

Recently, I had the good fortune to participate in a special Study Tour to Minami Soma, Iwaki, and Miharu. The main purpose of this trip was to let people better understand the current situation in Fukushima. In total, about 20 people went on this tour, including about 18 international students. Before I talk about the details of this trip, I'd like to share a little bit about my own prior experience visiting this area. In August of 2013, before I became a student of Fukushima Medical University, I took a trip to Fukushima City to visit Prof. Ugawa. During the visit, I found out that one of the doctors, Doctor Murakami, would take trips to the Minami Soma Public Hospital in order to provide medical services. Seeing an opportunity, I decided to hitch a ride in the car that picked him up and visit the surrounding area. Upon arriving I rented a taxi for about an hour and took a mini-tour of the disaster area. What I saw was wrecked boat, abandoned homes, and large areas that had yet recovered from the tsunami.

Therefore, this trip had an extra special meaning to me, because I could see how things have changed since 2 and a half years ago. On the first day, we went to one of the local supermarket (みらい百彩館んめ〜べ). There, they explained how they test the food for radiation contamination. Afterwards, we went to a restaurant run by one of the locals to try their food. Next, we visited one of the re-opened areas, Otaka district. When I had visited in 2013, this area was filled with debris and boat wreckage. Now, it has been cleaned up nicely, and is under construction. Currently, about 10% of the previous population has returned, and they hope for even more in the future. Then, they took us to an important local shrine. According to the guide, this shrine was built 1400 years ago as a memorial to the victims of an earthquake. He said that even during difficult times, we must protect this cultural heritage. Finally, we went to a hotel in Iwaki to rest for the night.

The next day, we went to the Aquamarine aquarium in Iwaki, the worker there explained what had happened during the 2011 disaster. This aquarium had been severely damaged by the tsunami, but it only took 4 months to rebuild it. The workers learned much from this experience, especially the importance of leadership and teamwork. Afterwards, we went to a restaurant in Miharu. On the way, it started snowing so heavily that the driver had to stop the bus and put

chains on the tires. The restaurant used a lot of local produce to make their dishes. Everything was so fresh and delicious! Our final stop was KomyuTan Fukushima (コミュタンふくしま). They recorded all that had happened from the 3.11 disaster up to now. The main purpose was to see all the research into Fukushima's radiation, and we could actually test some the radiation of some of the local produce!

In conclusion, I was deeply moved to see all the effort the government and the citizens put into the recovery of the areas hardest hit by the 3.11 disaster. I am very grateful to the prefectural government and their workers for letting me have this unforgettable experience. May the Force be with Fukushima!