



**Good Practice Story Title:**

Reviving Local Culture: Tono's Heritage System and Community Involvement

**Destination:** Tono City, Iwate Prefecture

**Country:** Japan

**Submitting Organization:** Tono Furusato Shosha Co., Ltd.

**Category:**

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

**Destination description:**

Tono is a small city surrounded by mountains in northeastern Japan. The city is known for its abundant collection of folktales and dedication to the preservation of traditional culture. Tono has an endless landscape of simplicity, beauty, and life in harmony with nature.

Tono's characteristic landscapes include small shrines, temples, stone monuments, giant trees and waterfalls, many of which are places mentioned in folktales. These have been protected by the inhabitants of 11 small districts. Each village has its own 'treasures', which have become an important part of the inhabitants' identity.



## Summary of Good Practice Story:

In Tono City, for heritage that was not designated for government protection, local residents had no choice but to protect them on their own — without any support. However, due to population decline and changing lifestyles, there are limits to what the efforts of local residents alone could achieve. As a result, in 2007, Tono City established the Tono Heritage Recognition Ordinance. This system, based on citizen applications, identifies local resources and promotes their protection and utilization through community collaboration.

To date 169 items have been recognized as important parts of Tono's Heritage. This initiative has increased local involvement in cultural and natural preservation activities and led to Tono Heritage sites becoming recognized as tourist attractions in their own right. The heritage recognition system attracts tourists and helps residents recognize and rebuild using the ample charm of their region.

## Issues faced:

There was concern that resources not designated as national or prefectural cultural properties might be destroyed or lost due to urban development. The preservation of these resources had heavily relied on local residents. However, with population migration from rural areas to cities and changes in lifestyles, there were limits to what the efforts of the residents alone could achieve.

Meanwhile, Tono City developed the "Tono City Comprehensive Plan Basic Concept" in 2006, envisioning the future image of "Tono, the Eternal Hometown of Japan." This initiative aimed to preserve the irreplaceable natural, historical, cultural, and environmental resources of Tono while making the city a place that could become a beloved hometown for many people.

## Solution:

In 2007, Tono City established the Tono Heritage Recognition Ordinance. Based on citizen applications, the ordinance recognizes local resources as Tono Heritage sites to be preserved for the future. This system promotes protection and utilization through community collaboration. After recognition, the city supports citizen-led protection and utilization by providing subsidies upon request from managing citizen groups. Additionally, Tono Heritage guidebooks are published annually, and standardized signs are installed to convey the charms of these local treasures to visitors.





## Methods, Steps, and Tools applied:

The steps leading to the contribution of the Tono Heritage Recognition System to the promotion and development of regional attractions are as follows:

### 1. Establishment of the System:

The Tono Heritage Recognition System was introduced in 2007, based on the Tono Heritage Recognition Ordinance, aiming to realize the vision of "Tono, the Eternal Hometown of Japan." The process encourages citizens to voluntarily recommend heritage candidates, which the administration then recognizes, fostering active citizen involvement.

The Tono Heritage is recognized in four categories:

- Tangible Cultural Heritage: Physical assets like buildings and monuments. Examples: Unetori Shrine, Hirakura Kannon Temple.
- Intangible Cultural Heritage: Traditional performing arts and customs. Examples: Itoyo Kagura, Aozasa Shishi-Odori dance.
- Natural Heritage: Habitats, landscapes, and natural phenomena. Example: Shitadashi Rock, The giant Japanese cedar tree of Taya
- Composite Heritage: Combined heritage of buildings and natural elements. Examples: Kumano Shrine and its sacred tree in Maita.

### 2. Nomination Conditions:

The nomination conditions for Tono Heritage are:

- Must represent the charm of Tono.
- Must be preserved and utilized by citizens after recognition.

This approach ensures the recognition of diverse heritage sites reflecting local characteristics. Only group nominations by community residents are accepted, enhancing local attachment and responsibility.

### 3. Recognition Process:

Tono Heritage nominations are collected annually. Recognition is granted after an investigation by the Recognition Investigation Committee consisting of both experts and citizens.

Community groups and neighborhood associations, led by residents, recommend candidates for Tono Heritage with the owner's consent.



Candidates are added to the candidate list.



Investigation by the Tono Heritage Recognition Investigation Committee.



The mayor grants Tono Heritage recognition.





#### 4. Promotion Activities:

Recognized heritage sites are promoted through annual guidebooks and standardized signs, highlighting their features and attractions to visitors. This active dissemination of information increases opportunities for both locals and visitors to appreciate the region's charm.

#### 5. Protection Activities and Administrative Support:

For recognized heritage sites, the city has established a subsidy system to support protection and utilization based on applications from resident groups. There have been 200 cases of protection and utilization supported this way.

Examples include:

- Repairing damaged roofs of shrines of tangible heritage.
- Maintaining access paths leading to waterfalls and megaliths of natural heritage.
- Publishing commemorative books documenting the history of local performing arts of intangible heritages.

#### 6. Tourism Utilization:

Recognized heritage sites are continually protected through community and administrative collaboration and used as tourism resources. Walking events and tours are organized incorporating Tono Heritage sites. Local tourist guides hold regular study sessions.

These steps demonstrate that the Tono Heritage Recognition System plays a crucial role in the voluntary preservation activities of the community and contributes significantly to the promotion and development of regional attractions.

### **Achievements and Results:**

The Tono Heritage Recognition System has recognized 169 items as Tono Heritage in 18 rounds from 2007-to-2023. This system has increased local involvement and revitalized cultural and natural preservation activities. Many community groups participate in this initiative with aims of community building and self-governance. Participation is not only limited to heritage protection.

Continuous resident-led preservation activities are conducted for recognized heritage items/sites: building repairs, environmental maintenance near heritage sites, publishing commemorative books, organizing events, and fostering community maintenance.

Tono Heritage sites are recognized as tourist attractions, establishing destinations for visitors. Tourists learn about the community's efforts to preserve traditions through these heritage sites which enhances the overall travel experience.



## Lessons Learned and Advice:

- The regional heritage recognition system is an effective system for municipalities to take the initiative in autonomously protecting the cultural heritage in their areas rather than relying on central government directives.
- The combination of resident initiatives and administrative support leads to effective protection and utilization of regional heritage. This fosters local pride and responsibility, ensuring ongoing and voluntary preservation activities.
- Recognition should be viewed as the start, not the goal. Post-recognition protection is crucial. With over 15 years of operation, many recognized heritage sites face challenges due to the aging population of their caretakers. Succession planning for future caretakers is essential.
- Tourist visits to Tono Heritage sites are mainly stopovers and their utilization of Tono Heritage sites is still limited. There is a need to link tourist visits to economic benefits, such as their buying local souvenirs and participating in local activities.

## Recognitions and Additional References

- Tono Heritage Recognition  
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- Tono Heritage Guidebooks  
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- The Role of Preservation Systems for Local Heritage in the Preservation of Cultural Heritage | YAMAKAWA Yukinori  
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