

INUJIMA-Art Project

by Noriko Ehara

The once thriving, but now sleepy island of Inujima is set for a revolution.

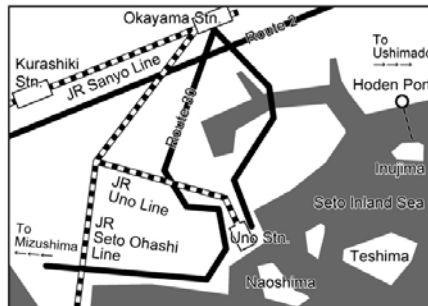
The island of Inujima falls under the jurisdiction of Okayama City and is less than 10 minutes by boat from the city's only beach at Hoden in the city's southeast. The island itself is surrounded by the Seto Inland Sea National Park. At the height of its prosperity, there were 3000 people living on the island and the local economy was supported by the Inujima



Refinery and the mining industry. Unfortunately the copper refinery closed after just ten years, the quarry slowly went into decline, and today the island has just 64 inhabitants.

Inujima itself is only 3.6km around with a total area of only 0.54 km² but its high-quality granite was renowned throughout Japan. The stone was used in the walls of Okayama Castle, Osaka Castle and even Edo Castle. Stone was still being quarried in the Meiji Era to build the foundations for the Port of Osaka. "The island of Inujima" is actually only the largest and the only inhabited one of six islands in the Inujima chain. One of the small islands has a large boulder which is shaped like a dog, and this was named Inu-no-shima (island of the dog) and this is the origin of the name of the archipelago and the main island.

Now, Benesse Corporation (represented by Director, Chairman and CEO Soichiro Fukutake) has started a one-billion yen project to bring some vitality back to Inujima. The project follows the success of the art project in Naoshima, which has come to be known as an "Island of Art". Technically Naoshima is part of Kagawa prefecture but it is 13km away from Takamatsu and very close to Uno Port in the south of Okayama prefecture.



The three pillars of the Benesse funded Inujima Art Project are architecture, the environment and modern art. The first stage of the project was completed on April 27th, when the old copper refinery (a national "Heritage of Industrial Modernization" site, now privately owned by the Benesse group) was opened to the public as a new museum of art following extensive refurbishments and additions. With the

supervision of acclaimed architect Hiroshi Sanbuichi the new museum has retained its main structures, brick exterior, chimneys and historic charm, but also combines the best of environmentally friendly modern architecture, incorporating geothermal and solar power, bio-geo filters, and a special temperature control system that uses the chimney to keep the temperature constant. There is even a café from which you can see the Seto Inland Sea. In short, the old copper refinery has been given a new lease of life as the symbolic center of the island and its artistic revolution. The only drawback would be that you need to make a reservation before visiting.

Contact information:

Inujima Art Project, Refinery
327-5 Inujima, Okayama City
Ph. 086-947-1112

Open 10:00~17:00 (Closed from Monday to Thursday)

Fee 1000 yen (Free for children under 15 years old)

To book, see <http://www.inujima-ap.jp/e/contactus/> (in English!) and send an email, or FAX your request to 086-947-1115

Park your car at Hoden Port (¥500, all day, 6:00~19:30) and catch the passenger-only ferry, ¥300 each way. (It's only an 8 minute trip.)