**(Introduction)**

Hello, my name is Sheridyn Usagawa and I'm 18 years old. I came to Okinawa through a home stay program. This program allows Okinawan students to visit Hawaii for two weeks in February, then the Hawaii students come to Okinawa. I hosted Asuka Zaha and Mirai Miyagi, they were able to come to Hawaii to visit my school and explore the island. Now I have come to Okinawa to learn about the culture and everyday life.

**(Overview of Hawaiian Islands)**

I live on the island of Oahu, which is one of the eight islands that make up the Hawaiian Island chain. The first and the biggest island is Hawaii but it's more commonly known as The Big Island, next is Maui, Kaho'olawe, Lana'i, Moloka'i, Oahu, Kaua'i, and Ni'ihau.

The Big Island is the largest of all the islands and currently has three active volcanoes, this includes: Mauna Loa, Mauna Kea, and Kilauea. The most active of the three is Kilauea, which has been continuously erupting since 1983. Each volcano is located in a National Park so tourists are free to visit.



The island of Maui is nicknamed The Valley Isle. It is home to Haleakala, Hana, and Iao Valley. Haleakala is the largest dormant volcano crater in the world. Hana, on the other hand is one of the last underdeveloped spots in Hawaii. It is truly a tropical paradise with its unique native plants, beautiful beaches, and scenic waterfalls.

The next island is Kaho'olawe it is the smallest island and has a population of zero. The U.S. Navy and Air Force once used this island as a target and thus there are unexploded shells. So, unless you have permission, no one is allowed to go ashore.



Lana'i is nicknamed the Pineapple Isle. Almost the entire island was part of the Dole Company Pineapple Plantation but it is now transitioning into tourism. Shipwreck beach is one sight to see there. Although the waters are not meant for swimming, it is known for the remains of the World War II Liberty Bell ship, as well as searching the sand for shells and other treasures that were washed ashore. One fun fact about Lana'i is that it only has one stoplight, on the entire island. Can you believe that?

Moloka'i was nicknamed The Friendly Isle. This island has the world's highest sea cliffs along the northern coast. Below those high cliffs is Kalaupapa. Back in 1866, King Kamehameha V banished all those afflicted with Hansen's Disease (leprosy) to Kalaupapa as a way to prevent an outbreak. Although the patients were cured some survivors still reside there.



The next island is Oahu. It was given the nickname of The Gathering Place and has the biggest population number out of all the islands. The main points are Waikiki Beach, Nuuanu Pali,



Pearl Harbor, and Diamond Head. If you ever come to Oahu I recommend going hiking as it is a great way to see all the scenery. Also, if you want to eat a burger that's bigger than your face, go to Seven Brothers in Laie. There you can get your burger and check out Laie Point, there's a sea arch just across the water and if you feel adventurous and brave, there's a place to jump off into the water.

The next island is Kauai, also known as the Gardening Isle as it has magnificent scenery and lush vegetation. Some key places to visit are Waimea Canyon and Kalalau Valley. The waterfalls are beautiful but the only way to get there is hiking through nature. Though it can be very fun because along the way you can swim in the lakes and camp out over night to see the stars.



Lastly is Niihau, nicknamed the Forbidden Isle, as it is privately owned. The access is limited and the only way to visit is through helicopters, which land in uninhabited sites. Legend says it was the original home of Pele, the goddess of fire.

Soon to be joining the Hawaiian Islands is the island of Loihi. It is located just off the southern coast of the Big Island and is currently underwater.

(School in Hawaii)

There are many aspects of school in Hawaii that differ from those in Okinawa. One thing is that we don't wear uniforms except for those who attend private schools. Another thing that contrasts is the grade levels in High School. In Okinawa, high schools include three levels (1-3), however, in Hawaii we have four levels (9-12). The 9th grade students in Hawaii are equivalent to 3rd grade junior high students. Both schools do have big activities through the year, while in Hawaii we don't have a school festival or a sports festival we do have others. The biggest events my school held includes Homecoming Week, Halloween, and School Dances.

Homecoming Week usually comes in the month of September and through this whole week we conduct competitive activities and dress up days to promote school pride. This past year we had competitions such as tug of war (students against students, and students against staff) and shield and flag, which is a routine done to music that incorporates shields and flags. We also have dress up days where students will dress up according to the theme of the day. On Monday we had Pajama Day, Tuesday was Twin Day, Wednesday was Wacky Hair Day, Thursday was Sports Day, and Friday was Aloha Friday. All of these events lead up to the last home game for our football team and the whole school comes to cheer them on.

Pajama Day



Twin Day



Aloha Friday

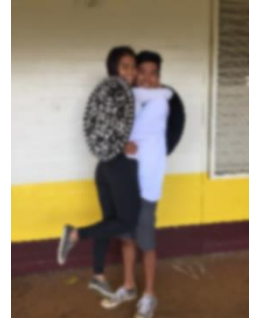


Homecoming Game

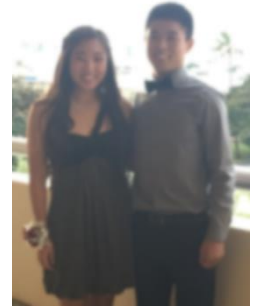




Halloween is a day where we dress up in a costume and either go trick or treating, or pass out candy. Although it is a celebrated holiday we still go to school but there's a twist to it. Every student can dress up in a costume and pretend to be someone or something else for the day. During lunch, we hold a costume contest and the winner gets a prize.



Another exciting event are school dances. During the winter, we hold a Winterball. This is like a Christmas party for the school. Everyone dresses up and we play games, eat dinner, and dance. Winterball is a dance opened to all grade levels (9th-12th) so anyone can come, students often bring their friends from other schools as well. In the second semester of school we hold dances for the different grade levels.



In February, we hold a Soph/Frosh, this is a casual dance that Freshmen and Sophomores (9th and 10th grade) can attend.

In March, Junior Prom is held and only Juniors (11th grade) can attend. Junior prom is a semi-casual dance as students can wear short or long dresses.

Lastly in April, Senior Prom is held, this is for the Seniors (12th grade) of the school and is like a good bye/congratulatory dance as there is only one more month until they graduate. This is a formal dance were girls are required to wear long dresses and boys must wear a tuxedo.

Since coming to Okinawa I have met and made a lot of friends and learned more about the culture. This is an exciting experience that I don't want to end. I hope you learned a little bit about Hawaii and maybe you'll come to visit sometime soon! Thank you for having me!

