



2023 TOP 100 GOOD PRACTICE STORY

Title: Wellness : The Sustainable “Hyang (Sweet)” Spot for Gangwon for all seasons

Destination, Country: Gangwon State, Republic of Korea

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

The Story in a picture:

A fragrant story lies in RomyZian Garden. Once, there was a man (Zian) who combed the land for a place that could comfort his wife (Romy), who was suffering from asthmatic bronchitis. During his search, he found that his wife was breathing and sleeping comfortably at a mountain 700 m above sea level, in Jeongseon, Gangwon State. The man purchased a plot of land there, and built a garden and mountain trails in a wish that other people can be healed in a same manner with his wife. With well-equipped environment and programs, RomyZian Garden has impressed the visitors and served as a premium wellness destination acknowledged by Gangwon Wellness Cluster.





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Summary:

In every crisis, there is opportunity, and this cannot be truer with Gangwon.

Gangwon was still a less popular in spite of the fact that it rose to fame as a world-class winter destination when it hosted the Pyeong Chang 2018 Winter Olympics. It also had some challenges to deal with various global market segments. When the world came to a standstill and travel suspended by Covid 19, Gangwon quickly rose to tackle the unprecedented crisis head on, converted its lush natural and cultural resources into 'Wellness' tourism destination to meet the new rising demand and rebooted itself as the premium post-pandemic haven, year round, and not just a mere Winter destination anymore.

However, it was not a "walk in the park," at all, establishing **wellness governance** system with various public and private sector players. But with grit, determination and strong political will, the State orchestrated together with the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Sports, multiple cities and counties, professionals and academics, the unique network entitled Gangwon Wellness Clusters. The '*Wellever Gangwon*' brand was born, incorporating Environmental, Social and Governance principles and practices.

The '*Wellever Gangwon*' is a one-stop platform to advise the facilities to elaborate the wellness program and inspire travel agencies to design the new Wellness Experience. Furthermore, collaboration with local communities under the '*Tourism Dure*' (Dure- means joint operation within small farming communities of Korea), a program that encouraged the residents to discover their selling propositions, local produce within and refined it as a premium cultural component. This way, they can do the business in a sustainable and independent way, which benefits both state government and host communities.

Wellness product contest '*Gangwon 5-Hyang (Fragrance) Wellness Package*' was organized to select the unique and sustainable local items across the region and was launched. The Gangwon Annual Wellness Festival was held to attract international travelers to visit Gangwon year-round, beyond the winter experience.

Overall, the entire process of the Wellness branding became productive thanks to the effective planning and support from national legislation to the engagement of grassroots communities and business owners in planning and developing of the Gangwon *Wellever* brand.

Declared only last June as the second self-governing state in the Republic of Korea, Gangwon State will continue to grow its Wellness tourism managing its natural, cultural and human resources in the most sustainable way.



Good Practice Story:

Destination description

Brief background of the destination.



Sokcho: Seoraksan Mountain

Picture a distinct natural scenery in Gangwon State, bathed in mountains and forest on the northeastern coast of the Korean Peninsula. Imagine the peace and tranquility adjacent to the border across the divide endowed with breathtaking lush greenery. Enjoy its outdoors in varied activities such as surfing, trekking, skiing, as well as premium wellness and cultural programs. Travelers re-live the K-drama phenomenon in filming locations, from traditional culture to a raging global K-wave, where the world's biggest boy band, BTS, also filmed videos their album and travelogues across the State.



Gangneung: BTS Bus Stop

- The Gangwon 2024 Youth Olympic Games will carry on its vision of nurturing a new generation of winter sports athletes riding on the resounding success of the PyeongChang 2018 Olympic Winter Games.
- The Gangwon Forestry Exhibition 2023 and Gangneung Intelligent Transport System (ITS) Congress 2026 are also scheduled to take place in Gangwon to boost overseas tourist traffic to the state.
- Ease of sustainable mass transport systems is the forte of Gangwon State, with infrastructure such as Korean Train Express (KTX) and the Intercity Train Express (ITX) connected to Seoul Metropolitan area and Yangyang International airport serving the direct international flights.

Issues faced

Problems/issues solved with the Good Practice Story.

- The almost 2 years pandemic lockdown, though not strictly observed within the State, has drastically affected not only international but domestic tourism.
- Gangwon is still not the popular choice as a Wellness nor a year-round destination. Internally, it needed to meticulously implemented State-wide health and safety measures as well as promote itself as a premier destination for all seasons.
- The foremost goal is to formulate the Wellness themed branding and campaign to attract post pandemic, domestic and international markets, with global sustainability standards in consideration, all throughout the year.
- Organizing, brainstorming, training, capacity building and coordination among public and private stakeholders in the tourism and hospitality industry and the grassroots communities was the biggest challenge, including providers of services and products, while still observing health and strict safety protocols and implementing sustainable tourism standards.
- Another resistance was to how to engage the Wellness and medical tourism clusters, and to involve various private stakeholders and local communities while each one still struggles to re-open, re-invest and recover from over two years loss of income.





Methods, steps, and tools applied

Solutions implemented to address the sustainability problems or issues.

- **G-Safe Travel Scheme**

As health and safety was the prime concern during and post-pandemic, Gangwon controlled all safety measures to keep the destinations clean and safe for international travelers and created the 'Gangwon PCR Fast Track', in collaboration with Korea Tourism Organization (KTO), Korea Association of Travel Agents (KATA) and Korean National Tuberculosis Association (KNTA).



Essentially, on-arrival PCR tests at any of the five test centers and two branches in Seoul and Chuncheon, Gangwon were facilitated, and once the result is out, the English report is sent via email while the test cost will be reimbursed to travelers accordingly.

- **Wellness: Adopting the new rising trend**

The pandemic has brought an unprecedented lifestyle with trending Korean contents in a global market, which got familiar with the Korean culture and lifestyle, thus making it the most attractive destination to visit.

During the pandemic, many undiscovered places in Gangwon were introduced throughout multiple streaming, online channels and attracted the attention of the global audience. Hence, the online branding boosted the destination awareness that Gangwon is well maintained and ready for visitors when borders opened to travelers.

Keeping branding work and communicating with partners online was our responsibility during this crisis - as it would be a win-win situation for both our destinations and travelers.

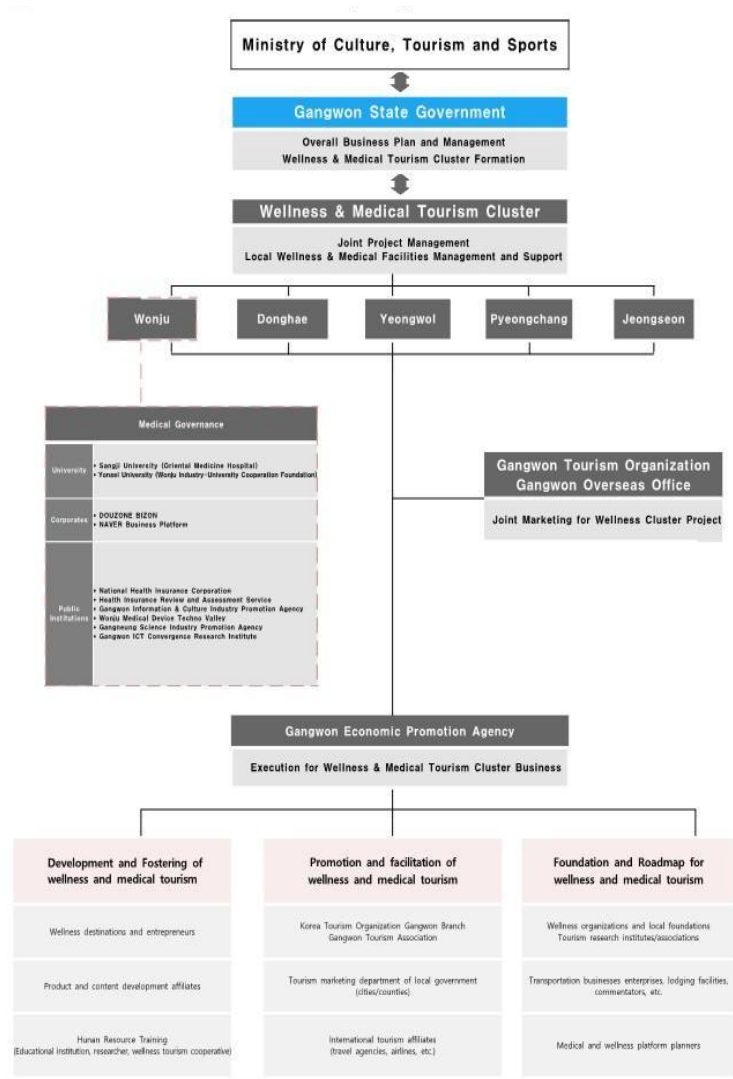
Following this trend, Gangwon enhanced the local branding of wellness-themed destination, through the Wellness-Medical Cluster project by Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Sports, it facilitated the public-private partnership to develop the wellness tourism and merchandise as a sustainable way to promote the destination.

As of 2023, Gangwon possessed the largest number of wellness facilities in Korea (12 out of total 64 places) and achieved the goals in a wide range of wellness program development and management, specialist training as well as marketing and promotions.





- **Wellness Governance Establishment**



- Gangwon Wellness program interconnects the state government with the enterprises to make synergy effect.
- Gangwon Wellness Week is held annually to feature the various wellness tour programs under its own brand 'Wellever Gangwon'.
- 'GangWonder Mall' is a platform by state government that enable the local entrepreneurs to run successful sales, with advice and consulting with the Gangwon wellness cluster team to expand the distribution and placement channels to raise the brand awareness and sales.



Key success factors

Critical elements that led to successfully solving the issues.

- Gangwon-style wellness and medical convergence, content advancement and industrial ecosystem establishment of a regional virtuous cycle model with hospitality industry and local communities.
- By linking “wellness tourism-local specialties” with local wellness stories and developing wellness tourism products
- Vitalization of information exchange between Gangwon wellness and medical tourism cluster related facilities to improve the quality of workers and customer response skills, such as fostering college students in the State and professional training for wellness workers
- With the medical data collected using wellness tourism facilities, the Wellness project was also a major means of alleviating mental illness (depression, stress, etc.) in our society.
- Establishment of wellness/medical network and governance to reinforce the cooperation system of wellness and medical tourism in Gangwon and vitalize cooperation among stakeholders

- Promotion of sustainable wellness/medical tourism and ESG (Environment-Social-Governance) tourism, expand the network of international tourism organizations linked to Green Destinations and strengthen the alliance
- Wellness/Medical Governance Seminars and Workshops: Conducting programs such as seminars sharing best domestic and international cases of wellness/medical tourism, presentations and various forum to promote wellness/medical tourism, and conducting programs such as field trips to best practices
- Revitalization of the local economy by attracting domestic and foreign tourists with promotion of high added value in the tourism industry, and lay the foundation for tourism vitalization by creating jobs and increasing sales of the tourism industry by linking local community contents such as the blessed natural environment, agriculture, cuisine and festivals
- Development of longer stay wellness tourism products in Gangwon, contributing to revitalization of the local tourism industry and economy by attracting tourists from the metropolitan area and overseas throughout the year
- Wellness product contest was organized in 2022 to select the unique and sustainable local items across the region and 'Gangwon 5-*Hyang* (Fragrance) Wellness Package' was launched.
- Under the theme of 5- "*Hyang*", its captivating component with meaning received a recognition from Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Sports and other partner affiliates as a great public-private partnership.
 - ① *Hyang*(香) ; Aroma [Zeolite Diffuser, Jeongseon]
 - ② *Hyang*(饗) ; Feast [Gusudam Soy Sauce & Salt, Pyeongchang]
 - ③ *Hyang*(籩) ; Grain [Buckwheat Tea / Balloonflower & Pear Tea, Hwacheon]
 - ④ *Hyang*(鄉) ; Country [Seasoned Vegetable Rice & Potato Probiotic, [Hoengseong & Gangneung]
 - ⑤ *Hyang*(響) ; Sound [Peeling Bean Body Coffee Scrub, Gangneung]



- Development and operation of Gangwon-type wellness and medical tourism specialized products for 12 target markets in Gangwon, taking into account the scale of tourism to Korea, connectivity to Yangyang Airport, and the current status of resuming international tourism in the country.
 - Focus Group: Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam, Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand, Japan,
 - Potential Markets: U.S., Australia, Hong Kong, Indonesia, China
 - G-Shuttle Bus: By using the G-Shuttle Bus, foreign tourists concentrated in the metropolitan area are distributed in the State and operated in connection with local tourist attractions, festival grounds, and traditional markets.
 - G-shuttle bus operation in connection with 5 cities and counties and 12 recommended wellness tourist destinations.
 - Foreigner Tour Taxi service consultation with cities and counties for the expansion and operation of foreign tour taxis for wellness and medical cluster areas through connectivity and preference of foreign tourists.

Lessons learned

Challenges faced while implementing the Good Practice and their solutions.

- Strengthening the foundation for Gangwon as leading global tourism destination

- How to grow as a unique global wellness tourist destination by improving the image of the region with new tourism content and attracting overseas travelers, utilizing Gangwon's nature and wellness assets
- How to develop Wellness and medical tourism cluster product development department in connection with major travel agencies
- Expansion of links to the medical field in the future to promote prominence as a wellness and medical tourist destination
- Efficient communication through the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism-State, cities/counties and wellness facility governance
- Overcoming crisis as an opportunity by recovering tourism that meets new demand
- Implement and train both public and private stakeholders in sustainable tourism practices through public-private cooperation and drive tourism recovery

Achievements and Results

Direct and indirect results of the Good Practice.





- Provincial-dedicated travel agency joint wellness-themed tourism product development and promotion support, attracting domestic and foreign tourists
 - Overseas online platform campaigns through the major travel portal channel and influencers
 - Maximize media publicity through travelogues and live broadcasts
- Proactively utilized wellness brand 'Wellever' to spread Gangwon wellness tourism contents through major domestic and international media promotion, and improve global awareness through diversification of promotional channels
 - Ads in major domestic media: paper, banner ads on major portal sites, etc.
 - Launched *Wellever* brand campaign using social media and global Online Travel Agencies platform
 - Promotion of wellness tourism viral marketing using famous influencers using KOL (Key Opinion Leader, popular YouTuber, celebrity, influencer, etc.), online travel, etc., and promotion through ambassador appointment ceremony in connection with Wellness Week
 - Promotional marketing such as Familiarization tours and travel road shows
 - Expansion of wellness and medical tourism cooperation using the East Asia Local Government Tourism Federation (EATOF), which was established by Gangwon State with the goal of establishing a single East Asian tourism zone
 - Promotion and marketing in connection with the launch of Gangwon Special Self-Governing State, 2023-24 Visit Korea Year, Gangwon Forestry Exhibition, etc.
 - Tour *Dure* Project is a great example that enabled the public participation to rebuild the old town and raised the brand awareness. Launched by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, it encouraged the residents to discover the local tourism businesses that produce and sell F&B, travel, experiences, and souvenirs with unique local characteristics, and support overall start-ups.
 - Najeon Station, Jeongseon County has been remodeled into retro-themed Najeon Station cafe and introduced a menu using agricultural specialties such as *Gondre*(thistle), apples, and plums.

- The Youth Mold Dreaming Cooperative remodeled the “Yeochhi Café” at Gujeolli Station of Jeongseon Rail Bike and is receiving a lot of love by operating a dessert cafe using the corn, iconic local produce in Jeongsoen. It develops healthy snacks and introduces them to tourists visiting the region.

- In addition, the resident-led cooperative cluster also helps middle-aged women in Jeongseon find hidden talents and make crafts through product development, brand development, and capacity building support, and helps exchanges between career-interrupted women while providing a workplace.

- Najeon Station Café and Meteorite 9020 Cooperative were selected as the 'Top Dure' of the Tourism Dure Project 2023.



Tips for other destinations

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

✓ **Do Public-Private Partnership**



- ☐ Engage all businesses and local host communities, farmers, providers of services, travel agencies and tour operators in the product planning and development.
- ☐ Cluster area tour programs. Develop products linked to wellness/medical facilities and wellness programs in existing tour bus/tour taxi products
- ☐ Establish and maintain a safe tourism environment by operating quarantine and management agents in wellness and medical facilities.
- ☐ Developing premium tourism products and promote to the global travel market with activities such as familiarization trips for the travel industry, tourism road shows and intensive joint marketing with designated travel agents specialized in domestic and overseas markets.

✓ **Community Participation. Community Teamwork Tour – “Tour Dure Project” with numerous results stated in the achievements mentioned is a way of ensuring sustainable tourism that will be a legacy for the future generations.**

Recognitions and Additional references

Recognitions and awards the Good Practice received and supporting evidence.

As the second self-governing state in Korea, Gangwon adheres to environmental, social and governance principle and runs policies to achieve the sustainability on a global spectrum.

✓ **Good Health & Well-Being, Sustainable Cities and Communities**

Gangwon integrated its gifted natural resources into wellness program to bring healthy travel experience to residents and tourists. By fostering Korea's largest number of wellness attractions by

public-private partnership titled Gangwon wellness cluster, it is recognized by ministry as a trendsetting wellness leader.



✓ **Climate Action, Affordable Clean Energy, Life on Land**

By reducing the carbon footprint by enlarging the eco-friendly transportation infrastructure and upgrading the green energy structure,

Gangwon is actively taking action against the climate change. Restoration and management of the areas have been underway to educate the residents and tourists on the importance of protection and conservation of the State's rich natural resources.





✓ Sustainable Consumption and Production, Partnerships for the Goals

Knowing the risk of over tourism, Gangwon has jointly worked with designated travel agencies to develop the quality tour program with unique and authentic themes of "Glocal (Global+Local)" to diversify the traffic and has won the grand prize at Glocal awards 8 years in a row.

Sustainable Tourism campaign with partners reminds tourists to consider the environment of the destinations and respect the local culture.



