



## MARIANAS VISITORS AUTHORITY News Release

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*Tourism is Everybody's Business!*

CHRISTOPHER A. CONCEPCION  
MVA MANAGING DIRECTOR

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For further information, contact:

Christopher A. Concepcion, Managing Director

Marianas Visitors Authority

Telephone: (670) 664-3200/3201 Facsimile: (670) 664-3237

[mva@mymarianas.com](mailto:mva@mymarianas.com)

[www.mymarianas.com](http://www.mymarianas.com)

### THE STORY OF ROTA COFFEE MARATHON

**Saipan, Northern Mariana Islands (NMI)** – This is the story of Rota Coffee Marathon, a race that took seed decades ago and that will bear fruit on Apr. 14, 2018, in the lush, unspoiled natural terrain of Rota, what many consider the most beautiful island of The Marianas.

It was 25 years ago that Kiyokazu Onishi, a native of Japan, was making his first visit to the island of Rota on tropical vacation only 3 short hours by plane from Tokyo. Given the hospitality that residents of Rota are known for even today, its no surprise that he ended up in the farm kitchen of a local couple, Jerry and Vicky Calvo. Vicky served Onishi a hot cup of “house coffee,” sharing how much she loved coffee made from the trees growing wild on their wooded property.

Drawn by the friendliness of the people and the stunning beauty of the islands, Onishi ended up falling in love with The Marianas, going as far as partnering with the local government to develop sporting events unique to the islands that would attract more visitors and allow him to return to the islands year after year organizing tours through his Kiyokazu Fitness Club (KFC). Over the next two decades, the Rota Blue triathlon, Tinian Turquoise Blue triathlon, and IRONMAN Saipan 70.5 were all launched in The Marianas under the tender care of Kiyokazu.

Fast forward to 2017. By now, the coffee trees planted during the Japanese administration of the islands 70 years earlier had been largely forgotten and lost to history, except by those who remembered their story and knew how good locally organic, tropical sun-dried, freshly brewed coffee could taste.

Kiyokazu is one of those people.

“It came upon me in a flash, the idea to revive the old Japanese coffee farm in the Rota jungle,” said Kiyokazu. “I approached Mayor Efraim Atalig and shared with him that wild coffee could become a resource for the economy and tourism in the near future, and he agreed with my idea at once! So now we’ve created the Rota Coffee Marathon to let this hidden treasure be known in Japan, Saipan and the other countries.”

The 1st Rota Coffee Marathon will be held on April 14, 2018, and is jointly organized by Kiyokazu Fitness Club Japan, the Rota Mayor’s Office, the 16<sup>th</sup> Rota Municipal Council, and the Marianas Visitors Authority. The race will feature three distances: 42.195K (7 hour time limit), 21K (no time limit), and 10K (no time limit).

But Kiyokazu is not satisfied with just a race, noting the prestigious place U.S.-grown coffee can hold.

“Do you know it is the custom that Kona coffee has been served at the inauguration of American presidents, because Kona grows coffee berries in the United States?” he asks. “When the Rota coffee farm is revived, we can negotiate with the U.S. government to serve Rota coffee. This would be a great promotion for The Mariana Islands and for tourism.”

To experience the beauty and history that is sparking the revival of coffee production in Rota, download a Rota Coffee Marathon application under the Marianas Visitors Authority’s Events Calendar at [www.mymarianas.com](http://www.mymarianas.com). Registration is \$60 for the 42.195K, \$50 for 21K, and \$40 for 10K. The entry fee includes a t-shirt and awards party. Prizes will be awarded for the top three Men and Women finishers and for age categories. The pre-race briefing for all applications will be on Friday, April 13, 2018, at 6:30 p.m. at Rota Resort & Country Club. The awards party will be held at Rota Round House at 5:30 p.m. on race day.

For more information or an application, visit the Marianas Events Calendar at [www.mymarianas.com](http://www.mymarianas.com) or contact MVA Community Projects Specialist Ed Diaz at 1.670.664.3200 or [ediaz@mymarianas.com](mailto:ediaz@mymarianas.com).



In partnership with KFC Triathlon Club Japan, the Marianas Visitors Authority will hold the 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Rota Coffee Marathon on April 14, 2018, celebrating wild coffee plantations among the island's lush vegetation.





Wild coffee berries ripen ahead of the 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Rota Coffee Marathon to be held on April 14, 2018.

The Marianas are a chain of idyllic islands including Saipan, Tinian, and Rota in the Western Pacific, offering a friendly, fun and exciting vacation in paradise. They are an excellent destination for families, adventure and sports-minded travelers, as well as business people looking for a tropical haven. Adventurous travelers looking for new travel discoveries will find them in The Marianas, just three hours travel from most cities in Japan, and four to five from other parts of Asia and Australia. The Marianas are served daily from Tokyo-Narita in Japan by Delta Air Lines with seasonal flights by Asiana Airlines. From Korea, Asiana Airlines, Jeju Air, Jin Air, and T'Way provide direct flights from Seoul-Incheon, and Asiana also provides service from Busan. From China, direct flight service from Shanghai, Beijing, Guangzhou, and Hong Kong to Saipan are available. United Airlines has daily flight connections from six cities in Japan to Saipan with one stop. United States mainland connections can be made to Saipan via Tokyo-Narita, Seoul-Incheon or Guam. Visitors from Russia and Taiwan usually arrive via Seoul, Tokyo or Manila. Interisland travel to Rota and Tinian is provided by United Express (Cape Air) and Star Marianas Air. For more information on The Marianas, visit [www.mymarianas.com](http://www.mymarianas.com).

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