

# Rebuilding Tourism after the Great East Japan Earthquake and Examining Post-Disaster Tourism in Kamaishi City

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## 1. Introduction

Natural hazards can have a devastating effect on tourism. In the case of the Great East Japan Earthquake (GEJE) of 2011, the tsunami caused damage to not only human lives but also to critical infrastructures in coastal areas in the Tohoku region. Tourist attractions and facilities were also damaged by the tsunami, and people who lived in the metropolitan and Kinki regions understood that they should avoid traveling to the Tohoku region (Yamamoto, 2013). Thus, a decrease in the number of visitors to the tsunami-hit area was reported in the Tohoku region immediately following the disaster (Igarashi et al., 2017). Fortunately, after suffering a drop in the number of tourists, the disaster area is experiencing a trend in recovery these days. “Disaster tourism” —defined as the practice of visiting natural or man-made environmental disaster sites (Amujo et al., 2012)—has succeeded in bringing visitors to the disaster area. However, eight years have already passed since the disaster, and the time lapse should be taken into account for promoting post-disaster tourism (Sasaki et al., 2018). From this viewpoint, the purposes of this study were established as follows: 1) to clarify the current situation of tourism after the GEJE of 2011 and 2) to examine post-disaster tourism in the Tohoku region.

## 2. Methods

The case study area for this study was Kamaishi City, which is located in Iwate Prefecture in northeast Japan; it was hit by the tsunami in 2011 and more than 1,000 lives were lost to the disaster. Thanks to disaster prevention efforts, however, almost all of the nearly 3,000 elementary and junior high school students miraculously survived (i.e., the “Miracle of Kamaishi”). Accordingly, many people have been infused with hope. To grasp the awareness and behaviors of visitors to the city, two post-recall questionnaires were distributed to Japanese people over age 17 from July to September in 2018. One was disseminated to visitors who participated in the guided tours conducted by storytellers with the Kamaishi Volunteer Guide Association. The other was given to tourists at the JR Kamaishi Station, Kamaishi Sennin-toge roadside rest area, and Hashino Iron Mining and Smelting Site (listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site). The survey focused on the following aspects: (1) visitor attributes (e.g., age, gender), (2) characteristics of visits (e.g., number of visits, group size, objectives of trips, places visited), (3) familiarity with guided tours (e.g., expectations, sources of information), (4) changes in awareness after a visit, (5) appreciation for disaster lore, and (6) the satisfaction and intention to revisit.

## 3. Results and Conclusion

In total, 478 people (guided: N = 155, non-guided: N = 323) participated in the survey, representing a response rate of 22%. As a result, the largest proportion of respondents included people over age 59 (47%); further, the total number was almost equally divided between the two genders (male: 51%, female: 47%). The most frequent group size of visitors was two or three people (43%); moreover, approximately 50% of visitors used private cars. The most common trip type was the day trip (46%), and the majority of visitors were not there for the first time (32%). The most commonly mentioned trip objectives were engaging in tourism (46%), visiting the disaster area (29%), and eating delicious food (25%). Additionally, the degree to which visitors intended to join a tour guided by a storyteller was high (77%), with the most common contents of interest being stories recounted from the time of the disaster (77%) and lessons from

the disaster (68%). A few people acknowledged enjoying the storytelling tour locally (12%) and on the Web (6%). On the whole, the GEJE experience was regarded as worth handing down to future generations and sharing with the world (very valuable: 82%, somewhat valuable: 11%). Compared to non-guided visitors, guided visitors had a greater sense of being present during the disaster ( $P < .01$ , T-test) and were encouraged to change their attitudes toward disasters ( $P < .01$ , based on a single regression analysis). In conclusion, Kamaishi City still functions as a disaster tourism site but it is thought that efforts to increase the city's appeal in the future are necessary.

Keywords: tourism, Great East Japan Earthquake, storyteller, questionnaire

