



2023 TOP 100 GOOD PRACTICE STORY

Title: Saving the Ancient Art of Wisteria Weaving

Destination, Country: Miyazu City, Kyoto Prefecture, Japan

Submitted by: Jesse Efron(Overseas Promotion Manager & Sustainability Coordinator)

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

The Story in a picture:
Preservation of the ancient art of wisteria weaving through interaction with visitors



Summary:

Known as one of Japan’s “ancient cloths,” wisteria weaving dates back to the Jomon Period (14,000 to 300 BC), and was thought to have died out with industrialization. Unbeknownst to the world, there was a single village located in the mountains of northern Kyoto (Tango region) where a handful of women have kept this ancient art alive by passing it down from mothers to daughters across generations. In the 1960’s the government asked if there were any remaining relics of wisteria weaving. A small village on the coast that used bags made of wisteria for pearl-diving, informed the surveyors that there was a village (Kamiseya in Miyazu) on the other side of the mountain that was still weaving wisteria. This one tiny village still had knowledgeable craftspeople who could teach others the techniques, and a preservation society was established to protect this highly endangered art. More than just an artform, this intricate process (of cutting, prepping, creating thread, and weaving) fits into the yearly agricultural cycle and serves as necessary supplementary income. Wisteria weaving is also incredibly sustainable. The vines are only culled, not killed, and the harvesting of the vines contributes to forestry management and a healthy tree canopy.





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Good Practice Story:

Destination description

Brief background of the destination.

The City of Miyazu is a small city on the edge of the Tango Peninsula in northern Kyoto Prefecture that is best known for Amanohashidate, a natural pine-covered land bridge that splits two seas, known officially as one of Japan's Three Scenic Views. Rich in biodiversity, natural springs, and abundant resources, the region gave birth to Japan's first ancient kingdom, and the mountains surrounding the City of Miyazu support a semi-alpine beech forest (also an excellent climate for wisteria) and small villages like Kamiseya, where people live on the slopes of the peninsula's beech forest. They live by growing vegetables and chemical-free rice on terraced fields between spring and fall, and weave wisteria when the village gets snowed in during the winter.

The area has a long history of weaving and trade, with a climate naturally suited to silk weaving and a calm bay that is protected from the rough waves of the Sea of Japan. The bay was a main hub of trade for hundreds of years, and with a strong fishing industry as well as fertile soil for raising crops, the region was home to a feudal castle, and a main stop on the Kitamaebune boat-based trade route around Japan that traded not only in goods but shared culture with other areas.

Issues faced

Problems/issues solved with the Good Practice Story.

Wisteria weaving is a highly endangered heritage art that had only 7 women still weaving (all in Kamiseya) when it was surveyed in 1980. Due to job shifts and population decline in both Kamiseya and the broader city of Miyazu, there are currently 2 women still weaving wisteria in Kamiseya. (Miyazu population: 1980, 28,881 people. 2023, 16,508 people. Kamiseya population: 1980 56 people, 26 households. 2023, 23 people and 11 households).

Another issue is that this art is very time consuming, and as more and more jobs are unrelated to agriculture (in which wisteria weaving fits between planting and harvesting cycles), it is difficult to include wisteria weaving into more 'modern' ways of living.

A third issue is an indirect and cyclical byproduct of wisteria weaving dying out. The art is inextricably linked to nature and forestry management (cutting back wisteria improves tree health and promotes a healthy forest), and wisteria also depend on healthy forests in order to thrive. With less people going into the forests to cull wisteria (and manage the forests in general), the forest suffers and so too does the wisteria, meaning there is less healthy wisteria to harvest.

Methods, steps, and tools applied

Solutions implemented to address the sustainability problems or issues.

STEP 1: Establishment of an organization to preserve this heritage art

The "Tango Wisteria Weaving Preservation Society" was established to preserve and disseminate the cultural techniques passed down by the women in the Kamiseya to future generations.

STEP2: Designation as an Intangible Cultural Property of Kyoto Prefecture

In order to promote and protect this cultural heritage art, "Tango wisteria weaving" was designated as an Intangible Cultural Property. And in conjunction with this designation, the Tango Wisteria Weaving Preservation Society was recognized as a protected organization.

STEP3: Promotion and management of visitors

Tango wisteria fabric exhibitions are held regularly. The fabric is also on display in museums such as the Kyoto Prefectural Tango Folk Museum.

With the support of Miyazu City, the "Wisteria Weaving Heritage Exchange Center" was created. In addition to providing a venue for workshops and exhibiting works, the museum also serves as a place for visitors to interact with visitors to the terraced rice fields of Kamiseya and other areas, and is used as a cultural exchange center.

Kyoto by the Sea DMO (regional promotion organization that includes Miyazu) develops tours with a focus on local community, local economy, and environment, and includes wisteria weaving experiences and cultural history tours in the area featuring local artisans.

Key success factors

Critical elements that led to successfully solving the issues.

Most importantly, as this is a cultural heritage art, the women who continue to carry on this tradition are the key factor for success, and their role in the development and continuation of the Preservation Society is the main reason this textile is still being produced. The Preservation Society also offers training and workshop visits for the public, and with support from the local and prefectural government has been able to carry on visits and training with facilities built to house completed work, weaving machines, and workshops.

Businesses in the region that continue to support wisteria weaving: e.g. Yushisha, a weaving company fusing silk thread and local wisteria thread. Tatamiya Tatsuzo, a tatami weaver that makes personal tatami-mat seats and uses locally woven wisteria for the tatami-beri (cloth edging of the mat), as well as shops that sell wisteria weaving products.

The publication of the Wisteria Weaving book in 2007 also documents the entire weaving process as well as the local culture of Kamiseya, ensuring that the techniques and culture that maintain them are documented for future generations. Also in 2007, a DVD about the "wisteria weaving class" was filmed.

Kyoto by the Sea DMO has created tours that feature wisteria weaving experiences. The DMO works with sustainable travel agencies to showcase the region's culture across a minimum of 2 nights and 3 days. The wisteria weaving experience is guided by a local wisteria weaver, and visitors tour a wisteria weaving workshop, learn the process, and have a chance to purchase locally made wisteria weaving products (bags, table mats, coasters, tapestries, etc.)

Lessons learned

Challenges faced while implementing the Good Practice and their solutions.

The creation of the preservation society was really the starting point for wisteria weaving's survival, and has really helped generate interest in preserving this artform. People come to Kamiseya not only out of sightseeing interest, but to learn this art and bring back the techniques to their towns and cities. That being said, the main challenge was, and still is, the number of people who can dedicate their time to this traditional art. As mentioned earlier, it harmonizes well with agricultural lifestyles, which are in decline. And since most of Japan's residents live in cities, access to wisteria is also quite limited even for those wishing to continue the art.

The dissemination of information, from books, to media promotion, and especially tourism, is helping wisteria weaving gain recognition with an increasingly wider audience. There are also other businesses in the region that have incorporated wisteria into their craft; and though there was

resistance at first from the silk weaving industry, one weaver in particular has fused silk and wisteria weaving, and is a member of a weaving collaborative that showcases their work around the world.

Tourism is playing an increasingly important role, and Kyoto by the Sea DMO's development of tourism content has evolved over time as well. Sustainability plays a large role in how tourism is being developed going forward, and shifting mindsets to focus on more sustainable and cultural experiences in favor of larger sightseeing attractions (Miyazu city being home to Amanohashidate, one of Japan's Three Scenic Views) has been an ongoing process. Wisteria weaving has incredible potential and has received very positive feedback from the inbound market as well. Not only is it a unique heritage art with roots in this region, but it incorporates traditional lifestyles, environmental sustainability, and supports local economies.

Achievements and Results

Direct and indirect results of the Good Practice.

- The Wisteria Weaving Preservation Society started in 1989 with 58 members, and as of 2019 has 136 members.
- As of 2019, 499 people have participated in the 'wisteria weaving class' to learn the process of wisteria weaving, many of whom have started their own wisteria weaving groups across Japan.
- The city of Miyazu supported the construction and opening of the Wisteria Weaving Heritage Center, which holds workshops for the public and acts as a kind of mini cultural museum. The center also supports local events, such as rice planting in the village of Kamiseya (demonstrating how agriculture and wisteria weaving go hand in hand).
- The publication of the Wisteria Weaving Book in 2007, with 1,000 copies published.
- In 2007, the Wisteria Weaving Class DVD was made.
- Kyoto by the Sea DMO developed a "wisteria weaving" experience with a local weaver in early 2023, and works with three sustainably focused travel agents that sell the experience. For 2023, Kyoto by the Sea DMO has worked with local artisans and tourism associations as well as with B-Corp and Travelife certified agents to create and get feedback for sustainably-focused tours in the area. Kyoto by the Sea DMO invested 4 million yen in 2022 for the responsible development of the aforementioned tours (and is continuing this for 2023). This includes agent FAM visits, feedback and sustainability reports, trial tours, and ongoing discussions with local artisans including wisteria weavers. Kyoto by the Sea DMO has successfully reserved tours in Miyazu for 128 participants through key partner travel agents with a total economic value of 11,000,000 yen.
- Miyazu City received 3,340,000 visitors in 2022, and has projections for 3,500,000 visitors in 2024, and is working with Kyoto by the Sea DMO to improve visibility for wisteria weaving by working with travel agents that will support local artisans. Kyoto by the Sea DMO already has requests from sustainable partner travel agents for 36 travelers for a total economic benefit to the area of 640,000 yen (includes locally run accommodations, artisan experiences, etc.).

Tips for other destinations

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

A main factor for success was the promotion of wisteria weaving on a broader scale. It has been promoted via the creation of the Preservation Society, on websites, in print, video, on national television, and is now being developed further with the tourism industry. Platforms like the GSTC good practice story are also excellent resources for the survival of endangered arts and cultures.

It has been important to have an organized system for preservation, and to determine what the most important aspect of preservation is and what is the greatest weakness/risk. For wisteria weaving, it

was about quickly identifying the shortage of people able to carry on the tradition, and working to increase the number of people involved in supporting this cultural heritage. The Preservation Society, other wisteria weaving businesses, and companies engaged in promotion like Kyoto by the Sea DMO, introduce new people to wisteria weaving every year, and as the network continues to grow, promotion and education reaches more and more people. For endangered heritage arts like wisteria weaving, reaching a wide audience in order to find people interested in supporting it in the future is paramount to success.

Recognitions and Additional references

Recognitions and awards the Good Practice received and supporting evidence.

- 1983, Tango Wisteria Weaving and Customs were registered as a Cultural Property of Japan under the designation of “Important Tangible Custom.”

<https://kunishitei.bunka.go.jp/heritage/detail/312/421>

- 1991, Tango Wisteria Weaving registered as an Intangible Cultural Property of Kyoto Prefecture.

<http://www.fujiori.jp/hozonkainoayumi.html>

- Two women of Kamiseya win the “Kyoto Akebo Award” given to women and groups that have made particularly significant achievements in pioneering activities in a variety of fields.

<http://www.fujiori.jp/hozonkainoayumi.html>

- 2013, The Suntory Price for Regional Culture

https://www.suntory.co.jp/sfnd/prize_cca/detail/2013c3.html

population data for Miyazu and Kamiseya:

<https://www.ato-co.jp/kyoto/miyazu/toukei-list.html>

<https://www.city.miyazu.kyoto.jp/uploaded/attachment/2883.pdf>

<https://www.city.miyazu.kyoto.jp/uploaded/attachment/4679.pdf>

[https://kamiseya.com/about#:~:text=%E4%B8%8A%E4%B8%96%E5%B1%8B\(%E3%81%8B%E3%81%BF%E3%81%9B,%E4%BA%BA%E5%8F%A323%E4%BA%BA11%E4%B8%96%E5%B8%AF%E3%80%82](https://kamiseya.com/about#:~:text=%E4%B8%8A%E4%B8%96%E5%B1%8B(%E3%81%8B%E3%81%BF%E3%81%9B,%E4%BA%BA%E5%8F%A323%E4%BA%BA11%E4%B8%96%E5%B8%AF%E3%80%82)

<https://www.pref.kyoto.jp/kankyo/rdb/eco/rs/2015rs04.html>