

Fukushima NOW

Vo.6 (Published in February 2018)

The Fukushima Prefectural International Association would like to communicate Fukushima in the “now” in multiple languages by recording the voices of the foreign residents of Fukushima and their efforts towards restoration after the disaster, be it through international exchange, or the efforts of various organizations.

※Translated versions of the newspaper can be downloaded from the FIA’s homepage.



Voices from Fukushima

Consecutive Surprises since Arriving in Japan

Francis Amimo Okoti (From Kenya, Living in Nihonmatsu City)



In 2007, while I was working as a fitness instructor in Nairobi, I met my wife who was dispatched by JICA, and came to Nihonmatsu. I’ve been an English instructor at the JICA Nihonmatsu Training grounds since March, of 2012.

My image of Japan before arriving in the country was limited to Seiko brand watches, Toyota brand cars, and Canon

brand cameras. Upon arriving, I was shocked at how advanced it was. From bullet trains to skyscrapers, brand new cars to beautiful towns with advanced toilets, from readily available fresh fruits and vegetables, to people dressed in proper uniforms and going to work. All of these things were completely outside of my expectations, and I was pleasantly surprised by such wonders.

During the Great East Japan Earthquake I was by myself in my apartment. We hardly ever experience earthquakes in Kenya, so I was very surprised and practically flew out of my apartment. The building in front of my eyes was swaying so vigorously that I thought it would crumble. Once the shaking quieted down, I went back into the apartment to get my passport, money, and warm clothes before leaving once more. Thinking the earthquake had ended, I returned to my room, but the emergency earthquake alert rang again, and I ran outside, repeating this over and over. Afterwards, I was shocked to see videos of the tsunami and asked my neighbor if the tsunami would reach Nihonmatsu. Reassured that it would not, I was able to calm my heart. After the earthquake I put my passport, some peanuts, warm clothes, and money in a bag to be equipped for the worst, which lasted about a month.

Once the nuclear accident occurred, I thought about evacuating outside the prefecture, but I believed in the Japanese government that said it was safe, and in the skills of the Japanese people, and remained in the prefecture.

Fukushima is a calm and wonderful place. The roads are uncongested, rent is not too high, and fruits and vegetables are always fresh. I recently heard that a shopping mall has been built in the formerly evacuated zone of Namie-machi, and I hope to have a look myself someday soon.

A Sense of Fate in Childhood Admiration

Yapaka Tiranun (From Thailand, Living in Fukushima City)



I came to Japan when I married at the age of 25. I lived in Nagano Prefecture for 5 years, then moved to Fukushima Prefecture, where I currently live.

During the Great East Japan Earthquake, I had the day off from work, so I was enjoying my time shopping. Right when I was thinking about heading home and getting into my car, the shaking started. Afterwards, the nuclear

accident occurred, but I decided to stay in the prefecture. Apparently the Embassy of Thailand secured a Thai Temple in Chiba as an evacuation centre, and was paying one-way plane tickets to Thailand for those wanting to leave.

I’ve been interpreting and translating for at the Fukushima Prefectural government since last May. I contact Thai people through the LINE app, and use the Facebook page “Welove Fukushima” to promote tourism in Fukushima Prefecture. When it comes to interpreting I struggle with Japanese keigo, or polite language, but I believe the challenge is worth the effort. I enjoy studying, and dealing with people and language, so I believe my current job suits me quite well. The people around me are kind, and I feel as though I am surrounded by family.

In my teen years in Thailand, my family had a calendar that displayed kimonos, and I remember thinking “how beautiful” and feeling deep admiration. At the time, I did not know that kimono came from Japan. As I grew older I forgot that admiration, but when I arrived in Japan and saw kimonos once more, I was suddenly reminded of those forgotten feelings. Thinking back on it now, I believe that I must have always had a connection to Japan.

There’s beauty everywhere in Fukushima. In the springtime you can enjoy various types of flowers. The Nicchu Line in Kitakata which boasts the beautiful Shidare Zakura (Prunus spachiana) which can be seen from the Tadami River’s first bridge, and Jupia-land in Hirata-mura, which is home to the Shiba Zakura (Phlox subulata) are my recommendations. I hope that many people visit this year.



▲ Working with a coworker

Handing Down Culture with Chinese Home Cooking

“Japanese-Chinese Cultural Connectedness Group ~Happiness” is a community in Koriyama for Chinese foreign residents. Their goal is to encourage cultural exchange between Japan and China, and connect to different regions by holding international exchange events and Chinese classes. On this day, 20 participants gathered for a cooking class on how to make a standard dish for Chinese New Years, boiled dumplings.

After making both pork and lamb boiled dumplings, participants learned about Chinese culture while enjoying a dried tofu bean curd and harusame (bean starch noodles) salad, egg soup, and a traditional



Chinese sweet called Sachima (a flour and egg mixture hardened with honey). Participants were also introduced to variations of the recipe which included fruits and nuts for sweet gyoza, and tofu for more healthy gyoza, all of which was taken in with fervor. The next cooking lesson will be on Saturday, March 10th, for a food known as Chunbin (a thick savoury crepe-dish) to welcome the springtime. For further details be sure to check out the FIA homepage.

<http://www.worldvillage.org/fia/news/details.html?id=2191>



▲ Lecturer Ms. Suzuki and Representative of the Japanese-Chinese Culture Connectedness Group ~ Happiness Ms. Li

Final Completion of Nihonshu that Started from Planting Rice!

To celebrate the completion of the “Surikami River Junmaiginjo” sake made from Gohyakuman-goku sake rice raised on the water of the Surikami River in Fukushima City’s Iizaka Town, a debut party was held for the newly made nihonshu.



On this day those involved in the sake rice planting including children of the area, foreigners, and other locals, made up about 50 people who gathered at a 200 year old private house in Iizaka after enjoying sake and food, to play Fukuwarai (a game akin to pin the tail on the donkey), Japanese traditional badminton and enjoy their cultural exchange. According to an expert, the sake they made is a mild-tasting sake that is well suited to foods like boiled stews, shiokara, namerou, and oysters pickled with oil.

One foreign participant of the rice planting endeavour was filled with satisfaction upon completion of the nihonshu and said “I’m originally from Seattle, so this is my first experience with farming. It was a really unique project for me to be participating in, and I now feel a really special



connection not just between myself and the sake I made, but with the place itself. Fukushima is a beautiful place. The people are kind, and no matter where you go, you’ll be warmly welcomed, so I am super happy.”

Understanding Fukushima’s Current Situation From Experience

Fukushima University runs the “Fukushima Ambassadors Program” with the goal of teaching students of the world about the current situation in Fukushima by participating in field work in various locations. This marks the 12th time this program has been run and the participants this time were from Glasgow University in Scotland. There were 15 students, and 4 volunteer students from within the prefecture. For 10 days they visited various locations in Fukushima Prefecture, learning about the safety of food and agriculture and the current state of the disaster struck coastal areas. They were also able to observe the evacuation zones and Fukushima’s Daiichi Nuclear Power Station.

One student from Glasgow studying community research said “I only heard about Fukushima after the disaster, and I chose to participate with the hope that I would learn what is universally necessary for the formation of a community. After hearing Mr. Ueno’s talk about the loss of his family during the tsunami, the Japanese sense of duty towards hometowns and families left a deep impression in me. Before today I believed that Japan’s sense of solidarity was the driving force behind Fukushima’s revitalization. But I now realize that I was wrong. I realized that I have a lot to learn about Fukushima’s efforts both



domestically and internationally. During my time here, I realized that everywhere outside of the evacuation zones, people are living normally, and I believe they are steadily progressing towards revitalization.”

Multilingual information on the Revitalization effort from “Fukushima Restoration Station”

On Fukushima Prefecture’s official revitalization related information portal site “Fukushima Restoration Station” hosts the latest data on food safety efforts and the activities of those supporting Fukushima in 9 different languages (Japanese, English, Mandarin, Korean, German, French, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese).

Fukushima Restoration Station <http://www.pref.fukushima.lg.jp/site/portal-english/>

Support Desk for Foreign Residents

Here at the FIA, we provide consultation services for foreigners in English, Chinese, Korean, Tagalog, and Portuguese.

- **English, Chinese, Japanese Consultation**
Every Tuesday to Saturday from 9:00 to 17:15
- **Korean, Tagalog, Portuguese Consultation**
Thursday from 10:00 to 14:00

※Appointment necessary for 4th and 5th Thursdays.

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