



Good Practice Story Title:

Regaining our Balance

a community comes together to protect one of the World's Most Beautiful Bays

Destination: Miyazu City

Country: Japan

Submitting Organization:

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Category:

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

Destination description:

Miyazu is a small city on the edge of the Tango Peninsula in northern Kyoto Prefecture and 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. The people here, nurtured on fresh fish, shellfish, and varieties of seaweed, have the calm Miyazu Bay and Aso Inland Sea to thank. Miyazu Bay, a UNESCO endorsed World's Most Beautiful Bays, has also played a role as 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. The people of this area preserve a variety of Japan Heritage arts, from the high-quality Tango chirimen silk weaving, to the ancient art of wisteria weaving.



Summary of Good Practice Story:

Marine ecosystems worldwide are under threat from human activities, and many attempts to *correct* or *counteract* these issues have led to further problems. Rather than implement blanket solutions, the people of Miyazu City are helping nature find its balance once more. Collaborative efforts across a plethora of stakeholders have helped preserve what is a very unique and delicate ecosystem that includes the Bay of Miyazu (connected to the greater Sea of Japan), the natural land bridge of Amanohashidate (that splits Miyazu Bay and Aso Inland Sea), the Aso Inland Sea, and connected tributaries.

In the face of climate change related issues, increased tourism and plastic waste, and a declining economy nationally, stakeholders across the region have banded together to support an environment that is so much more than a beautiful 'destination.' Realizing the needs of the region and learning from the over-beautification of nearby seaside areas, multiple groups are working in tandem to restore balance to the bay that has supported them for over 1,000 years.

Organized by both the prefectural and local government, along with local stakeholders, there are multiple groups doing both land-based and sea-based beach and sea clean-ups throughout the year. There is a group dedicated to tackling invasive oyster species that threaten to overrun the inland sea and an innovative local beer brewery that uses the collected oyster shells as part of the filtration process of the beer brewing. The local fishing industry understands the importance of balance in the bay as well and there are a host of regulations that help keep the bay healthy, from overfishing regulations, to the use of nets that allow smaller fish to escape, and even a group that is helping to rebuild fish habitats. This includes monitoring nutrient levels to ensure that over-cleaning doesn't happen. Local fishing collectives in the region have even partnered with the regional DMO (Kyoto by the Sea DMO) to create educational experiences for guests who want to learn about how the region both promotes tourism and protects the bay when they visit the area. A university group from Hong Kong even collaborated on a reef building project with members from the Miyazu fishing industry to help restore fish habitats. As the region is a popular beach destination in summer, the city has also implemented regulations that limit the speed of pleasure boats to reduce noise levels harmful to marine populations. There is also communication with the scientific community; groups that take monthly measurements of sea temperatures and assess the health of the tributaries that feed into the sea.

Many regions around the world, including Miyazu, are at risk of over-beautification. For example, creating cement fortified embankments along tributaries to reduce erosive flow into the bay. This makes the beaches and swimming areas look more appealing but have consequences on the balance of the ecosystem. Miyazu has managed to create an understanding amongst the community that over-beautifying can have the same effect as doing nothing to keep a marine area clean. When waterways are over-beautified to create crystal clear waters, nutrient depletion can affect the food chain



severely. And since people here depend on the health of the bay and inland sea to live, its survival is their survival.

Issues faced:

Miyazu is home to Amanohashidate, one of Japan's Three Scenic Views. Miyazu Bay has also been recognized as a UNESCO endorsed World's Most Beautiful Bay. With a history of tourism and beaches that are popular in summer, the city feels pressure to present the image of a pristine Amanohashidate and to maintain the "green pine white sand" beaches the area became famous for. This puts the region at risk of over-beautification.

Environmental issues tend to be multi-faceted, and the bay is also affected by rising sea temperatures, invasive species, marine biodiversity decrease, sea nutrient balance (nitrogen and phosphorous levels) which affects marine life survivability, river nutrient run-off (water run-off from farm lands that use pesticides into the tributaries that feed into the river flowing into the bay), plastic, and noise pollution.

Education is also an important component of the Bay's story, as aging members of the fishing industry as well as the general tourist population may be unaware of how actions have environmental ripple effects. If tourists don't understand the reasons for not over-beautifying the bay (for example), they may push the city to make changes that aren't in the best interests of environmental conservation (even though they might be favorable to tourism in the short-term).

Solution:

There is no current *solution* for climate change, but mitigation and steps to help preserve the natural harmony of the ecosystem are the result of many groups working in tandem. Collaboration across stakeholders has been a recipe for the success of many of the GSTC's top story destinations, and it is certainly a necessity when dealing with issues as large as environmental ones. Government supported, resident driven initiatives like the Amanohashidate Protection Group, the Aso Marine Environmental Creation Collaborative, and international initiatives like IVUSA (International Volunteer University Student Association) and The Most Beautiful Bays of the World Association, along with innovative fishing industry groups, local start ups (like Local Flag making beer using oyster shells), and the regional DMO (Kyoto by the Sea), have all played a part in Bay protection, education, and rehabilitation.

With the increased awareness and education about the fragile regional ecosystem, a variety of different groups across different industries have emerged to help maintain the balance of Miyazu Bay. Groups created in this way are supported socially and, in many cases, financially in order to become established and have an impact on the region. Miyazu City (local government) supports a variety of these initiatives



with funding, such as the Amanohashidate Protection Group, the Aso Marine Environmental Creation Collaborative, and World's Most Beautiful Bays, as well as assisting with promotion, coordination, and participation.

Methods, Steps, and Tools applied:

The waters of the bays are monitored and used predominately by the fishing industry. The fishing industry is overwhelmingly run by small family businesses, with only two larger fishing companies in the area, all of whom uphold Kyoto Prefectural Fishery Law regulations implemented to maintain the overall health of the bay. Developed in 2020, Kyoto developed a Resource Management Policy with regulations and an open sharing of information on catches, fish types, etc.

And some groups have taken this further. Habitat creation projects and education for both industry members and visitors alike contribute to a growing understanding of the importance of a balanced ecosystem. In 2021, Kyoto by the Sea DMO developed the Community-based Discovery & Design Program with the idea of converging tourism, education, and business development. Two of the three programs are based in Miyazu, and one focuses specifically on marine-related activities (topics include resource management, improved aquaculture techniques, sustainable communities). The education programs not only teach about sustainability, but provide companies aspiring towards sustainability goals with steps and tools to help develop this on their own.

Some results of this growing education have trickled into the business sector where groups like Local Flag have seen some of the problems (like invasive oyster species) as potential solutions (using the shells in beer production). Supported by government funding, Local Flag was created in 2019 by young local entrepreneurs who are working to support local culture, economy, and work towards environmental sustainability. Through their beer they tell a local story, as the process uses locally grown hops as well as shells from the invasive oyster species in the Aso Inland Sea.

As evidenced already, awareness and communication across stakeholders is a big part of the balancing process. Groups like The Aso Marine Environmental Creation Collaborative work with groups like IVUSA to tackle marine related issues. The Aso Marine Environmental Creation Collaborative was formed in 2007 and has 18 years of experience organizing events and running activities related to balance in the regions' waters. This is the group that has been organizing (among many other activities) events for the removal of invasive oyster shells from the inland sea, of which Local Flag has become a part. The management of the invasive oysters in the bay has also helps with nutrient balance in the bay, which in turn protects the delicate marine ecosystem.

Miyazu City also hosts beach clean-ups, and supports local volunteer groups that hold frequent cleanings. These programs have actually been ongoing since 1976, and are organized by both the city,



local volunteer groups, and more recently in support with the UNESCO endorsed World's Most Beautiful Bay's Club association, which Miyazu Bay joined in 2016.

The impetus of these initiatives is supported by evidence that has been regularly gathered by the scientific community since 2009. Reports on invasive species, sea levels, marine populations, nutrient levels, and other data help local groups focus on challenges facing the region. For example, The Aso Marine Environmental Creation Collaborative also reported on tributary chemical levels (mainly from farmlands that still use chemical sprays) in order to keep farmland irrigation systems from flowing into the rivers that in turn flow into the seas. Reliable data is a vital part of the decision-making process for best policies to implement in the region. The data supports education and helps volunteer groups know where to focus their efforts.

Miyazu City not only supports these groups but has utilized data to implement regulations for beach goers to help keep both the beaches clean and reduce noise pollution on the water. The city started implementing regulations for pleasure craft in 2020 as well as creating restricted areas to protect the natural environment on Amanohashidate's National Park. The city (in coordination with Kyoto by the Sea DMO, the proximate Maizuru City, as well as the Prefectural government) also regulates requests from cruise ships hoping to visit the area. There are prefectural and coast guard enforced regulations restricting how far into the bay region large vessels are allowed. This helps prevent both boat pollution and noise pollution.

Achievements and Results:

- 49 years of beach cleaning events across three different groups throughout the year, with up to 1500 people volunteering at one time.
- Rules and regulations for the fishing industry
- In 2023 alone, volunteers collected 4.5 tons of invasive oyster shells.
- Published research findings from seawater surveys
- Sustainably-focused companies with relation to the bay: SOPA soap company (using unnecessary accumulated mud from the bay in soap making), ASOBI beer, Mizojiri Fishery Company (referenced below), Miyazu Sea Cucumber Association (referenced below)
- Amanohashidate Activity Center offers a variety of experiences that feature Miyazu Bay, such as environmentally friendly activities like SUP and sea kayaking, and other cultural experiences like chikuwa making (which uses locally sourced sardines from the bay to make a regional delicacy).
- Kyoto by the Sea building and selling tours that focus on sustainability and only use public transportation and include educational information to visitors about Miyazu Bay, Amanohashidate, and Aso Inland Sea during half day and full day guided tours. The Kyoto by the Sea DMO has created tours with two-night minimums in Miyazu that also include eating local sourced ingredients, and experiences. These tours are sold to key partner travel agencies that are both B-Corp and Travellife certified. Kyoto by the Sea DMO experience sales in 2023 were 1.57 million yen. Sales for two-night





- three-day packages where guests stayed in locally owned accommodations exceeded 3.7 million yen (which includes experiences).

Lessons Learned and Advice:

Communication has been an integral part of the region's ability to help with ecosystem preservation. This might seem like an obvious answer, but cooperation across stakeholders, including future-thinking and innovation, is a direct result of cross-stakeholder communication.

There is still real pressure to beautify the bays here. Regular information dissemination and broader education are the best ways to combat this. The tourism industry and visitors alike can still benefit from further education. While local hotels and restaurants benefit greatly from the marine life in the area, they are likewise benefiting from tourists who come for white sand beaches and the iconic green pines of Amanohashidate. If more people have an understanding of how imbalance can destroy the marine ecosystem and consequently the tourism industry, shifting mindsets can further opportunities to better help balance the regional environment.

Regional DMOs, city offices and tourism boards can play a central part in all of this, even without a large budget to support the initiatives. Hosting information sharing sessions, publishing information/data/results publicly online, and helping to organize local initiatives are all (mostly) free ways to be involved and support local people with ideas for change (in whatever capacity that may be).

Recognitions and Additional References

UNESCO World's Most Beautiful Bays Club

Amanohashidate One of Japans Three Scenic Views

Amanohashidate National Park

Miyazu Sea Cucumber Association received the Minister of the Environment Award

<https://www.city.miyazu.kyoto.jp/site/citypro/20089.html>

2015 Social Contributor Award received by Kaiyo High School (for contributions to the sea)

<https://www.fesco.or.jp/winner/h27/winner.php?wid=12142>

Mizojiri fishermen won the JAPAN Sustainable sea food Awards U30 category.

<https://www.wwf.or.jp/press/5158.html>

Tango Hikinawa-kai (Tango Harpoon Society) won the Director-General's Award of the Fisheries Agency.

<https://www.pref.kyoto.jp/suisan/news/press/2022/3/27taikai.html>

Community-based Discovery & Design Program

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5cafce8316b6402d0449d72a/t/63c77c7e35211b06e00732c6/1674018131503/Communnity+based+Discovery+and+Design+Program.pdf>



