

A Journey with the Ama:

A Two Thousand Year Old Tale



Enrich yourself through learning

Travel and connect with others

Journey through space and time

Since the dawn of history, legends speak of female divers known as ama. They are still active in Toba today. The world of these women is a treasure trove of wondrous stories. Fairy tales whispered over bonfires speak of monsters seen in the deep sea, miracles dwelling within loose stones... For the traveler who has made it to Toba, the land of the ama, we will share with you the hidden stories of these women of the sea.

Chapter 1

A Woman's One and Only Prayer

The secrets of Ishigami-san's power



As you approach the Shinmei Shrine in the town of Osatsu, you can find the Ishigami Shrine, affectionately referred to as "Ishigami-san". The local ama pray here for safety and a bountiful catch.

At this shrine, it is said that each female visitor will only be granted one prayer. Thus, many women come here with a wish in their heart. Ishigami-san enshrines the deity known as Tamayori-hime who, since ancient times, is said to be able to grant women's wishes. Perhaps the prayers themselves of present day women make this shrine a powerful place as well.



Associated Areas

- Shinmei Shrine (Ishigami-san)
30 minute drive from Toba Station.
5 minute walk from Osatsu (Ishigami-san mae) Bus Stop

Chapter 2

The Hidden Buddha of Mount Aonomine in Shofukuji Temple

The goddess that rode a whale

A top Mt. Aonomine stands Shofukuji Temple where ama and fishermen come to pray. This temple houses an eleven-faced statue representing the Buddhist deity of mercy. According to legend, the deity appeared in the sea near the town of Osatsu riding a whale. Although seldom able to be seen by the public, the statue is said to be wearing a fisherman's waistcoat like in the old folktales. 30 minutes by car from the base of Mt. Aonomine, you can find a monument commemorating the origin of this legend at Kujirazaki, in the town of Osatsu.



Associated Areas

- Mt. Aonomine Shofukuji Temple
30 minute drive from Toba Station
1 hour walk from Kintetsu Matsuo Station via hiking trail
- Kujirazaki
30 minute drive from Toba Station
6 minute walk from Osatsu (Ishigami-san mae) Bus Stop

Chapter 3

The Memory of a Storm on a Stone

Harusame: a monument to tragedy and courage



On a stormy night in November of 1911, the destroyer "Harusame" became stranded on Sugesaki Reef at the entrance of Matoya Bay. The local villagers, men and women alike, jumped into the sea in the middle of the storm to help those in danger. A monument to their courage is now located at Sugesaki Park. Harusame Observatory offers visitors a lovely view of the sea and forest, not to mention a romantic spot to watch the sunset.

Associated Areas

- Sugesaki Park (Harusame Observatory)
35 minute drive from Toba Station
30 minute walk from Osatsu (Ishigami-san mae) Bus Stop



Chapter 4

Ama's Fear: Tomokazuki

Warding off the demon with "Doman" and "Seman"



"I received abalone from a strange ama in the sea. With a grin and a laugh it was taken from my hand. When I got to the surface, I looked around and found no one there". This is said to be the work of the evil spirit, Tomokazuki. But worry not! Two lucky markings will fend off this demon. The first is the "doman", a cross hatched pattern that throws the demon into confusion. The second is the "seman", a five-pointed star drawn with a single stroke that brings you safely to shore. Ama wear these symbols on their hoods and tools to keep themselves safe.

Chapter 5

Purveyors to the Ise Jingu Shrine for Two Thousand Years

Abalone offering from the ama of Kuzaki

Once upon a time, Princess Yamato, the daughter of Emperor Suinin, disembarked from a boat onto the shore of Kuzaki and was offered abalone from an ama by the name of Oben. The princess was so pleased with this that she ordered it to be ritually offered as a meal to the enshrined spirits of Ise. Henceforth, for the next 2 millennia, the people of Kuzaki have offered abalone to the Ise Jingu Shrine. A kitchen specializing in abalone for the Ise Jingu Shrine (Jingu Goryo Awabi Choseisho), located at the entrance of Yoroizaki Cape, prepares thinly sliced, dried "Noshi Abalone" for use in ceremonial offering. The aforementioned Oben is enshrined at nearby Amakazukime Shrine and is still worshiped locally.



Associated Areas

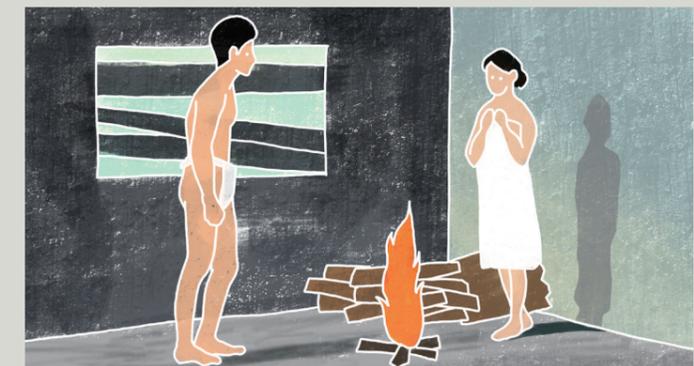
- "Jingu Goryo Awabi Choseisho" kitchen : 35 minute drive from Toba Station, 5 minute walk from Kuzaki Bus Stop
- Amakazukime Shrine
5 minute walk from Kuzaki Bus Stop

Chapter 6

A Journey to a Masterpiece's Inspiration

Kamishima, the setting of "The Sounds of Waves"

"The Sounds of Waves", known in Japanese as "Shiosai", is a love story featuring an ama heroine. It has had 5 film adaptations and was a massive hit in the Showa Era (1926-1989). The story is set on Kamishima, a small island that can be easily explored on foot. There you can see firsthand Niwano beach where the white-coated ama dived, or the famous climax scene at Kantekisho, an old lookout tower from WWII. And, of course, you can visit Yatsushiro Shrine which the novelist Yukio Mishima declared "one of the most beautiful places in the world". All of the stunning scenery on this island inspired the writing of this story.



Associated Areas

- Kamishima: 40 minute ferry ride from Toba Marine terminal
- Yatsushiro Shrine: 5 minute walk from Kamishima Port
- Kantekisho Lookout Tower Remains
30 minute walk from Kamishima Port via hiking trail

Let's Take a Tour to the Scenes of These Tales...

The waves eternally breaking onto the shore, the murmur of the trees in the forest, moss-covered stone Buddhas lingering alongside a path... As you visit the places related to the tales, you'll find yourself increasingly immersed in the journey.

Route 1

Walk. Eat. Talk.

A complete tour with the ama hut



When taking a break from their fishing activities, ama gather at their hut and sit around the bonfire to keep warm. There are places where you, too, can experience this atmosphere. While eating grilled fish and shellfish, you can enjoy conversation with real ama. You'll have the choice of going to Osatsu, the port with the largest number of ama in Japan, or Toshi, where you'll be greeted with the hospitality of the local islanders. Whose "Kamado" (hearth) will you be visiting today?

【The Ama Hut Experience】

- A_ Osatsu Kamado
5 minute walk from Osatsu (Ishigami-san mae) Bus Stop
- B_ Hachiman
30 minute shuttle bus ride from Toba Station
- C_ Shimanotabisha
20 minute ferry ride from Toba Marine Terminal to Toshi Port

【Guided Tours】

- D_ Kaito Yumin Club
5 minute walk from Toba Station
- E_ Osatsu Ama Culture Council
3 minute walk from Osatsu (Ishigami-san mae) Bus Stop
- ※ All experiences require advance reservations

Route 2

Learn about Real Ama at Museums

These are must-see locations if you're deeply interested in the real work and culture of ama

- F_ Mikimoto Pearl Island
Learn about the beginning of pearl farming by world-renowned Kokichi Mikimoto with the assistance of ama. You can also watch real demonstration of ama diving into the sea.
5 minute walk from Toba Station



G_ Toba Sea-Folk Museum
Exhibits detail the tools that ama use and the marine environment in which they work, and explain in-depth the techniques of their labour.
10 minute walk from Umi No Hakubutsukan Bus Stop

- H_ Osatsu Ama Culture Museum
Their exhibition features models of ama harvesting from the sea, photos and sculptures. The museum also serves as a tourist information center for the Osatsu area, where the highest population of ama in Toba can be found.
3 minute walk from Osatsu (Ishigami-san mae) Bus Stop

Route 3

"I pray for safety and a bountiful catch"

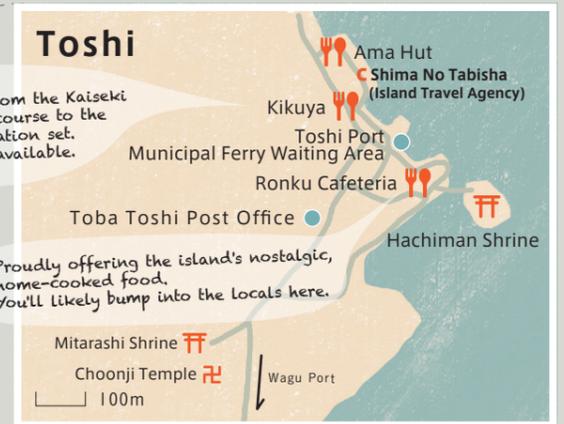
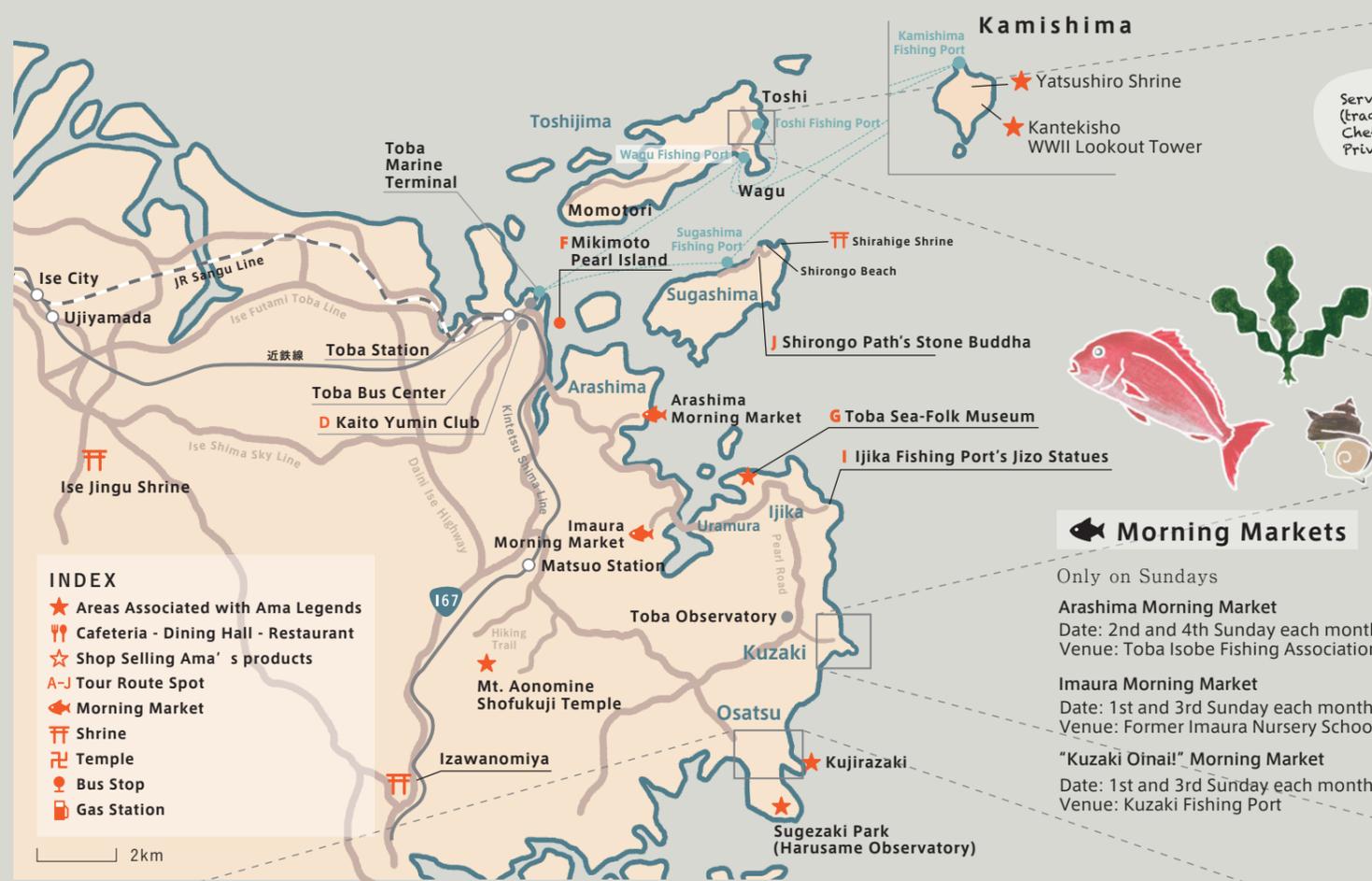
An ama's prayer to a "jizo-san" statue



Jizo-san are stone sculptures that can be found on roadsides or at the corners of harbors. People pray to jizo-san for various reasons, but ama customarily ask for a safe return from the sea, and for an abundant catch.

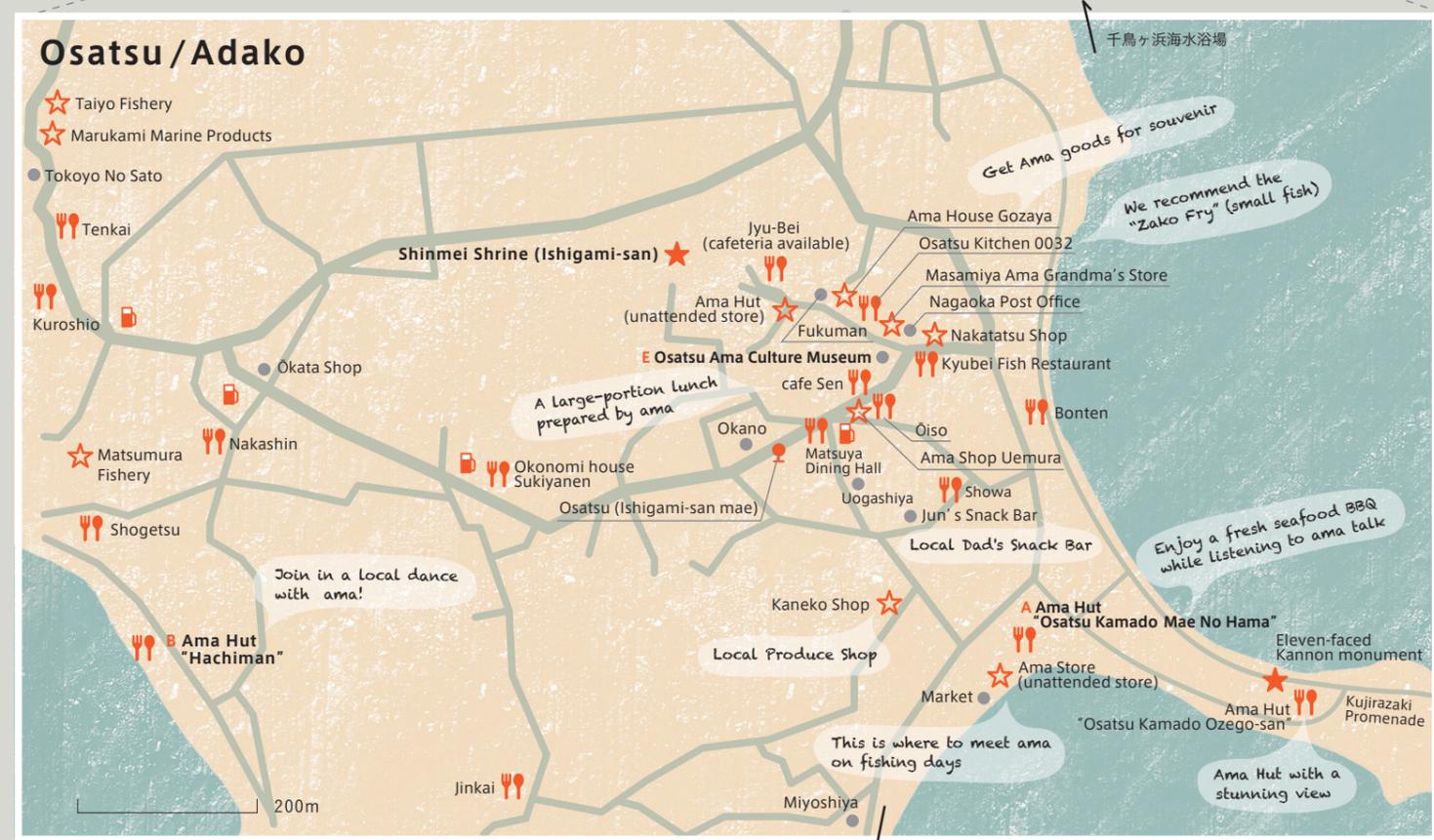
- I_ Ijika Fishing Port's Jizo-san Statues
30 minute drive from Toba Station
Located right beside Ijika Port Bus Stop

- J_ Shirongo Path's Stone Buddha
10 minute walk from Sugashima Port
※ It's located up the stairs before Shirongo Beach



Morning Markets

- Only on Sundays
- Arashima Morning Market
Date: 2nd and 4th Sunday each month from 8:00 AM
Venue: Toba Isobe Fishing Association, Arashima Branch
- Imaura Morning Market
Date: 1st and 3rd Sunday each month from 8:00 AM
Venue: Former Imaura Nursery School
- "Kuzaki Oinai" Morning Market
Date: 1st and 3rd Sunday each month from 8:00 AM
Venue: Kuzaki Fishing Port



Transportation

To access the areas associated with ama in Toba City, please use a rental car, taxi or public transportation. The municipal "Kamome Bus" departs to all mainland destinations from the Toba Bus Center located across from Toba Station. To access remote islands, you can make a round-trip from Sadahama Port (Toba Marine Terminal), a 5 minute walk from Toba Station. Multiple use tickets are available for the Kamome Bus (one day ticket ¥1000; two day ticket ¥1500) and for the municipal ferry (four day ticket: ¥1460). For more details, please enquire at the respective ticket counters.



Municipal Ferry

- From Toba Marine Terminal
- To Wagu Port approx. 20 min.
- To Toshi Port approx. 30 min.
- To Sugashima Port approx. 15 min.
- To Kamishima Port approx. 40 min.

Municipal Kamome Bus

- From Toba Bus Center
- To Ijika approx. 40 min.
- To Kuzaki approx. 45 min.
- To Osatsu approx. 40 min.



Access Information

Contact
Toba Municipal Ferry Department ☎0599-25-4766
Mie Kotsu Co., Ltd. Ise Office ☎0596-25-7131

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