

Local Government Exchange and Cooperation Seminar 2016

CLAIR Hosted Tour of Iwaki

The Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (CLAIR) is a government-affiliated agency that was set up as a means to support internationalisation efforts in Japan and facilitate exchange between Japanese and overseas local governments. Apart from its involvement in the Japan Exchange and Teaching Program (JET Program), CLAIR also invites local government officials each year from areas covered by their overseas offices to study the current situation of local governments in Japan and help contribute towards improved community development in both countries as part of the Local Government Exchange and Cooperation Seminar.

For the most recent seminar, CLAIR London invited eight local government officials from across the United Kingdom for a study tour of Iwaki. The tour was aimed at:

- Showing the UK local government officials the amount of progress Iwaki has made in recovering after the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011.
- Offering a better understanding of Fukushima and the areas that suffered due to misinformation spread as a consequence of the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Disaster.
- Providing dialogue between the Iwaki and UK local government officials in order to find out useful information for future community planning.



Apart from touring various facilities, the UK officials also had a chance to meet with the mayor of Iwaki as well as hold discussions with representatives of the various divisions within Iwaki City Government. Through meetings and exchanging opinions with people who are in charge of disaster prevention, nuclear countermeasures, industry & regional development, housing, agriculture, fisheries, tourism and various other divisions, the UK officials were able to gain a sense of how the different divisions in Iwaki City Government are working together to help restore Iwaki and develop a city that is even more prosperous than before 2011. Iwaki officials also received some useful advice about how London handled the 2012 Olympics so that Iwaki will also be able to make the most of its initiatives in the lead up to and during the Tokyo 2020 Olympics.

Iwaki Vision asked the participants to share their thoughts on their time in Iwaki. Here's what some of them had to say:

January's visit to Iwaki City was absolutely fascinating and a privilege: to see how another country is approaching some of the ordinary day to day issues we also face in the UK but also in particular to see how the Iwaki City government and its local people have responded to the exceptional and horrific events of March 2011. It was impressive to see how the city government is working alongside business and local communities to reinvigorate Iwaki and to shape a new identity for the place in the future. Amongst many highlights of a wonderful three days in Iwaki, I'm still most struck by the resilience shown by local people, which we learned of when visiting a housing development site to rebuild a community devastated by the tsunami. And amongst many enjoyable experiences the show at Spa Resort Hawaiians was unforgettable! I wish the people of Iwaki all the best in their efforts to rebuild the city and make it a success and I hope to be back to visit at some point.

— **Damian, Newham Council**

Iwaki is a fascinating place, both culturally and from a local government perspective. I was grateful to be granted such an insight into the many challenges the city government has faced and how the area is developing and moving forward, including through initiatives on local food and produce, housing and tourism.

— **Julia, Greater London Authority**

The memory of my time in Iwaki will stay with me forever. We were all overwhelmed by the warm welcome we received in the city – there are not many places you visit and the first thing you do is be greeted by the mayor and his team! Sampling the vast array of Iwaki's tourism offer was really fun – from visiting a tomato farm to trying on a kimono and attempting calligraphy after a traditional tea ceremony – all incredible experiences. The most special part of the trip, however, was meeting Iwaki residents affected by the tsunami and to learn more about how they are rebuilding their homes and their lives. It was incredibly moving to hear about the determination and spirit of the residents, and I feel very lucky to have met some very inspiring people. The memory I will take back with me to my family, friends and colleagues is that Iwaki is a very special, unique and resilient place, and everyone should have the opportunity to visit and experience everything it has to offer!

— **Jessica, New Local Government Network**

When I applied to join the Local Government Cooperation and Exchange Seminar, I was very eager to learn about the reconstruction efforts in and around Iwaki City but did not really know what to expect. Like the rest of the world, I had watched the coverage of what happened in 2011 and those were the images that were in my mind as I flew to Japan. But what I saw and experienced was completely different: a vibrant, attractive city with a beautiful landscape, amazing cuisine and the friendliest people. That is the message that I have carried back with me. The vision that the mayor and city officials spoke about to make Iwaki City even better than it was before definitely feels like it is becoming reality. On a final note, I must express my profound gratitude to our hosts from the city council and CLAIR for their hospitality and warmth, as well as my best wishes to Iwaki City residents for a bright future.

— **Plili, Birmingham City Council**

Japan is a country with which I have had a relationship for more than 20 years – my wife and daughter are both from Aomori – so it holds a special place close to my heart and that's why I applied to take part in the exchange visit in January and why I was so keen to visit Iwaki City and learn about its recovery from the Great East Japan Earthquake. I found the three days in Iwaki City quite emotional; I was incredibly moved by the openness and transparency with which our Japanese colleagues approached the visit and by meeting some of the people directly affected by the disaster. As a fellow local government officer, the very thought of needing to create a department called 'Nuclear Disaster Recovery Division' is, well, incomprehensible. The scale and magnitude of the recovery officials have had to plan for and implement is truly astounding – and of course the job is not yet complete. I came away with a deeper respect and admiration for the city officials and people of Iwaki, for their strength and resilience and their ability to look to the future and plan for a better Iwaki for its residents both old, and new.

— **Simon, Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead**

Thanks to this recent CLAIR sponsored tour, Iwaki has been able to present a more accurate image of Fukushima to overseas representatives. Through inviting tourists and official guests from other nations, Iwaki has helped combat the negative stereotypes and spread this positive image across the world. This is one effective step towards encouraging more visitors from across Japan and abroad to visit this city.

Photo (page 2): Participants of the Local Government Exchange and Cooperation Seminar share their opinions and advice for Iwaki during discussions with Iwaki City representatives.

Photo (page 3): Participants of the seminar wear kimonos and hakamas at the Kanazawa Shoko Art Museum (participants from left to right: Simon Fletcher, Plili Das Gupta, Damian Atkinson, Jane Dudman, Ian Harvey, Jessica Studdert, Peter Bungard, Julia Harrowsmith).

* Disclaimer: Iwaki Vision sought comment from all of the participants of the Local Government Exchange and Cooperation Seminar 2016. However at the time of publishing this edition, we were unfortunately unable to include everyone's comments due to time constraints.

