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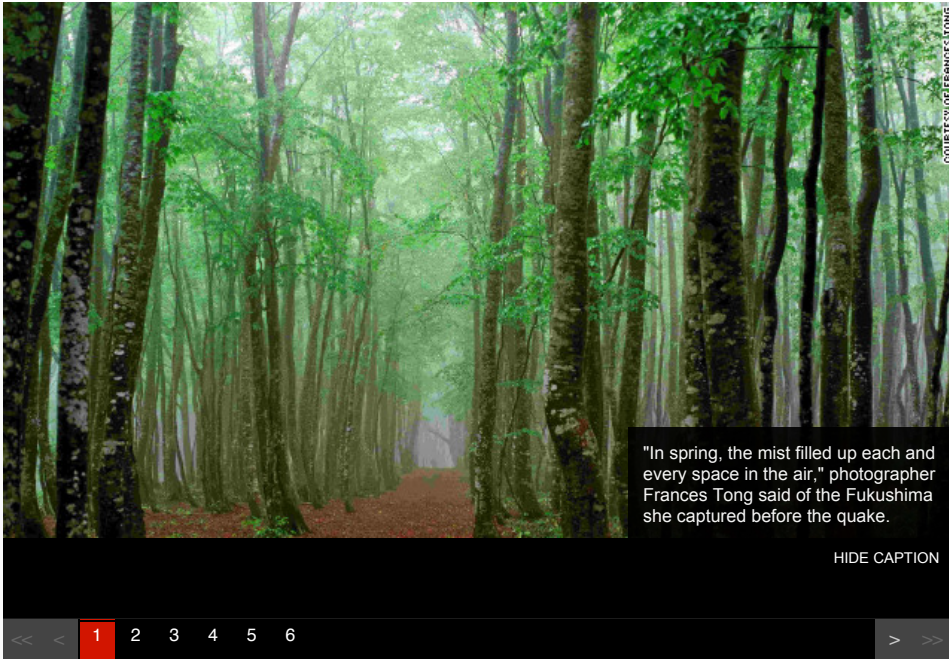


Focusing on Fukushima's beauty

By **James Chan Kin-sing** and **Manon Pierre**, for CNN
March 13, 2012 -- Updated 1006 GMT (1806 HKT)

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STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- To most people, scenes of Fukushima evoke death and destruction
- Two photographers are determined to offer artistic alternative

Tokyo (CNN) -- Since last year's Tohoku earthquake, the scenes of devastation and Daiichi nuclear disaster immediately come to mind when people hear "Fukushima."

Few see the beauty of Fukushima's landscape, both before the quake and how it now remains. Two photographers, Frances Tong and Katsumi Omori, respectively from Hong Kong and from Japan, are determined to offer artistic alternative.

"In spring, the mist filled up each and every space in the air. In autumn, the falling leaves colored the forest and the sweet scent of maple leaves merged with every breath that I drew in ... and that's the image of Fukushima that I can recall," said Tong, an amateur Hong Kong photographer who went to Fukushima prefecture several times before the earthquake.

"Fukushima after the quake is no longer the Fukushima that I once visited," said Tong. "Despite the sad side of Fukushima, I want to show its peaceful and hopeful side as well. The scenes of Fukushima that I've seen on television are so dark and devastated."

Tong founded a charity organization called "Friends of Fukushima," which set up three photo exhibitions in Hong Kong showing 30 photographs of Fukushima's mountains and lakes for charity. Earlier this year, \$12,000 was raised and donated to Citizens Nuclear Information Centre, an anti-nuclear organization in Japan, to help the Fukushima nuclear plant workers.

Tong, a 36-year-old business development manager, discovered



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February 28, 2012 -- Updated 1624 GMT (0024 HKT)



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Fukushima prefecture's scenery during a business trip in 2007. Since then, Tong went to Fukushima every year to capture the scenery on film. Tong says she feels a bond with the prefecture's environment, including one unforgettable sunrise.



"I woke up at 3:30 in the morning. I waited there for hours with my tripod. I witnessed the rising sun gradually lightening up the sky, from dark to dawn to morning. I felt so light and relaxed, as if I was merged with nature," said Tong.

Rather than looking back in the past, Katsumi Omori chose to show the existing beauty of Fukushima.

Right after the quake, Omori, who lives in the Tokyo suburb of Urayasu, felt the need to go to the affected areas last April.

"The world has changed. It wasn't what it was before," the 48-year-old said. "I had to see it for myself."

Without any precise idea of what would be seen in the area, he decided to head to Fukushima to take pictures of "sakura". These Japanese cherry blossoms are the main theme of his ongoing artistic project since 2001, consisting largely of photos taken in Tokyo and his neighborhood.

"Sakura is planted by people. I wanted to see how those people are living and their conditions," he said.

His sakura photo series was presented to the British public in "Everything Happens for the First Time", his solo exhibition held in London, August 2011.

"People who were expecting to see the massive devastation caused by the tsunami and the earthquake might have been disappointed," he said. "Those who saw my work as an artistic expression of my feelings told me that they really like my exhibition."

Omori wanted to show the "unseen" which has not been exposed by the media. He believed that, as a photographer, his job is to capture things out of the ordinary rather than what is easily seen.

Some people told him they felt *natsukashi*, or "nostalgia" in Japanese, when looking at his pictures. Being a photographer for 20 years, he observed that artists' attitude has somewhat changed after this disaster.

"People seem to realize that things do break and things that humans made get washed away," he said. "The way artists pay tribute has changed. Their works are sometimes offered to charity organizations and remember what happened."

Haruka Nuga contributed to this story



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