Change begins with the heart

Sun Moon Lake National Scenic Area, Taiwan
Sun Moon Lake National Scenic Area Headquarters, Tourism Administration, MOTC
Local Destinations (including villages, cities, municipalities, islands)
People & Community

Summary of Good Practice Story

Sun Moon Lake, Taiwan's iconic boating and cycling destination, faced an unsettling realisation when extreme weather dropped water levels low enough to force a dock-closure warning, threatening both boat operators' livelihoods and the ring road's traffic order. Rather than only marketing scenery, the Sun Moon Lake National Scenic Area Headquarters worked with transport partner Nantou Bus, whose earlier 2014 e-bus pilot had failed due to immature battery technology, to try again as EV technology matured, completing full ring-road bus electrification in April 2026 alongside improved trail drainage and slope reinforcement against heavier rainfall. This rebuilt momentum spread to local shops: stores offering a reusable-container rental service grew from 19 to 26, with rented reusable cups climbing from 416 sets in 2022 to 848 in a 103% increase. The core lesson: the biggest obstacle to low-carbon transformation isn't technology but confidence — local partners needed to see that an earlier failure didn't preclude trying again, and honest acknowledgment of ongoing climate pressures, rather than only polished success stories, is what brings a community together to face transformation collectively.

Setting the Scene: Destination & context

For many tourists, the Sun Moon Lake is a lake of beauty and serenity. But for residents living here, this lake has always been part of their daily life and livelihood.

The lake carries the traveling boats, while connecting the everyday life of the community, cultures, and people. Residents live according to the changing seasons and environment, while travelers move about with ease using the boats, bicycles, trails, and shuttle buses.
However, the real challenge facing the Sun Moon Lake is not the ebbs and flows of the tourists, and the stability of life and tourism here around the lake is slowly feeling the impact of climate change.

The Turning Point: Why change was needed

We have always believed that safeguarding the beautiful mountain and lake will bring in endless tourists, forming the steady foundation of the livelihood and income of residents.
However, with the ever-worsening extreme weather events, we realize for the first time that this lake will not sustain. The real crisis facing the Sun Moon Lake is that when extreme weather event strikes, everything that holds the tourism and life here at the Sun Mook Lake cease to exist.
We issued a pre-warning to close all docks when the water level dropped. It was the first time we truly felt that the life sustained by this lake could also cease to exist. For the vessel operators, the connection between the scenery, tourists, and their livelihood could be disrupted. Meanwhile, the ring road was congested due to influx of private cars, whereas silence gradually took over the docks. “How will we live if the water level continues to go further down?” The question from vessel operators put things into perspective for us. It was not just the tourism that faced threats, the life that residents have built alongside the lake was also on the line.
We realized that beyond promoting the scenery and managing tourism, we must also safeguard the local life and manage the order of tourism. This transformation is not just to safeguard the scenery before us, but to ensure safe lives for residents and enjoyable journey for tourists despite extreme weather events.

The Vision: What you set out to do

Our vision is to make sure that life continues as usual despite climate change, so that residents will have secure livelihoods and tourists enjoy their journey with ease.
We no longer strive for growing numbers in tourists; we want tourism to be sustainable and co-exist with local life and the natural environment. Therefore, we are rethinking mobility for all, designing facilities that can respond to climate risks, and trying to engage more local partners in safeguarding this land.
We want Sun Moon Lake to be more than just a famous tourist site, but a destination that allows for secure livelihood for residents and safe travels for tourists despite extreme weather events.

The Journey: How change happened

To get the Sun Moon Lake going, we realized that the biggest obstacle was not engineering or technology, but how to convince the once-frustrated local partners to again believe that change is possible. Facing ever-frequent extreme weather events, we need to start with what we can change. By improving the trail drainage, reinforcing the slop stability, and introducing low-carbon

design in new-built facilities, we hope that residents can still enjoy secure livelihood while tourists travel with ease despite the extreme weather events.
While promoting low-carbon emission transportation, we came to realize that the real obstacle lies not in technology but in how to rebuild confidence within our local partners. Therefore, we continue to set up the entire package with charging facilities, aiming to first create an environment that allows change.
The most difficult but also heartfelt story in this process of transformation was Nantou Bus, our most important transportation partner in the Sun Moon Lake.
Round about 12 years ago (2014), Nantou Bus initiated a two-year e-bus pilot program. However, with the limited advancement in battery technology back then, the power efficiency was low while charging took a longer time. It was never able to match the transportation efficiency of a diesel bus, so the program resulted in going back to diesel buses after the pilot ended.
Many years later, with EV technology maturing and charging facilities more widespread, and the State promoting low-carbon public transportation, Nantou Bus re-evaluated their failed-attempt 12 years ago and decided to take on the e-bus challenge again; investing in setting up corresponding charging facilities.
12 years later, e-bus again runs along the Sun Moon Lake ring road. For us, we overcame not 12 years in time, but the fact that local partners are willing to move on from “already failed” to “willing to try again”.
From looking on to participating
This newly instilled confidence slowly spread to every corner of life in the area. An increasing number of store owners engaged in the “reusable container rental service” and are willing to share this service with tourists.
From boats on water, buses on land, to stores around the corner, the real transformation we saw was not in facilities and technology, but the fact that more and more local partners are willing to engage and safeguard the future of the Sun Moon Lake together.

The Breakthrough: What you achieved
“Sustainable” became everyday life, not just a policy terminology.
I. Low-carbon option became the norm: In April 2026, the ring road bus route operated by Nantou Bus completed their electrification process. The diesel exhaust and noise slowly dissipated, turning low carbon transportation into more than just a policy goal but a change residents and tourists can feel every day.
Also, stores joining the reusable container rental service saw an increase from 19 to 26, reusable cups rented grew from 416 sets in 2022 to 848 sets, an accumulated growth of 103%. They mean more than just the decrease in the use of disposable containers, but that more people are willing to travel differently.
II. Start preparing for the future: facing the ever-frequent heavy rainfall, we continue to improve the trail drainage and reinforce the slope stability, so that safe passage is guaranteed for residents and tourists despite extreme weather events.

“Post-disaster recovery” is no longer the only method of management, instead, we turn to everyday preparations that will make us more resilient.

III. Locals start to believe that change is possible: stores engaging in “reusable container rental service” have come to realize that safeguarding the environment does not necessarily mean sacrificing profit. Instead, they found a new balance between the environment and local business.

From “I’m asked to” to “I want to”, the change in mentality was our most treasured achievement. An increasing number of residents, business operators and tourists now believe that safeguarding this land could also be their everyday life is what ultimately changed the Sun Moon Lake.

Reflections: What you learned and what others can learn

This journey showed us that real changes comes from the fact that people are willing to take part in the change together.

I. Limited authority may not be limiting

We used to be frustrated that the vessel phasing out was not our authority, and we realized that subsidy alone cannot push change. It also helped us understand that when we provide not just subsidies but help build an environment enabling change, we can attract more government departments and local partners to join us.

II. Being honest outweighs perfect presentation

Instead of only telling beautiful stories, we admit that there are pressures of extreme weather events, damaged facilities, and congested traffic, but that we are slowly transforming the place. When people see the problems, the area will face the transformation together.

III. More people joining, driving real changes

As the number of stores engaging in the “reusable container rental service” increases, we realized that tackling climate change takes more than just engineering or technology. It requires partners in the area to all thinking about how we want to live life in the future.

When residents and business operators start to see changes in their everyday life, that joint commitment formed is stronger and will last longer than any hardware or facilities.

Our experience taught us that real transformation rarely starts from the perfect answer, but from willing to face the problem together and attempt changes together.

The Ripple Effect: Lasting impact

I. Our experience showed us that the focus of destination management should be more than just tourist experience, it must also respond to long-term issues including climate change, ecological conservation, and local life.

While improving our facilities, we introduced solutions that are nature-centered, and slowly established partnerships with agencies including the Forestry and Nature Conservation Agency, Ministry of Agriculture.

It showed us that a tourism destination is not just a place to serve tourists, but that it can be an important platform to connect ecological conservation, infrastructure, and local development.

II. This journey also showed us that the main challenge to low carbon transmission is not technology, but the rebuilding of confidence and the willingness to try.
III. Nantou Bus again invests in e-bus operation after 12 years, showing the local partners that even with past failures, when the time is right, change can still take place.
IV. What really drives the transformation may not be the most advanced technology, but the people who are willing to take the first step together.
We may not have a perfect answer, but we would like to prove that with willingness to take the first step, change will slowly take shape.

Awards or Certifications
I. Green Destinations Silver Award Certification (2024)
II. Taiwan Sustainability Action Award (TSAA) – Bronze Award (2025)

Web Articles
I. Sun Moon Lake Launches Electric Bus Services to Advance Low-Carbon Mobility (https://news.ltn.com.tw/news/life/breakingnews/5316054)
II. Sun Moon Lake Expands Green Walking and Cycling Experience through Trail Improvements (https://reurl.cc/M2eVR4)
III. Dedicated Pier for Electric Boats at Sun Moon Lake (https://reurl.cc/N2W909)

Other Relevant Links
I. Official Sun Moon Lake Sustainable Tourism Information (https://www.sunmoonlake.gov.tw/guides/ArticlesText?a=41)
II. Sun Moon Lake Circular Container Program (https://www.sunmoonlake.gov.tw/guides/ArticlesText?a=41#source)
III. Sun Moon Lake Round-the-Lake Bus Route (Official Route Information) (http://www.ntbus.com.tw/s03.html)

Quotes or Testimonials
12 years ago, we failed, so we were hesitant this time round. But now, we finally believe that this journey will get us there.