Kasari Area, Amami City Tale of Maehida Community

Kasari area is surrounded by the Pacific Ocean and the East China Sea, and has small mountains with altitudes of 200m or less running north and south. On the east side, here lies a flatland where sugarcane and semi-tropical fruit fields are cultivated, and livestock is raised. Kasari Bay, one of " 500 Important Wetlands in Japan," designated by the Ministry of the Environment, covers the west side. Many communities in Kasari area inherit their traditional performing arts, passing their unique culture from generation to generation through their daily lives.

※ The scale below is presented as an approximate guideline.

0Km 1Km 2Km 3Km 4Km 5Km

Amami City HP

Administration: Amami City

Legend

- Toilet
- Shower
- Parking area
- Major Sightseeing Spots and Facilities
- Rest area
- Barrier-free toilet
- Kasari Branch, Amami City

Maehida (*Mehijan* in local dialect)

Maehida Community faces Kasari Bay. With a beautiful white sand beach spreading out wide nearby, it is a perfect natural wharf inside the calm bay. There is also a dry beach connecting to the neighboring Tekebu Community. Their papaya pickle made of community-grown papayas and the row of banyan trees planted as windbreakers are the designated unique community brands of Amami.

1 Row of banyan trees

The row of banyan trees, a designated unique community brand of Amami and often referred to as the best in Amami, was planted more than 100 years ago to protect the farmland and cattle in the community. Similar sceneries used to be commonly seen along the coastline of Amami Oshima island, but the number has drastically decreased in recent years, entitling this row of banyan trees "the best in Amami."

2 Ocean Fence

Shiogaki, or the ocean fence, is called *Kaki* among the locals. *Kaki* is a bow-shaped stone fence built on a wide and shallow bay with large tidal differences. The fence is not visible at high tide. At low tide, therefore, fish that came into the fence during high tide are captured in the fence. It also functions as a fish shelter for small fish, crabs, and octopuses. There are a few of these *Kaki* recognized in Tekebu Bay.

3 Yamato *Gusuku*

With a narrow ridge stretching out from the western mountain and the eastern ocean, Yamato *Gusuku* (fortress) is situated on a plateau at a height of 25 - 35m. It is said there used to be a graveyard, but it has not been verified yet. There sits a thick mound surrounded by a 1m wide groove, called *Hachimaki yama* (headband mountain).

4 Old house

The Tsukishima residence, featuring Amami's traditional residential architectural structure, has a stone washbasin brought from far Suru Beach. The banyan trees that were planted as windbreakers have grown to be large trees, forming a magnificent residential forest. It is representative of an old, traditional residential house from Amami's past.

5 Yamatohana

Yamatohina is the border between Maehida and Tekebu communities. Older names of places still remain in Yamatohina: Shiri, Hija, Urubaru, Ikeda, Seho, Asan, Hanazuru, and Hinno. Yamatohina forms a large curve at the tip sticking out to the ocean, and people fear this spot saying a *Kenmun*, a mythical monster in Amami, appears.

6 Shallow offshore beach

Maehida Community's coastline is shallow offshore, and has interesting stories about whales. In addition to a "whale stone," there used to be a site here where whole whales were cut up until the 1950's. The beach has a sacred rock at which *Yuta* priestesses made prayers, and people used to dance their traditional August Dance on the white sand beach. The coastline is associated with worship for the ocean.

7 Fukugi Trees

People in the Amami islands, frequently attacked by typhoons, have long used Fukugi and Banyan trees for windbreakers. Fukugi (*Garcinia subelliptica*) is called *Kwajiki* (fire tree) in the local dialect for its thick and wide leaves that help prevent the spread of fire. In fact, this row of Fukugi trees, pictured here, once prevented a real fire from spreading.

8 Papaya Pickle

Almost all residences in communities in Amami Oshima island had papaya trees in the old days. Their *atari* (kitchen garden) had various island vegetables, among which papaya was the representative plant. People in Maehida are actively engaged in papaya pickle making, and some are even successful enough to make it on a commercial basis. Elder residents in the community get together to make papaya pickles in the traditional way, replicating the taste of the good old days.