

# Hundreds of Host Towns Ready for Big Sports Events

## Rugby World Cup in 2019 and Olympic/Paralympic Games in 2020



Scott Fardy talked to 60 sixth-grade students about the aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake at an elementary school in Kamaishi City and enjoyed playing tag rugby (a version of rugby for beginners) with them.

The Host Town Initiative is a project which the Government of Japan has been promoting to local governments across the country in preparation for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games. It is a unique project, aimed at creating opportunities for sports-based exchanges between local residents and people from around the world, by taking advantage of the Games not only in Tokyo, but also across Japan.

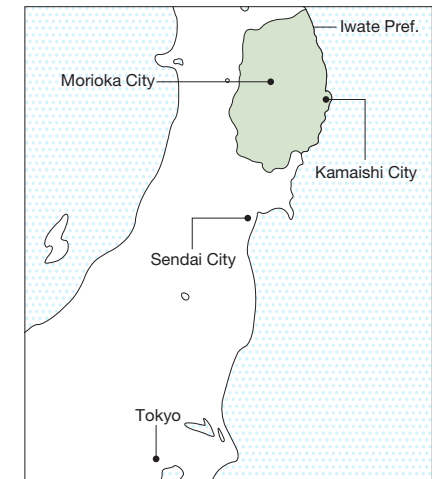
As of April 2018, a total of 298 local governments in all prefectures of Japan, from Hokkaido to Okinawa, have been registered as host towns, while the number of partner countries and regions has reached 95. These host towns have been implementing their own exchange programs; for example, getting local universities to host training camps

for sports teams from overseas, and providing Japanese cultural experiences to promote exchanges between Japanese students and participants from other countries.

Additionally, 15 local governments in the three prefectures most severely affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake (Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima) have been specially registered as “Arigato” (“Thank You”) Host Towns for Supporting Reconstruction, which are promoting exchanges with residents while showing how they have recovered to countries that have supported them. Kamaishi City, situated in coastal Iwate, is one such town, with Australia as its partner country. Having been selected as a host of Rugby World Cup 2019, the city has been promoting international exchanges through rugby in the



Mayor Takenori Noda of Kamaishi City says, “Kamaishi, which was devastated by the Great East Japan Earthquake, has received a great deal of support from abroad. We wish to show how we have recovered, and express our gratitude, to many people from around the world through the ‘Arigato’ Host Town activities.”



initiative. Since Kamaishi City is the long-standing home of the rugby team Kamaishi Seawaves RFC, the city has rugby in its genes.

Scott Fardy, a former member of Australia’s national rugby team, was in Kamaishi City when the Great East Japan Earthquake struck on March 11, 2011. The city was hit by a tsunami on that day, and Fardy, who played for the rugby team in the city at that time, suffered from the disaster. Although Australian Embassy officials advised that he return home, he declined and helped in the aftermath for six months as a volunteer worker. Fardy says, “I decided to stay because I had Japanese teammates and friends and wanted to help the city that had supported me.” Thanks to Fardy and many other people who have offered support, including those from outside Japan, Kamaishi City is now well on its way to recovery.

In March 2018, Kamaishi City invited Fardy to the city as part of its “Arigato” Host Town activities and implemented exchange programs, such as a friendship tag rugby event with local elementary students and a welcome reception by Kamaishi citizens. He enjoyed exchanging with local residents of different generations, from elementary school

children to adults, and said, “I hope rugby will continue helping maintain exchanges between Australia and Kamaishi.”

Mayor Takenori Noda of Kamaishi City, who invited Fardy this time, says, “The Host Town Initiative inspires children to have dreams for their future through exchanges with people from other countries. At the same time, sports-based international exchanges can also revitalize regional communities, including disaster-stricken areas. We are hoping that we can continue to exchange with people worldwide after the Olympic and Paralympic Games.”

Now that Japan has been selected to host the Rugby World Cup in 2019 and the Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2020, it is feeling a nationwide enthusiasm for sports, while networks of international exchanges are expanding across Japan. The initiative is certain to help bridge between people all over Japan and the world toward and beyond 2020.



Fardy described his impression of the city, saying, “Kamaishi City has delicious food and many other good things. This is a really beautiful, quiet place. People living here are very strong and kind, just as they were when they were hit by the earthquake.”



Kamaishi City has received a wide range of overseas support for rapid reconstruction since the earthquake in 2011. Among such partnership projects was the visit to the city by a group of renowned New York chefs led by Daniel Boulud (“NY Cooks for Tohoku”), who went to Kamaishi in July 2011 to serve a meal to evacuees, as well as to demonstrate the safety of Japan and Japanese food to the world.