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This brochure was created with cooperation from the Zamami Village
Whale Watching Association and the Tokashiki Village Whale Watching Association.

National
Parks
of Japan



Keramashoto National Park Whale Watching in Zamami and Tokashiki Village



Whale Watching Brand Book

Discover a Unique Winter Experience in the Okinawa's Keramashoto National Park

An archipelago of more than 30 islands forms the Keramashoto National Park, which was designated the 31st National Park in Japan on March 5, 2014, also known as Coral Day. The majority of its park area, encompassing Zamami and Tokashiki Village, consists almost entirely of ocean. Each island is close enough to see the neighboring islands, surrounding an inland sea of beautiful "Kerama Blue". Compared to the outer seas, the inland sea is tranquil and crystal-clear year-round. The Kerama Islands feature mountains that reach the coast, along with countless rias coastlines of cliffs and coves sculpted by wind and waves. Shallow, tranquil natural beaches are scattered across these islands.

In the Kerama Islands, Bellflower cherry trees bloom from January to February, with Tokashiki Island taking advantage of its mountainous terrain to host the annual Tokashiki Marathon in February, and Zamami Island holding the Whale Watching Festival from January to March. The natural mountains and seascapes of the Kerama Islands never fail to captivate visitors. However, the greatest attraction in winter here is the annual return of humpback whales from Russia and Alaska.

The Kerama Islands and their surrounding waters are protected as excellent natural scenic areas of Japan.

The Islands of the Kerama Archipelago

The Kerama Islands consist of more than 30 islands, both large and small, including inhabited ones such as Tokashiki, the largest of the Kerama Islands, Zamami, which stretches east to west, Aka, and Geruma, as well as uninhabited islands such as Fukaji and Amuro. The islands can be reached by ferry or high-speed boat from Tomari Port in Naha on the main island of Okinawa, so every journey to the Kerama Islands begins with a scenic boat trip.

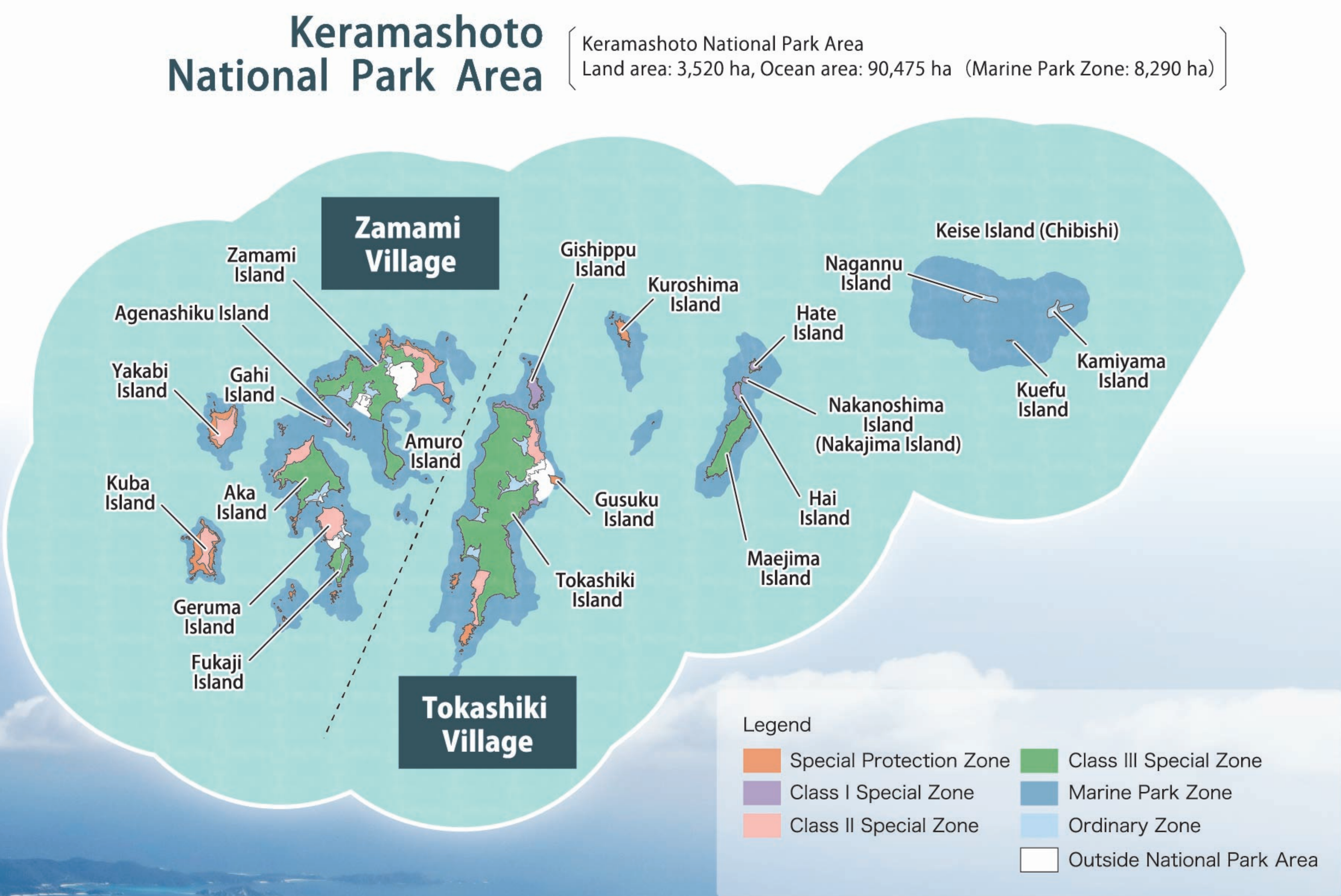


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ZAMAMI



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TOKASHIKI



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The Breath Taking Seas of Kerama Experience the world of “Kerama Blue,” shaped by a chain of beautiful islands

Dense coral reefs stretch across the waters of the Kerama Islands. The inland sea and coastal areas are shallow and feature exceptionally clear waters.

On these sunny seafloors, nearly 250 species of reef-building coral, including table, branch, antler and block coral, have been observed, helping create a rich ecosystem within these crystal-clear, nutrient-poor waters.

A diversity of marine life inhabits these seas, encompassed by islands. The sight of this chain of islands, whether viewed from the sea or from an observatory, creates a magnificent landscape where land and sea unite — a scene that truly takes your breath away.

Known as “Kerama Blue,” this is one of Japan’s most beautiful seascapes.

Here, the inland sea embraced by the Kerama Islands is sheltered from wind and waves, creating calm, gentle waters — an ideal sanctuary for humpback whales to breed.



Image credit: masahiro - stock.adobe.com



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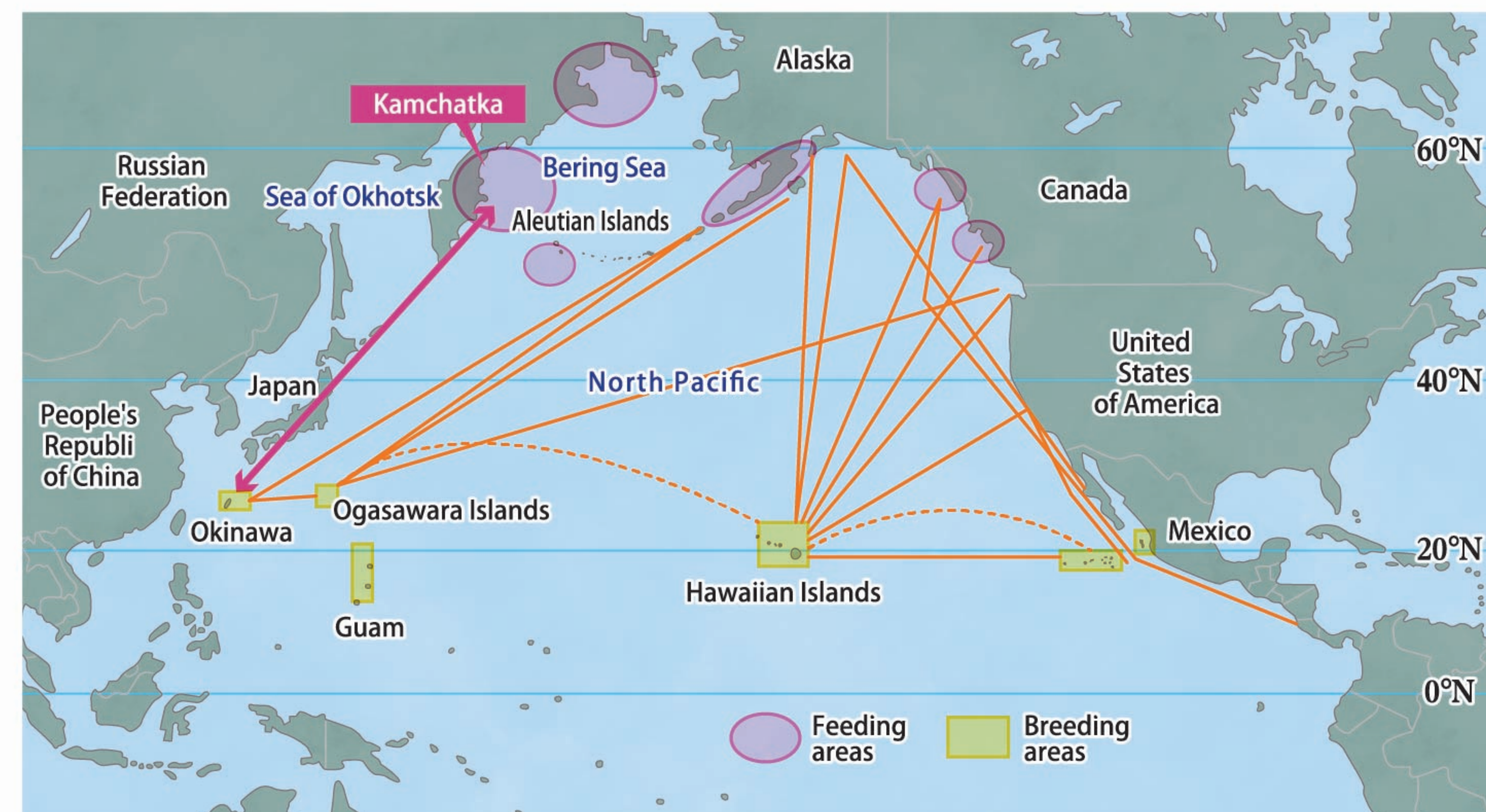


Image Credit: dam - stock.adobe.com

A diverse array of fish are protected by the coral and make the reefs their home.

Humpback Whale Breeding Areas: Unforgettable Encounters With Whales in Kerama, Okinawa During Winter

With the arrival of winter comes the annual return of humpback whales to the seas of Kerama, which the islanders greet warmly. Humpback whales have lifespans as long as humans and migrate across the globe seasonally, traveling thousands of kilometers each way every year. In the North Pacific, they spend summers in high-latitude cold feeding areas such as Russia and Alaska, building up fat reserves. Then they travel south to low-latitude warm breeding areas in Okinawa, Hawaii, and Mexico to breed and nurse their calves.



Distribution and Migration of North Pacific Humpback Whales (modified from Darling and Mori, 1992)

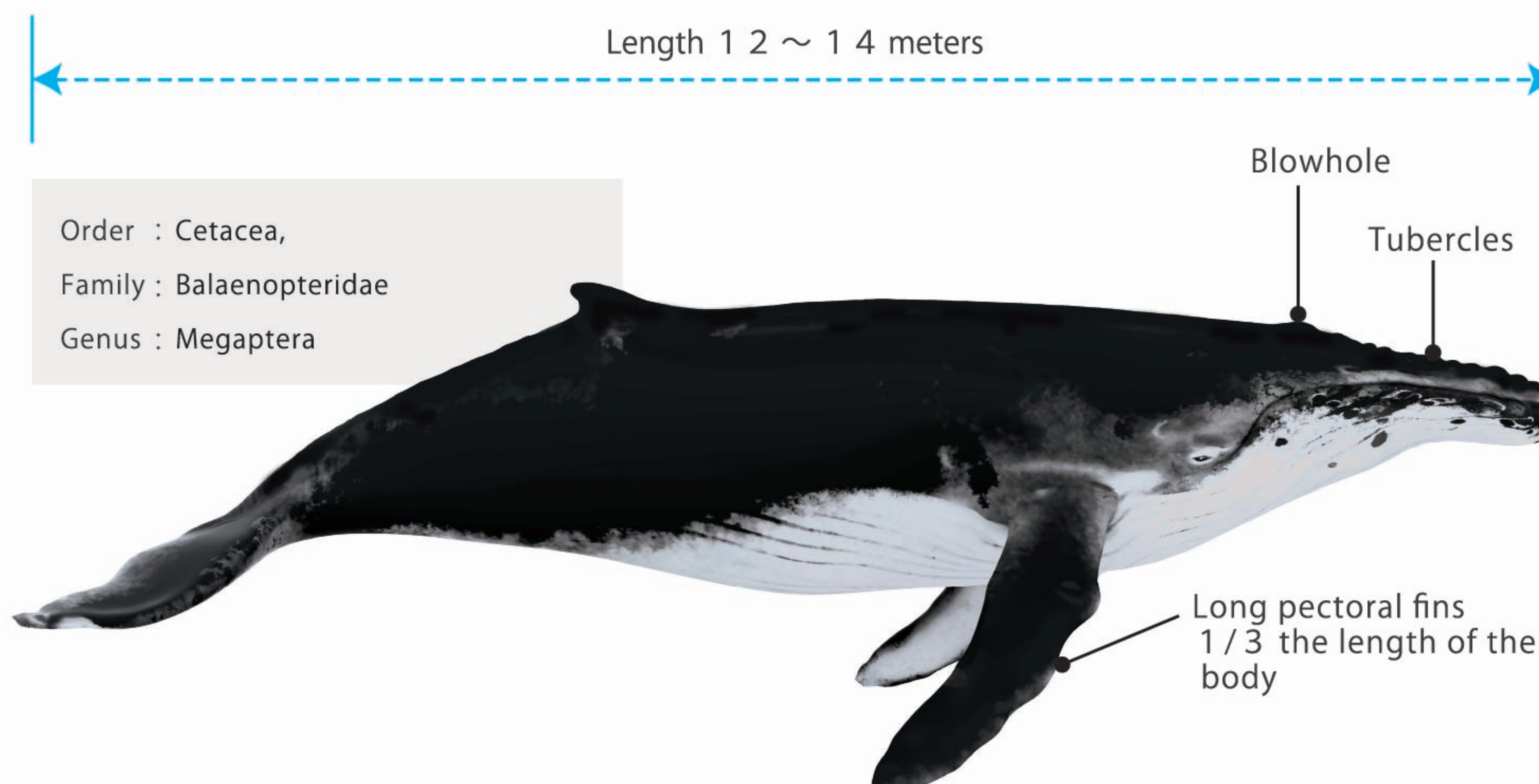


Image Credit: nerthuz - stock.adobe.com

Humpback whales return to the waters around Okinawa, including the Kerama Islands, every year around December and can be seen until the end of March. During this time males and females gather to find mates, and mother whales come to nurture their calves after giving birth in their home waters following roughly one year of pregnancy, continuing the circle of life. Humpback whales have site fidelity, with certain whales coming back to the Kerama Islands year after year.

Why Do Humpback Whales Come to the Kerama Islands?

Surrounded by islands, the Kerama inland sea has tranquil waters that provide ideal conditions for nursing calves, attracting many whale mothers and their calves, along with males and females looking for mates.

What Makes the Seas Ideal for Whales?

- ✓ The tranquil waters surrounded by islands provide a safe environment for calves, who are not yet good at swimming.
- ✓ Island shelters offer protection against wind and waves, even when the wind direction changes.
- ✓ These quiet shelters allow whales to nurse their young and rest.
- ✓ Just offshore are shallows such as shoals that humpback whales prefer, enabling mothers to keep their calves away from males who can sometimes interfere with raising young.
- ✓ Shallow waters are an ideal environment for raising whale calves, who are not yet able to dive deeply.

This is ideal for nursing calves

Safe and protected waters for whales

These conditions are what make the inland sea of the Kerama Islands such an important breeding area.

KERAMA WHALE WATCHING HISTORY

March 1985 Two whales spotted in the waters around the Zamami

Mr. Yukifumi Miyamura, who still serves as a whale watching boat captain in Zamami today, encountered two humpback whales in the waters around Zamami in March 1985 and was so surprised he reportedly exclaimed "Agijabiyo!"*1 This discovery became the talk of Zamami, and excited villagers began searching for whales, marking the beginning of whale watching in the Kerama Islands.

*1: A word in the Okinawan dialect used to express surprise

February 1989 Conservation organization WWF Japan visits the Kerama Islands to conduct humpback whale survey

Village boat captains received guidance from world-renowned whale researchers and also participated in a survey that revealed the waters around the Kerama Islands to be humpback whale breeding areas.

April 1989 Volunteers from Zamami visit the Ogasawara Islands for Inspection

Learning from Ogasawara Islands' self-regulatory guidelines and organizational structure, based on whale watching operations in Hawaii, they aimed to develop whale watching as a winter tourism business.

1985~

1960s~ End of whaling

Whaling in the waters around Okinawa ended in the 1960s. Although this was intended to protect humpback whales, which were once feared to be on the brink of extinction, sightings of whales around Okinawa completely disappeared and eventually became little more than old tales.

1990~

March 1991 Zamami Village Whale Watching Association established

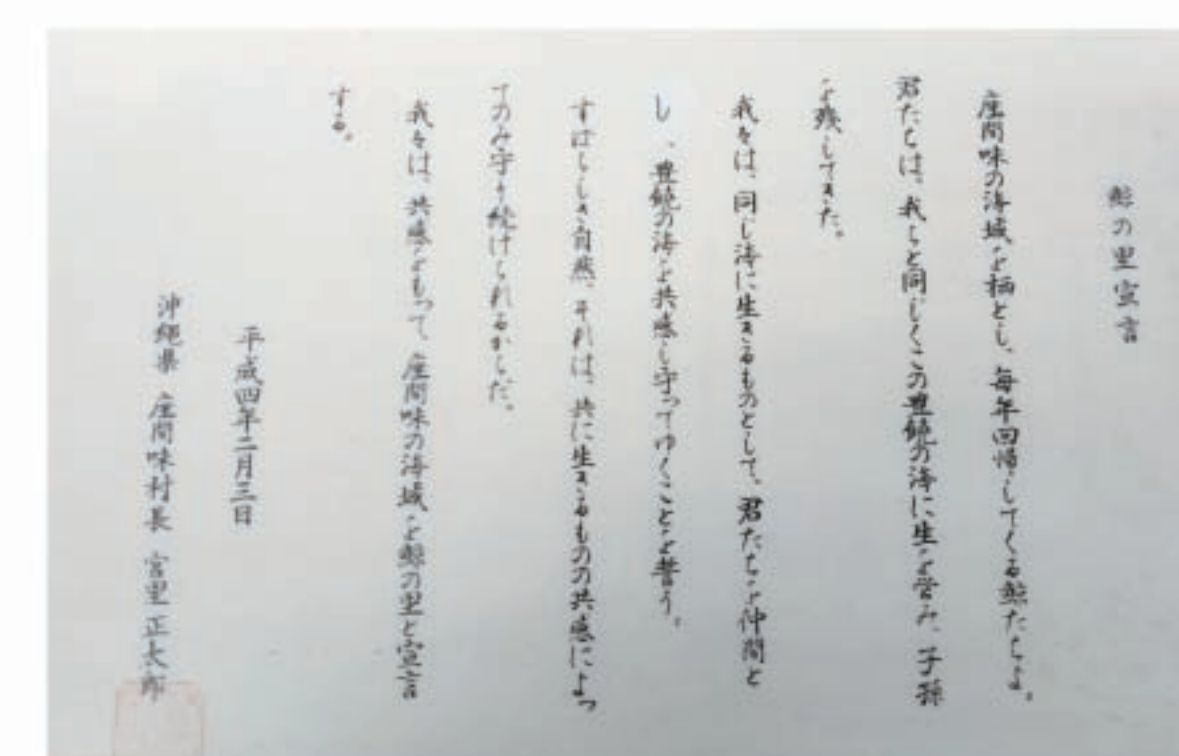
- Development of self-regulatory guidelines.
- ※See P25 for details
- Photo identification research begins.

February 1992 The village of Zamami makes the "Whale Home Declaration"

Whale watching tours begin using the high-speed boat "Queen Zamami."

1997 Whale spotting system begins

※See P21 for details



[Whale Home Declaration]



[Provided by Okinawa Times (April 4,1993)]

December 2022 A "Mother and Calf Whale Sanctuary" is established in the inland sea of Zamami Village

This area serves as humpback whale breeding areas and as such whale watching by boat is strictly prohibited to protect whales and their calves.



※See P26 for details

November 2023 The Tokashiki Village Whale Watching Association established

- Self-regulatory guidelines developed based on those of the Zamami Village Whale Watching Association.



慶良間諸島周辺でホエールウォッチングを楽しむ客（長谷和典さん提供）

[Provided by Okinawa Times
(December 6,2023)]

クジラ観察協会設立
渡瀬敷の業者 保護目指し連携
谷和典さん(43)は「慶良間はクジラの里のや未来につなげていくやり方を指している」と話し

2020~

2010~

March 2014 The Kerama Islands are designated as a National Park

「慶良間の海を守る」
国立公園指定 地元、決意新た
【渡瀬敷・座間味】慶良間諸島から日、国立公園に正式指定されたことを受けて、渡瀬敷、座間味両村の関係からは「県内外にアピールしたい」と歓迎の声が上がった。また「国立公園の名に恥じないよう、海を守り続ける」と決意を新たにする声もあり、「保護」と利用の両立へ向けた取り組みが始まる。午前9時半すぎ、渡瀬敷、座間味の両村役場には環境省那覇自然環境事務所、座間味自然環境事務所の植田明浩所長から、電話で正式指定の報告があった。渡瀬敷村役場の屋上から記念の横断幕が掲げられると、職員から拍手が湧き起こった。座間味島長村長は「村内外に国立公園をアピールし、多くの観光客が

[Provided by The Ryukyu Shimpo Co., Ltd (March 6,2014)]

February 2016 The Zamami Village Whale Watching Association transitions to an incorporated association

They received the Excellence Award at the 11th Ecotourism Awards co-hosted by the Ministry of the Environment and Japan Ecotourism Association.



Photography: Miyako Endo

Whale monument on the west side of Zamami Port.

A Day with Whales in Kerama



What We Value

World-Class Whale Watching Where Humans and Whales Live in Harmony

A safe place for whales to come back to
— that is the Kerama brand.

In the Kerama Islands, self-regulatory guidelines that prioritize the protection of whales above all else have been established, turning these waters into a safe “cradle” where whale mothers can raise their calves with confidence. Ensuring continued coexistence between whales and humans over the next century will require not only the efforts of local communities but also cooperation from tour participants to protect, learn about, and connect with whales for the future.

Whale-Friendly Whale Watching

Reduces stress on whales

Kerama has long served as a “cradle” for whales, and to ensure that they continue to return to these waters, our whale-watching tours observe their natural behaviors without interfering with birthing, nursing calves, or mating.

Reduces stress on tour participants

Land-based whale spotters locate whales before the boats set out, ensuring smooth and efficient encounters. Even when bad weather prevents boat trips, whales can still be observed from the shore. Visitors can also enjoy interacting with the boat captains and guides.



Image Credit: jukucho - stock.adobe.com

We are Whale Lovers

Encountering Love in the Cradle of Whales

The captivating sight of these magnificent creatures awaits you on a whale-watching tour in the Kerama Islands.

Like a whale with her calf, we cherish the time spent lovingly observing these whales. Great love is nurtured here, gently rocked by the waves in the inland sea’s “cradle.” We don’t just go to see whales—we go to meet them, which is at the very heart of what “We Are Whale Lovers” means.

*Inland sea whale watching is kept to an absolute minimum.

The Future We Are Building

A sea where humans and whales can coexist sustainably for the next 100 years.

The Kerama Islands see whale watching not just as a “tourist attraction” but as a way for humans and whales to coexist—learning about whale ecology and behavior while considering the effects of changing ocean conditions and climate. This effort aims to protect the waters so that the many whales that migrate here will feel safe to return year after year.

Creating breeding areas and preserving the whales' home

- Protect the “Mother and Calf Whale Sanctuary”, creating a “cradle” for whales and their young, and ensuring that as many whales as possible continue to return to the Kerama Islands.
- Maintain these waters as vital breeding areas and protect the whales’ home for generations to come.

* For details on the “Mother and Calf Whale Sanctuary,” see P26

Striving for the Future Building a Sustainable Whale Watching System for the next 100 years

- Maintain world-class whale-friendly “self-regulatory guidelines” in an effort toward sustainable whale watching.
- Land-based whale spotters, boat captains, tour guides, and association members work together to create high-value tours here in this world-recognized homecoming for whales.
- Build stronger bonds among whale spotters, boat captains, tour guides, and association members. Partner with academic research and pass on guide commentary and boat handling skills through workshops and training.

Turning both sea and land into observation and learning spots

- Create a better environment for watching whales, not only from aboard boats at sea but from land as well.
- Work to offer nature observation tours where people can learn about the importance of protecting the natural environment while watching whales from land.

* For details on self-regulatory guidelines, see P25



Photography: Miyako Endo

Our Initiatives

Trust Built by Protecting Whales – The Bond Between Whales and the People of Kerama, for Generations to Come

We aim to achieve world-class, sustainable whale watching experiences, and place great importance on creating a balance between protecting nature and enjoying tourism responsibly. Our mission is to protect whales and share their importance with the next generation, for a future where humans and whales live in harmony.

Follow self-regulatory guidelines and put trust and safety first

- Continue to build trust with the whales and adhere to the Kerama Islands' self-regulatory guidelines to protect the oceans, ensuring that whales can thrive.
- Ensure the safety of participants and provide a world-class whale-watching experience that can be enjoyed with complete peace of mind.

* For details on self-regulatory guidelines, see P25

Sharing the value of “waiting for the whales to come to us”

- Create an environment where whales approach the boats and convey the idea that "waiting is part of the fun of whale watching".
- Share the value of the land-based whale spotting system and spread awareness of the importance of land-based whale spotters working with boat captains and tour guides.

Pass our whale protection efforts to the next generation

- Promote whale conservation efforts that both customers and the whale-loving people of the Kerama Islands will endorse.
- Create deeper customer understanding through whale watching to increase the number of whale protectors and whale fans.

* For details on the land-based whale spotting system, see P21



© The Tokashiki Village Whale Watching Association

Kerama's Unique Whale Watching

Unforgettable whale encounters through eco-friendly rules — a special experience full of wonder, excitement, and a deep connection with nature

This collaboration between captains and whale spotters ensures whale-friendly tours based on Kerama's eco-friendly self-regulatory guidelines and a long tradition of whale-loving villagers who understand and have built trusting bonds with whales. These ideas come together in unique tours that quietly observe whales and their calves, creating memorable "whale stories" full of learning opportunities.

World-Class Whale Watching United by Sea and Land

- Using the land-based whale spotting system from the mountains, whale spotters play an important role in finding whales.
- The land-based whale spotters and captains work together to efficiently spot whales in designated waters then disperse watching boats to reduce stress on whales.



© The Tokashiki Village Whale Watching Association

Land-based whale spotter

Land-based whale watching spotters watch carefully for whales from several observatories in Zamami and Tokashiki and radio the exact location and appearance to whale watching boat captains to guide the boats. This helps protect the whales by encouraging boats to spread out.

A Special Experience Born from the Connection Between People and Whales

- Whales approaching boats, a behavior called "Takkuwari," in the Okinawan dialect proof of the trust whales have in our people and boats, a special experience that is a gift from the sea.
- Photo identification allows us to track whale growth, migration distance, which years they visit Okinawa, and personality, all of which are reflected in whale watching efforts.
- The magic here lies in the rare chance to meet the same wild whales year after year.



© The Zamami Village Whale Watching Association

Mugging (Takkuwari)

Years of following self-regulatory guidelines have built trust in our boats among the whales, who will sometimes approach the boats of their own volition. This behavior is called "Takkuwari" that is a word in the Okinawan dialect used to whale mugging.

Photo Identification

Humpback whales each have different tail fluke patterns, and in Okinawa, including the Kerama Islands, each whale is assigned an individual ID to track growth, migration distance, which years they visit Okinawa, and personality.

An Experience Filled with Excitement and Emotion

- The close connection and unique atmosphere that only a small boat and a small group can offer.
- Tours are enriched by stories from veteran boat captains and tour guides who share the history and natural beauty of the area with participants.
- Enjoy insightful commentary from the captain and tour guides, even if the whales don't show the behaviors you hoped to see.
- Watching spots close to shore have shorter travel distances, reducing the risk of seasickness.

Key players in Connecting the Land and Sea

Land-based whale spotters play an important role in making whale-friendly watching possible



Photography: Miyako Endo



© The Zamami Village Whale Watching Association

The Kerama Islands employ a land-based whale spotting system that connects land and sea in which whale spotters are positioned at multiple observatories. Whale spotters start early each morning, climbing to observatories in Zamami and Tokashiki before tours depart to scan the entire sea in search for whales for half a day or all day long. They watch for whale blows, and when they spot a whale, they radio the captains with the precise location and its appearance to guide the boats.

They search for whales while guiding boats to spread out, avoiding crowding around a single pod. They leave mother and calf whales in peace, instead guiding boats toward adult pairs or mating groups*. Whale spotters on land stay in close communication with captains and guides at sea, all working together to protect the whales.

This teamwork between land and sea makes world-class, whale-friendly tours possible. Whale spotters know humpback whale behavior well, which helps to create a safe and respectful environment for both whales and participants, where self-regulation is carefully practiced.

*mating groups : Groups of male whales competing for female whales

Charming Local Captains Loved by Many Guests



Whale-loving captains receive updates from land-based spotters about whale locations and behavior, then skillfully guide their boats while carefully following self-regulatory guidelines to avoid stressing the whales. Some of these veteran captains have over 30 years of experience and are so well-loved that guests return just to see them. With their fun stories and relaxed conversations—often in the Okinawan dialect—these popular captains add to the unique charm of whale watching in the Kerama Islands.

Experienced Guides Who Know Whales Well and Keep You Safe on the Water



While supporting participants and keeping tours safe, guides also help to make the experience more enjoyable. They offer easy-to-understand explanations about whale ecology and behavior, while reading the whales' movements and predicting what they'll do next. With insights like, "This whale surfaces every 18 minutes—it should come up for air soon," you'll be impressed by their sharp eyes and deep knowledge. These guides play an essential role in making whale watching fun and meaningful.

What the Collaboration Between Zamami and Tokashiki Has Achieved with the Support of Local Communities



The Zamami Village Whale Watching Association



The Tokashiki Village Whale Watching Association

Since 1991, the Zamami Village Whale Watching Association has been promoting whale watching as a key part of winter tourism in the Kerama Islands. Building on this, the Tokashiki Village Whale Watching Association was formed in November 2023, supporting the same mission. Members from both villages share information and follow self-regulatory guidelines to protect whales, while also cooperating with humpback whale surveys and research.

Each whale watching association includes not only captains and tour operators, but also local inns and restaurants as members. In the Mother and Calf Whale Sanctuary, where boat-based whale watching is completely off-limits, fisheries cooperative, diving groups, ferries, and high-speed boats all work together to follow the rules and support whale-friendly practices throughout the villages.

The Zamami and Tokashiki Village Whale Watching Associations bring together whale-loving captains, knowledgeable guides, and dedicated whale spotters—often considered the key players—who work together to share information and improve coordination between land and sea, watching over the whales from a wider perspective.

* See P26 for details on the Mother and Calf Whale Sanctuary

What the Collaboration between the Zamami and Tokashiki Whale Watching Associations has made possible

1 More Chances to Spot Whales Over a Broader Area

On clear days, the waters around the Kerama Islands open up into a stunning panorama—stretching from west of Zamami to just before Tonaki Island, and from east of Tokashiki all the way out to Chibishi.

2 Information sharing between land-based whale spotters, coordination between captains

Tracking whale locations across the wide waters of the Kerama Islands allows spotters to offer more choices for boat routes, making it easier to spread out. At the same time, smooth coordination between captains helps keep both participants and whales safe.



In the future, the Zamami and Tokashiki Whale Watching Association will build even stronger support systems by introducing programs like Kerama-certified guide training and navigation workshops to help captains sharpen their skills, all to prepare the next generation of guides and captains. The Zamami and Tokashiki Village Whale Watching Associations also aim to join forces with their members to spread the idea of "whale-friendly watching" from the Kerama Islands to all of Okinawa—and eventually to Amami.

1

What we ask of association members and non-members

Association boats must follow the self-regulatory guidelines. Non-member boats are asked to cooperate with following the guidelines.

2

Areas where the guidelines apply

These guidelines apply in waters within 10 miles (18 km) of the coast of the islands in Zamami and within 7 km of the coast of the islands in Tokashiki.

3

Whale species covered by the guidelines

Baleen whales (such as humpback whales) and sperm whales.

4

Guidelines for boats, including non-motorized vehicles such as yachts, sabanis, and SUP

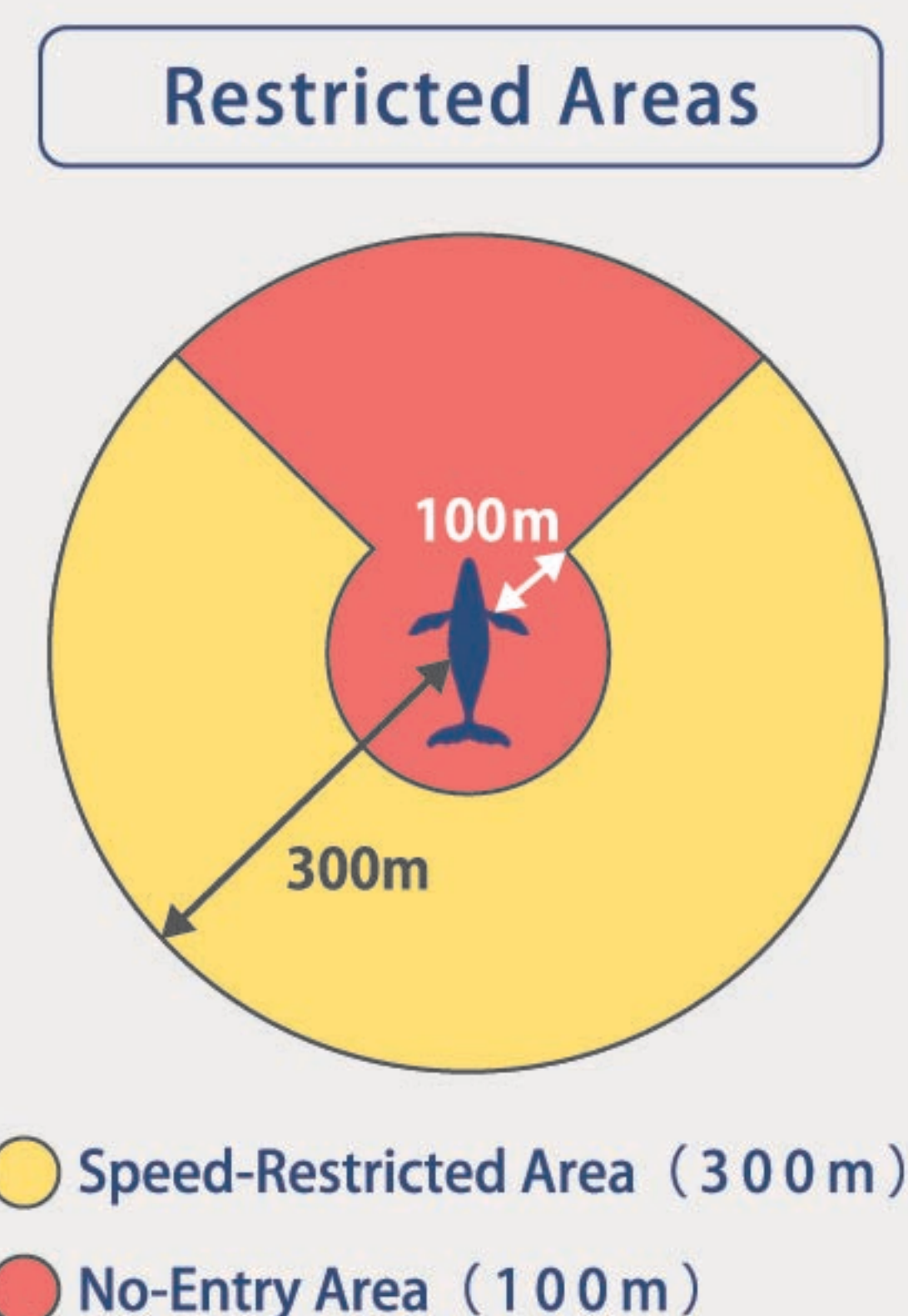
Areas within 300 meters of a whale are designated as "speed-restricted area" and areas within 100 meters as "no-entry area."

Guidelines for Speed-Restricted Areas

- Whale watching boats must reduce speed when approaching whales.
- Boats must not navigate in ways that interfere with the whales' path.

Guideline for No-Entry Area

- Boats do not approach whales.
- When whales approach, boats must stop and maintain position until they leave restricted waters.
- Whale watching boats must not make sudden starts, sharp turns, or other abrupt maneuvers.



Self-regulatory Guidelines for Whale Watching in Kerama

These guidelines are based on the self-regulatory system established by the Zamami and Tokashiki Whale Watching Associations to protect humpback whale breeding areas and prevent disturbance to these precious creatures during whale watching tours in the waters around the Kerama Islands.

5

Time Restrictions

Whale watching is generally limited to 2 hours per whale or pod of whales. However, for mother whales and their calves, whale watching must be limited to 1 hour in the morning and 1 hour in the afternoon for all boats.

6

"Mother and Calf Whale Sanctuary"

A part of the inland sea around Zamami and Tokashiki Islands has been designated as a "Mother and Calf Whale Sanctuary."

Guidelines for the "Mother and Calf Whale Sanctuary" Area

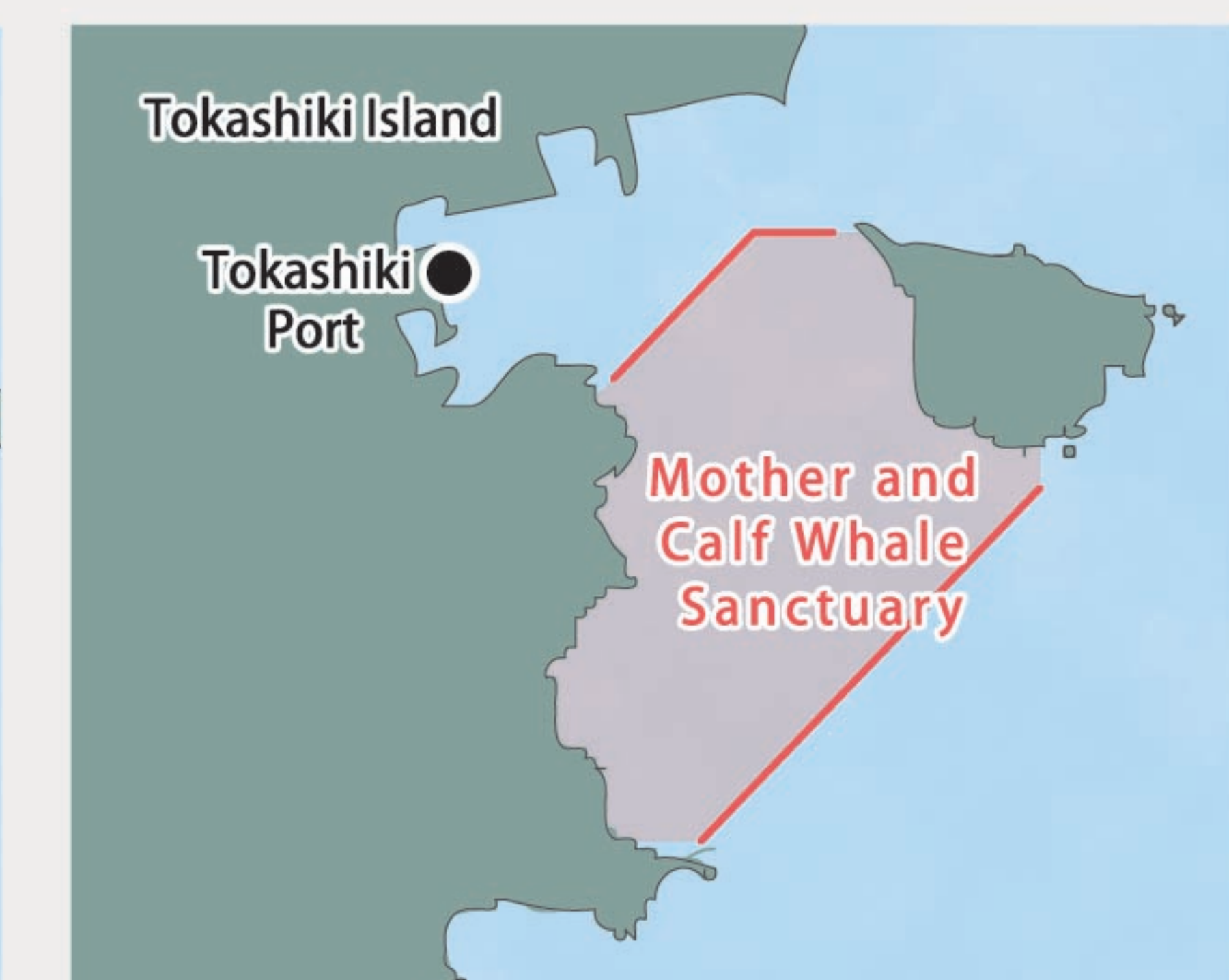
Boat-based whale watching is strictly prohibited here. However, research vessels are allowed, as long as they display a "research vessel" flag.

Designated Area



Zamami

West Amashiru ~West Gahi ~South Gahi
~South Agenashiku ~Amuro-Fish reef Buoy~Amuro



Tokashiki

From Nagasachi at Tokashiki Port to the line
connecting to Gusuku to Tokashiki Port

7 Prohibited Activities in Areas Covered by These Guidelines

Swimming with whales, diving, snorkeling, and all other forms of "underwater whale watching" are prohibited. Underwater filming of whales is also generally prohibited.

Exception

When the whales themselves approach the boat "Takkuwari" (Mugging).

Underwater filming is allowed only in these cases, provided that care is taken not to disturb the whales and that the camera alone is gently lowered into the water from the boat's edge.

Do not make whale calls or similar sounds underwater (does not include normal boat engine sounds).

8 Exceptions

Anyone wishing to approach whales for non-profit educational, survey, or research purposes must submit a plan in advance, obtain permission from the association, and display a "research vessel" flag or other special flag.

Other necessary measures shall be determined by the Association Guidelines Committee.



© The Zamami Village Whale Watching Association

Q & A

Q. Attire & Belongings

Sunglasses

For sun protection. These help protect your eyes on sunny days, when the light reflecting off the sea can be blinding.

Outerwear

Something that provides protection from the cold and water. Winds aboard the boats are strong, and you may get soaked by rain or ocean spray, making windbreakers or raincoats your best bet.

Hats

The Okinawan sun is intense, even in winter. The wind is strong as well, which is why we recommend a hat with a chin strap.

Trousers

Wear clothes that allow for easy movement and provide protection from the cold and water. Skirts and shorts are dangerous.

Shoes

Sneakers are ideal. The boat sways, making it easy to slip. Heels and other shoes that are easy to slip in are prohibited.

※ Wearing a life jacket is mandatory.

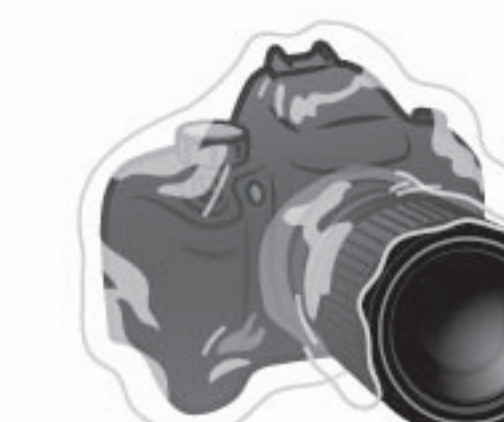
Combating seasickness

The boat sways considerably. To enjoy 2 full hours of whale watching, we recommend taking motion sickness medication an hour before boarding.



Waterproof Belongings

You can use a plastic bag to help protect your single-lens reflex camera and smartphone from the seawater.



Q. What are the cancellation criteria for Kerama Island whale watching boats?

- A.** • When wind speeds are 10 m/s or higher, wave heights are 3-4 meters or higher, or visibility is 300 meters or less.
- When heavy rain or thunderstorms are forecast, or when advisories or warnings have been issued.
- When the association cancels the tour based on the criteria above.

Q. Can whales be seen from land?

- A.** Whales can be viewed from coastal roads and observatories offering spectacular views. Viewing from land in both Zamami and Tokashiki is also recommended, because the "Mother and Calf Whale Sanctuary" is near the coast.

Q. Why isn't swimming with whales allowed in the Kerama Islands?

- A.** Research has shown that swimming with whales causes significant stress to whales because it requires getting quite close to them. Swimming with mother whales and their calves in particular interferes with nursing and rest, and may adversely affect survival or the healthy growth of calves, and is thus prohibited in order to protect breeding areas.

The key sign for spotting whales is their "blow" — Humpback whales migrating to the Kerama Islands



Image credit: nerthuz - stock.adobe.com

Humpback whales which live in sea all across the world migrate seasonally between feeding areas and breeding areas. North Pacific humpback whales migrate to high-latitude cold feeding areas in summer, around Russia and Alaska. In winter, they travel to low-latitude warm breeding areas around Okinawa and the Ogasawara Islands in Japan as well as Hawaii and Mexico.

Humpback whales are one of the species of baleen whale

Humpback whales are mammals measuring 12 to 14 meters in length and weighing between 30 to 40 tons.

Roughly the same size as Kerama whale watching boats, these whales have tubercles on their heads and long pectoral fins as distinguishing features. The pectoral fins are about one-third the length of the body, and the tail fluke is roughly the same width as the length of the pectoral fins.

Instead of teeth, they have baleen in their mouths, making them members of the baleen whale family. In feeding areas, they capture krill and schools of small fish along with seawater. Filtering them through baleen to eat. They have grooves running from the lower jaw to the belly that help when feeding. The patterns on the belly side of the tail fluke and the shape of the serrated edges differ for each whale, and Whale Watching Association in Kerama uses these characteristics to identify individuals.

Humpback Whale Behavior Patterns

When watching humpback whales, you may see them engaging in a wide variety of behaviors. The purpose of this behavior is not well understood, and different theories include that it is done to remove old skin or parasites, appeal to a mate, intimidate, express emotions, or possibly communicate through sound.

Imagine yourself as a humpback whale in that moment and picture why it might be performing that behavior or how it might be feeling.

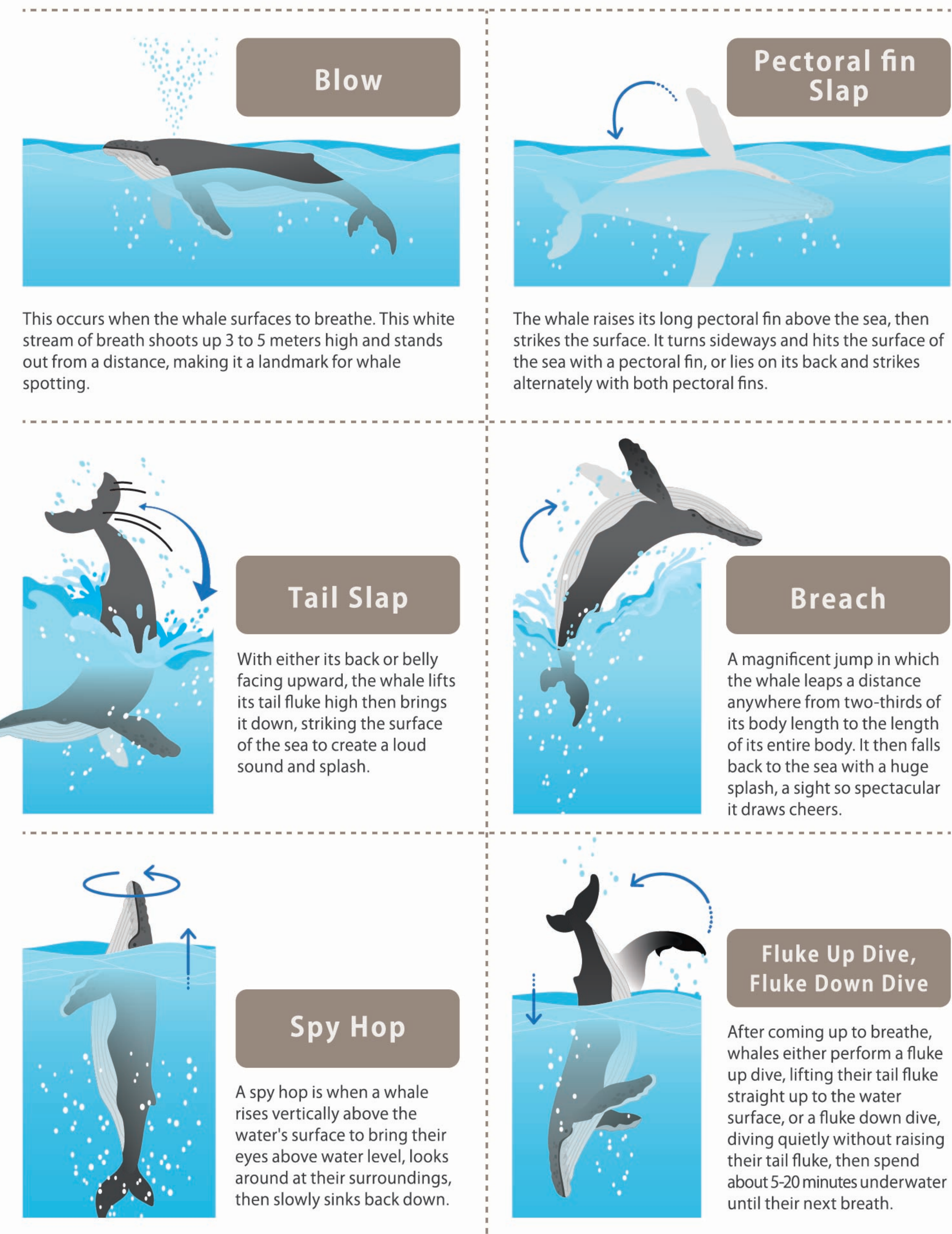


Photo Identification of Humpback Whales

Each humpback whale has unique patterns on the ventral side of its tail fluke and distinct serrated edges. These markings work like human fingerprints, making it possible to identify individual whales. Using this method, the Zamami Village Whale Watching Association began studying individual humpback whales when it was established in 1991.

Photographs of humpback whale tail flukes taken in the waters around the Kerama Islands are collected, and each whale is then given an individual ID such as "ZA-1". They are documented with photos and detailed notes to track their growth, migration range, personality, and behavior.

"This whale migrates here nearly every year"

"This whale is visiting the Kerama Islands for the first time!"

More than 1,800 whales have been identified. Some whales have been given nicknames, which helps provide clues for understanding humpback whale ecology in detail and are reflected in whale watching efforts as well.

ZA-8

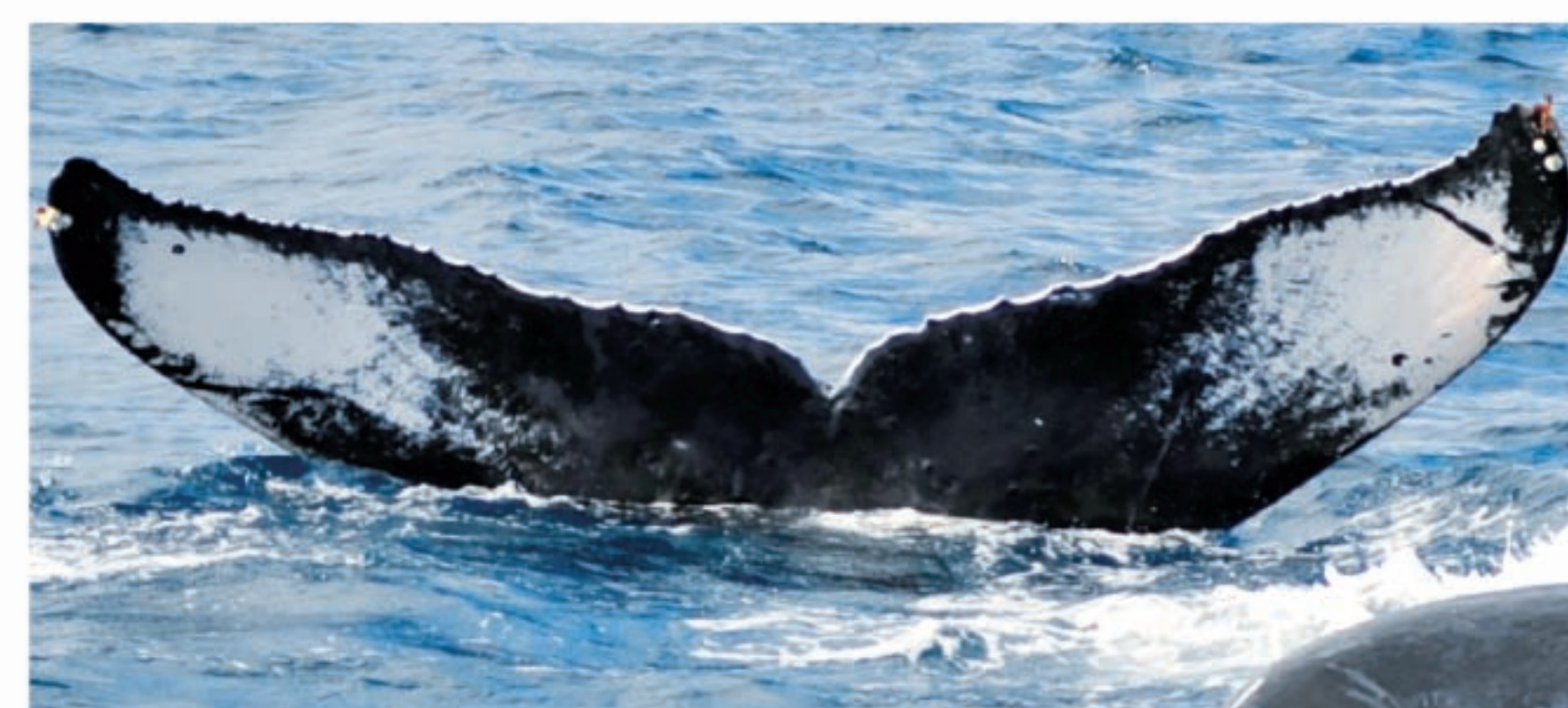
Z (Zed) ♂



Zamami's most well-known whale, with confirmed visits spanning over 30 years since 1990. A clear "Z" shape appears on the right side of his tail fluke. The whale has even been recorded traveling between Okinawa and the Philippines within a single winter.

ZA-177

White Lady ♀



The back of its pectoral fins is white, making the whale appear pale blue when swimming just below the surface. Since 1999, this mother whale has returned nearly every other year with her calves.

ZA-186

Snoopy ♂



This male whale was named for the black spots on a white area that resemble Snoopy's face, and has been spotted almost every year since 2000.

ZA-550

RuPhiZO ♂



This whale has been spotted across the North Pacific, and was named using the first letters of the places where it was seen: Russia (Ru), Philippines (Phi), Zamami (Z), and Ogasawara (O).

ZA-609

Ayumi-chan ♀



When first confirmed in 2006, this whale was a small calf and was named after a child born in Zamami that same year.

ZA-1451

Swan ♀



Born in 2015, this whale was first spotted with its mother, and returned in 2024 with a calf of its own.

ZA-1880

H ♀

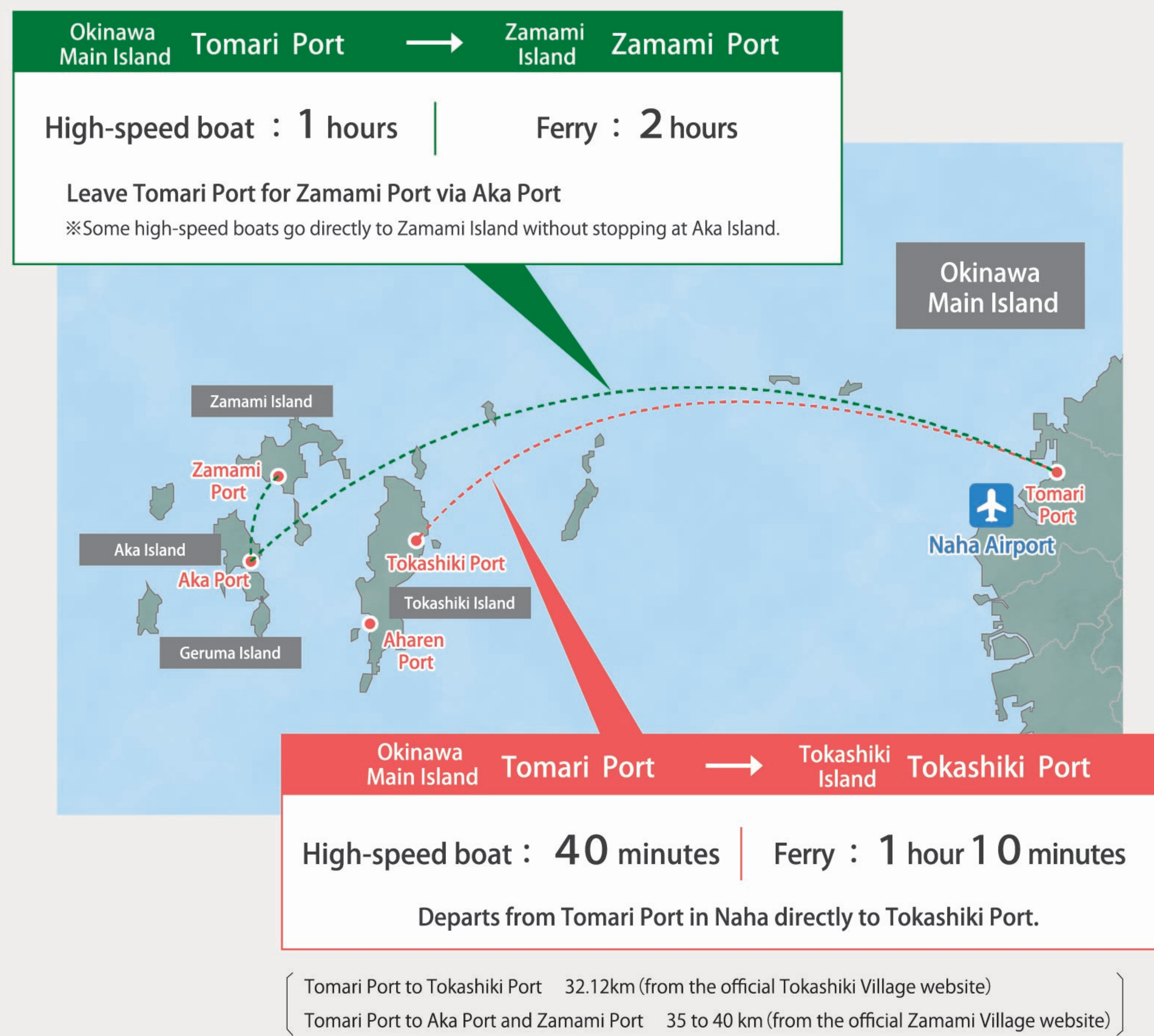


Named H because of the "H"-shaped pattern on the right side of its white tail fluke, this whale was first spotted in 2025 accompanied by a calf that also had a white tail. The two have often been seen breaching together.

ACCESS

By ferry and high-speed boat from Tomari Port in Naha to the Kerama Islands

20 minutes by car from Naha Airport. Ferries and high-speed boats to the Kerama Islands depart from Tomari Port in Naha. (※Reservations are recommended)



Ticket sales and check-in at Tomari Port are available on the first floor of Tomarin terminal on the south shore of Tomari Port. The high-speed boat dock is on the north shore of Tomari Port, a short distance away.
(High-speed boat tickets can also be purchased on the north shore.)

INFORMATION

Participating in Whale Watching in Kerama

Check out the whale watching tour applications on the website of each Association. For details, scan the QR code to visit the official website.



The Zamami Village Whale Watching Association

The Association was established in 1991 and established self-regulatory guidelines. The following year, Zamami Village made the "Whale Home Declaration." Starting in 1997, a whale spotting system with whale spotters stationed at observatories was launched, and the efforts toward whale-friendly whale watching received the Excellence Award at the 11th Ecotourism Awards. It transitioned to an incorporated association in February 2016.

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The Tokashiki Village Whale Watching Association

Established in November 2023, this association endorses the efforts of Zamami Village Whale Watching Association and operates according to its self-regulatory guidelines. Its two whale watching boats run once per day, departing in the morning. In Tokashiki Village, known as the strait of whales, boat captains, guides, and whale spotters combine their knowledge and skills to boost customer satisfaction through the uniqueness and quality that small-scale operations provide.

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