

# Visit helps students to forget deadly tsunami

By ANTHONY BRAND

**TWENTY-TWO** Japanese school students who live with the agonising effects of the 2011 tsunami have arrived on the Sunshine Coast for a well-earned break.

The students come from the coastal Japanese provinces of Miyagi and Fukushima, which bore the brunt of the tsunami's devastation.

The group's trip has been funded by Friendship Force of the Sunshine Coast, which has worked tirelessly to raise the \$42,000 needed to make it a reality.

Friendship Force members were due to head to Fukushima in 2011 but were forced to cancel following the tsunami as the town was within a 100km exclusion zone surrounding a damaged nuclear reactor.

Friendship Force of the Sunshine Coast president Neville Berry said his group was touched by the effects of the tsunami and felt they must do something to brighten the lives of these students.

"This is just a little bit of repayment for all the problems they've had," he said.

"We put together a pro-



**BUNDLE OF JOY:** Misaki Iwabuchi, Ami Fujino and Megumi Gato are among 25 Japanese students visiting the Sunshine Coast from the tsunami affected Fukushima area.

PHOTO: JOHN MCCUTCHEON

gram and put together an idea, and we started trying to raise money through garage sales, sausage sizzles and let-

ters begging for money.

"It's been a big effort by our 85 members."

Friendship Force of Koriya-

ma the children were deeply moved by the efforts of the Coast-based group.

"The students got a lot of trouble after the tsunami and six of these kids lost their parents," he said.

"They didn't open their mouths after that.

"Those kids now live with their relatives and grandparents in temporary housing.

"The town is virtually the same as it was after the tsunami and still has not been rebuilt."

Mr Kinugasa said the week on the Coast would offer the students some welcome relief from their ongoing pain.

"This is wonderful reward for them and will take their minds off everything for week," he said.

"This is the first time for them to come overseas so some are very nervous and excited."

The group will be officially welcomed by Sunshine Coast Mayor Mark Jamieson at the Nambour Civic Centre today.

This week's highlights for the group include a trip to Australia Zoo, Aussie World and fun-day at Matthew Flinders Anglican College.

ma field representative Yasushi Kinugasa, who is one of three chaperones travelling with the group, said he and