by hand. On the second floor mini-gallery, you will find a *sabani* sailboat with an appearance of having been used, and we paid special attention to the Roseate Tern decoy to replicate its characteristically plump body and its long beak. Our wish is for visitors to see all of these and become more interested in these living creatures and culture.

07



Construction

FUKUCHIGUMI CO., LTD.

Sadaharu Uno

I was responsible for the construction of the Ao no Yukuru Kan. As the visitor center is located on a busy intersection and bus traffic, our main priority was to manage the construction site with the safety of the residents first. This building is a double-decker reinforced concrete structure along with a wooden roof truss. Although the ceiling beams are the structure that supports the roof, they also play a design role that creates an atmosphere different from that of the first and second floors in terms of design. Ryukyu limestone, which is a characteristic of Okinawa, is used in various places in this building to invoke the feeling of Okinawa. In addition, the roof tiles are red tiles with a Ryukyu limestone plaster pattern that our contractor from Ibaraki Prefecture laid with wind-resistant polyfoam adhesive. The eaves on the roof tiles have a bonito pattern that represents Zamami Island. Also, some of the patterns are mixed with creatures related to Zamami Island, so please look for them. This has been my first experience working on a remote island. There were many challenges, such as the delivery of materials, travel, and accommodation for the craftsmen had to be changed many times due to cancellations of the ferry because of bad weather conditions. Despite this, we were able to complete the project thanks to the cooperation of the people at the accommodations and neighbors. Thank you to all residents of the island.

Irodori

— The décor of Ao no Yukuru Kan

and the passion instilled into each.



The flopping bonito fish engraved in the eaves of the tile

KOBAYASHI ROOF-TILE INDUSTRY.CO.LTD.

Norio Kobayashi

Upon disembarking on Zamami Harbor, you will see the beautiful red and white roof in front of your eyes. This roof is tiled with the newly developed “Chura Kawara” meaning beautiful tiles.

This roof tile is an integrated roof tile that imitates the Ryukyu roof tile, and the white part is baked with glaze to evoke the design of Ryukyu plaster. The baking process removes the possibility of deterioration experienced by conventional plaster so that the beautiful design endures. The roof tiles are glued one by one using polyfoam, making the roof strong against strong winds.

Looking up at the roof, you can see the design of bonito fish flopping engraved in the round part of the tile at the eaves. This symbol was adopted due to the Kerama Islands being the birthplace of the bonito fishing industry in Okinawa Prefecture.

In fact, other creatures are hidden in the tiles at the eaves. Look up and try to find them all on your next visit.

Karansha
Chika Miyara



I operate a workshop called Karansha in a small community at the foot of Katsuren Castle in Uruma City. I dye yarn with traditional Ryukyu indigo and plants, weaving hand-woven fabrics that can bring color to anyone's life. After receiving the commission to make the clothes for the Ao no Yukuru Kan, I knew I had to travel to the Island to learn more about Zamami. The natural beauty of Zamami Island was far beyond my imagination. Looking down at the sea from Takatsukiyama Observation deck, the sea and the cove connect via an intricate crystal-clear blue as it overlaps with the blue sky and the lush greenery to create a beautiful panorama. In the evening, the blue world turns into a purplish madder color, as the sun sets while emitting a gentle light. That night I spent there happened to be the harvest moon in mid-autumn. While listening to the sound of the waves on the beach, I lost track of time watching the fluctuation of the *Minamo* (water surface) reflecting the moonlight.



I decided to weave the vivid but gentle natural colors of Zamami Island using the traditional flower weaving technique called *tibana* based on the transparent indigo color.

The *noren* (split curtain) on the first floor is titled *Tsuki no michi* (path of the moon) to express the moon reflected in the sea at night. The title of the border light on the second floor is "Zamami Sanka" (Zamami hymn).

The pink zone is the world of the sun. *Makai* (bowl) is a motif to pray for a good meal. The blue zone is the world of the sea. Fish is a symbol of big catch and marine leisure. The green zone is the world of the earth. The turtle is a motif to pray for longevity. I weaved it with the hope that the people of the island and visitors to the Ao no Yukuru Kan will look up and smile. I hope that Zamami Island, an island of endless charm, will keep prospering for a long time to come.



Second floor: Border lights "Zamami Sanka"
(Zamami hymn)



First floor: *noren* "Tsuki no michi"
(path of the moon)

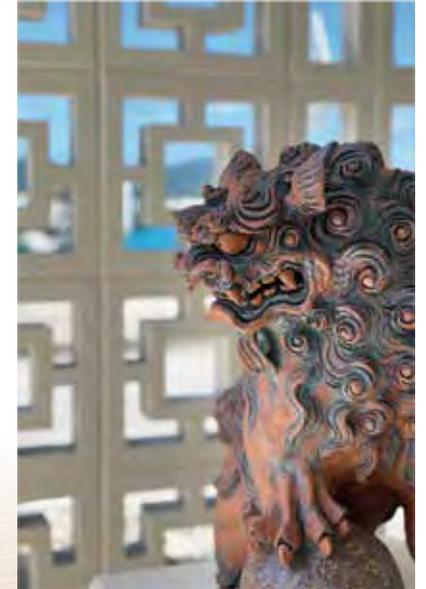
Ryukyu gangu seisakusho Kokura (Ryukyu toys manufacturing Kokura)

Children's toys that have been loved in Okinawa for a long time, such as "Koi Nori Doji (child on the koi fish)" and "Hato (Dove)", which are lucky charms of the May festival.



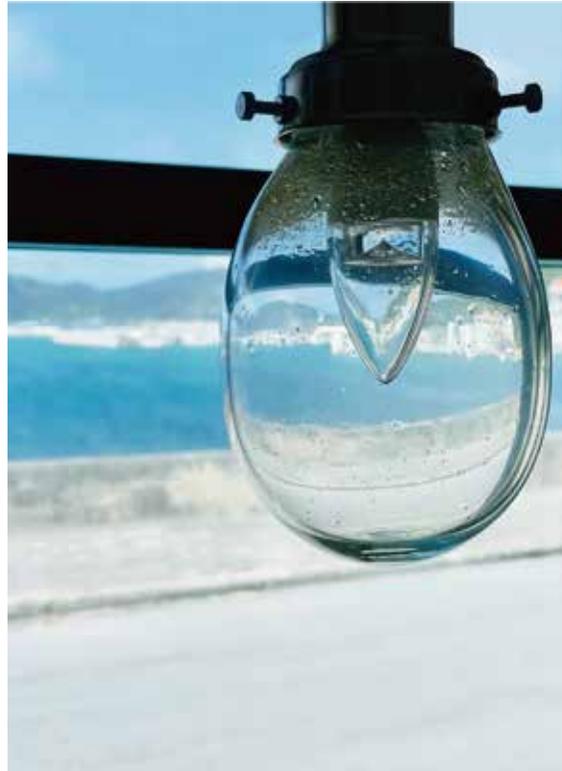
Yachimunya

Guardian deities known as *shisa* are installed on the roof or at the gate of the house. From its facial expression, colors, to each strand of hair, the attention to detail is second to none.



Fukigarasu kōbō Ruri (Blown glass studio Ruri)

A Ryukyu glass lampshade with a thick and rounded shape. The air bubbles help it bring out a soft light.



Glass Art Ai

The motif is of a *Ryukyu Aobato* (green parrot) which is said to bring good luck.



Roseate Tern decoy

Keise Island (commonly known as *Chibishi*) in Tokashiki Village within the national park is an important habitat for birds and is located in the prefecture's wildlife sanctuary. The video in Story B introduces the breeding of terns.



Teeth of a parrotfish

The parrotfish have strong jaws and teeth. The algae that serve as food are bitten along with the coral skeleton with sharp teeth, and even using the teeth in their throat to grind it even more finely.

The coral crushed in this way is carried by the waves to become the white sand on the beach.



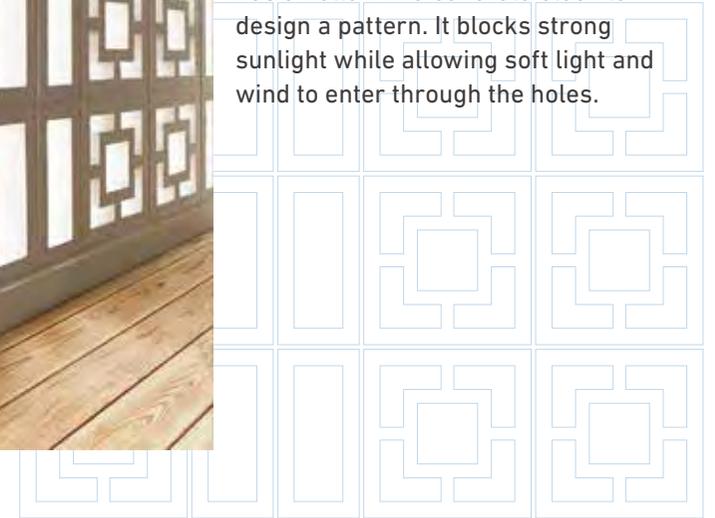
Sabani

A wooden fishing boat that has been used for a long time in Okinawa. Since 2000, a *sabani* sailing race has been held from Furuzamami Beach on Zamami Island to Naha Port with dozens of vessels competing.



Hana (Flower) blocks

A building material born in Okinawa that has a hollow in a concrete block to design a pattern. It blocks strong sunlight while allowing soft light and wind to enter through the holes.



Ryukyu limestone

Rocks are formed by the accumulation of coral and shells. It is porous and has excellent moisture retention and breathability.



Details

Facility Overview

Commissioned by: Ministry of the Environment

(Okinawa Amami Nature Conservation Office, Kerama Ranger Office)

Name of the facility: Ao no Yukuru Kan

Location of the facility: Zamami hamlet, Zamami Village,
Okinawa Prefecture

Structure: Part wooden two stories RC structure

(Site area: 645.89m² / Total floor area: 493.60m²)

Management / operation

Facility open days: All year round (possibility of temporary closure)

Facility hours: 9:00 to 17:00

Management: Zamami Tourism Association

