



Good Practice Story Title:

How the 'Sustainability Gang' Won Against the Changing Seasons

Destination:

Gangwon State

Country:

Republic of Korea

Submitting Organization

Gangwon State Government

Category:

- Destination Management
- Nature & Scenery
- Environment & Climate
- Culture & Tradition
- Thriving Communities
- Business & Marketing

Destination description:

Gangwon is a diverse destination that appeals to a wide range of interests. It offers winter sports against a backdrop of scenic beauty, opportunities for wellness retreats, insights into local history and culture, and a glimpse into South Korea's entertainment scene, including K-wave attractions. Whether visitors seek outdoor adventures, cultural experiences, or relaxation in natural surroundings, Gangwon promises a balanced and enriching travel experience.

Summary of Good Practice Story:

Gangwon, facing challenges in its winter tourism sector due to climate change and a declining birth rate impacting snowfall and visitor demographics, has strategically transformed itself by embracing Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles and forging innovative public-private partnerships with diverse stakeholders. Ski resorts in Gangwon have diversified their offerings with year-round wellness and cultural programs, emphasizing sustainability and community engagement. These initiatives have propelled Gangwon into a new era of sustainable tourism, striking a balance between economic benefits, environmental stewardship, and cultural exchange. It provides valuable insights into resilience and innovation for global tourism development, exemplified by initiatives like the 'Dream Program,' which repurposes Olympic facilities to foster participation among youths from countries without snow.

Issues faced:

- Once a high-class sport in South Korea, skiing became popular in the late 1990s. The ski industry is highly vulnerable to changing snowfall patterns. Recently, rising winter temperatures due to global warming have shortened snowfall periods, complicating slope maintenance.
- South Korea's birth rate has declined from 1.57 in 1990 to 0.84 in 2020, among the world's lowest. This demographic shift reduces the customer base for Gangwon's ski resorts, decreasing attendance and revenue. Additionally, an aging population leads to labor shortages and increased operational costs.
- **Climate change** and **population decline** significantly impact Gangwon's ski industry, known for its winter sports and as the 2018 Winter Olympics host. The industry faces reduced snowfall and shorter seasons, challenging its balance between economic benefits and long-term sustainability amidst ongoing climate challenges.

Solution:

- Gangwon and ski resorts have embraced **Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG)** principles to promote sustainable tourism.
- Ski resorts are encouraged to adopt year-round themes like **wellness and culture** programs, and local community collaborations in a sustainable manner.
- Gangwon teams up with **public-private stakeholders** including ski resorts to organize 'Gangwon Snow Festa,' integrating winter, cultural, and festive activities to attract international tourists and 'Dream Program', providing youths from snowless countries with wintry and cultural experience.

Methods, Steps, and Tools applied:

“Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) Implementation”

- In Gangwon, 3 ski resorts have transformed into year-round wellness destinations by embracing sustainability. This reflects a global trend, with 73% of Koreans supporting local conservation efforts. Travelers are increasingly mindful of reducing their ecological footprint and supporting eco-friendly tourism practices.
- **High 1 Resort** (Jeongseon) has transformed into an eco-friendly green enterprise through initiatives such as eco-campaigns involving employees and customers, reducing disposable item usage, and implementing a food waste recycling system. Their efforts include reducing greenhouse gas emissions, developing environmentally friendly food waste recycling facilities, and surpassing targets for greenhouse gas reduction through measures like restarting energy-saving devices and prioritizing green product purchases.
- Formerly Yongpyong Resort, **MONA Park**(Pyeongchang) is actively enhancing professional capabilities in the field of wellness through its ESG support initiatives, focusing on holistic health concepts such as stress relief and inner development. Wellness College is designed to empower young adults to become experts in wellness and bolster their confidence in professional settings.
- **Oak Valley**(Wonju) actively implements ESG-driven operations including eco-friendly course management and customer service, aiming to achieve sustainable development goals. Additionally, Oak Valley engages in community-oriented initiatives like the 'Oak Valley Plogging Day', involving local residents in environmental cleanup efforts as part of its broader commitment to environmental stewardship and sustainability.

“Inventive through Public-Private Partnership”

- **Wellness for Year-round:** Named after "MOther NAture," **MONA Park**(Pyeongchang) boasts diverse trees like pine, birch, maple, and Cyprus, providing habitats for wildlife and a tranquil environment. The Mona Park Wellness Program at Mt. Balwangsan offers activities such as sound bath therapy and mindfulness meditation, promoting physical recovery and mental well-being. **High 1 Resort** (Jeongseon), once a coal mining area, now provides a serene environment ideal for its wellness hiking and cultural program. Visitors can enjoy scenic views and learn about local history. **Oak Valley**(Wonju) provides cultural immersion opportunities, inviting visitors to experience local traditions and contemporary artistry at Museum SAN. This integration of art, culture, and nature enriches the wellness journey.
- **Community-Visitor Cultural Interaction:** Collaborations with local community for culture, leisure sports and K-wave contents in neighboring locations enrich stay experience. Gangwon successfully hosted large-scale incentive programs, such as the one for 5,000 employees from MCI Indonesia. These programs incorporate unique activities like snow sled competitions at High 1 Resort, *Arirang* learning programs, and traditional market experiences in Jeongseon. Such initiatives have received acclaim for their innovative approach to team building and cultural immersion, earning repeat visits and positive feedback from participants and organizers alike.
- **More than Winter:** Hosted by Gangwon State, the Korea Tourism Organization (KTO), and various well-known ski resorts, the Gangwon Snow Festa is an annual celebration that revolves around exhilarating winter activities and K-wave-themed experiences, complete with immersive cultural and wellness highlights. The festival culminates with various winter events and trekking experience across the state. Joint marketing with Trip.com, the largest online travel agency, boosts its winter promotion towards the global market, further enhancing the Snow and K-wave mixture across the state.

“Open New Frontiers”

- Since 2004, the Dream Program, part of PyeongChang's successful bid to host *Asia's second Winter Olympics* in 2018, has offered youth from countries lacking winter sport opportunities the chance to experience winter sports and Korean culture. Participants engage in activities like Taekwondo, K-pop, and traditional samulnori music, leveraging world-class facilities to promote athletic development, international friendship, and cultural exchange under the mission "New Horizons for winter sports."

Achievements and Results:

- Gangwon's resorts have embraced **Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles** to promote sustainable tourism. MONA Yongpyong (Pyeongchang) and High 1 Resort (Jeongseon), as well as Oak Valley (Wonju), have implemented eco-friendly practices and received certifications for their efforts. These initiatives not only minimize environmental impact but also enhance the overall tourism experience, contributing to Gangwon's reputation in sustainable tourism.
- Gangwon boasts **13 wellness facilities**, largest number in Korea, including 3 ski resorts with comprehensive wellness programs, addressing seasonal visitor fluctuations. In 2023, Gangwon attracted 250,000 tourists to these facilities, boosting the local economy. Through the Gangwon Wellness Cluster, a public-private partnership, Gangwon is recognized as a leading wellness destination, recognized by the ministry.
- Gangwon Snow Festa saw a **38% increase** in sales compared to the previous year, as reported by Trip.com. This winter festival for the 2023-2024 season features Korea's winter sports, cultural events, and Korean Wave content, attracting numerous tourists.
- The Dream Program has produced over **100 professional winter athletes** from Thailand, Malaysia, Jamaica, Taiwan, Singapore, Kenya, Tunisia, and more, aiding them with training and resources to achieve significant career milestones. The program has engaged over 2,000 youths from 83 countries, enhancing their sports careers through dedicated support.

Lessons Learned and Advice:

- **Community Engagement and Resilience:** Climate change has highlighted the need for sustainable tourism and stronger community-based engagement in Gangwon. Gangwon and its partners prioritize nature and sustainable tourism, aiming to protect the environment and ensure resilience through inclusive tourism that embraces cultural essence and involves local communities.
- **Tackling Change as Opportunity:** Viewing change as an opportunity fosters growth and improvement. Adverse conditions, like bad weather or geographic challenges, can present unexpected opportunities. Pyeongchang leveraged its challenges to host the Winter Olympics. By thinking creatively, we can turn difficulties into advantages, demonstrating human wisdom and resilience.
- **Diversity and Equity:** Dream Program's success in producing athletes from diverse backgrounds highlights its effectiveness in promoting equal opportunity in winter sports. By engaging youth from snowless countries, it demonstrates that winter sports are for everyone, fostering a more inclusive and equitable sports world.

Recognitions and Additional References

- Recognized by the Korea Environmental Industry & Technology Institute, a subsidiary of the Ministry of Environment, **High 1 Resort** has achieved the Environmental Label for its hotel services. The resort's management is based on ESG principles [Article](#), and they have published an ESG report. [Article](#).
- **Oak Valley Resort** has been recognized as one of the 'Global Sustainable Brands 40' by the UN SDGs Association, marking a first in the domestic golf and resort industry. [Article](#) This accolade underscores its leadership in eco-friendly practices and commitment to sustainable development, evaluated based on criteria such as environmental management, ESG values realization, climate change mitigation efforts, and global sustainability expansion.
- **Yongpyong Resort** proudly announced its receipt of the Ministry of Employment and Labor Award for its participation in the 'Youth-friendly Enterprise ESG Support Project', where 54 companies collectively provided 3,000 young individuals with practical work opportunities and achieved significant value through ESG activities. [Article](#)
- Gangwon has pioneered sustainable tourism practices through its "**Glocal(Global+Local)**" initiative. Collaborating with designated travel agencies, Gangwon has developed high-quality tour programs that blend global appeal with local authenticity. This approach aims to diversify tourism traffic while preserving the region's natural environment and cultural heritage. The initiative has been recognized with the prestigious Glocal award for 8 consecutive years, underscoring Gangwon's commitment to responsible tourism and community engagement. [Article](#)
- PyeongChang 2018 Winter Olympics left a profound legacy by promoting peace and reconciliation. It was a historic event where North and South Korea marched together under a unified flag during the opening ceremony. Leading up to the 2018 Winter Olympics, over 2,500 participants from 97 countries engaged in winter sports through various initiatives. This initiative not only broadened access to winter sports but also promoted international friendship, aligning with the Olympic spirit of **unity and inclusivity**. [Article](#)