



Disaster areas, tourism and reconstruction

"I would like to visit disaster areas but there is nothing I can do now. Is it alright to go there just for sightseeing?" asked one of the supporters living in Tokyo the other day.

More than two years have passed since the Great East Japan Earthquake occurred on March 11, 2011. In the disaster areas, some say that it is hard to think about Tourism because there still are many serious problems to be solved, such as group relocation from the areas devastated by earthquake and tsunami, reconstruction of buildings and infrastructure, construction of coastal levees and windbreaks, preservation of architectural remains from the disaster, disposal of disaster waste and so on.

Many of the disaster areas were not tourist spots but residential areas or fishing villages, so the local residents are still puzzled to see many people from other areas visiting there.

On the other hand, one of the remarkable challenges for reconstruction is to prevent depopulation of the area, which had been progressing even before the disaster, by rediscovering the fascination of the area and attracting people as many as possible. For this purpose, a far-sighted tourism revitalization plan is being developed and implemented now, so that the vitality of the local communities can be maintained into the future; 5 years, 10 years and beyond. The plan, that a joint effort with between public and private sector, combines various resources such as the beautiful scenery and delicacies that are peculiar to the Sanriku region, geographical

Sanriku region, geographical connection with famous tourist sites, and relationship with volunteers, which started after the disaster.

Many shops and restaurants that were lost in the tsunami are already reopening in temporary shopping centers one after another, and towns are becoming busy again. Moreover, various efforts are being made, which include attempts to keep the memories of the disaster from fading, such as volunteer-guided tours and Kataribe Taxi, and development and sales of products using local produces and materials. [Kataribe taxi, guide-tour-taxi drivers take tourists to places where the scars of disaster still remain and describe what actually happened there.]

These attempts represent the feelings of the people, such as: "Please don't forget the memories of the disaster" and "Let's reconstruct our beautiful town once again."

Whether or not you have visited the disaster areas before, please come and feel the atmosphere of reconstruction in progress.

In this monthly report, we will report the outcome of the Kesenuma City Strategic Meeting for Tourism, which was launched in March 2012, and the activities of Civic Force, which have been supporting the management of meetings and formulation of the strategies.

[Kesenuma City in Miyagi prefecture was severely damaged by the earthquake disaster.]

Developing Strategies for Tourism Promotion in Kesennuma City

Monthly Topic

Civic Force selects hot topics among various projects and brings best ones to you on this page.

The 10th meeting on developing strategies to promote tourism in Kesennuma City was held at the end of March. Kesennuma City in Miyagi Prefecture has been the base where Civic Force operated from for our activities in the earthquake and tsunami devastated region. This is final round of the monthly meetings held since last year.

The meetings were attended by a committee of 24 members made up of representatives from the local tourism industry and external advisors. The committee was formed to develop concrete tourism-related projects. Such plans were given high priority in the city's "Earthquake Recovery Plan" unveiled last October. The committee discussed a range of ideas to rebuild the local community through tourism promotion. Ideas to attract tourists include local cuisine made from local ingredients, lessons learned from the earthquake, and how the city recovered from the earthquake.



On the same day, the committee submitted their recommendations for strategies in tourism promotion to the mayor of the city (second from the right in picture).

The two key strategies proposed are: 1) develop attractions based on contents exclusive to Kesennuma; and 2) creation of value-added services through partnerships between the fishery industry and the tourism industry

One of Civic Force's mid- to long-term projects for this area is on tourism revitalization. As part of this project, we had been supporting this committee since it started out. Civic Force also took part in the Communications Sub-Committee, one of the five under the main committee, to give suggestions from an external perspective in developing an environment ideal for tourist attraction.

We also conducted various research and analysis on case studies, and contributed views on what should be made the high priority in the strategy plan, in cooperation with industrial experts within and outside Kesennuma.

Mutual Cooperation Agreement with Mie Prefecture

Civic Force has been establishing partnerships with local governments and private enterprises in preparation for disasters. On March 27, 2013, Civic Force signed a mutual cooperation agreement with Mie Prefecture. Under the agreement, Civic Force will work closely with the prefectural government, to provide prompt and effective support to victims when disaster strikes, in the following ways:

1. Collecting and sharing information
2. Procurement, provision and transport of relief goods
3. Coordination with cities and towns in the prefecture for needed relief activities
4. Participation in disaster drills organized by the prefectural government

Mie Governor, Eikei Suzuki said (right in photo), "I have deep admiration and respect for Civic Force's sustained efforts at the disaster areas since the early days after the March 11 earthquake.

"I am thus very heartened to conclude such an agreement with Civic Force which can work in close partnership with many other enterprises and organizations," said the Governor.

Kensuke Onishi, Chairperson of Civic Force (left in photo) said, "As Mie has a long coastline, much study and preparation will be needed for effective logistics during disaster times. We will make plans with to ensure coordination with private enterprises, the Japan Self-Defense Forces and the US forces."

Following Fukuroi City in Shizuoka Prefecture and Kesennuma City in Miyagi Prefecture, this agreement is the third one that Civic Force has made with local governments but the first on a prefectural level.

Establishing a platform for tourism projects

The next challenge is putting these plans into practice. For this purpose, the "Platform for Sanriku Region Tourism Revitalization (tentative)" is created.

One of the most important aspects in revitalizing the tourism industry is to create an infrastructure that effectively supports tourism which has resources and clear functions. To this end, local residents and representatives from the fishery industries need to be included in this system, not just representatives from the local tourist industry. Having this platform will support the activities of individual members and also enhance cooperation between various parties. Hopefully, the platform promotes achieving the goals laid out in the plan.

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Messages from scholar students of the “Dream Support Project”

This project supports students living in the disaster-affected areas, such as Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima Prefectures through scholarships and educational programs. The scholar students looked back over the past year and wrote essays on what impressed them most, what they learned, what they did the best and what they try to do next year. Here are small excerpts of their essays. (As of March 2013)

[My ambition is to become a teacher]

I am working hard towards the dream of becoming a teacher. As a result of the sudden earthquake disaster on March 11, 2011, our family faced financial hardship and it even compelled me to give up on enrolling to the university to further my education in the future. My teacher of the Sendai Commercial High School, however, motivated me to become a teacher. I was so enthused about his words and since then it has always been in my mind. Last year, the teacher, who was in a hospital to treat cancer, passed away on July 1, which is the date of my birthday. Succeeding the message that he told me at the time, I believe that it becomes repay for my teacher to become a teacher of the Sendai Commercial High School, and try hard from now on. (The third grade of high school, Miyagi)

[Exchange letters with an old man living in Hokkaido]

I attended an essay contest and got the best prize, which was published in a newspaper. One day, I got a letter from an 86-year-old man living in Hokkaido prefecture. He read the article and sent me a letter. Since then, I started exchanging letters with him. The other day, he came to Rikuzentakata town in Iwate Prefecture. I showed him the place where my house and town were once located. The scene that he went back to Hokkaido with a bag filled with debris, impressed me. His behavior was unforgettable for me. Our corresponding still continues. Opening a letter from him, I always get energy. The earthquake left indescribable sadness but I appreciate this opportunity to meet him. (The first grade of high school, Iwate)

[The sea in Yamagata]

Last summer, I swam in the sea in Yamagata Prefecture, which impressed me. Before the quake, I visited to Miyagi Prefecture to swim in the sea. After the quake, I could not do so due to the crippled Fukushima nuclear power plant. My family is considering moving to Yamagata Prefecture in the near future because my father, a fisherman, is forced to give up his job due to the fear of cesium contamination. However, I am worried about living in new place, but the beautiful sea in Yamagata Prefecture attracted me alot. (The first grade of high school, Fukushima)

[Support from people close to me]

We moved from Minamisoma to Fukushima City in order to escape the effects of the quake. As a result of the move, I traveled about an hour and a half—some 73km each way—to attend classes at my high school in Minamisoma. I had to wake up early every morning, but my mother woke up even earlier than I did. She cooked my breakfast, prepared my lunch box, and drove me all the way to school. I owe a lot of thanks to my classmates and teachers who gave me encouragement and support in the most tiring and trying of times. I would also like to thank our principal for suggesting the “Dream Support Fund” for me. I am not talented but I am a very lucky girl surrounded by good people. My dream is to become a nursery teacher, and from this day forward I will do my best to make that dream come true. (The third grade of high school, Fukushima)

Mid-to Long-Term Reconstruction Projects

Civic Force has been active in providing assistance in the Tohoku region of northeastern Japan for a year and a half ever since the earthquake struck. To better concentrate our efforts to solve the problems and difficulties that the region faces, we began some mid- to long-term projects in the summer of 2012.

▪ Tourism Revitalization Project

—Enhancing cooperation between the public and private sectors to make Kesenuma City into a “city that tourists want to visit” . Refer to page 2 for more details.

▪ Wings for Life Project

—Support of helicopter services for emergency medical purposes
Even before the disaster, availability of medical services was already a problem in the coastal areas devastated by the earthquake. We are planning to start an emergency helicopter service to provide better access to medical services from May. We are now finalizing details on the heliport, coordination process with health-care professionals and other issues.

▪ Green Circle Project

—Developing a sustainable forest industry and effective utilization of woody biomass
Together with local companies, such as Kesenuma Energy Development Corporation, and other NPOs, Civic Force aims to promote sustainability by utilizing woody biomass. We are supporting the training of individuals engaged in the forestry and the management of lumber yards, and the pilot for community local currency.

▪ Community Revive Project

—Support efforts by the local community to create homes and jobs
Civic Force has continuously supported construction projects and community development of new towns for group relocation of disaster victims, in cooperation with local NPOs and local administration. We assist by sending specialists and providing human resource development programs to these new towns and existing towns which are looking to redevelop their community.

▪ Dream Support Project

—Support for local youths through scholarships and conducting locally-developed educational programs
Many high school students face financial difficulties as a result of the earthquake. To ensure that they can continue with their education through to university, this project provides scholarships for such students up to seven years. This project group also conducts educational programs in the devastated areas and other prefectures.

What we are doing
in Tohoku

NOW

Our activities in fiscal year 2012

<http://www.civic-force.org/news/news-1034.php>

For corporation partners

<http://www.civic-force.org/about/membership/>

Redesign and launch the “Team Onishi” website

<http://www.onishi-kensuke.net/>

Support us with single-click on the site

<http://www.clickbokin.ekokoro.jp/139.html>
<http://www.psc-inc.co.jp/clickdonation/index.html>

A fund-raising event held in support of Tohoku

As two years have passed since the earthquake, various corporate and individual supporters have greatly helped our relief projects. Their generous and innovative assistance have encouraged people in the disaster-stricken areas.

For instance, Isabel Marant, a French fashion brand, held the fund-raising event at their flagship shop in Omotesando, Tokyo this year from March 1st to 31st. In the process, they sold an original pouch and donated a portion of the proceeds to the Civic Force.

In support of our projects, around 10 corporate backers, including Isabel Marant, have placed charity boxes in various places, such as next to their cash registers in their shops, reception areas and event halls.

We are looking for new support in providing places to put charity boxes. We hope you will develop an interest in this project and support our relief activities both in Japan and overseas.

For details: pr@civic-force.org.

Donate as you buy it:
 an original pouch sold in the fund-raising event

CHECK!!

 <https://twitter.com/civicforce>

 <http://www.youtube.com/civicforceorg>

 <https://www.facebook.com/civicforce>



A Message from Disaster Areas

This column features voices of people living in Tohoku disaster areas in Northeastern Japan. Our guest for this time is **Ms.Naoko Moritani** who works at an aesthetic salon “Bi Salon MM” (literally, “Beauty Salon MM”) in Kesenuma, Miyagi prefecture.



Kesenuma
 Bi salon MM’s Ms.Moritani

—— The tsunami swept away the house I used to live with my family of three and we moved to the house on the top of a hill where my parentes in law lives, I tried to contribute by appealing for donation of relief goods through social networking sites and on radio. I also helped distribute rations to neighbors. Also, many victims could not enter the shelters for various reasons. With other volunteers, we drove around in the Kessenuma area distributing relief goods to such “invisible victims” .

This is my first time expressing my thanks as a victim to all who have helped me. I would like to offer a deep bow as to the warm support many of you have given.