



2022 TOP 100 GOOD PRACTICE STORY

Title of the Story: Crowd Control at Nabegataki Park

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

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

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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?

Nabegataki Falls is a small waterfall 10m high and 20m wide located in Oguni Town, Kumamoto Prefecture, Japan. It was formed by the erosion of pyroclastic flow deposits over the years, characterized by the very wide space behind the waterfall. In 2014, the Aso Geopark was recognized as a "Global Geopark," considered one of the most important places in the Aso Geopark where visitors can feel the heat of the Aso land.

Previously unknown to anyone and not a tourist attraction, it became popular and gradually attracted tourists when it was used as a filming location for a TV commercial. At the time, there was only a parking lot for a few cars for the waterfall, connected by a road described as a promenade maintained by hand by the local community in the mountain forest. The park was completed in 2012. Local residents and the local community are deeply involved in Nabigataki Falls, with the direct sales shop operated by local residents and nighttime lighting events organized by the local community (currently suspended due to the spread of COVID-19 infection cases).

Due in part to such community efforts, Nabegataki has been featured in many TV programs and magazines. Up to pre-pandemic 2019, it was visited by 240,000 tourists a year, making it one of Kumamoto Prefecture's leading tourist spots. However, the roads in the surrounding villages are narrow and difficult for multiple vehicles to pass, causing a major problem of heavy traffic congestion in the villages during major holidays. This congestion problem has had a major impact on the living environment of local residents, reducing the satisfaction level of visitors.

In 2015, Oguni Town introduced measures to alleviate traffic congestion by utilizing a closed school in the village to provide a shuttle bus service, which temporarily eased traffic congestion during major holidays. However, that effort was also halted due to the spread of COVID-19, as conditions of overcrowding and congestion in shuttle buses, shuttle bus stops and parks failed to address the measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 infections. This prompted the closure of Nabegataki Park during major holidays. The number of visitors to the park, which had risen steadily, reaching 240,000 annually up to 2019, declined to about 90,000 in 2020. In order for Nabigataki Park to remain a tourist destination in the future, it is necessary to resolve this problem and create a welcoming environment that preserves the living environment for local residents and allows tourists to visit without health concerns.





Methods, steps and tools applied

How was the good practice implemented?

The following steps were taken to improve Nabigataki Park and alleviate traffic congestion.

2009: Start of Nabegataki Park development

2012: Nabegataki Park completed

2015: Nabegataki Park toll system introduced; heavy traffic congestion in villages around Nabegataki Park; shuttle bus service implemented to alleviate traffic congestion

2020: Shuttle bus service suspended due to the spread of COVID-19; Nabegataki Park temporarily closed during major holidays

2021: Experimental demonstration begins of the advance reservation system at Nabegataki Park

2022: Full-scale operation of advance reservation system

While there have been many cases of reservation system implemented at indoor facilities and restaurants, there has been almost no precedent for the implementation of such a system in an outdoor nature park located in a rural community, such as Nabigataki. In efforts to alleviate traffic congestion, it was necessary not only to limit the number of visitors entering the park, but also to adjust the number of parking spaces in the parking lot to prevent an over capacity.

Year	Number of visitors/persons
2015	224, 565
2016	143, 177
2017	206, 777
2018	236, 037
2019	245, 603
2020	89, 179
2021	74, 148





Key success factors

What helped you tackle the issues?

This project was realized in collaboration with the following stakeholders:

Local residents, local community: Traffic congestion mitigation measures require the cooperation and understanding of local residents, and the details of the project must be communicated to them as needed.

ASO Oguni Tourist Association: As one of the town's tourist attractions, we have received many inquiries to the tourist association. We have been sharing information with Nabegataki Park as we have worked on this initiative. The reception desk at Nabegataki Falls Park has been outsourced to the ASO Onuguni Tourist Association, and since the switch to a reservation system will require changes in staff duties, training sessions have been held with opinions exchanged as part of joint efforts to alleviate traffic congestion.

JTB Kumamoto Branch (travel agency): The company is the outsourcing partner for the reservation system, responsible for the system design and operation method development.





Lessons learned

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

Lessons learned:

- Ensure visitation to Nabegataki Fall through publicizing the use of the reservation system to prevent confusion
- Setting the time frame and number of people of reservations to control traffic and parking congestion
- Impose special measures (different from normal days) during major holidays when more than 3,000 people visit the park per day

Solutions to address challenges are as follow:

Publicize the Reservation System

The biggest concern in introducing the reservation system was how to switch to the reservation system without causing confusion among customers. We announced the changeover to the reservation system in advance through various media, including newspapers, transportation, and the Internet. We also distributed flyers and posters to public facilities, lodging facilities, and restaurants in the town so that visitors could obtain information before coming to Nabegataki Falls on the day of the switchover and the day before. In addition, since it was anticipated that there would be many inquiries from customers at the time of the switchover, a call center was set up in addition to responding to inquiries at the town hall. Also, a system was put in place to respond to inquiries about the reservation system and how to make reservations. In addition, with the cooperation of the ASO Oguni Tourist Association and the JTB Kumamoto Branch, we were able to launch the reservation system without major confusion. As for the situation after the introduction of the reservation system, the reservation rate during the demonstration period (November 2021-March 2022) was about 50%-60%, indicating that many more customers made reservations in advance than expected. However, those who could not make reservations had to pay in cash at the counter as in the past, which left some issues to be addressed during major holidays when there are many visitors to the park.





Setting the time slots and number of people for reservations:

Parking management is important to prevent traffic congestion. With assumptions of the number of visitors to Nabegataki Falls and how long they would be staying, we set the time and number of people to reserve 40-minute slots with 170 people per slot. This is based on the calculation that 85 spaces are used per reservation slot for 123 parking spaces, and by allowing room for 38 parking spaces, we can ensure accommodating someone came without a reservation. It is intended mainly to accommodate customers who arrive earlier or later than their reserved time. We conducted a survey of visitors to the park after the reservation system started, allowing us to verify that the average time to enter the park was 30 minutes and 30 seconds, which was roughly in line with our expectations. The fact that we were able to operate the reservation system with enough time to spare without overbooking the parking lots even during the peak 10:00-12:00 time slot was a good decision for the major multi-day holidays. The results also confirmed that the reservation quotas were effective in dispersing the number of visitors during the peak hours.

Countermeasures for major multi-day holidays:

For Golden Week, the first major multi-day holiday after the introduction of the reservation system, the following measures were implemented based on the results of the demonstration experiment:

(1) Consideration of a complete reservation system

During the period of the demonstration experiment, which was a period from fall to winter when the number of visitors was relatively low, we operated the park using a combination of advance reservation through the website and on-site cash payment for those who could not make reservations. But since this method was likely to attract many visitors who had not made reservations during the major holidays, measures were taken under the assumption that this method would not be able to cope with the situation during major holidays. Therefore, in order to manage the number of visitors, we decided to implement a complete reservation system for admission to the park. However, if a full reservation system is used, visitors who cannot make reservations will not be able to enter the park. As a preventive measure, same-day tickets will be issued at the ASO Oguni Tourist Association counter in the Oguni Yu Station Roadside Station. We began publicizing this system one month in advance and announced that during the GW period, visitors only with reservations would be able to enter the park.





(2) Consideration of time slots and number of people to make reservations

Since there are more visitors during major holidays than usual, we examined whether the reservation time frame of 40 minutes and 170 people set during the demonstration experiment needed to be revised. We also considered increasing the number of visitors to 185 (a 10% increase), but the risk of overcrowding the parking lot was high, so we decided to maintain the number of reservations to 170. It also would be the first major holiday since the reservation system was introduced.

(3) On-site response

Since we anticipated many visitors would come to the park without knowing that reservations were required, we decided to set up a place in the middle of the village in Nabegataki Falls Park to check whether visitors had made reservations. This is because we anticipated that the parking lot would be full if we had to confirm on the spot with visitors who came to the Nabegataki Falls Park parking lot. Therefore, we used the grounds of an abandoned school in the village to confirm that all non-local cars were reserved at the grounds. By doing so, we were able to create a mechanism in which only those with reservations could pass through the section between the ruins of the elementary school and Nabegataki Falls Park. For those who had no reservations, a manual explaining how to make reservations was distributed on the ground, and reservations were made on the spot. Those who could not physically make reservations, such as those who had difficulty operating the system, did not have a smartphone, or did not have a credit card, were asked to go to the Tourist Association counter in the Roadside Station Yu Station to purchase same-day tickets.

Result of measures for major holidays:

The number of visitors during the major holidays totalled approximately 11,000, and on days when the weather was good, the maximum number of reservations was achieved. (Maximum 1,870 visitors per day * 170 visitors per slot x 11 slots). About 90% of the visitors made reservations, and the confirmation of reservations at the old elementary school site went smoothly. In addition, there was 10%-20% room in the parking lot even during the peak hours.

However, we have received feedback from customers and local residents that the system of requiring customers who cannot make reservations to return to the roadside station, which takes about 10 minutes each way, should be improved, and improvements are needed for the busy summer season in the future.





Results, achievements and recognitions

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

The main benefits of the project are as follow:

- Elimination of traffic congestion in the communities around Nabegataki Falls during major holidays.
- Use of a reservation system that distribute (restricted) the number of people entering the park by time slots created an environment in Nabegataki Falls Park where traffic congestion is not as high.
- Implementation of reservation-only on the first major holiday – Golden Week – using the reservation system helped eliminate traffic congestion in the area, prevent the parking lots from becoming full, and did not create a crowded situation for visitors in the park. We were able to confirm that the time slots in the reservation system and the number of visitors entering the park per time slot were appropriate.

The success of this project primarily benefited the following stakeholders:

- Improved living conditions for local residents living near Nabegataki Falls due to the elimination of traffic congestion
 - Reduced the risk of COVID-19 infection among tourists by providing a safer environment for them to enter the park even during the pandemic
- Increased the number of visitors to Nabegataki Falls, which will lead to an increase in the number of visitors to tourism-related businesses in the town.

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).

Nabegataki Falls Park Reservation Website : <https://ogunitown.info/nabegataki/>

