



2022 TOP 100 GOOD PRACTICE STORY

Title of the Story: Trail of Opportunity: Maximizing Natural Resources for Sustainable Tourism Initiatives in Higashimatsushima

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

Higashimatsushima City

Country:

JAPAN

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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

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

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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.

Issues faced

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

With its specialty products of oysters and seaweed and plethora of attractive tourism resources such as sight-seeing cruises, stunning beaches, and lively seafood festivals, Higashimatsushima City used to attract more than 1.1 million tourists annually. However, the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011, caused unprecedented damage, inundating 65% of the urban area and devastating the region's tourism resources. By 2012 the number of annual tourists had plummeted to just 360,000.

Since then, the city has continued to accept educational tours in an effort to encourage disaster preparedness and promote tourism, but the overall number of tourists has been slow to recover. To promote the recovery of tourism and revitalize the local economy, it was necessary to reevaluate and discover new resources for new tourism potential.

Methods, steps and tools applied

How was the good practice implemented?

After reviewing local resources, particularly the wonderful nature-rich landscape of Higashimatsushima, we focused on the concept of 'Olle'. 'Olle' is a Korean word referring to a trail which connects visitors to the community through nature, and that can be explored at your own pace. Olle trails have been created in various locations across the globe and promoted as a new style of trekking, where visitors can not only experience and feel the natural scenery, but also the local culture and history, through all five senses.

The 'Oku-Matsushima' Olle trail was developed through cooperation between local government and residents, and officially opened in 2018. To raise awareness and connect visitors and the local community with the trail, many promotional events and initiatives are being conducted in collaboration with multiple stakeholders and sister Olle courses in Miyagi Prefecture.

Key success factors

What helped you tackle the issues?

- Selecting the Trail Course

Course selection was a joint effort between public and private sectors. The voices of many local nature lovers were reflected in the selection process, including the addition of small mountain trails that had historically been used by local elderly people when they were children on their way to school.

- Making the most of natural attractions (Otakamori Observatory)

Mt. Otakamori is visited by about 15,000 people annually. From the peak, visitors can enjoy panoramic views of Matsushima Bay. A Buddhist temple located halfway up the mountain is registered as a National Important Cultural Property. The surrounding area is also home to designated national historic sites like the "shell mounds": archaeological sites dating from the Jomon period, which offer a glimpse into local life 6,800 years ago. The trail course showcases the unique landscape, history, and culture of the area, allowing visitors to feel a stronger connection to the region.





- Promotion, fundraising, and maintenance

The trail course is utilised as a stage for seasonal events, held four times a year, that showcase both the natural attractions and local produce of Higashimatsushima. The highly popular events allow visitors to experience the region through all five senses and to fully appreciate the changing seasons. Information about the trail and events is featured on the city's website, promotional flyers, and shared at press conferences. The course is also actively featured on the city and prefectural social networking sites to attract tourists. Donations from "hometown tax payments," a system that indirectly supports environmental conservation and other community revitalization activities, are used to fund course maintenance and management. 55,238 donations were received in FY2020, some of which were used to maintain and improve the course. The entire community works together to manage and take care of the course. City employees and city-appointed reconstruction and community development staff carry out primary management, and local volunteer groups carry out environmental conservation activities. As the course itself is also regularly utilized and loved by residents, it has become more than just a tourist attraction; it is a symbol of community with deep roots in the region.

- Trail Rules / Etiquette

Visitors to the trail are informed of the below set of rules/ etiquette in pamphlets and other materials to encourage them to enjoy the trail while protecting the environment, the region and their own safety. (Excerpt) -Be sure to take your trash home with you. -Do not pick plants/flowers along the trail (appreciate them with your eyes!) - Refrain from dangerous activities on steep slopes / off-trail areas etc. - Be careful of cars when walking on the road. - Please refrain from travel in case of bad weather conditions such as typhoons, heavy rain, or heavy snowfall.

Lessons learned

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

- Importance and potential of regional cooperation.

A virtuous cycle was created by holding events in conjunction with sister 'Olle' courses in Miyagi Prefecture. As a result of multiple regions working together to share information and promote the trails, the number of overall tourists to the region increased. This has demonstrated the importance of engaging multiple stakeholders, including the community, town, and local government, in effectively using local resources to promote tourism that ultimately benefits visitors, the environment, and the host communities.

Private companies have begun to utilize the trail as part of their welfare programs. Higashimatsushima City instructed them on effective use of the trail for such events, leading to new partnerships between public and private sectors. Ultimately, the goal is to create a system that will allow private entities to utilize the trail independently.

- Attributes of Trail Users

According to the results of an event survey, the average age of participants was in their mid-50s. However, the age range was broad, ranging from under 10 to over 80 years old. A primary feature of the trail events is that anyone can participate. By simply stopping to make small talk and share information about local attractions, anyone can contribute to the experience of others, creating valuable opportunities for locals to take pride in their community.





Results, achievements and recognitions

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

There are four sister 'Olle' trails in Miyagi Prefecture, boasting an annual average of 6,800 visitors, with the Oku-Matsushima trail accounting for 49%. By June 27, 2021, the trail had attracted 20,000 visitors since its opening, confirming its role as an effective tourism resource both locally and regionally. Cooperation between stakeholders is steadily progressing, with trail events providing opportunity for cooperation among local businesses and contribution to the city's economic cycle. The trail has also been incorporated into the activities of local elementary and junior high schools and is a budding example of a communication tool that transcends generations.

Faced with rapidly declining birthrate and aging population, it would be difficult for residents of Higashimatsushima to maintain and manage the trail alone. Thanks to its development as a tourism resource, the path will be regularly maintained, leading not only to preservation of the rich natural scenery along the course, but also to contribution to local disaster preparedness as an evacuation route.

Use of the trail is expanding rapidly, including its partial incorporation into the 'Michinoku Coastal Trail' (MCT). Covering over 1,000 km, the MCT was fully opened in June 2019. It is a symbol of northern Japan's recovery, and a result of efforts of the Ministry of the Environment and relevant local governments, private organizations, and residents of 28 cities, towns, and villages in four prefectures. As the use of the trail expands, so does the scope for its use in exchange activities with universities and other organizations, and as a stage for independent research and field trips.

In creating the trail, the passion and efforts of local nature-lovers has brought the community and the government together towards a shared goal. The increase of tourism from outside of the community has also led to renewed awareness of the unique environment and attractive natural resources of Higashi-Matsushima among residents, fostering regional pride.

The local lifestyle of Higashimatsushima, in harmony with the abundant blessings and lessons from nature, and generations of accumulated history and culture are linked to the present through the trail. By providing means and opportunity to slow down and appreciate the natural scenery, the trail is increasing the number of visitors to the region and promoting the local economy through tourism and exchange. Above all, the warmth of people-to-people interactions and new connections created while walking is one of the major attractions and blessings the trail brings to Higashimatsushima.

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).

- Olle pamphlet
- Event flyer
- Articles on the event (city publicity)
- Number of entries of Olle (press conference materials)
- Olle results in the prefecture
- MCT National Geographic article https://drive.google.com/drive/u/1/folders/1mY_Bsva_INbWx-c7O2xzxt91jTPXBX2
- GPS_movie <https://youtu.be/CfpErql-9pM>

