



Good Practice Story Title:

Abandoned Salt Fields Transform into Bird Paradise, Restoring Hope for Local Residents.

Destination: Southwest Coast National Scenic Area

Country: Taiwan

Submitting Organization: Southwest Coast National Scenic Area Headquarters, Tourism Administration, M.O.T.C.

Category:

Destination Management

V Nature & Scenery

Environment & Climate

Culture & Tradition

Thriving Communities

Business & Marketing

Destination description:

The Southwest Coast National Scenic Area covers parts of Yunlin County, Chiayi County, and Tainan City. The National Scenic Area lies in the Chianan Plain, covering the eight administrative areas of Sihou and Hukou in Yunlin, Dongshi and Budai in Chiayi, and Beimen, Jiangjun, Qigu, and Annan in Tainan. It was the earliest development site of the Ancestors' Ferry a hundred years ago.

The nutrients brought by the river, the rise and fall of the salt industry, and the development of new land from the sea have made the coast rich in agricultural and fishery resources, forming the coastal impression of 'the hometown of agriculture and fishery.'

The Southwest Coast Area has an extremely long coastline, including sandbars, lagoons, estuaries, and other special coastal wetlands, and is the richest area in Taiwan in terms of coastal wetland ecology, with a wide variety of shallow wetland ecosystem species such as fish, shrimp, shorebirds, waders, egrets, mangrove forests, and other types of shallow wetland ecosystems.





Summary of Good Practice Story:

The Southwest Coast of Taiwan has rich wetland ecosystems. After the abandonment of salt fields, these areas unexpectedly attracted numerous bird species, including many internationally protected ones. However, the region also began facing issues like rubbish dumping and uncontrolled resource extraction. To address these problems, the SWC National Scenic Area Administration was established in 2003 to promote ecological protection and tourism development. In 2007, the Budai Salt Fields were declared a Wetland of National Importance, and the Budai Wetland became an environmental education site. By collaborating with local governments, NGOs, and residents and integrating local culture to revive the economy, we aim to ensure the sustainable development of this area.

Issues faced:

Since the Taiwan Salt Corporation switched to mechanical salt production, the original salt fields in the coastal area of Chiayi Budai have gradually become deserted, affecting land prices. This has led to various large-scale development plans by relevant units, such as constructing a large petrochemical industrial zone to increase local job opportunities and the development of leisure resorts to drive the local tourism market. Still, the development projects could not move forward smoothly due to strong opposition from the residents. The abandoned salt flats have become wetlands, but they have unexpectedly attracted lots of birds, including some internationally protected birds! This has attracted the attention of many bird watchers. At the same time, some salt fields and wetlands have been illegally dumped, and fishing nets have been set up to catch fish, making the overall environment dirty and messy.

This made residents aware of the crisis, and they began to take the initiative to protect the environment, actively participating in ecological and birdwatching training courses, hoping that the birds would come here to rest every year. They also turned the unused buildings into birdwatching pavilions and cooperated with relevant units to hold birdwatching activities. After years of promotion, young people have returned to their hometowns to set up local businesses, using local characteristics to cooperate with us. By 'starting with wetland environmental remediation', we have tried to find a feasible, sustainable development model in Yunlin, Chiayi, and Tainan coastal areas.

Solution:

The Budai Salt Fields were opened as a salt farm in 1930. With the decline of the artisanal salt industry, the Taiwan Salt Corporation ended the salt drying industry in 2001, and the entire salt field began to fall into disuse. It just so happened that this area was located along the southwest coast of Taiwan's coastal corridor, where water birds stop to rest and feed; it





has unexpectedly become an important breeding ground for water birds and is also an essential habitat for the globally endangered black-faced spoonbill. The founder of the International Black-faced Spoonbill Alliance (SAVE International) advocated that the Budai Salt Fields be listed as a black-faced spoonbill habitat. Due to its ecological importance and value, it was listed as a nationally important wetland in 2007, and Bird Life International also recognised it as an Important Bird Area (IBA) in Taiwan.

There were plans for large-scale industrial development in the past, vehemently opposed by residents, communities, environmental groups and other NGOs. In 2003, the government designated the area as a national scenic area to protect the ecological resources, natural landscape and cultural characteristics of this area, and meanwhile established an official organization 'Southwest Coast National Scenic Area Administration', which is responsible for promoting ecological conservation, wetland environmental remediation and restoration, tourism resource management, cultural heritage, and promoting local economic development through the development of the tourism industry.

This area is also an important habitat for many wild animals and plants, a feeding area for protected animals, a stopover for migratory birds from East Asia, New Zealand and Australia, and a breeding ground for rare water birds in Taiwan. It is adjacent to important fish and shrimp fry breeding areas. It also has the function of protecting fishery resources and protecting wild animals and plants. Therefore, it has been listed as the environmental education site in Taiwan.

At different stages, various stakeholders such as the local government (Chiayi County Government), NGOs (Chiayi County Ecological Conservation Association, Kaohsiung Wild Bird Society), local elementary school (Xincen Elementary School), local groups (Budai Cultural Association, local businesses, local communities) and residents have worked together to reinterpret the relationship between the salt industry and Budai Town, and to pass on the local cultural features. They are looking forward the reappearance of the past prosperity in Budai Town.

Methods, Steps, and Tools applied:

The Budai Salt Fields is an important habitat for many wild animals and plants. Since it was designated in the national scenic area "Southwest Coast National Scenic Area" in 2003, we have begun to conduct environmental monitoring and various surveys here. To maintain ecological diversity, we have carried out restoration plans for the wetland's topography and landforms, hydrology, wetland vegetation, and ecosystems. In addition, we hold public briefings and seminars for the residents to strengthen the environmental awareness. With the need of tourism, designate wetland ecological restoration areas; promote low-carbon





ecological travel, we offer “slow travel”, combining cycling and the ecology resources, let the tourists deeply experience the nature and understand the local.

In 2002, a serious case of black-faced spoonbill botulism occurred in the southern Taiwan Wetland Reserve, killing 73 black-faced spoonbills. Conservationists began to advocate that the reserve should gradually increase the number of potential habitats for the black-faced spoonbill population to disperse the population from over-concentration, which would lead to a shortage of food sources and an increased risk of disease. Professor Randy Hester, founder of the International Black-faced Spoonbill Alliance (SAVE International), joined the initiative. In 2007, Budai Salt Fields was designated as a national important wetland, and in 2015, the area was announced as an Important Bird Area (IBA) by Bird Life International.

We also work with stakeholders from all sides on the road to sustainable tourism development. Not only the local governments, NGOs, but Budai Xincen community and the local industries have been aware of social responsibility and education. Thanks to the support of the local community, the promotion of sustainable tourism can be long-term going on. NGOs (Chiayi County Ecological Conservation Association and Kaohsiung Wild Bird Society) adopt some areas, and conduct monthly bird surveys, such as water level mediation, dredging ditches and habitat improvement every month. Furthermore Kaohsiung Wild Bird Society regularly holds birdwatching activities, and the information about these activities is posted on their Facebook fan page “Budai Salt Field Five”. These activities invite community and the local elementary schools joining together in order to promoting ecological education.

Budai Salt Fields have become a habitat for wildlife and a stopover for migratory birds due to years of neglect. In 2003, traces of horseshoe crabs were found here. Horseshoe crabs are an endangered species in Asia. The Chiayi County Government and the Chiayi County Ecological Conservation Association began to restore the horseshoe crab. Between 2020 and 2021, 14 juvenile horseshoe crabs (about 4-5 years old) and two juvenile horseshoe crabs (about 6-7 years old) were found in the restoration area. We also cooperate with the nearby elementary school to design local courses on the environment, the ocean, and the community so that children can become more environmentally aware through the research process of observing and breeding horseshoe crabs and passing on the unique salt field living culture.

In 2013, the Chiayi County Government assisted the Budai Xincen community in building a birdwatching base based on the model of the gun turret, an early salt industry defence structure. This building can be seen as the most critical milestone in the community's awareness of protecting the wetlands of the Budai Salt Fields. In order to preserve and





promote the beauty of their hometown's ecological resources, the residents of Xincen community have taken on the role of volunteer birdwatching guides. At first (2019-2020), we hired professional teachers to lecture locally. Volunteers will take courses the Kaohsiung Wild Bird Society offers to improve themselves. Currently, there are about 20 birdwatching guides in the community, and they also have birdwatching telescopes, which can be booked by groups of tourists (paid service).

In addition, the community also organises residents to serve as environmental volunteers, who are responsible for cleaning the birdwatching environment (mowing, cleaning toilets), patrolling the water area, and monitoring water level adjustments. Because of the cohesion of the community, from 2018 to 2020, the Shiner Education Foundation held the Floating Island Art Project in Xincen community. This foundation invited art teachers to Xincen, combining the local culture and landscape, and using a series of art activities to showcase the cultural characteristics of the coastal community. Through the participation of residents (about 400 residents participated in the activities, and 20 local women participated in the performances), the charm of the abandoned salt fields was presented.

The local business has also joined the ranks. In 2008, local youths established "Zhou Nan Salt Farm" to revive the salt industry of Budai. They aimed to change perceptions, raise support, and restore the farm using sunlight. In 2013, they collaborated with local practitioners of eco-friendly agriculture and fisheries production to promote the significance of eco-friendly food ingredients and the culture of agriculture, fishery, and salt life.

Achievements and Results:

1. Increase in the number of Black-faced Spoonbill: After the reclamation of salt flat in Budai, the number of Black-faced Spoonbill in the wetland increased from around 10 in 2001 to 239 in 2011. In the 2015 Global Census of Black-faced Spoonbill, 215 Black-faced Spoonbills were recorded in the Salt field Important Wetland, accounting for 10.5% and 6.5% of the total number of Black-faced Spoonbills in the entire country and the world (2,034 out of 3,272) respectively. The 2023 International Black-faced Spoonbills Census reported 4,228 wintering in Taiwan and 651 in the Budai Salt field Important Wetland. The results of the 2024 International Black-faced Spoonbill Census indicated 4,135 wintering colonies in Taiwan and 887 in Chiayi, showing that the Black-faced Spoonbills highly favour our ecological environment.
2. Increase in bird species: The Budai Salt field Important Wetland Park was once an abandoned salt field. We preserved the original landscape and added a water island for waterfowl. The park features facilities related to the salt industry and provides an excellent habitat for birds. Visitors can see a variety of bird species foraging and resting, included waders, shorebirds, terns and grebes. (*Chlidonias hybrida*, *Anas clypeata*)





3. The wetland is rich in flora and fauna: The area's plant ecology includes forests, grassy wetlands, and waterways. Plant species include seahorse grass, box elder vine, Mimoso, neem, olive, white laminaria, Taiwan sea tungsten, aloe vera, and bitter linden. There are also exotic species such as horse cherry blossom, large-flowered salmon grass, and field peasants. (*Casuarina equisetifolia*, *Melia azedarach* L., *Terminalia catappa*) In 2024, the number of fish was recorded to 17 species across 12 families.
4. Successful Rehabilitation of Live Fossil Flycatchers: Shin-Cen Elementary School has established the "Marina Environmental Education Hall," which integrates flycatcher rehabilitation with environmental and ecological education. In 2022, over 600 flycatchers have been successfully hatched.
5. Raising the environmental awareness of residents: The community has taken the initiative to maintain the bird-watching environment, create a community economy, and protect the ecological characteristics of the area. We have improved the environment of Hsin-Cen Park by enhancing the planting and pavement, using original materials that do not damage the landscape, constructing a shaded bird-watching wall that does not interfere with the habitat, and installing a bicycle rest stop. These improvements provide a better resting environment for residents and tourists alike.
6. A tourist environment that combines ecology and recreation: The Yunlin, Chiayi, and Tainan Management Office commissions professional vendors to organize bird-watching tours in the Yantian Wetlands every year, providing low-carbon and in-depth ecological education and activities. Environmental education and activities. In 2023-2024, the Yunlin County Government will organize 11 activities in the Budai Salt Fields Wetland, with around 2,000 participants.

Lessons Learned and Advice:

1. Conduct systematic inventory of ecological resources to understand the distribution of species on land and in water.
2. Investigate the historical trajectory of traditional industries to ascertain their environmental interdependencies and foster greater community engagement.
3. Enhancing the effectiveness of environmental education and publicity through co-worker advocacy by various stakeholder

Recognitions and Additional References

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