



2022 TOP 100 GOOD PRACTICE STORY

Title of the Story:

Challenges to Sustainable Regional Development through "E-DMO"

Destination Name: *(include any state, province or region)*

Gero-spa Town

Country:

Japan

Submitter name:

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Position:

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Submission category: *(Please check one of the boxes that indicates the focus of your story)*

Please find detailed information for the categories below in the Top 100 training module 'Good Practice Story'.

- Governance, Reset & Recovery
- Nature & Scenery
- Environment & Climate
- Culture & Tradition
- Thriving Communities
- Business & Marketing





DESCRIBE YOUR GOOD PRACTICE STORY

Address each aspect of your good practice story in the different sections being specific including relevant quantitative and qualitative information.

Find detailed instructions for submitting good practices in the Top 100 training module "Good Practice Story".

Should you have any questions on your submission please refer to our FAQ page or contact top100@greendestinations.org

Issues faced

What was the problem/issue solved with the good practice?

The population of Gero City continues to decline. The population was 39,822 on April 1, 2004, soon after the merger, but reached 30,381 on April 1, 2022, a decrease of 9,441 in 18 years, reflecting a drop of more than 500 people annually. In light of this current situation, in efforts to maintain the community as a sustainable region and improve the quality of life of its residents, it is essential to secure and increase the number of people interacting with each other and to acquire foreign currency.

The annual number of overnight visitors in Gero City reached 1,162,449 in FY2018, with the total at 1,103,237 in FY2019, both in pre-COVID-19 years. The consumption of overnight travelers has a significant economic ripple effect on each industry, heightening production and securing employment in a wide range of industries. Therefore, the most important issue is to further drive the city's economy by increasing the number of overnight visitors, raising the unit price of overnight stays, and increasing the number of recipients of tourism consumption.

To solve this issue, the Gero Onsen Tourism Association aimed to establish a tourism promotion system and strengthened marketing and management as a DMO. In addition, in efforts to both utilize and conserve resources throughout the city, the association has been working on ecotourism. It has created an overall concept (plan) in accordance with the Japanese law "Ecotourism Promotion Law," which stipulates the appropriate use of resources, monitoring and other environmentally friendly tourism promotion measures. This system of cooperation between DMOs and ecotourism is called "E-DMO."

The COVID-19 pandemic occurred just as this system was being put in place, causing unprecedented damage to tourism in Gero City. The number of overnight visitors dropped to 520,000 in FY2020 and 560,000 in FY2021, half the numbers in previous years. However, the city is aiming to attract even more overnight guests than before the pandemic, by developing business operations for a turnaround, including the development of visitor attractions and marketing tools and content for the post-pandemic period.

In the future, it will be necessary to build consensus and create a roadmap for sustainable regional development in cooperation with various sectors across the board, and to demonstrate concrete initiatives.





Supplementary Explanation of the E-DMO Cooperation System

After the merger of Gero Town, Kosaka Town, Hagiwara Town, Kanayama Town and Maze Village in 2004, the tourism associations of each of the former municipalities continued to exist side by side. The Gero Onsen Tourism Association, the only one with a legal entity, has been promoting a strong outbound tourism business, but its area of jurisdiction was limited to the former Gero Town. However, in order to respond to diversifying tourism needs, it became necessary to understand the tourism resources in the four surrounding areas of the city and to explore ways to utilize them. Since 2006, the Gero City Tourism Association has been collaborating with the Gero City Tourism Association Liaison Council and other organizations. The DMO and eco-tourism promotion councils have included the four tourism associations as members, with the DMO side creating PR tools for tourism resources, promoting, enhancing and creating products. The ecotourism side has been involved in organizing and developing resources, informing citizens, formulating rules for their use, and training human resources. The Gero Onsen Tourism Association's sustainable perspective on each region and resource enables consistent promotion of use and conservation activities.

Methods, steps and tools applied

How was the good practice implemented?

To drive the city's economy through tourism, an E-DMO promotion system was established and promoted as follows:

- A: Establish a system and rules
- B: Develop tools to attract visitors
- C: Create recipients, maximize economic ripple effects





A: Establish a System and Rules

Establishment of DMO

The Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011 triggered a monthly meeting of stakeholders. In 2016, it was registered as a DMO candidate corporation under the national system, then in 2017, it was upgraded to a DMO corporation and then to a priority DMO. As per the original goal, the company has established a system without omissions and duplication by closely sharing information among stakeholders, and has strengthened marketing and management through objective business development based on statistical data analysis.

Formulation of an Overall Concept for Ecotourism

In 2007, the Ecotourism Promotion Law (hereinafter referred to as the "Law") was enacted. However, because the efforts were made by the former towns and villages before the merger, there were limits to how far they could spread outside of the city. In the process of the Gero Onsen Tourism Association's efforts to build consensus with various stakeholders and regional management as a DMO, the association realized the importance of regional sustainability through balancing economic activities and environmental conservation, prompting it to establish the Gero City Ecotourism Promotion Council in 2016. In 2018, the entire law -- based on the concept, which defines the promotion system, objectives, policies, guidance rules, and monitoring of resources -- was approved by the government.

The concept of "E-DMO," which combines these principles and initiatives, will be used as the promotion system for tourism in Gero City.

B: Develop Tools to Attract Visitors

- Treasure Hunting Survey Project

In order to uncover local resources, a "treasure hunting" survey was conducted among residents. As a result, 2,714 resources were raised, which were organized by category and season to create a phenology calendar. Each region also presented their treasures to each other to deepen understanding among the regions.





- Creation of Tour Programs Utilizing Natural and Cultural Resources Unique to Each Region

In order to make the most of the resources uncovered, tour products were developed and enhanced for distribution.

- Implementation of One-coin Tours

One-contact trip tours were held exclusively for residents to deepen their understanding of ecotourism and new tourism resources.

- Data Collection and Analysis of Experiential Programs in Gero City

Collected data on the number of tourists who participated in experiential programs, their attributes, and responses, which were then analyzed to be used to attract more visitors in the future.

- Creation, Distribution and Other Effective Uses of Videos of Experiential Programs

Created PR videos (spring/summer and fall/winter versions) of the "Land-based Experience" program and distributed them via SNS advertisements, etc.

C: Create Recipients and Maximize Economic Ripple Effects

- Guide Human Resource Development

Specialized guide training sessions were held, with guide groups offering experience programs in Gero City were invited to attend these sessions to develop human resources.

- Matching Businesses With Experiential Program Providers and Lodging Facilities

The program aims to provide matching opportunities between lodging facilities and ecotour operators to extend the length of stay and increase the amount of money spent by overnight visitors.





- Development of Website for Sales of Experiential Programs

A website was built to sell experiential programs, ecotours and other products, enabling tourists to easily access information on experiential programs and other products and to make reservations at any time, thereby minimizing opportunity losses.

- Development and Usage of Information Distribution Bases in Gero Onsen Town

The Gero Onsen Tourism Association operates the "Yumegurikan," a tourist exchange facility built by Gero City in the Gero Onsen Hot Spring Resort area, and introduces programs for experiencing various areas of the city inside the facility. At the same time, the facility offers an electrically power assisted bicycle rental service, which can be used as transportation to various destinations. Yumegurikan purchases CO2-free electricity, which contributes to addressing global warming and climate change.

- Implementation of Sales Promotion Coupon Business for Experiential Programs

A campaign is planned to grant coupons equivalent to half the price of experiential programs, etc. sold on the above-mentioned website.

Through these steps, local resources (materials) were commercialized while building a system to promote ecotourism, spreading the word to the public, and improving the skills of guide personnel. Then, through public relations and sales promotion activities, they are working to build a system that will spread from Gero Onsen to the entire city area, maximizing the economic effects of tourism.





Key success factors

What helped you tackle the issues?

As for the economic ripple effect to the entire Gero City area, the system is being put in place, although it is not yet sufficient. Toward these goals, we believe that we have been successful in steadily carrying out activities by establishing appropriate cycles and improvements, such as reviewing the implemented projects every year.

It is also important to involve various stakeholders in the DMO and the Gero City Ecotourism Promotion Council, including not only tourism operators but also key persons in each region, such as local community association officials and immigrants.

Lessons learned

While implementing the Good Practice what challenges were faced, and how were they overcome?

The city area of Gero City spans wide, from north to south, and prior to the merger, the former towns and villages were unaware of each other's tourism resources. Even after the merger, there were still barriers and lack of communication between the regions, but mutual understanding was created through presentations at the "Treasure Hunting Survey Project," one of the ecotourism initiatives, and at the "National Ecotourism Convention," leading to empathy and collaboration (new product development).

The project was initially unable to take shape due to differences in business models, but over the course of several years of steady work, the two parties were able to develop a product that would be a success. After several years of steady efforts, the two parties grew to know each other, leading to a compromise.

Results, achievements and recognitions





What were the qualitative and quantitative results of the good practice?

Quantitative Effects

The table below shows the number of participants and the amount of money consumed for experiential programs and ecotours.

In FY2020 and FY2021, both the number of participants and the amount consumed were sluggish due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, but the unit consumption amount has been increasing.

No. of participants (persons) Consumption (yen) Consumption per person (yen/person) by Year

FY2008: 20,036	32,585,030	1,626
FY2019: 25,787	35,590,706	1,380
FY2020: 13,834	23,609,914	1,706
FY2021: 14,681	26,315,408	1,792

Qualitative Effects

The establishment of the Gero City Ecotourism Concept clarified the promotion system, objectives, policies, guidance rules and monitoring of resources, etc.

The treasure hunting project has provided information on many local resources to residents, and has broadened their understanding of ecotourism.

The Treasure Hunting Project has provided residences with a lot of information about local resources, and has helped to broaden their understanding of ecotourism.

The guide human resource development project enhanced the skills of guide groups, the number of products and the safety management system, leading to improved customer satisfaction and higher unit consumption.

The promotion of DMOs and ecotourism has exposed local guide groups to the importance of marketing and management, while tourism operators have recognized the importance of sustainability of resources.





Additional references

Provide links to further information. Pictures and videos should be available for download either from YouTube, Vimeo or other Cloud-based (Google/ One Drive) download URL (not WeTransfer).

Gero City Ecotourism Overall Concept

<https://www.city.gero.lg.jp/soshiki/16/2161.html>

Gero Onsenkyo+

<https://gero-taiken.gero-spa.com/>

Gero Onsen Tourism Association YouTube Link

<https://www.youtube.com/user/GeroOnsenAs>

