Navigating Sustainability: How Three Generations of Fishers Are Transforming Chenggong

East Coast National Scenic Area, Taiwan
East Coast National Scenic Area Headquarters, Tourism Administration, M.O.T.C
Protected Areas (including public natural or cultural parks)
People & Community

Summary of Good Practice Story
Chenggong Township, Taiwan's largest fishing port on the Kuroshio-fed East Coast, faced declining fish stocks and fading traditional fishing knowledge as elder captains aged and youth left the community. The East Coast National Scenic Area Headquarters partnered with three generations of fishers to convert a fishing marina into a Marine Environmental Education Center, training veteran captains as educators for programmes like "Whale Sounds & the World" and a harpoon-fishing experience linking tradition to climate awareness, while supporting local operators such as Jin-Ling Whale Watching toward sustainability certification. The Center now draws 7,000–10,000 visitors annually, with about 10% of participants becoming "Ocean Ambassadors" who choose responsible operators and sustainable seafood, and it achieved official Environmental Education Facility Certification while helping form the Chenggong Slow Travel Association. The key lesson: cultural connection and storytelling move visitors to sustainable behaviour more effectively than statistics alone, and conservation succeeds only when fishers see it reinforcing, not threatening, their livelihoods.

Setting the Scene: Destination & context
As the Destination Management Organization (DMO) responsible for over 100 kilometers of Taiwan's East Coast, the East Coast National Scenic Area Headquarters (ECNSAH) stewards a coastline shaped by the Kuroshio Current and a deep connection between people and the sea. Among the communities under its care, Chenggong Township—the largest fishing port on the Hualien–Taitung coast—was selected as a key site for sustainable transformation.

For generations, Chenggong has depended on the ocean's abundance. The Kuroshio Current supports rich marine biodiversity and a fishing culture that defines the town's identity. Today, however, climate change, shifting fish stocks, and cultural decline are placing increasing pressure on this coastal community.

At the heart of this story are three generations of fishers: elder captains safeguarding traditional knowledge, working fishers adapting to change, and young people returning home with new aspirations. Their shared commitment reflects Chenggong's transition from a traditional fishing port toward a more resilient and sustainable future, making this community an ideal setting for a story of people, heritage, and ocean stewardship.

The Turning Point: Why change was needed
For generations, Chenggong Township, the largest fishing port on Taiwan's East Coast, thrived on the ocean's abundance. But beneath its vibrant maritime culture, a silent crisis was growing.

The sea that had sustained the community was changing. Rising ocean temperatures, extreme weather, overfishing, and human disturbance altered fish populations and disrupted marine ecosystems, threatening local livelihoods. At the same time, traditional fishing knowledge was fading as veteran captains aged and younger generations left in search of opportunities elsewhere. A gap also remained between traditional maritime wisdom, modern education, and safe marine practices.

These challenges came to a head among three generations of fishers. Elder captains feared their knowledge would disappear. Young people returning home searched for new possibilities. Active fishers stood between them, torn between preserving tradition and adapting to an uncertain future.

The turning point came when the community realized that the sea could no longer be viewed solely as a resource to harvest. Without change, both marine ecosystems and fishing heritage could be lost.

For the East Coast National Scenic Area Headquarters, this was also a moment of realization. As a DMO, we understood that lasting change would require not isolated projects, but long-term collaboration and a shared commitment to sustainability.

The Vision: What you set out to do
As stewards of Taiwan's East Coast, we knew that Chenggong Township, a fishing community shaped by the Kuroshio Current, stood at a crossroads. Climate change was transforming the ocean, while aging populations and youth outmigration threatened the survival of traditional fishing knowledge.

Yet change began from within. Three generations of fishers—elder captains, active fishers, and returning youth—chose to act. United by a shared love for the sea, they refused to let their heritage fade. Inspired by this local awakening, we stepped forward as partners in their journey.

Together, we set a simple but ambitious goal: to transform Chenggong from a port that depends solely on marine resources into a destination where conservation, cultural heritage, education, and sustainable tourism create value together.

Our vision is a future where healthy oceans support thriving communities, traditional knowledge remains alive, and local businesses embrace sustainability. By strengthening collaboration between people, nature, and industry, we aim to build a resilient destination that can prosper while safeguarding its maritime heritage for generations to come.

The Journey: How change happened
The transformation of the Marine Environmental Education Center of Chenggong Yacht Marina was not a single project, but a journey built on five interconnected pillars. At its heart was education, while the East Coast National Scenic Area Headquarters (ECNSAH), as the destination management organization, helped scale local efforts into a destination-wide sustainability strategy.

The journey began by reimagining a traditional fishing port as a hub for sustainable tourism and experiential learning. Rather than importing external models, the Center placed local fishers at the core. Veteran captains became educators, sharing generations of maritime knowledge through innovative programs such as Whale Sounds & the World, which uses sound-based activities to foster empathy for marine life, and the Harpoon Fishing Platform Experience, which connects traditional fishing practices with sustainable seafood and climate awareness. To ensure continuity, the Center trained interpreters, environmental educators, and local instructors while creating opportunities for intergenerational learning.

Education soon inspired demand for more sustainable experiences. In response, ECNSAH supported local businesses in pursuing the Good Travel Seal (GTS) through workshops, one-on-one coaching, and incentive programs. A leading example is Jin-Ling Whale Watching, a partner in the harpoon fishing experience and an early adopter of sustainability certification and responsible whale-watching practices.

Scientific knowledge became another cornerstone. Collaborations with the Kuroshio Ocean Education Foundation, university researchers, and fisheries experts strengthened marine education, while citizen volunteers conducted ecological monitoring at Sanxiantai Recreation Area, later inspiring guided eco-tours.

Recognizing that sustainability could not be achieved alone, ECNSAH connected educators, whale-watching operators, cultural organizations, local food producers, fishery businesses, and schools into a collaborative network. This partnership eventually evolved into the Chenggong Slow Travel Association, creating a stronger platform for sustainable local development.

Finally, the Center pursued official Environmental Education Facility Certification, ensuring long-term quality and credibility.

Together, these five pillars transformed a single classroom into a catalyst for the sustainable transformation of an entire fishing community.

The Breakthrough: What you achieved
The impact of the Marine Environmental Education Center can be seen not only in growing numbers, but also in lasting behavioral change.

Today, the Center welcomes 7,000–10,000 visitors annually, making it one of the most important environmental education hubs on Taiwan's East Coast. More importantly, approximately 10% of participants in immersive programs demonstrate meaningful changes in behavior. Many become informal "Ocean Ambassadors," choosing responsible whale-watching operators, purchasing sustainable seafood, and participating in beach cleanups. As a result, learning extends beyond the classroom and influences everyday decisions.

The project has also strengthened connections within the community. Through its intergenerational learning model, experienced fishers, active practitioners, and younger generations share knowledge and perspectives, helping preserve maritime traditions while fostering greater community pride and cohesion.

At the institutional level, the Center achieved official Environmental Education Facility and Field Certification from Taiwan's Ministry of Environment, providing long-term recognition and a solid foundation for future development.

Perhaps the most significant achievement is the shift in mindset. Rather than viewing tourism as a pressure on marine resources, the community increasingly sees it as a tool for education, conservation, and cultural preservation. In response to global challenges such as overfishing and biodiversity loss, Chenggong has demonstrated how tourism can become a catalyst for

stewardship. The model is practical, scalable, and offers a valuable reference for coastal communities seeking a more sustainable future.

Reflections: What you learned and what others can learn
Transforming a traditional fishing port into a living ocean classroom taught us that lasting change begins with emotion, not information.

Our greatest surprise was that cultural connection inspires action more effectively than facts alone. Visitors were moved not by statistics, but by the stories of Chenggong's fishers—their respect for the sea, their skills, and their way of life. Once people connected with this heritage, sustainable choices followed naturally.

We also learned two important lessons.

First, conservation cannot succeed if it is seen as a threat to livelihoods. Some fishers initially feared that sustainable seafood education would undermine their income. The turning point came when they became storytellers, guides, and cultural ambassadors. As visitors began valuing local traditions, conservation and economic opportunity started reinforcing one another.

Second, one educational approach cannot engage everyone. Programs designed for adults proved less effective for younger audiences. By introducing hands-on activities, games, and experiential learning, we made sustainability more accessible and engaging across generations.

For destinations facing similar challenges, we offer three recommendations: build on local traditions rather than replace them; empower communities to tell their own stories; and connect sustainability to everyday experiences. People are far more willing to protect what they understand, value, and feel proud of.

The Ripple Effect: Lasting impact
The Marine Environmental Education Center was never the end of the journey—it was the stone that set new ripples in motion across Chenggong Fishing Harbor.

The first ripple reached local tourism businesses. Through long-term collaboration with whale-watching operators and other partners, marine education became part of visitor experiences, encouraging more responsible travel and consumption.

The second ripple strengthened community collaboration. With support from the East Coast National Scenic Area Headquarters, local businesses, cultural organizations, schools, and NGOs formed new partnerships, eventually leading to the establishment of the Chenggong Slow Travel Association and a stronger shared commitment to ocean stewardship.

The third ripple extended beyond Chenggong. The Center has become a living demonstration of sustainable tourism, attracting visits from public agencies, NGOs, and educational organizations seeking practical lessons and inspiration.

Looking ahead, Chenggong is evolving from a traditional fishing port into a model of coexistence between community, culture, tourism, and the sea—demonstrating how even a small coastal town can inspire lasting change.

Awards or Certifications
The Marine Environmental Education Center of Chenggong Yacht Marina was officially approved by the 100th Meeting of the Review Committee for Environmental Education Certification of the Ministry of Environment on October 27, 2025, and was granted Environmental Education Facility and Field Certification.

Source: https://www.eastcoast-nsa.gov.tw/zh-tw/event/news/5789/

Web Articles
1. Feature Article by the East Coast National Scenic Area Headquarters, Tourism Administration, MOTC – “A New Wave of Education”
This feature highlights how the East Coast National Scenic Area Headquarters has supported the project and recognized it as a model case for sustainable tourism development on Taiwan’s East Coast.
https://www.eastcoast-nsa.gov.tw/zh-tw/event/news/5789/

2. Media Report by Vision Taiwan – “How a Fishing Harbor Became a Hub for Sustainable Development”
This in-depth report explores how the Marine Environmental Education Center successfully transformed a traditional fishing community and generated positive impacts on the local economy, cultural heritage, and community development.
https://www.storm.mg/article/4439580

Other Relevant Links
1. Official Website of the Marine Environmental Education Center
https://www.eastcoast-nsa.gov.tw/zh-tw/attractions/detail/240/

2. Supporting Videos (Available in the Same Google Drive Folder)
https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/11kb3H-qiIiWk7OH7oK_6ULeDL1ce9S6W?usp=sharing

A. “The Voice of the Ocean – Stories from Chenggong Township”
A documentary that tells the story of local fishers who transformed from resource users into environmental educators, and how the community rebuilt its relationship with the ocean through

education. Drawing on a lifetime of experience at sea, local fishers transformed their fishing knowledge, maritime culture, and community memories into educational resources. Through their guidance, environmental interpreters and visitors gain a deeper understanding of Chenggong's marine ecology, fishing traditions, and coastal way of life. The film demonstrates how local knowledge can become a powerful force for conservation, cultural transmission, and sustainable community development.

B. "Learning from the Sea"
The official brand video of the Marine Environmental Education Center, showcasing its core values, educational philosophy, landscapes, and cultural identity. Through short-form visual storytelling, the video makes marine knowledge more accessible to the general public while introducing the unique culture of Chenggong. Featuring nocturnal ecological observations, marine life, fishing village traditions, local beliefs, and fish market operations, it illustrates the connections between environmental education, ecological awareness, cultural heritage, and community memory, inspiring greater appreciation for both the ocean and local culture.

Quotes or Testimonials
1. "The Marine Environmental Education Center transformed marine conservation from a classroom topic into a living experience. Through harbor tours and hands-on activities, students connected with Chenggong's fishing culture and began making more responsible choices, from selecting sustainable seafood to reducing single-use plastics in daily life."
— Teachers from Taitung County Yanwan Elementary School and The Affiliated Elementary School of Tunghai University

2. "Visitors discovered that traditional marlin harpoon fishing is not a threat to conservation, but a practice rooted in skill, respect, and balance with the sea. Their support for responsible fishing and local products strengthens both the Kuroshio ecosystem and the future of our fishing community."
— Local Partner and Young Fisher, Chenggong Township

3. "Guided by the principle of education instead of consumption, understanding instead of disturbance,' the Center demonstrates how tourism can become a powerful tool for conservation, community participation, and cultural preservation. It is an inspiring example of responsible tourism in action."
— From Sustainable Travel Taiwan