



JAPAN

OGIMI
THE VILLAGE OF
LONGEVITY

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Haru Miyagi, 100 years old, in her garden in Ogimi, on the island of Okinawa. Haru lives alone, she has a son who works in Tokyo, and she is a widow: her husband died in the Second World War. In Japan Ogimi is called the "village of longevity" due to the high percentage of centenarians.

- ▶ In Japan Ogimi is called the “village of longevity”
- ▶ With just a little more than 3000 inhabitants, there are 14 centenarians and 158 people over the age of 90.
- ▶ Ogimi has become famous, and many restaurants even sell “longevity meals”
- ▶ In 1970 there were no hospitals on the island and yet illnesses were extremely rare
- ▶ The secret? Social life, physical activity, and a low-calorie diet



A bowl of algae, considered "longevity food". A low-calorie diet is one of the "secrets" of the population of Ogimi, known as the "village of longevity" due to the high percentage of centenarians.



Ogimi, a man getting prepared for the Ungami Festival.



Miyagi Misako, 88 years old, in her home. In Japan Ogimi is called the "village of longevity".



Cape Hedo, north of Ogimi.

A trip to Ogimi, among the centenarians of Okinawa

Ogimi is a village arising from the northwest coast of the island of Okinawa. A village of low houses, small streets, and a lot of green. And one special characteristic: of its 3103 total inhabitants, 14 are over one hundred years old (but if we also count those over 90 the number rises to 158 people). For this reason, on the island which has always been known for its centenarians (other than karate and the famous battle of 1945), Ogimi is known as the “little village of longevity”.

There is the supermarket where they sell algae and vegetables associated with longevity, restaurants offer “longevity meals”, and it is not uncommon, especially during the end-of-summer festivals – like Ungami, a celebration of the god of the sea – to encounter spry older folks walking briskly down the street in traditional clothing. “The island of Okinawa” Makoto Suzuki, director of the Okinawa Research Center for Longevity Science, explains, “has the highest percentage of centenarians in the world, and most of them are women. Ogimi is at the heart, and it has one characteristic: the elderly are healthy almost until the last days of their lives”.

When professor Suzuki arrived on the island from Tokyo, in 1970, there were no official doctors or hospitals; moreover, the inhabitants of Okinawa had no idea what diabetes or cardiovascular disturbances even were, and people were four times less likely to develop cancer or a degenerative illness than the average. The secret? It does not seem to have anything to do with genes, but an ideal mix of daily physical activity, human relations, and a low-calorie diet (for the most part a vegetarian and fish-based one, with short cooking times and little salt). That and a society which does not consider the elderly a burden but an *ayakaru*, a “good luck charm”.



Hatsu Miyagi, 101 years old, in her house in Ogimi, on the island of Okinawa. Hatsu has been a widow for 49 years; she has four children and five grandchildren. In Japan Ogimi is called the "village of longevity" due to the high percentage of centenarians.



Yambaru, Okinawa, an elderly fisherman along the way to Hiji falls, not far from Ogimi.



Nanjo, a typical house, reconstructed for Okinawa World theme park.



A detail of Haru Miyagi, 100 years old. Haru lives alone in Ogimi, she has a son who works in Tokyo, and she is a widow: her husband died in the Second World War. In Japan Ogimi is called the "village of longevity" due to the high percentage of centenarians.



Bise, Okinawa. A house in a village not far from Ogimi.



Naha (Okinawa), Yamanaka Etzko, 82 years old, and Yoko Suzuki, 80, during a festival dedicated to longevity, in Yukaruhi Hall.



Nago (Okinawa), tourists taking selfies along the road to Ogimi.



Ogimi, flowers on a restaurant table.



Cape Hedo, a house in a village not far from Ogimi.



Women in the gulf of Shioya during celebrations for the god of the sea, on the occasion of the Ungami Festival.



Naha (Okinawa), an elderly guard in Usasuka Hall, where the royal throne is located, in Shuri Castle, the residence of the kings and the religious centre of the Ryūkyū Kingdom.



Nanjo (Okinawa), a shop for traditional clothes.



The hair of Haru Miyagi, 100 years old. Haru lives alone in Ogimi, she has a son who works in Tokyo, and she is a widow: her husband died in the Second World War. In Japan Ogimi is called the "village of longevity" due to the high percentage of centenarians.



Ogimi, steps along a path outside of the village.



Women in the gulf of Shioya getting ready for celebrations of the god of the sea on the occasion of the Ungami Festival.



An old photograph, taken in the gulf of Shioya, shows women during celebrations for the god of the sea on the occasion of the Ungami Festival.



A restaurant along the coast, not far from Ogimi.



Men in the gulf of Shioya during celebrations for the god of the sea, on the occasion of the Ungami Festival.



Ogimi, Miyagi Misako, 88 years old, in her garden. In Japan Ogimi is called the “village of longevity”.



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PARALLELOZERO, VIA DONATELLO 19/A MILAN - INFO@PARALLELOZERO.COM - WWW.PARALLELOZERO.COM - +39 02 89281630