



2022 TOP 100 GOOD PRACTICE STORY

Title of the Story: Preservation and revitalization of patrimony in a Japanese castle town

Destination Name: Ozu, Ehime Prefecture

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".

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





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?

A steady decrease of population in Ozu's historic centre during the past decades has resulted in the abandonment of many properties. Neglected or disregarded, centennial structures have started to crumble or are being torn down. The way Ozu used to be inhabited for more than 400 year is in danger of physical extinction.

Set in a natural haven, flanked by blue-green mountains and a fierce water stream, Ozu grew into an industrial powerhouse despite its remoteness. *Washi*, wax and silk brought in riches that helped to shape a neatly arrayed burg. Shunned by post-war modernity, long decades in limbo preceded the aforementioned decline, markedly exacerbated with the advent of the new millennium.

Gifted with a healthy built-heritage, locals saw with horror how the lack of guardianship entailed wreckage and rubble in their neighbourhood, how their beloved bookshops or *kissaten** were forced to close down due to a lack of customers. Jobs were disappearing with the same celerity as lodgings did. Urban decay was rampant in a once shining castle-town.

**tea-drinking shop*

Methods, steps and tools applied

How was the good practice implemented?

Ozu has produced gradual albeit resolute responses to this decay. Alarms were triggered in 2016, after a certain landlord stepped into the city hall determined to consummate the dismantling of his (listed) estate, overwhelmed by economic burden of maintaining his vacant property.

1.) A sense of urgency convened young locals, intent on keeping an eye on deteriorating houses. Soon afterwards they created 'Yatsugi' (a NGO), in order to clean those neglected abodes and organize brief pop-up events in them (labelled 'Machibito').

2.) Simultaneously, officials began to inquire among urban regeneration specialists. Between 2017 and 2018 academics and consultants conducted surveys on the state of affairs and possible ways out. As an outcome, Ozu City Council enacted a strategy which **designated tourism as the main tool** to attain urban **regeneration of the historic centre**. Ultimately, a public-private partnership (PPP) agreement was signed in 2018 between the Ozu City Council, local Iyo Bank Ltd. and two *machizukuri* consultants: NOTE Co. Ltd and Value Management Co. Ltd.





Eventually the two movements merged upon the establishment of Kita Management Group, nourished by Yatsugi's vigour and the financial might -as well as the expertise- of the freshly constituted PPP.

Endorsed by the city council, Kita Management was assigned with the task of implementing urban regeneration. Namely, putting into practice the tourist strategy. Coordinating the PPP from August 2018, 'Gen. Inc. Association Kita Management' assumed the role of local DMO (destination Management Organization), whereas KITA Co. Ltd was entrusted with real estate management in the old district.

Securing funds ('Ozu Machizukuri Fund') and gaining trust of home proprietors ignited the regeneration project of abandoned-houses (2019). In parallel, efforts were made to carve out a plan to welcome visitors in low numbers, vying for long stays and with a pinch of interest in local culture.

Perhaps it is important to note that, up till present-day, Ozu had never enjoyed a great success as a tourist destination (despite a significant concentration of assets).

Key success factors

What helped you tackle the issues?

First and foremost, the ability of composing an eclectic team, with members originating from the public service -Ozu city council- or the academic -Hosei University-, financial -Iyo Bank- or consultancy -Value Management- realms, opened a myriad of collaboration possibilities to Kita Management Group. Such heterogeneity enables a profusion of perspectives when considering new goals or obstacles. Ingenuity was vastly needed when executing an unproven plan, running against time and with an initial lack of funds.

Gaining the understanding of local residents was also important in order to guarantee a smooth implementation of regeneration policies. Initially reluctant house proprietors joined the project at a later stage, upon realisation of its scope and ultimate intentions.

A little bit of luck -or good timing- has also added to the auspicious enactment of Ozu's tourist strategies. In the aftermath of the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, re-evaluation of priorities led the Japanese national government to increase its efforts in heritage conservation. Various advisory panels and dedicated funds were consequently constituted.

Thanks to exhaustive scrutiny of governmental directives (sometimes difficult to uncover), Kita Management was able to apply to and take advantage of some of them (i.e., Cabinet Office's Kominka Support Council 歴史的資源を活用した観光まちづくり advisory or MILT sponsored





MINTO 機構 funding). These subsidies and/or collaborations have contributed to bolstering the project, both in economic terms and reputation-wise.

Lessons learned

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

The system put in place in Ozu is out of the ordinary. Landlords are requested to lease their property to Kita Management for a period of 15 years, in exchange of its renovation. Securing that consent proved particularly difficult. Especially in the first stages of the project, at a time when Kita Management hadn't been heard of.

The fact of being directly sponsored by Ozu City Council and the fact of counting officials among its staff helped to build a sense of security and trust between home owners and Kita Management. Nonetheless, clear, simple ways of introducing the regeneration project to local public had to be learnt. A careless, ill-timed approach could put in jeopardy previous commitments of potential bestowers. Patience and clarity have been key factors to persuade locals to hop on into the project. (This proved to be true with non-homeowners too).

On a different note, artisans or carpenters involved in renovation works had to be trained on-site to appreciate and discern elements worth being salvaged. It was evident that they had assimilated 'scrap & build' practices in their professional proceedings (customary approach to construction in Japan). Confronted to a more nuanced and selective approach to construction, operators needed to learn from architects and site managers. After some mishaps, new principles were ultimately grasped. Fewer occurrences were reported during the second (FY2020) or third (FY2021) phases of renovation.

Results, achievements and recognitions

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

At the time of writing -June 2022-, a total of 22 houses of the old district have been renovated and have found a new use. This represents a drastic turnaround in recent urban-scape trends of Ozu, where houses were being abandoned and torn down. Upon completion of the plan 33 houses will have been renovated (2024).

A 'scattered hotel' occupying many of the renovated houses opened its doors on July 2020. Local residents are delighted with the sight of visitors overstaying or bulbs of light switched on in formerly abandoned abodes. Beyond hotel operators or visitors, newfound spaces are being invested by





local entrepreneurs. In exchange of a symbolic rent fee, Hirai-san, Yamaki-san or Aoi-san are pursuing their little dreams (ranging from creation of Japanese delicacies to the spread of organic towels -edible ones!- or healthy drinks innovations).

Ozu's heritage preservation commitments have called the attention of both national and international media. Articles and accounts on renovations of abodes or stays at the local medieval castle (part of the new accommodation offerings), have appeared in numerous outlets including Asahi Shinbun, Nihon Keizai Shinbun, AFAR, CNN, La Repubblica, etc. This has contributed to increasing the recognition of Ozu as a tourist destination. A novelty in the history of the city.

First successes in regeneration programmes have also permitted the extension of the scope of the project. New houses expected to be renovated have been added to the initial pool. National agencies (Agency for Cultural Affairs & Japan Tourism Agency) are taking a closer look on what is happening in Ozu and increasing their collaborations / support (seminars and workshops on re-evaluation of uses of National Heritage or creation of regional brands).

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).

Overall information on destination:

[EN] <https://www.visitozu.com/en-gb> | [JP] <https://jp.visitozu.com/>

Local DMO (Kita Management):

<http://kita-m.com/>

Assets:

Garyu Sanso (Tea House) <https://www.garyusanso.jp/>

Ozu Castle <http://www.ozucastle.jp/> **Ozu Castle Stay** <https://castlestay.ozucastle.com/>

Videos :

MACHIBITO Pop-up events on cleaned up houses, organized by Yatsugi NGO (precursor of Kita M)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d3FU5wxLuKE>

JNTO (Japan National Tourism Organization), Heritage Stays | Ozu Castle Stay
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mpQzedoPgLQ&t=4s>





Culturally-minded stays at renovated houses

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HdBdS6xsIVU>

General introduction and discovery of lesser-known areas of Ozu

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z177ujwSAkk>

