Introduction of Iwaki City

Introduction of Iwaki City, which carried the triple burden of East Japan Earthquake, Tsunami and Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant accident.

General Location of Fukushima Prefecture:

Japan consists of 4 large islands and various small islands. Fukushima prefecture is located at the North East part of Japan’s Main Land. The prefecture is shaped like an arc stretching North to South.

Fukushima prefecture is located at the South most part of Tohoku Area and it is the nearest entrance coming from Tokyo Metropolitan Area. The distance from Tokyo on highway is 175km and it takes about 1 hour and 50 minutes by car. It may be the equivalent of going from Santa Monica to San Diego in the States, from Paris to Le Man in France and London to Sheffield in UK. This may give you the idea of the location although whether the distance seems near or far may depend on where you live.

Access to Fukushima Prefecture from Tokyo

Historically, Japanese train system developed earlier than the highway system and especially “Shinkansen, bullet train” became very popular since its service started in 1964 and quickly spread throughout Japan as the main means of transportation (apart from Hokkaido, the North most large island). Shinkansen system also opened up in Tohoku Area (known as Tohoku Shinkansen) and it has became the main trunk line transportation going through Tohoku area, but Iwaki City, a city in Fukushima, does not have Shinkansen bullet train going through but has a local express train going from and to Tokyo in 2 hours and 15 minutes. As I said before, Iwaki City is only 2 hours away from Tokyo using highway, since the highway system in Tokyo is almost always congested, using the local express train to and from Iwaki is the most accurate and pleasant means of transportation.

Iwaki City and Fukushima Daiichi and Daini Nuclear Power Plant

The eastern part of Fukushima Prefecture is facing the Pacific Ocean and made up of 140 km coastline. The warm and cold current meet just off the coast and make for an abundant fishing ground and popular ocean ports area. Especially the clean ocean and good Pacific Ocean waves in Fukushima were widely loved by surfers and sailboat lovers alike and was one of the best touristic resources alongside other abundant natures seen in Fukushima. The main coastline stretches through Soma City and Iwaki City and both cities used to be the main touristic areas as well as the industry base as both cities has a long history of being the castle towns.

The weather on the coastline is very warm and mild, especially for Iwaki City, it was sometimes introduced as “Japan’s L.A. (Los Angeles)”. The city’s sales copy is “Sunshine City Iwaki”.

The Fukushima Daiichi (No.1) and Daini (No.2) Power plant is located in between these two cities. The nuclear power plant was constructed here in Fukushima after a careful consideration of its location. Power plants needs lots of water, the solid ground to construct on and the population of the area should not be too dense. Power plant started operation in March 1971. So Fukushima nuclear power plant was one of the first nuclear power plants built in Japan. Politically, the Fukushima prefecture was left behind in Japan’s economic development so the prefecture offered the land to build the nuclear power plant having learnt the Japanese government’s intention in shifting towards nuclear power in generating electricity.

And such old nuclear power plant was hit by tsunami which was one of the concern from the beginning, resulted in the worst disaster in nuclear power plant accident history by losing reactor cooling function completely and1-3 reactors went almost to the state of complete melt-down. Now looking back, everyone has been worried about the tsunami catastrophe and it became a reality in the worst ever form.

Tsunami Damage

Tsunami brought about the huge damage to all seafront port facilities, houses, farming lands, rivers and roads and many people died from it.

In Fukushima Prefecture only, more than 1500 people died and many people are still missing. Altogether, more than 30,000 people died from this earthquake and tsunami disaster.

About Iwaki City

Iwaki City had been active in re-development of the coast centering the industrial town called Onahama and its port by facilitating many tourist attractions such as aquarium and marine ports facilities.

Onahama port, as the industrial center used to ship coal from Joban Coal Mine in the old days and recently it was used to ship chemical component from the nearby chemical plant. Nissan also constructed engine factory in this area. The International freight terminal was built in 1998 and it was assigned as both the “important port” and the “new industrial city” and continued its development.

Iwaki City, A Large City

Inland of Iwaki City, there are Taira district, and Yumoto district, known as one of the three oldest springs, and the mountain area full of nature stretches through towards Koriyama City one of the commercial center of Fukushima Prefecture. The total area of Iwaki City is about twice the size of Tokyo 23 districts. The population is about 34,000 people, so unlike the high population urban cities, it hosts a good environment, mild weather and unique districts characters.

It was selected as the number one city in Japan as the desired city to live after retirement in some marketing research result. Many people came to live here from Tokyo metropolitan area after the retirement. I wanted this city to be like Santa Monica in U.S.

With such background, the people’s lives depend on the use of the car, connecting scattered towns inside the City. The train system, as I said before did not go hand in hand with the road system in its development, and the overall development of the city and its surroundings did not produce the synergetic effect. Each district is developed on its own and it is difficult for people visiting Iwaki City to understand the overall characteristics of the City.

Iwaki City And It’s Beautiful Coast

The eastern part of Iwaki City, located South East of Fukushima Prefecture is facing the Pacific Ocean and 7 coast districts play an important industrial and cultural roles.

Each coast district is equipped with swimming beach, and there are deep-sea fishing and coastal fishing happening, touristic attractions, ocean sports facilities, accommodations, hot springs and scenic driving routes. But since the roads, houses and facilities are built very close to the coastline, there have been damages done by Typhoon, high wave and tsunami in every few years. However, the worst tsunami caused by 2011 Tohoku Earthquake and Tsunami produced many casualties in this area.

Toyoma Beach and Usuiso Beach (I thought this was the best beach in Japan), which I used to bathe at childhood, were completely destroyed along with coastal towns. I have heard it later that many people were watching tsunami at the embankment thinking it was just another small one. The people evacuating to the high ground at once and the people thinking it was not a big deal became the difference between life and death. The tsunami damage at the coast was devastating. In Onahama port and surrounding area had tsunami ran through the fully developed port and destroying houses, restaurants and inns. For small port towns, the mountains close in behind and many people was taken in by tsunami. Tsunami damage varies depending on the small difference in location. For example, where there was a river running into the sea, the tsunami went up inland through the river and spilled out at the bottleneck to destroy many houses. Many issues became apparent by this disaster regarding the design of the coast towns and how to protect houses, rivers and roads from tsunami.

Earthquake, Tsunami and Nuclear Radiation

I will write about the effect of nuclear radiation in other article in more detail. Iwaki City is located at the South of Fukushima Daiichi and Daini Power Plant, and amount of radiation contamination is much less than Minami Soma at the North and Iidate Village at the North West, due to the direction of the wind, but no one knows what would happen to the city if there was another nuclear power plant reactor accident due to the failure on the safety cooling. Sometimes a large amount of radiation is measured in some parts of the city in the city based radiation measurement.

The North of Iwaki city is 30 km away from the nuclear power plant so Iwaki City, being less affected by radiation has became the restoration base. The front line for the restoration is J-Village, which is 20 km from the nuclear power plant, the North of Iwaki City and Iwaki City is the support base for the frontline.

People in the world, if you happened to live within 100 km from the nuclear power plant, I will advice you to find out the wind direction throughout the year from the power plant. Because if your house happened to be in the downwind direction, the damage could be enormous if the accident happened at the nuclear power plant.

Citizens facing the nuclear power plant and their feelings

Citizens’ opinions towards the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant accident are almost divided into two. Some are for the nuclear power plant and some are opposed to it, and some people are for it with conditions. Their opinions differ depending on where they live. Since Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant constructed in the area with not much industry and left from the development is the main industry for this area. Naturally, many citizens are hired directly by the nuclear power plant, and many more are working in the related industry. So it has became a necessary work place for the people living in the City. However, the electricity generated by Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant is not consumed in Fukushima, but is sent to TEPCO’s supply area in Kanto and consumed mainly in Tokyo Metropolitan Area. Fukushima people’s feelings about it is somewhat mixed because of this fact.

Therefore, the people who are not direct stake holders of TEPCO become very emotional and say no more nuclear power plants. This kind of emotional conflict happens between good friends before the accident, so you can imagine how stressful it is. They are already suffering from the physical damage cause by the disaster.

Japanese government still gives unclear two-sided answer to the world saying they will take into consideration of abandon nuclear power generation in future however for the present the nuclear power generation should be continued. The government’s attitude it very unclear and it is irritating even to the Japanese people. This Japanese characteristic of not making clear decision is not only seen among politicians but Japanese enterprises do have the same nature. Maybe foreign people would get confused in getting to know Japanese people as the Japanese often separate one’s principles and intentions.

Germany has changed its national policy to abandon nuclear power plant only in two months. It will never happen in Japan. The nuclear power plant situation is widely different in Japan compare to Germany, the number of power plant in Japan is more than twice and interests are much more complicated, that is why Germany’s strong will is really amazing. As we do not know of the domestic dispute in Germany over the decision if there is any, we could only guess the real situation, but in any case, it’s strong political power to steer the wheel drastically to shift the national policy is amazing.

Energy Revolution Starting from Iwaki City

What Iwaki City can do as the energy revolution is to experimentally introduce the facility to regenerate the energy from other countries such as Germany to prove that Iwaki is more suited in generating solar, wind or geothermal energy compared to other areas. But there are lots of issues ahead in terms of funds, promoters and leaderships.

Restoration of Iwaki City and End of the Nuclear Accident

I would like to communicate the current situation of Iwaki City, Fukushima, which faces the nuclear power plant issue. How Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant accident will close is not known. It is because what is really happening inside reactors is not clear. And the recovery plan was drawn up based on the estimate that no more accident would happen. The reactor meltdown was only announced after two month of the accident, although some people predicted that the meltdown would happen within few hours considering the scale of the accident and strongly emphasized the evacuation for areas within 30 km from the plant, and 50 km for the downwind areas. Yet, the government announced that there is no problem for the nuclear reactor and directed to stay within the house for areas more than 20 km from the plant.

Considering what had happened, people started to discuss who should be responsible for the nuclear power plant restoration. Many people working in the nuclear power plant restoration risking their lives stay in Iwaki City. The disaster happened and the current status of the dreadful site is becoming clear everyday, and I do not know how long it will take to restore, 10 years, 20 years or 30 years? In any case it will be a long history of restoration for Iwaki City and Fukushima.