

KIZUNA Project

Special Feature (1)

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sceptical. To counteract this, farmers have banded together to invest in state of the art equipment to test their products and communicate that they are safe to consume.

We had similar discussions with the staff at Aizu Sake Brewery and Daikura Ski Resort. Both businesses have witnessed orders and bookings cancelled out fear of contamination in the area. Businesses have been forced to make redundancies slowing the recovery efforts still further. In an attempt to turn the situation around, they have invested in public relations campaigns, to better inform consumers, and promote positive perceptions of the region.

A long road ahead for evacuees

After the nuclear accident at Fukushima's Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, residents from the neighbouring town of Okuma* were forced to evacuate. First they moved to emergency centres in public halls, and now they are housed in temporary accommodation. It was a difficult transition - not only because they had few personal possessions to start their new lives, but also due to the horrible weather that magnified their difficulties.

* Okuma is the sister-city of Bathurst, NSW. See *Japan Reports* Vol.47 no.1 Autumn 2012.

Residents described how they were overwhelmed by the heavy snowfall as they were used to the milder winters of the coast. Farmers who lost their land struggled to find work and adapt to urban lifestyles. In another three to five years they will relocate again, this time to permanent housing. This is a particular strain on elderly residents who wonder if they will ever return to their hometowns.

Amongst the stories of tragedy and loss, there have been those of triumph and kindness. One such story came from Aoki Yoshiko who was the principal of Tomioka High School, another area evacuated after the nuclear accident. She worked with local radio stations to broadcast news to evacuees and involve children in radio programs to provide a distraction from the disaster.

She even helped compile an address book of the new temporary addresses of Tomioka residents so they could keep in touch with each other. Aoki san is a brave and passionate woman who is taking positive actions to support her community in the recovery. This is reflected in her comment, 'We are the victims of the disaster but the heroines of our own recovery.'

Okiagari koboshi

The *okiagari koboshi* is a traditional Japanese doll that was given to us as a gift on our trip to Aizu in Fukushima Prefecture. It is a good luck charm as it automatically rights itself when pushed or knocked over. The doll symbolises the perseverance and bravery the people of Tohoku and greater Japan have shown in their



recovery from the disaster of March 2011. Our trip highlighted the strong sense of community that people have following the disaster. They have a strong desire to help others, support friends and rebuild together. The conversations we had were inspiring and I believe the Project was successful in achieving its aims.

April Morley

Recommended Sightseeing in Aizuwakamatsu, Fukushima Prefecture

April says, "If you are planning a trip to Japan soon I recommend travelling to the Tohoku region. The people are very warm-hearted and appreciate attempts to support their rebuilding efforts."

Her tips for Aizuwakamatsu sightseeing are—

- Tsurugajo Castle
- Aizu Sake Brewing Museum
- Aizutajima to Aizuwakamatsu Scenic Railway
- Yamada Folk Craft Workshop
(paint your own *okiagari koboshi*)
- Aizu samurai residences
- 19 tombs of the Byakkotai
- Aizu Higashiyama *onsen* (hot spring)

For information on Aizuwakamatsu: <http://e.samurai-city.jp/>

JNTO Website
www.jnto.go.jp/eng/location/regional/fukushima/aizuwakamatu.html



KIZUNA participants in front of Tsuruga-jo Castle



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