

The Island Where People Live the Longest

On the Japanese island of Okinawa, many people live past 100. What is their secret?

Places & Culture · A1 Level · ~10 min read

How long do you want to live? Seventy years? Eighty? What about one hundred? In most countries, living to 100 is very rare. But there is a place where many people live to 100 — and some live even longer. This place is **Okinawa**, a group of beautiful islands in the south of Japan. Scientists call Okinawa a "**Blue Zone**." A Blue Zone is a place where people live much longer than **normal**. What is the secret of Okinawa? Let's find out.

Where Is Okinawa?

Okinawa is far from Tokyo. It is in the south of Japan, between Japan and Taiwan. There are about 160 **islands**. The weather is warm. The sea is blue and clear. There are beautiful beaches. About 1.4 million people live in Okinawa. It is a quiet, **peaceful** place. Life is slow here. People are not in a hurry.

The Oldest People in the World

Okinawa has more people over 100 years old than almost anywhere in the world. Scientists are very interested in this. They come to Okinawa to **study** the old people. They want to know: why do these people live so long?

The answers are not magic. They are simple. The people of Okinawa live long because of how they eat, how they move, how they think, and how they live together. Let's look at each one.

How They Eat

The people of Okinawa eat very **healthy** food. They eat a lot of **vegetables**. They eat tofu, sweet potatoes, rice, and fish. They do not eat a lot of meat. They do not eat a lot of sugar. They do not eat a lot of fast food.

But there is one very important rule. In Okinawa, people say "**hara hachi bu**." This means: "Eat until you are 80% full." They stop eating before their **stomach** is completely full. This is very different from many Western countries, where people eat until they cannot eat any more. Scientists say "hara hachi bu" is one of the biggest reasons the people of Okinawa are so healthy.

How They Move

Old people in Okinawa do not sit at home all day. They are **active**. They walk a lot. Many of them work in their **gardens**. They grow vegetables and flowers. Gardening is good **exercise**. You bend down. You stand up. You carry things. You walk. It is not running or going to a gym. It is slow and gentle. But they do it every day. That is the important thing.

Some old people in Okinawa also do tai chi. Tai chi is a slow, gentle exercise from China. You move your arms and legs very slowly. It helps you stay strong. It helps your **balance**. It is very popular with old people in Okinawa.

How They Think

In Okinawa, there is a word: "**ikigai**." It means "a reason to get up in the morning." Every person needs an ikigai. It can be anything. Maybe your ikigai is your garden. Maybe it is your grandchildren. Maybe it is cooking. Maybe it is helping other people. The important thing is: you have a **purpose**.

Scientists say purpose is very important for a long life. People with an ikigai are happier. They have less **stress**. They sleep better. They smile more. In Okinawa, even people who are 95 or 100 years old have an ikigai. They still have a reason to get up every morning.

How They Live Together

In Okinawa, people live in **communities**. They are not alone. Old people are not lonely. They have friends. They have neighbours. They have family. There is a tradition called "moai." A moai is a small group of friends who meet **regularly** — every week or every month. They talk. They drink tea. They laugh. They help each other. If someone has a problem, the moai helps.

This is very important. Scientists know that **lonely** people often get sick. People with friends and family are healthier. In Okinawa, nobody is really alone. The community takes care of everyone.

Can We Live Like Okinawa?

You do not need to move to Okinawa to live a long life. But you can learn from the people there. Eat more vegetables. Eat less sugar. Stop eating before you are completely full. Walk every day. Find a hobby. Spend time with friends and family. Find your ikigai — your reason to get up in the morning.

The secrets of Okinawa are not complicated. They are very simple. Eat well. Move. Have a purpose. Be with people you love. Maybe that is the best recipe for a long and happy life.

Vocabulary

Word	Definition
Okinawa	a group of islands in the south of Japan
Blue Zone	a place where people live much longer than normal
normal	usual, like most other people
islands	pieces of land with water all around them
peaceful	calm and quiet, without problems or fighting
study	to look at something carefully to learn about it
healthy	good for your body
vegetables	plants that you eat, like carrots, tomatoes, and broccoli
hara hachi bu	eat until you are 80% full
stomach	the part inside your body where food goes
active	doing things, moving your body, not sitting still
gardens	a piece of land near a house where you grow flowers or vegetables
exercise	moving your body to stay strong and healthy
balance	the ability to stand and walk without falling
ikigai	a reason to wake up in the morning
purpose	a reason to do something, a goal in life
stress	the feeling of worry and pressure when you have problems
communities	groups of people who live near each other and help each other
regularly	again and again, at the same time, for example every week
lonely	feeling sad because you are alone and have no friends near you

Comprehension Quiz

1. What is a Blue Zone?

- A) A place with a blue sea
- B) A place where people live much longer than normal
- C) A place in the north of Japan
- D) A place with only old people

2. What does "hara hachi bu" mean?

- A) Eat a lot of fish
- B) Eat only vegetables
- C) Eat until you are 80% full
- D) Eat three times a day

3. What kind of exercise do old people in Okinawa do?

- A) They run every morning
- B) They go to the gym
- C) They play football
- D) They walk and work in their gardens

4. What does "ikigai" mean?

- A) A type of food
- B) A reason to get up in the morning
- C) A group of friends
- D) A kind of exercise

5. What is a "moai"?

- A) A type of Japanese tea
- B) A traditional dance
- C) A small group of friends who meet regularly
- D) A garden where old people work

Answer Key

1. B · 2. C · 3. D · 4. B · 5. C