

Long Live the Fishing Industry of Miyato Island!

Earthquake and Tsunami Reconstruction Efforts in Miyato Island

On March 11, 2011, the Great Tohoku Earthquake and Tsunami laid waste to the coastal regions of Northeast Japan. According to eyewitnesses, the tsunami poured in as if a black cloud of smoke, reaching up to 8 meters in height.

The Condition of Miyato Island after the Disaster



The view of the coastline from Isuzu Shrine, prior to the disaster



Miyato Island on the day of the disaster



Cars carried over the guardrail in Tsukihama



Debris from the earthquake and tsunami



A house dislocated by the tsunami, blocking the road



Matsugashima Bridge, the only bridge onto Miyato Island, severed by the tsunami, leaving the island isolated

The only bridge onto the island was severed by the tsunami, leaving the island isolated.

Directly after the earthquake, residents of Tsukihama evacuated to the area around the Kami no Ie lodge; however, after the tsunami warning was issued, residents were re-evacuated to Miyato Elementary School in two trips by a minibus.

Residents still remaining in Tsukihama after the tsunami warning attempted to relocate to Miyato Elementary School, but by that time the tsunami had already begun to work its way up the shore, leaving the remaining residents with no choice but to take cover in the Kami no Ie lodge.

Luckily, all of the residents of Tsukihama managed to evacuate in time and were saved from the tsunami.

The tsunami severed the only bridge onto Miyato Island, Matsugashima Bridge, leaving the island in isolation. Miyato Island was left without electricity, water, and phone service, leaving residents to supply their own needs. The Kami no Ie lodge quickly turned into a shelter for local survivors. Survivors boiled water behind the lodge, prepared meals in the storehouse in front of the lodge, and ate and lived together inside the lodge.



Survivors boiling water for laundry behind Kami no Ie



The storehouse in front of Kami no Ie became a temporary kitchen

Survivors quickly began to live and work together as a community.

The main businesses of Oku Matsushima are the fishing industry and tourism. Survivors depended on a number of power generators, water pumps, gasoline canisters, refrigerators, water tanks, and drum cans which were spared from the tsunami to support their communal lifestyle. Survivors also searched through the debris for any types of resources that could help them in their communal lifestyle.

1. Drinking water was carried from the 200 ton water tank used for seaweed production of the Miyato West Division Office of the Miyagi Prefectural Fishing Association and stored in water tanks throughout the island.
2. Water for laundry was drawn from underground streams using water pumps running on gasoline gathered from surviving houses.
3. Earthquake and tsunami debris was used for fuel to light fires.
4. For bathrooms, we dug holes in the nearby rice field and built a temporary bathroom unit.
5. We carefully took food from our refrigerators and freezers as each item thawed out.
6. We used a duty roster system for each of these daily activities.
7. Eventually we began to receive aid from Japan Self Defense Force helicopters, and our lifestyles switched from being self supported to government supported.
8. In April, with the help of the Self Defense Forces, Matsugashima Bridge was finally repaired and vehicles were able to move on and off of the island.
9. After the bridge was reopened in April, we were greeted by a large number of volunteers, whose support helped us to finally get back to our everyday lives.



Temporary bathing house constructed by volunteers, allowing us bath everyday



Daily life at the refuge shelter

In June, efforts were started to remove the earthquake and tsunami debris.



A look at the Tsukihama coast line after the removal of the debris



Construction of temporary housing units (residents moved in on July 30)



The local community is brought together through the disaster



A "raft" used for harvesting seaweed is restored

We received a large amount of support from volunteers, and this helped us to overcome the trauma of the disaster. Through this support, we were quickly encouraged to start working towards rehabilitation and reconstruction. We began to work on a number of rehabilitation efforts for the local industries.



Preparation of seeds (in threads) for seaweed



The reconstruction of the torii (gate) of Isuzu shrine



A large canopy tent for activities made available through the support of volunteers (1800x1100cm)

1. In March, 2012, the government provided us with a large canopy tent and BBQ equipment for communal and tourist activities.
2. The canopy tent is located on the beach of the Tsukihama fishing port. It is just 200 meters from the swimming area, and there are a number of hands-on fishing experiences available for tourists. At the same time, the designated evacuation area is only 100 meters away.
3. Safety is the priority during all activities. We keep a portable radio with us at all times to stay informed if an earthquake or tsunami warning is issued.

Future Vision

1. Tsukishima will be rebuilt into a hub for tourism.
2. The prefectural government tourist agency, Matsushima Shizen no Ie, will be relocated to the Tsukishima area.
3. There will be a 200 meter evacuation route, making it possible to quickly evacuate the area.
4. The hands-on fishing experience will be located just 5 minutes from the coast by boat.

Tourism and Activity Rehabilitation Plan for Higashimatsushima



We will continue our efforts to bring back the Okumatsushima from before the disaster that we all came to know and love.

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