Simple ideas make safe cities

Reminisce the magnitude 7.9 earthquake in Sikkim on September 18. It took 115 lives. And just a few days before that, Delhi experienced an earthquake magnitude 4.2 earthquake. Natural disasters are growing—and climate change is adding to the uncertainty of natural disasters. Typhoons, tsunami, 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 has been rated the Number 14 Most Livable City in the World by the Economist in 2016. It is a city unlike any other. 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), or do a large part of its resorts. 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 Fukuoka, through its ecologically 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 watch 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 5 and 7 earthquake with screens on either side of the simulations showing how buildings respond to both the quakes. It was an experience that I did not expect to meet Fukuoka makes an unusual, educational and fun experience. The 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 that we can live in a better, safer world.

A Building that sort of grows (on you)!

The architecture in Fukuoka is extremely modern, with attention paid to maintaining beautiful urban landscapes, deforestation, 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 Kengo Kuma, whose Kengo style has become a standard through Japanese modernism and the legendary Michael Graves. Across, which is a centre for international information exchange, is appropriately home to the UN Habitat's Asian headquarters. The building is all glass in front and has a beautiful shape. I was not able to visit. The building also houses the Fukuoka Symphony Hall. Just walking around Across 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 65 metres/second, the view from the tower is spectacular, and the city's artificial waterfront looks just like fire.
- Shop Sake: Learn what robot can do, play with them and even attend a workshop where you get to make a robot. Just round the corner from Fukuoka Tower.