



# 2023 TOP 100 GOOD PRACTICE STORY

**Title:** Spinning History, Marugame Uchiwa New Meister 31

**Destination, Country:** Marugame City, Japan

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**In the category:**  Destination Management  Environment & Climate  Thriving Communities  
 Nature & Scenery  Culture & Tradition  Business & Marketing

**The Story in a picture:**

International students being lectured on Uchiwa making by the Marugame Uchiwa New Meisters



**Summary:**

Marugame Uchiwa, a traditional craft that has been handed down for 400 years in the castle town of Marugame Castle, is facing a critical situation: the industry is shrinking amid a shortage of successors, with no way to pass on the traditional techniques.

The main solution, initiated by the government, is the establishment of a successor training course and the introduction of the Marugame Uchiwa New Meister System. The successor training course is designed to pass on the techniques of Marugame Uchiwa production, and those who have contributed to the industry for more than three years after graduating from the course will be judged and awarded the title of Marugame Uchiwa New Meister.

As a result, 31 Marugame Uchiwa New Meisters were born, who are passionate about passing on the art of Marugame Uchiwa. With support from the government and other organizations, they are not only preserving the tradition of Marugame Uchiwa, but are also taking on the challenge of developing more innovative and sustainable Marugame Uchiwa.

Their efforts to promote Marugame Uchiwa through demonstrations for tourists, hands-on Uchiwa making, and sales outside the city have succeeded in attracting potential successors from outside the city and prefecture, and have even led to the creation of new immigrants to the area.



## Good Practice Story:

### Destination description

*Brief background of the destination.*

Located in the center of Kagawa Prefecture, Marugame is the second-largest city in the prefecture with a population of approximately 110,000. Facing the Seto Inland Sea, Marugame is a compact city rich in nature, with the sea, mountains, rivers, and plains.

In the center of the city sits Marugame Castle, the highest existing wooden castle structure in Japan, built more than 420 years ago, atop a beautiful stone wall. The Marugame Uchiwa is a traditional national craft that has been handed down in the castle town for 400 years. The tradition of Marugame Uchiwa has been so cherished by the local people that there is a song that refers to the tradition of pasting Tosa paper on Iyo bamboo to make the "Sanuki Uchiwa," which will make you feel extremely cool. Encouraged as a souvenir during pilgrimages to Konpira in the neighboring town of Kotohira, it became a firmly rooted industry in Marugame as the samurai warriors were encouraged to make the fans to supplement their income, ultimately leading to a well-known cottage industry. At that time, it was commonplace to have a "Marugame Uchiwa" in the family, as people enjoyed the cool of the evening with a bamboo fan in one hand on the porch, or used it to start a fire for a traditional Japanese charcoal brazier. Even today, the Marugame Uchiwa is still a summer tradition, a gem that expresses the Japanese sense of "wa" (harmony) and "coolness." In 2023, we finally obtained a trademark registration for "Marugame Uchiwa," made from local bamboo, to enhance the local brand.

### Issues faced

*Problems/issues solved with the Good Practice Story.*

The Marugame Uchiwa, which has been a symbol of the residents of Marugame for over 400 years, is on the verge of disappearing. In the 1950s, there were more than 400 uchiwa fan manufacturers, producing 120 million uchiwa fans annually.

With the rise of electric appliances such as fans and air conditioners, as well as with the spreading of cheap and mass-produced plastic Uchiwa fans, demand fell for Marugame Uchiwa along with the shrinking of its production.

In the 1990s, there were only 80 Uchiwa manufacturers and production dropped to 70 million Uchiwa per year.

Despite the opening of the "Uchiwa no Minato Museum" as a comprehensive museum of Marugame Uchiwa in 1995, attracting between 20,000 and 30,000 visitors a year, the serious problems of the shrinking Marugame Uchiwa industry, the lack of successors, and methods of passing on traditional techniques remained, and the survival of the traditional industry in Marugame City became a major crisis.

### Methods, steps, and tools applied

*Solutions implemented to address the sustainability problems or issues.*

The following steps were taken to nurture and secure successors for Marugame Uchiwa and to pass on traditional techniques:

#### STEP 1:

1995: "Marugame Uchiwa no Minato Museum" was opened by "Kagawa Prefecture Uchiwa Cooperative Association" and the government

→As a general museum of Marugame Uchiwa, we aimed to attract tourists and raise awareness of Marugame Uchiwa.

STEP 2:

1999: The Kagawa Prefecture Uchiwa Cooperative Association was established in 1999 on the occasion of being designated as a national traditional craft.

The Association and the government jointly opened a training course for successors

→ We gathered technical trainees for the purpose of inheriting traditional techniques and holding a succession training course for a month every year.

→ At the same time, we began to actively engage in demonstration sales to both inside and outside the prefecture.

→ From 2000, we conducted sales demonstrations and sales overseas and worked on publicity of Marugame Uchiwa.

STEP 3:

2001: Twelve graduates of the Successor Training Course opened the "Uchiwa Kobo Take" inside Marugame Castle, a famous sightseeing spot.

→ A section of the Marugame Castle Tourist Information Center operated by the local government and the Marugame Tourist Association was offered to "Uchiwa Kobo Take".

→ Demonstration sales were carried out targeting people visiting Marugame Castle for sightseeing.

STEP 4:

2003: The "Marugame Uchiwa no Minato Museum" and "Uchiwa Kobo Take" started full-scale Marugame Uchiwa-making experiences for tourists.

→ Administration received requests from tourists to make their own Uchiwa during demonstrations and sales in Japan and abroad,

The government, the Kagawa Prefecture Uchiwa Cooperative Association, and artisans collaborated to create the hands-on experience.

→ The result is that people who have seen the sales demonstrations at various places are now visiting Marugame City to make their own fan.

STEP 5:

2013: Introduction of the Marugame Uchiwa New Meister System

→ The Kagawa Prefecture Uchiwa Cooperative Association and the Administration will introduce the "Marugame Uchiwa New Meister System."

The "Kagawa Prefecture Uchiwa Cooperative Association" certifies those who have contributed to the Uchiwa industry for at least three years after graduating from a successor training course. The system is designed to certify those who meet certain conditions. Those who are certified become artisans and are given priority in receiving work orders from the association and the government. This has led to the creation of employment and business opportunities in the Marugame Uchiwa industry.

### Key success factors

*Critical elements that led to successfully solving the issues.*

The success of this system was mainly influenced by the following two points:

- The existence of traditional craftsmen at the time of the establishment of the system.

At the time of the introduction of the Marugame Uchiwa New Meister System, there were already 18 craftsmen who had been contributing to the Uchiwa industry for more than three years after graduating from the Successor Training Course, and who were working to promote and pass on Marugame Uchiwa as traditional craftsmen. Thanks to their refined skills and experience, they were

able to improve both their skills and imagination if they continued their craftsmanship. The course also served as a motivational tool for those seeking certification as a Meister.

• Demonstration and hands-on fan-making instruction for tourists.  
Graduating from the Successor Training Course does not mean that one can immediately make uchiwa fans that sell well. The level of design and technique is still in its infancy. However, the government and the Kagawa Prefecture Uchiwa Cooperative Association actively provided them with opportunities to demonstrate their skills in public and to give lectures to tourists during the Uchiwa-making experience. By doing so, they were able to visualize more concretely what they will be doing three years from now when they will be certified as Meisters. Also, by making them feel closer to the industry, they were able to stimulate their desire to grow and develop their passion for Marugame Uchiwa, which at the same time helped to foster civic pride.

### Lessons learned

*Challenges faced while implementing the Good Practice and their solutions.*

Issues:

The Marugame Uchiwa New Meister System was established to certify those who have contributed to the uchiwa industry for at least three years after graduating from the Successor Training Course, based on a comprehensive evaluation of (1) how well they work with the Kagawa Prefecture Uchiwa Cooperative Association, (2) how much enthusiasm they have for Marugame uchiwa, and (3) their level of uchiwa-making skill. However, problems arose when the technical level of the third item (3) was not up to par, or when the quality of the Uchiwa was too uneven to be certified, even though both (1) and (2) were fully met. This was due to the fact that the Association was not able to visualize the technical level standards for certification.

Solution:

We changed the auditing process so that two aspects and two positions would be involved.

The first is the relationship with the Kagawa Prefecture Uchiwa Cooperative Association and the enthusiasm for the Marugame Uchiwa. This aspect will be judged by the secretariat of the Kagawa Prefecture Uchiwa Cooperative Association. The second is the level of skill in fan making. This aspect was reviewed by a traditional craftsman.

Furthermore, the Association actively supported those who had graduated from the Successor Training Course but were still inexperienced in the technical level, and gave them lectures repeatedly until they were recognized as traditional craftsmen.

By doing this, there was no variation in the technical level and workmanship of the fan at the time of certification of Marugame Uchiwa New Meister, and after certification, we were able to create successors enough to be able to accept demonstration sales and experiences to tourists even immediately.

### Achievements and Results

*Direct and indirect results of the Good Practice.*

Social Benefits:

The Marugame Uchiwa New Meister Program has been successful in attracting potential successors from outside the city and prefecture, with it even leading to the creation of new immigrants to the city. The 31 Marugame Uchiwa New Meisters, including those who have moved to Marugame, have become a valuable presence that conveys the charm of Marugame Uchiwa to local children, students visiting Marugame on educational tours, and foreign tourists, as well as passing on the tradition and techniques to the next generation.

- Graduates since the opening of the Successor Training Course: 245
- 31 people certified under the Marugame Uchiwa New Meister System (including traditional craftsmen).
- The breakdown of certified persons is: 6 persons living outside the city, 25 persons living in the city (\*3 persons moved to the city)

#### Economic Benefits:

The opening of the "Marugame Uchiwa no Minato Museum" and "Uchiwa Kobo Take" has increased sales of Marugame Uchiwa to tourists, leading to an increase in income for the artisans.

Offering Uchiwa-making experience to tourists contributes to increase the income of artisans.

- Total number of visitors to the Marugame Uchiwa Museum: approximately 580,000
- Total sales of Marugame Uchiwa as souvenirs: approx. 200,000,000 yen
- Total number of visitors to the Uchiwa-making experience: Museum (approx. 80,000), Uchiwa Kobo Take (approx. 8,500)
- Total income of fan-making experience: approx. 90,000,000 yen

#### Environmental Benefits:

- Environmental preservation through bamboo grove maintenance: By cutting down abandoned bamboo groves for the collection of bamboo, the raw material for Uchiwa fans, the uncontrolled expansion of bamboo groves is prevented and the negative impact on forest biodiversity and the landscape is controlled.

- The "Marugame Uchiwa," which is made from bamboo, also contributes to the reduction of plastic uchiwa.

- Contribution to energy conservation: The continuation of traditional Japanese uchiwa fans is expected to contribute to energy conservation by maintaining the culture of cooling off without electricity.

- Contribution to waste reduction and recycling: By reusing fishing nets, which are a common source of marine debris, the company produces and sells Shibu Uchiwa, a strong, unbreakable, and rigid fan product. They are also reusing nets used to boil udon noodles, a specialty of Kagawa Prefecture, and using Japanese paper made from the boiling water of udon to create new "Marugame Uchiwa" products.

### Tips for other destinations

*Your suggestions or recommendations for other destinations facing the same issues or implementing similar solutions*

• In order to preserve the tradition of objects made by human hands for future generations, it is important not only to pass on the techniques, but also to create opportunities to reach and nurture the feelings and pride of the makers to many people and to give successors a vision for the future. Originally, Marugame Uchiwa were made with a division of labor: one who takes the bamboo, one who makes the framework, one who makes the Japanese paper, one who applies the paper, one who shapes the paper, and another who advertises and sells the paper, all of them putting their hearts and souls into making one piece of work, which is delivered to people's hands. We believe that history and traditions will continue if we create opportunities for craftspeople and their successors to share with visitors and repeat visitors alike that a community is created when various people are involved in the process of making a single object, relationships are built, and the circle of that community expands.

• In order to pass on the skills and passion of the craftsmen who create traditional handicrafts to future generations, it is effective to design a system that serves as a "gateway to success." As in the Marugame Uchiwa New Meister System, even after receiving lectures from pioneering craftspeople

and acquiring a certain degree of skill, succession is impossible unless one continuously maintains a strong desire to contribute to one's own personal growth and the development of tradition. Therefore, graduates of the Successor Training Course are given a three-year apprenticeship period, and are supported by the public and private sectors to not only improve their knowledge, skills and enthusiasm, but also to become human resources who can absorb and transmit all that is put into traditional crafts. If they are able to pass the gateway to success during the training period, they will naturally find their way to becoming craftspeople and establish their own traditional human presence.

### Recognitions and Additional references

*Recognitions and awards the Good Practice received and supporting evidence.*

1. Marugame Uchiwa homepage <https://marugameuchiwa.jp/>
2. Marugame Uchiwa Successor Training Project <https://marugameuchiwa.jp/heir>
3. Marugame Uchiwa Technique Lecture Students Application Page  
<https://marugameuchiwa.jp/student>
4. Activities to promote Marugame Uchiwa <https://marugameuchiwa.jp/activity>
5. Marugame Uchiwa New Meister <https://marugameuchiwa.jp/tradition>
6. Marugame Uchiwa Making Experience <https://marugameuchiwa.jp/experience>
7. Marugame Uchiwa Making Experience Facilities <https://marugameuchiwa.jp/facility>
- ✂The following are articles of our activities
8. Awards for Achievements of Traditional Craftsmen  
<https://marugameuchiwa.jp/news/new/1363.html>
9. New Meisters from outside the prefecture <https://marugameuchiwa.jp/news/new/1171.html>
10. Commendations for the promotion of traditional craft industry  
<https://marugameuchiwa.jp/news/new/1001.html>
11. Marugame Uchiwa PR project in Taiwan <https://marugameuchiwa.jp/news/new/413.html>
12. New Meisters including those from outside the prefecture  
<https://marugameuchiwa.jp/news/new/348.html>
13. Marugame Uchiwa PR Video [https://youtu.be/pu\\_uYWDLhfl](https://youtu.be/pu_uYWDLhfl)