

## Iwaki's Revitalisation 5 Years After the Disaster: Usulso and Toyoma Districts

The final article of our series covering Iwaki's progress in the reconstruction after the Great East Japan Earthquake takes a look at two of the most devastated areas of Iwaki after the tsunami: Usulso and Toyoma.

### Before and during the disaster

Toyoma and Usulso were once popular bathing areas; Usulso alone attracted 260,000 swimmers to its beautiful beach each year. Toyoma's beach attracts many local surfers, even today. Before the disaster, 787 people lived in Usulso and 1784 people lived in Toyoma with the communities possessing 344 and 769 houses respectively.

Usulso recorded the largest loss of life out of the tsunami-affected areas of Iwaki after an 8.5m tsunami inundated a 27ha area, taking 115 lives. An additional 90 lives were lost in Toyoma. A total of 850 buildings were completely destroyed in both districts.

Despite the tragic losses in these areas, there was one fortunate coincidence on the day. The local junior high school in Usulso held their graduation ceremony on the morning of the earthquake. Although the tsunami flooded the school, the students had already left after the ceremony, preventing potentially more casualties. However, the school had to close down and relocate as a result of the disaster.

### Usulso and Toyoma 5 years later

Since Toyoma and Usulso experienced the largest and most destructive tsunamis within Iwaki in 2011, the Iwaki City and Fukushima Prefectural governments have been working to ensure these coastal communities are given the maximum level of protection from future tsunamis. A 7.2m seawall will be built in addition to a 50m wide green zone to shield the Usulso-Toyoma coast from incoming tsunamis. Most of the land including the new roads near the coast has been raised by excavating land from the nearby mountains and piling it up closer to the shore – raising the overall height above sea level. New roads and parks are also being built to rejuvenate the area. Overall, the reconstruction project covers a 37ha area in Usulso and a 55.9ha area in Toyoma, with a projected 185 lots and 349 lots of housing in the respective districts. Since there is less land available on the coast due to the green zone, the Usulso-Toyoma redevelopments also include the creation of new districts on higher ground where the hills have been flattened and the excess soil moved onto the coast. The lots are all expected to be handed over by March 2018.

Usulso is also being restored as an attractive beach destination with a carpark established for beachgoers to accommodate the potential tourist demand. In other developments, the new junior high school to replace the one that was damaged in 2011 is expected to open after the summer break in August 2017.

Toyoma will also feature a new road and bridge along the shoreline to help with the tourism aspect of the region's recovery. This coastal route will connect to Usulso and provide a scenic drive offering spectacular ocean views from Hisanohama all the way down to Nakoso. A large disaster-resistant park will also be constructed to serve as an evacuation area for the future residents.

Considering the enormous tragedy that struck these two regions of Iwaki, it is quite inspiring to see how far these communities have come in the process of revitalisation. Not only are Toyoma and Usulso aiming to recover from 2011, but they are aiming to restore themselves as picturesque tourism destinations that are even more popular and appealing than before the disaster.



Photos (clockwise from top left):

- 1) Land readjustment project nearing completion in Usulso with the new higher ground district visible to the left.
- 2) Japanese black pine tree saplings on the coast to form the green zone and help reduce the impact of tsunamis.
- 3) Land on the side of a hill being excavated in Toyoma and moved to the coast to create green zones, etc.
- 4) Toyoma coastline with a road to be built adjacent to the seawall as part of a planned scenic route to Usulso.