

Australia-Japan Joint Symposium on Tourism and Disaster Resilience (2023/6/21-22)

Theme: Disaster risk reduction, tourism, recovery, preparedness

Venue: IRIDeS and Higashi-Matsushima

Following the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, various tourism development policies have been enacted in order to promote the growth of the tourism industry which could facilitate economic recovery of affected regions. Since then and until the 2020 pandemic, tourism numbers had grown exponentially, as more communities grow increasingly more reliant on the tourism industries. Although the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic saw tourism numbers drop from 2020-2022, it is expected to rebound in 2023 as Japan re-opened for international tourism. The growth of the tourism industry in Japan brings about two challenges. First in regards the host communities that have become tourism destinations, how can tourism contribute to livelihood sustainability in the region, and how could community stakeholders strengthen their resiliency in the face of inherent vulnerabilities tourism may bring due to its risk of external shocks? Secondly, for the tourists, how can the tourism sector prepare for disaster and assist tourists who may be unfamiliar with local hazard risks?

In order to address these issues, this symposium invited academic, industry and government experts from Australia, where much research has been done on tourism and disaster resiliency research due to the country's booming tourism sector and significant exposure to multiple hazards. Joining these experts were academic, industry and government representatives from Japan. This two-day workshop, funded by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's Australian-Japan Foundation Grant, consisted of a field trip to Higashi-Matsushima on June 21st, followed by a symposium held on June 22nd.

During the field trip, participants were greeted by the Mayor of Higashi-Matsushima, Mr. ATSUMI Iwao. The city of Higashi-Matsushima provided transportation and interpretation services for our participants as the meeting was followed by a field trip to multiple areas affected by the 2011 disasters. Participants had the opportunity to interact with local businesses to discuss their experiences in the recovery process, which was followed by a field trip to the Nobiru museum to learn about the disaster. Participants also enjoyed the local seaweed udon.

On the second day, a symposium was held at Tohoku University at the IRIDeS multi-purpose hall. In addition to the twelve speakers from Japan and Australia, were guests from over 22 countries that joined in-person and online. Guests also included representatives from the UNWTO, UNDP, Sendai Airport, among others. The symposium was split into three parts, with the morning session focusing on presentations on Japan, the afternoon session on presentations on Australia, and the final session which focused on the discussion of the two challenges aforementioned challenges.

At the end of the symposium, after two days of knowledge exchange, participants became increasingly interested in continuing collaboration between Australia and Japan and have identified several areas for future research activities.

Report: David N. Nguyen (Tsunami Engineering Lab and Earthquake Induced Tsunami Risk Evaluation Lab (Tokio Marine and Nichido Fire Insurance))

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Australian and Japanese participants visiting a disaster memorial in Higashi-Matsushima City.



Australian and Japanese participants during a lunch meeting, discussing recovery efforts in Higashi-Matsushima, while enjoying the local seaweed udon dish.



Group photo of the participants who attended the symposium in-person at IRIDeS. In addition, there were also participants who joined online.



Associate Professor (Specially Appointed) David N. Nguyen provides an explanation of the Tohoku region's history to participants.