

# Open Sesame

# Simple ideas make safe cities

Remember the magnitude 6.9 earthquake in Sikkim on September 18? It took 111 lives. And just a few days before that, Delhi experienced a magnitude 4.2 earthquake. Natural disasters are growing—and climate change is adding to the uncertainty of natural disasters. Typhoons, tsunamis, earthquakes, fires, floods, droughts and landslides are disrupting life, changing economies and drawing a tremendous amount of attention from city and town planners. How do we design our cities so that they can cope with disaster better?

Fukuoka is a city that was voted the Number 14 Most Livable City in the World by the Economist in 2010. It is a city unlike any I have visited. It is friendly, comfortable, charming, beautiful and safe.

You can cycle through Fukuoka (and that is a wonderful way to get to know the city), as do a large part of its residents. Fukuoka is remarkably cycle-friendly. Not only does it have cycle parking everywhere, it also has underground cycle parking and multi-level cycle parking. That last one—multi-level cycle parking—took me quite by surprise.

So, you may ask, what makes Fukuoka a city where you can discuss disaster management and enjoy a holiday? The two seem quite at odds! But think about it: Fukuoka, through its eco-friendly practices, ensures the efficient collection, conservation, distribution and use of water, ensuring that it values water and is becoming drought resistant. Simple ideas are being fostered in Fukuoka to make cities more environment-friendly and safe.

One of the most fascinating places that I had a chance to visit was the Fukuoka Citizens' Disaster Prevention Centre, where I got to fight a fire on a large interactive screen. It was a good and exciting use of interactive technology to help understand how fires behave. At the same place, I experienced a magnitude 6 and 7 earthquake with screens on either side of the simulations showing how buildings respond to both the quakes. It was an experience that literally shook me! Fukuoka makes an unusual, educative and fun city to visit. In a world where being environment friendly is both difficult and necessary, Fukuoka presents a way that can be adopted by each one of us. When you return from Fukuoka, you come back telling yourself: we can live in a better, safer world.

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**PICTURE PERFECT!** Graceful architecture on Fukuoka's artificial waterfront built on reclaimed land. PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR.



**FUKUOKA TOWER:** It is built to withstand a magnitude 7 earthquake.



**PEDAL POWER:** Fukuoka is a very cycle-friendly city.



**GLASS & GREEN:** Acros, the building that has the UN Habitat's Asian headquarters.



**MUST-VISIT!** Located on the west coast of Japan, Fukuoka is a modern city with sustainable practices.



**SAFE & SOUND:** Cycles significantly lower air and noise pollution.



**FIRETENDER RESCUE:** A treat for kids and grown-ups alike at the Fukuoka Citizens' Disaster Prevention Centre.



**EARTHQUAKE SIMULATOR:** At the Disaster Prevention Centre, an amazing experience of what earthquakes can do to buildings!

**A building that sort of grows (on you)!**

The architecture in Fukuoka is extremely modern, with attention paid to maintaining beautiful urban landscapes, afforestation, night-time illumination, the use of signs, the placement of statues and the use of public spaces. The city has inspiring buildings designed by leading architects such as Kingo Tatsuno, whose Tatsuno style has become a standard through Japanese Manchuria and the legendary Michael Graves. Acros, which is a centre for international culture and information exchange is, appropriately, home to the UN Habitat's Asian headquarters. The building is all glass in front and has a beautiful stepped, forested back. The building also houses the Fukuoka Symphony Hall. Just walking around Acros is a mesmerising experience.

**Things to do in Fukuoka**

Here is a list of captivating places in Fukuoka to visit:

- Fukuoka Citizens' Disaster Prevention Centre: Experience disasters and learn how to handle them. From simulated earthquakes (Magnitude 1 to 7) to fires, the Disaster Prevention Centre provides a unique life-like experience unlike any you've been through.
- Fukuoka Tower: Just a short distance from the Disaster Prevention Centre is the soaring 234-metre tall Fukuoka Tower, built to withstand a magnitude 7 earthquake and winds of up to 63 metres/second. The view from the tower is spectacular, and the city's artificial waterfront looks beautiful from here.
- Robo Square: Learn what robots can do, play with them and even attend a workshop where you get to make a robot. Just round the corner from Fukuoka Tower.