



South Exit area of Iwaki Station before and after redevelopment. Most of the area in the left photo is now occupied by the LATIV shopping centre. The right photo shows the completed pedestrian deck area and new station building. (Photos by Iwaki City 1989 (left) and 2010 (right))

- 2000: National Route 6 Joban Bypass opens
- Marine Science Museum Fukushima Prefecture (Aquamarine Fukushima) opens
- 2002: Joban Expressway Iwaki-Yotsukura – Hirono section opens
- 2004: Windfarm System begins operating at the Flower Centre
- 2005: Iwaki Park opens
- 2006: Futabasaurus is given the official scientific name Futabasaurus Suzukii
- Hula Girls begins screening in cinemas across Japan
- 2007: The LATOV building, part of the Iwaki Urban Redevelopment Project, opens
- 2008: Iwaki Tourism and City Planning Bureau established
- Entire stretch of Ban'atsu Expressway from Iwaki to Niigata is upgraded to four lanes
- 2009: Grand opening of Iwaki Performing Arts Centre Alias
- New Iwaki Station Building opens
- 2010: 1st Iwaki Sunshine Marathon
- Redevelopment of South Exit of Iwaki Station complete
- 2011: At 2:46pm on 11 March, a major earthquake with a seismic intensity of 6-lower occurs off the Pacific coast of Tohoku
- One month later on 11 April, another major earthquake with a seismic intensity of 6-lower occurs with its epicentre in the south-western region of Iwaki

- 2011 (cont.): Kauai County (Hawaii, USA) signs a sister city agreement with Iwaki
- Onahama Port designated an International Strategic Bulk Port
- "Ganbappe" (We can do it!) Iwaki Restoration Festival
- 2013: Iwaki Kaisei High School takes part in the 85th Japanese High School Baseball Invitation Tournament as one of the 21st Century Teams
- Mascot character Iwaki Hulajiro (nickname "Hula-Ojisan") is created to be Iwaki's tourism navigator
- 3rd round game of the Nippon Professional Baseball All-stars Series played in Iwaki Green Stadium
- 2014: Samurai Hustle begins screening in cinemas across Japan
- Iwaki City's official social media account launched
- 2015: Joban Expressway Joban-Tomioka-Namie section reopens
- Joban Line's Hitachi special express train begins a through service to Shinagawa Station
- 7th Pacific Islands Leaders' Meeting (PALM7 Summit)
- 2016: Iwaki City celebrates its 50th anniversary
- Wonder Farm opens
- Humanoid robot "Pepper" installed inside Iwaki City Hall
- 3rd WBSC U-15 Baseball World Cup
- Samurai Hustle Returns begins screening in cinemas across Japan
- Iwaki and Kauai officially become sister cities



Damage from the 3.11 earthquake in Taira. (Photo by Takayuki Sato 2011)



World leaders gathering for the Pacific Islands Leaders' Meeting (PALM7 Summit). (Photo by Cabinet Public Relations Office 2015)

Iwaki's Revitalisation 5 Years After the Disaster: Obama and Iwama Districts

The third part of our series that looks at Iwaki's reconstruction after the Great East Japan Earthquake takes us to Obama and Iwama. These two coastal areas are located in southern Iwaki and separated by a 2km cliff in between. Yet they share a similar story of destruction and revival.

Before and during the disaster

The Obama district's beach was once a popular bathing area adjacent to a fishing port whilst Iwama was once an area full of rice paddies and its beach attracted many surfers. Before the 2011 disaster, Obama was home to 164 people living in 64 households and Iwama had a population of 306 residents in 189 homes.

The Obama district was devastated by a large tsunami which reached up to a height of 7.1m and flooded 3.8ha of the coastal area. Meanwhile, Iwama was struck by a slightly higher 7.6m tsunami which swept through 11ha of coastline. Most people managed to reach higher ground in time. However, two lives were lost in Obama and seven lives were lost, in addition to three people left missing, as a result of the tsunami in Iwama. The tsunami completely destroyed 31 houses in Obama and 80 houses in Iwama.

Obama and Iwama 5 years later

Discussions held by the city with residents affected by the disaster found that some people wanted to have their houses rebuilt and return home and others preferred to live elsewhere or relocate to higher ground. That is why the reconstruction project for Obama and Iwama districts also included a new 1.5ha district in nearby Kobara, which is located on higher ground away from the coast.



Both districts will be protected by a 7.2m high seawall and redesigned roads – including the straightening of the prefectural road that connects them – for smoother evacuation. The Obama district will be further protected with the land on the coast raised by 1.8m and a 7.2m high green zone will also help shield Iwama from future tsunamis. Once completed, the newly developed Obama district will consist of 33 households for 85 people and Iwama will eventually house 200 people in 78 households. Currently all of the houses in Kobara and a small number of houses in the other districts have been fully rebuilt. The redevelopment project is expected to be fully complete by fiscal year 2020.

The areas that were affected by the 2011 disaster in southern Iwaki are rebuilding one step at a time. Also, a recently held Sagicho (bamboo lighting) festival held on Obama Beach for the first time in 32 years gives some positive indication that some vitality has returned to these communities.



Photos: (Top right) view of Iwama district showing Iwama Beach, the industrial estate and the area that was damaged by the tsunami in the top right. The prefectural road will be straightened for easier access (7 November 2016). (Bottom left) Sagicho bamboo fire festival on Obama Beach (August 2016).