

## What happened in Japan after the tsunami?

Standing here in the midst of this bustling modern street, it's difficult to imagine that this town - the town of Onagawa - was once on the front line of the tsunami that struck on March 2011 At 2:46 in the afternoon just 15 miles from where i'm standing now a magnitude 9 earthquake triggered a devastating tsunami which swept through the bay and washed away the entire town.

In the space of a few hours the tsunami with waves of up to 15 metres high destroyed 70% of Onagawa's buildings and claimed the lives of 827 people, almost 10% of the town's population.

Looking at the images of the aftermath you might easily wonder how the locals here could have possibly hoped to recover from such a disaster and yet from the debris of the tsunami Onagawa and many towns along the coastline have not only come on to quickly recover but gone on to thrive and succeed with a stronger sense of community and a renewed spirit of entrepreneurship.

Seven years have passed since the most powerful earthquake ever recorded in Japan wreaked havoc upon the Tohoku coastline, but the echoes of the disaster still live on through the people whose lives were forever changed by it.

I've come to the towns of Onagawa and Kesenuma and the Tohoku coastline to hear the inspiring stories of those who are breathing new life into the region.

From an eccentric mayor who brought a town together, to entrepreneurs and even Japan's most famous actor who have chosen to start new businesses in the region.

To the owner of an award-winning inn who tragically lost her family but never stopped looking forward to the future.

Because they are people who have such a positive mindset about the future I think that there's going to be amazing things that are going to be happening here going forward.

Yosuke Kajiya owns his own workshop called the "Glide Garage" designing handcrafted luxury guitars. Originally from the distant island of Tanegashima at the Japanese mainland's southernmost point.

Yosuke moved a thousand kilometers north to the town of Onagawa to start his new business.

His innovative guitar known as the "Questrel" is unique for not using any screws or glues, instead using the same traditional Japanese carpentry techniques used to build shrines and temples, where wood is carefully carved and slotted together.

It was designed in collaboration with Ken Okuyama, one of Japan's most celebrated industrial designers who previously masterminded the Enzo Ferrari.

Between the guitars famous designer and the unique production method the Questrel has been selling for up to \$7,500 to enthusiastic buyers keen to get their hands on the exclusive instrument.

Glide garage is one of the new innovative companies that sprung up in the heart of Onagawa town; rather than rebuilding the old town the people of Onagawa invested their reconstruction budget, starting from scratch and building a modern town center and aiming to turn it into the hub for the local community and the air of change has attracted entrepreneurs like Yosuke to relocate to a typically isolated fishing town.

Next door to the Glide Garage is an equally innovative business acting as a showroom for the unusual sight of the Danborghini.

Produced from 500 pieces of corrugated cardboard and on a one-to-one scale, the Damborghini is the brainchild of local business owner Hideki Konnou. It's also a clever play on words given that Danboru is the Japanese word for cardboard. Hideki owns a corrugated cardboard company and in recent years he's branched out into producing toys and model replicas from a giant Gundam robot to an impressive ATAT walker from Star Wars.

I wanted to find out how he'd got involved with the new towns development.

With Lamborghini's blessing the Damborghini soon became Onagawa's unlikely mascot helping to reinvigorate the town's image and remarkably even leading to Hideki meeting the Emperor himself when he paid a visit to the region.

Hideki's inspiration for the Damborghini came from his long-held dream of owning a supercar - a dream that seemed far away when he and his family were forced to move to prefabricated housing after their home was damaged by the tsunami.

However seven years later and with business booming he's finally been able to get his hands on the real thing. Slightly better than the cardboard version.

Becoming the mayor of a town that's been almost completely destroyed is no easy task and yet Yoshiaki sooner put himself forward for the challenge the months after the tsunami in his home town of Onagawa.

I met him overlooking the construction site of the new waterfront which is still being terraformed and raised several meters as a preventative measure for future Tsunamis.

Whilst Yoshiaki is trying to attract new people to Onagawa in the nearby city of Ishinomaki there's an entire industry attempting to attract younger generations to their profession through some unusual entrepreneurial initiatives. The profession of being a fisherman is becoming less and less popular to younger generations and with that in mind the local fishermen have launched a brand known as "Fisherman Japan" to showcase the more exciting and adventurous aspects of the trade.

Last year they launched a somewhat unconventional service that went viral online called "Fisherman Call".

So the idea is if you're a lazy student or somebody who's struggling to wake up in the morning you choose the time you want to be woken up and select your fisherman and then the next morning the fisherman who's out there somewhere working in the Pacific Ocean will drop you a line - yes pun intended - and wake you up and maybe even show you what he's caught. I mean it does sound a bit gimmicky and yet there's something quite nice about connecting two different people from different backgrounds and professions through the difficult daily task of waking up in the morning.

My next stop is Kesennuma a port town further north which suffered extensive damage and I've come to hear how Japan's most internationally recognisable actor Ken Watanabe came to open his own restaurant in the town in the years after the tsunami.

Unfortunately Ken Watanabe isn't here today he's off around the world somewhere making a movie but every day he sends a fax to the restaurant for customers to read so you can get some sort of connection with him nonetheless.

I asked the manager Megumi what was Ken Watanabe's motive for getting involved with Kesennuma and how the K-port came to be.

And of course the inevitable question; How often does the man himself visit the cafe?

After the tsunami many people from around Japan and internationally came to volunteer during the difficult years of the region's recovery. Like me Nisshant Anu came to Tohoku as an English teacher on the Japan exchange teaching program.

After teaching he returned home to the US but has since come back to Kesennuma to work for the local tourism department. I wanted to find out what factors have led him to return.

So the first apartment I lived in, in Kesennuma was actually right behind a place called the Yatai Mura which is the recovery village temporary housing establishment for people who had lost their businesses in the tsunami. So there's maybe like 15 or 20 different shops and restaurants I'd have to walk through to get home. Walking through the Yatai Mura on my way home people would be like "Hey Nisshan! Haven't seen you around in a while!"

"Are you doing alright? Sit down, have a drink. I've got a fish for you man."

"Come eat this fish" and then I'm like oh this is beautiful I'm home.

If you spend time in Kesennuma it's a mindset you'll find in abundance a friendly optimistic attitude that can often feel the odds with the scale of the disaster and what the people have been through.

Ichiyo Kannou is the energetic owner of the Tsunakan minshuku a traditional Japanese bed and breakfast. The Tsunakan has a reputation that stretches far beyond Kesennuma and Tohoku on account of Ichiyo probably being the world's friendliest person.

In 2011 her entire home was destroyed by the tsunami however her and her husband - a prominent local fisherman - rebuilt it and elevated it several meters and reopened it as the Tsunakan. It quickly became popular with famous faces including Ken Watanabe often visiting and winning numerous awards along the way.

Ichiyo became a pillar of the local community in the years following the tsunami.

Just as Ichiyo and her family were putting the disaster behind them tragedy struck again in 2017.

One day Ichiyo's husband, eldest daughter and son-in-law went out fishing and their boat overturned all three of them lost their lives in the accident. For several months Ichiyo contemplated on the future of her business before deciding to reopen the Tsunakan and continue doing what she loved.

When people think of the Tohoku coastline often they still picture those same images we all saw on our screens in March 2011 but today if you visit the region you'll find that quite the opposite, that people carry a strong sense of optimism for the future.

Their stoic attitude towards the worst imaginable circumstances is not only inspiring but a testament to the strength of the human spirit.

Obviously a disaster is not a positive thing but I think the unique spirit of the people here is that they've sort of taken the disaster and taken the positives away from the disaster. The disaster happened and there's nothing we can do about that but where do we go from there.