

Japanese students return home

The Friendship Force of the Sunshine Coast, Australia hosted 22 Japanese students who had been affected by the tsunami and nuclear disaster in 2011 and their three adult chaperones from Miyagi and Koriyama Friendship Force clubs.



The visitors have now returned home safely after enjoying a wonderful week of fun and laughter with us and we hope the time spent here will help them to face the future knowing that people in the world care about them, their families and their situation.

Arriving here on 24 March they were welcomed at Coolangatta airport by members of FF Gold Coast, who took care of them until the Mystic Mountains bus arrived to transport them to the Sunshine Coast to meet their host families.

Next morning the Sunshine Coast Mayor, Mark Jamieson, received us all in the Civic Centre and spoke to the visitors, giving them letters and gifts to take to the Mayor of Sendai City and the Governor of Fukushima Prefecture. Yasushi Kingugasi responded with a speech, thanking the Friendship Force and local community for the visit, giving us some statistics of the disaster in 2011, and describing the situation then and now. He then presented letters and gifts from Sendai and Fukushima dignitaries to Mayor Jamieson. The Mayor then invited everyone to a delicious morning tea.

After the formalities the fun began and we have enjoyed a hamburger and ice-cream party under the stars, a visit to Australia Zoo with a special trip round the animal hospital thanks to the Irwin family, and a great visit to Matthew Flinders Anglican College to meet lots of Aussie kids and enjoy an Aboriginal demonstration.

A day of sport followed with croquet matches and more eating and drinking courtesy of Nambour Croquet Club, a trip to the University to play soccer and swim in the Olympic pool and receive gifts of sports gear presented on behalf of the Vice-Chancellor.

Friday was Family Day at Maroochy Botanic Garden where we had 'horse-racing', sack races and egg-and-spoon races and played soccer again. This was interspaced with consumption of Subways, hot cross buns and Easter eggs all washed down with coca cola.

The visitors have all enjoyed various outings and activities with their host families and gathered at



Maroochy SLSC for a complimentary breakfast and fun at the beach on their last day.

Our final event was a farewell lunch at Mooloolaba Bowls Club with a delicious buffet. The visitors entertained us with demonstrations of rap-dancing, cheer-leading, Japanese children's games, martial arts, calligraphy and sang Japanese songs for our delight.

Final speeches were made and votes of thanks to everyone who had participated in the exchange, which has been hard work for many people but richly rewarding in terms of friendships forged, which is what Friendship Force is all about.

