

**Newsletter from Ambassador in charge of Okinawan Affairs
No.2: The beginning of the new year**

30 January 2026



International Friendship Shinnenkai 2026 Hosted by
American Chamber of Commerce in Okinawa & U.S. Consulate General, Naha
(13 January 2026, Ginowan City)

It has already been a month since the start of the new year. How have you been? From 5 January, the first working day of the year, until the end of this month, I attended a series of New Year's gatherings hosted by municipalities and economic organizations in Okinawa Prefecture, the U.S. Consulate General and economic groups as well as U.S. Forces, where I had the opportunity to greet many people.

In addition, in mid-January, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and Okinawa Prefecture jointly organized, for the first time, a tour of Okinawa Prefecture for the diplomatic corps stationed in Japan. I also continued to pay introductory visits to mayors and university presidents. I also visited Ishigaki Island as well, where I met not only with the mayors of Ishigaki City and Taketomi Town but also received

briefings from Japan Ground Self-Defense Force (JGSDF) Camp Ishigaki and the Ishigaki Coast Guard Office, Japan Coast Guard.

In this edition of the Newsletter from Ambassador in charge of Okinawan Affairs, I would like to share a summary of activities I have undertaken and my impressions as Ambassador in charge of Okinawan Affairs at the start of the new year.



Introduction of “Fly from Okinawa to Asia!” Dispatch Students
at the Okinawa Association of Corporate Executives New Year Gathering
(23 January 2026, Naha City)

● Participation in New Year’s Gatherings

On 5 January, the first working day of the year, I extended New Year’s greetings to key figures from various sectors here by attending a series of events, including the Okinawa Tourism New Year Gathering, the Naha City New Year’s Celebration and Business Card Exchange, and the Joint New Year’s Banquet of Economic Organizations. Throughout the rest of January, I continued to attend New Year’s gatherings hosted by Ginowan City, the Federation of Chambers of Commerce

and Industry, Urasoe City, Okinawa City, the Okinawa Medical Association, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in Okinawa and the U.S. Consulate General in Naha, the Okinawa Political and Economic Council, the Central Region's Municipal Association, the Okinawa Defense Association, the U.S. Army in Okinawa, the Okinawa Association of Corporate Executives, and the U.S. Navy in Okinawa, where I had the opportunity to greet organizers and attendees alike.

At each New Year's gathering, I learned a great deal not only from traditional ceremonies like kagami-biraki and friendly discussions but also from keynote speeches outlining the organizers' goals for the year, awards presented to distinguished contributors, and presentations showcasing the culture and initiatives of various organizations. For example, at the Central Region's Municipal Association's New Year's gathering, I was deeply moved by a performance of a modern adaptation of the traditional Okinawan dance-drama "[Kimutaka no Amawari](#)" by junior and senior high school students from Uruma City. Additionally, at the Okinawa Association of Corporate Executives' New Year's reception, ten students participating in the "[Fly from Okinawa to Asia!](#)", overseas training program were introduced, each explaining their experiences during the program, which I found to be an excellent example of collaboration between industry and academia.

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Kachāshī Dance at the Welcome Reception
Hosted by Okinawa Prefecture for Diplomats' Study Tour
(14 January 2026, Naha City)

● Diplomats' Study Tour in Okinawa Prefecture

From 14 to 15 January, a Diplomats' [Study Tour in Okinawa Prefecture](#) was held. This tour, co-hosted by MOFA and local governments, has been conducted annually since 2010, and this was the first time held in Okinawa Prefecture.

The theme of this tour was “Exploring Okinawa: From the Ryukyu Kingdom to the Present,” showcasing the diverse attractions of Okinawa Prefecture—including its history, culture, traditional crafts, cutting-edge academic research, and industries—to the diplomatic corps in Japan. The 18 participants, comprising ambassadors and their spouses from 13 countries, visited the Okinawa Institute of Science and Technology (OIST) and the University of the Ryukyus on the first day. On the second day, they toured Shuri Castle, the Shuri Dyeing and Weaving Center (Suikara), Zuisen Distillery, the Cornerstone of Peace, and the Umindo Sea Grape Farm, receiving explanations from each organization.

Immediately after the group arrived in Okinawa, I hosted a lunch meeting at a hotel in Onna Village, where I exchanged views with representatives from the participating countries to strengthen ties with Okinawa. That evening, I also attended the welcome reception hosted by Okinawa Prefecture, further deepening our exchanges. Through various projects by MOFA like this one, I intend to continue supporting the international activities of Okinawa's diverse organizations and businesses.



Introductory visit to Mayor Sakihara of Nishihara Town
(16 January 2026, Nishihara Town Hall)

● Introductory Visits to Mayors and University Presidents in Okinawa

In January, amidst a series of New Year's gatherings, I continued to make introductory visits to mayors and university presidents across Okinawa Prefecture.

With each mayor, we exchanged views primarily on issues the municipalities are facing, including those related to U.S. forces facilities and areas, as well as initiatives of international exchange for next generation. By the end of January, I have visited 21 out of 41 municipalities within the prefecture. MOFA's Okinawa

Liaison Office is supporting youth exchange projects in cooperation with the [U.S. Department of Defense Education Activity \(DoDEA\)](#). Taking into account the circumstances and needs of each municipality, I would like to explore what kinds of collaboration and cooperation can be developed.

Regarding universities, I paid introductory visits to the presidents of the University of the Ryukyus, Okinawa International University, Okinawa University, and Okinawa Christian University. We plan to further strengthen collaboration through lectures conducted by our office at these universities, as well as by utilizing the Ministry's ["Think of Okinawa's Future in the United States" \(TOFU\) program](#) and [internships at the Ministry's headquarters](#).



Okinawa Institute of Science and Technology (OIST)
(15 January 2026, Onna Village)

● **Okinawa Institute of Science and Technology (OIST)**

On 15 January, I visited the [Okinawa Institute of Science and Technology \(OIST\)](#) to pay an introductory call on President Karin Markides. During our meeting, President Markides shared insights into OIST's research achievements and its

contributions to Okinawa. Afterwards, Executive Director Kato Shigeharu provided a detailed briefing on the background of institute's foundation and gave us a tour of its main facilities.

Established by the Government of Japan in 2011, OIST is an interdisciplinary graduate university offering a five-year integrated doctoral program in science and engineering. It comprises approximately 90 research units and about 300 doctoral students. OIST aims to serve as a world-class center for scientific and technological research and to foster an intellectual cluster that drives technology transfer and industrial innovation in Okinawa.

OIST contributes broadly to Okinawa through next-generation education, innovation, environmental initiatives, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). MOFA's Okinawa Liaison Office intends to support OIST's international collaborations and contributions to Okinawa in any way possible.

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Introductory Visit to Mayor Nakayama of Ishigaki City
(19 January 2026, Ishigaki City Hall)

● Visit to Ishigaki Island

From 17 to 19 January, I visited Ishigaki Island for the first time since assuming my post. On 19 January, I paid introductory visits to Mayor Nakayama Yoshitaka of Ishigaki City and Mayor Maedomari Masato of Taketomi Town. During these meetings, I received briefings on the priority issues of Ishigaki City and Taketomi Town as well as the current measures they are taking as remote islands. We also exchanged views on international interaction, including sister and friendship city relationships, and human resource development.

On this occasion, I was also able to visit the JGSDF Camp Ishigaki and the Ishigaki Coast Guard Office. At the Camp Ishigaki, Commander Nakamura Yasuo explained the background to establish the camp in 2023, its activities such as disaster relief and training, interactions with the local community, and the Japan-U.S. cooperation. We exchanged views on future collaboration. At the Ishigaki Coast Guard Office, Director Tanaka Takehiko provided an overview of the organization and structure, maritime security efforts including patrols around the

Senkaku Islands, crackdowns on illegal fishing by foreign vessels, maritime rescue operations, disaster response, and management of navigational aids. We also discussed cooperation with MOFA.

In the future, I plan to visit other islands of Okinawa prefecture at an early stage—including Yonaguni and Miyako Islands—to learn about their respective situations.



Yaeyama Peace Memorial Museum
(17 January 2026, Ishigaki City)

● Learning about Okinawa's History and Culture

During my recent visit to Ishigaki Island, I [participated](#) in [the Ishigaki Island Marathon](#), which gave me the opportunity to engage with local residents and fellow participants. I also visited several cultural sites including the Ishigaki City Yaeyama Museum, the Yaeyama Peace Memorial Museum, Miyara Dunchi, and the Minsah Craft Centre to learn more about the history and culture of the Yaeyama region.

On weekends, I have been touring historical sites, museums, and art galleries throughout Okinawa Prefecture, including in Naha City and other areas. Last month, I visited Shurijo Castle, Shikinaen Garden, and the Prefectural Museum and Art Museum. This month, I went to the Katsuren Castle Ruins, Urasoe Castle Ruins, and a [special exhibition at the Kaisuri Magistrate's Office](#) in the Urasoe Art Museum. Through these visits, I have come to appreciate the unique historical backgrounds, cultures, and traditions of various parts of the prefecture. Moving forward, I plan to continue visiting different locations to deepen my understanding of Okinawa's history and culture and to apply this knowledge to my work. If there are any historical sites or museums you recommend, I would be grateful to hear your suggestions.

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