From Heritage to Horizon: How Houli Horse Ranch Shapes New Collective Memories for the Community

Taichung City, Taiwan
Tourism and Travel Bureau of Taichung City Government
Local Destinations (including villages, cities, municipalities, islands)
Culture & Heritage

Summary of Good Practice Story
Houli Horse Ranch in Taichung, Taiwan — a military horse-breeding site since 1937 and Taiwan's only remaining ranch of its kind, home to the country's first international-standard equestrian arena — fell into disrepair after its military function ended, with termite-damaged Japanese-style wooden stables threatening a century of history following the site's 1997 handover to local government. Rather than isolating the buildings behind protective walls, the city designated the historic stables as protected sites in 2016, then used hosting the 2018 Taichung World Flora Expo to fund restoration and reopen the century-old stables as an "Equestrian Heritage Pavilion," later bringing in a private operator (under negotiated "preserve the old while establishing the new" terms) to run over 20 national equestrian championships annually alongside circus performances and a formal animal-welfare monitoring system — Taiwan's first Animal Exhibition Permit for a public historic site. Total operating revenue grew 308.4% between 2023 and 2024, and the ranch drew 254,683 visitors in 2025, a 27.8% increase, now linked to regional cycling routes for a combined "admiring horses and riding bikes" experience. The core lesson: the best way to resist history's erasure isn't isolated static preservation but letting heritage coexist within the daily life of a modern city.

Setting the Scene: Destination & context

The Houli Horse Ranch is a unique site in Taichung City, Taiwan. It is an equestrian center with more than a century of history, and is the only remaining horse ranch of its kind in Taiwan.

The ranch was originally established by local residents as a pasture. In 1937, during the Japanese colonial period, it was transformed into a horse breeding farm under the then Taiwan Governor-General's Office. In 1952, the Nationalist government set up the Joint Logistics Stud Farm on the site and it was tasked with breeding military horses and cavalry training. In 1973, Taiwan's first international-standard equestrian competition arena was built here, cementing the ranch's irreplaceable status as the "Cradle of Taiwanese Equestrianism."

For decades, secretive area until it was handed over to the local government in 1997. Faced with the challenge of transforming a historic site, the Government seized opportunities to showcase its natural beauty and historical significance. It selected the horse ranch as the site of the 2018 Taichung World Flora Expo and 2020 Taiwan Lantern Festival. At the same time, it has promoted a sustainable strategy of "restoration over demolition." The historically significant Japanese-style wooden stables within the ranch have been meticulously restored.

The Turning Point: Why change was needed

As times changed, the original military and horse-breeding functions of the ranch gradually receded, and Houli Horse Ranch suddenly found itself at a crossroads of fate. At that time, the long-secluded ranch had fallen into a state of neglect and disrepair. The historic Japanese-style wooden structures faced real threats from severe termite infestation, material aging, and structural damage. The high cost of maintenance, coupled with the site's isolated location, further deepened the disconnect between this land and the rapidly advancing urban development of the city it was located in.

It was then that the local community and a city government team experienced a profound struggle over the "identity" of the ranch and a wave of collective anxiety over what to do with the site. If left unused, a century of historical memory would be mercilessly erased by time.

The crisis ultimately gave way to a profound "aha moment." We realized that the best way to resist the erasure of history is not to build a high wall around it for isolated protection—if we simply shut the doors, history would truly die.

We had to break free from the static framework of traditional historical preservation. The core strategy thus shifted: "We must allow horses and historical buildings to coexist together within the daily lives." This awakening resolved the conflict between community needs and development, allowing the ranch to be transformed into a core hub for low-carbon cycling tourism.

The Vision: What you set out to do

Deepening the revival of cultural heritage: Grounded in the site's historical context, we ensure the routine maintenance of the Japanese-style stables and historical buildings on-site. Rejecting blind renewal and safeguarding the spirit of the place.

Driving infrastructure upgrades through major events: Building on the successful experiences of hosting the Taiwan Lantern Festival, which enables us to continuously maintain and upgrade the infrastructure. Employing green construction methods that prioritize on-site protection, we enhance the ranch's landscapes and low-carbon recreational facilities.

Strengthening public-private collaboration and public engagement: We deepen our OT (Operate-Transfer) partnerships with professional private equestrian associations. We introduce popular and innovative content, such as circus acts, to turn the ranch into a place for everyone.

Institutionalizing animal welfare and low-carbon tourism: Strictly aligning with SDG 15, we have established a horse health monitoring system and a life education program to educate people about respecting horses and other animals. In the future, we will continue to connect with the HouFeng Bikeway through cycling festivals, normalizing the dual-low-carbon-tourism model of "admiring horses and riding bikes."

The Journey: How change happened

Phase 1:Rescuing a Century-Old Sleeping Heritage

The starting point of the transformation was a race against time. Built in 1912 during the Japanese colonial period as a horse breeding farm, this site was once a rare military stud farm in the subtropics. When the city government took over the site in 1997, the Japanese-style wooden historic structures behind the high walls of the ranch faced real threats of severe structural damage and termite infestation.

The first step toward change came in 2016, when the city government demonstrated its resolve by designating the "Historic Buildings" within the ranch as city-designated historic sites. However, this was followed by the financial challenge of high restoration costs. The government wrestled with the question: How can cultural heritage coexist sustainably with urban development?

The turning point came in 2018, when the government seized the international opportunity presented by hosting the World Flora Expo. We adopted an innovative strategy of "using events to drive development" and secured crucial funding. When the Flora Expo opened grandly, millions of visitors poured in and witnessed the century-old stables transformed into the "Equestrian Heritage Pavilion." At that moment, the team confirmed its path forward: we must break free from static preservation and let history live within the daily lives of modern residents —fulfilling SDG 11.

Phase 2: The Growing Pains and Innovations of Introducing Private Sector Vitality and Event-Driven Economy

After the successful conclusion of the grand events, the equestrian center faced its second major challenge: how to maintain long-term financial sustainability after the festivals ended and prevent the site from falling into disuse once again.

To address this issue, the city government took a bold step by bringing in a private operator with market acuity (through an OT contract) to manage the site. However, the early stages of this partnership were fraught with friction and conflict. The operations team sought to introduce highly profitable entertainment facilities, while the city government and heritage conservation

officials held firm to the principle of "low-intensity development," rejecting superficial, indiscriminate renovations.

After countless rounds of negotiation and dialogue, both sides reached a consensus of "preserving the old while establishing the new": placing "horses" at the core and developing innovative programming that caters to both professional and general audiences. Starting in 2023, the team deepened its collaboration with the Equestrian Association of Taiwan, maximizing the advantage of the on-site international standard arena by hosting over 20 national equestrian championships each year. This unique "event-driven economy" has attracted elite talent from across Taiwan, driving a tourism industry chain that includes dining, accommodation, and bicycle rentals, thereby injecting strong economic resilience into the local community -fulfilling SDG 8.

Phase 3: Sustainable Co-existence Through Green Low-Carbon Practices and Animal Welfare

As visitor numbers rebounded, the team encountered the final and most critical sustainability challenge: would a high degree of tourism development harm the site’s ancient ecology and the welfare of the horses?

In response to growing public concern over animal rights, the city government and the operations team shifted from a reactive to a proactive stance. They institutionalized animal welfare, complied with the Animal Protection Act. Ensuring the preservation of the original landscape and ecology -fulfilling SDG 15.

Houli Horse Ranch has been successfully integrated with the Houfeng Bike Path and the Dongfeng Bike Greenway. We continue to host the annual Taichung Bike Festival and have normalized the promotion of the "double-horse" low-carbon tourism model — appreciating horses and riding bikes (aka “iron horses”).

The Breakthrough: What you achieved

The revival of Houli Horse Ranch is not merely the reopening of a park; it is a green miracle that has transformed the fate of the city. This achievement rests upon a sustainability commitment we have never abandoned.

Looking back on this long journey, this century-old horse ranch, once endured its most agonizing Turning Point. As military equestrian policies came to an end, behind its closed walls the site faced the real crises of deteriorating heritage structures and aging buildings.

In the face of this crisis, we forged a Vision: believing that the best way to combat the loss of history is to break the framework of static preservation and advance a revolution of "historical assets coexisting sustainably with the city." We boldly laid out the blueprint to "let them (the horses) and them (the historical buildings) live together in the daily lives of today's city residents."

Our persistence in going down this path ultimately led us to an undeniable Breakthrough: In terms of quantifiable economic and operational performance, the introduction of professional equestrian events and international circus acts completely resolved the financial crisis of facility underutilization. Total operating revenue in 2024 experienced an explosive growth of 308.4% compared to 2023!

Furthermore, the Ranch site itself accumulated 254,683 visitors in 2025, a significant increase of 27.8% over 2024. This green wave of visitors has injected strong economic resilience into the local community, successfully fulfilling the visions of SDG 8 and SDG 11.

Today, ranch is no longer just a heritage specimen on a map; it has become tightly synchronized with the pulse of this modern city, serving as the strongest and most resilient node connecting local sentiment with a sustainable future.

Reflections: What you learned and what others can learn

Looking back on the revival of Houli Horse Ranch, what surprises and inspires us most is that "the depth of time can be transformed into the strength of sustainable development." A century-old military heritage that once seemed like a heavy burden can, with appropriate reinterpretation, unleash unexpected local economic momentum and social cohesion.

The most profound lesson this journey has taught us is that the sustainable revival of large-scale historical sites must rely on the strategic integration of "event-driven economy" and "sustainable construction."

The key insight we gained from this is: in the process of public-private partnerships, the government must never act merely as a contracting authority. Instead, it must serve as a steadfast "defender of public interest and sustainable values." By fully institutionalizing "animal welfare monitoring" and "historical heritage protection," we have learned how to promote commercial innovation without compromising core values of historical preservation or ecological environment protection.

If we could go back and do it all over again, we would involve the local community in collaborative planning even earlier, making residents' voices a core driving force in the early stages of transformation. To all those walking a similar path, we want to say: "Do not fear the burden of history, nor lock heritage away in the past. As long as you adhere to sustainable thinking, the oldest land can also dance the modern dance.

The Ripple Effect: Lasting impact

The gentle revolution of Houli Horse Ranch has already stirred profound ripples in Taiwan and even the international sustainable tourism community.

This practice has spurred groundbreaking policy change. Houli Horse Ranch successfully obtained Taiwan's first "Animal Exhibition Permit" for a publicly operated historical site, materializing the animal welfare principles of SDG 15 through strict regulations. This breakthrough demonstrates to the public that while developing public-private partnerships and normalized tourism revenues, cultural heritage sites can achieve perfect coexistence and balance with animal rights through institutionalized monitoring of the horses’ health and education on respecting horses and other animals.

Furthermore, this century-old horse ranch has been substantially transformed into a cradle of local pride. It is regularly integrated with the Houfeng Bike Path and hosts the annual "Taichung Bike Festival," successfully embedding the "double-horse" model — appreciating horses while riding bikes — as a green daily lifestyle for city residents.

Looking to the future, Houli Horse Ranch will continue to deepen low-carbon tourism and animal welfare education. We hope that this 14.86-hectare green space will be refine refined into dazzling landmark.

Awards or Certifications

Web Articles

A. 2018/05/28 Municipal News - Flower Expo "Horse Ranch Splendor Pavilion" Witnesses the Historical Evolution of Houli Horse Ranch

B. Global Views Monthly - Reports related to Houli Horse Ranch

C. Taichung Tourism Website - Houli Horse Ranch Introduction

D. Houli Horse Ranch Official Website

E. Tourism Administration, Ministry of Transportation and Communications | Tourism and Recreation Site Statistics Database

Other Relevant Links

A. https://english.taichung.gov.tw/10273/10554/1278975/1204476

B. https://www.gvm.com.tw/article/116143

C. https://travel.taichung.gov.tw/zh-tw/attractions/intro/65#

D. https://www.houliequestrian.com/

E. https://stat.taiwan.net.tw/

Quotes or Testimonials

●Visitor and Parent Testimonials (Joy and Life Education)

1. Mrs. Chang (A mother brought her child to the circus for the first time)

"I used to think Houli Horse Ranch was just for horseback riding, but I was amazed by the international circus performances they brought in! The performers were incredibly dedicated and professional. The great show kept our whole family on the edge of our seats, laughing and cheering together. Even after returning home, my child couldn't stop talking about how exciting it was. This place isn't just a great spot for kids to burn off energy; it truly helped us create cherished family memories."

2. A Travel Blogger passionate about cycling and heritage tourism:
"Riding an e-bike from the Houli Bikeway, the route perfectly connects to this century-old horse ranch. Strolling beside the historic Japanese-style wooden stables while watching the gentle horses and adorable capybaras under the warm sun offers a perfect rhythm of harmony among nature, history, and people. It is a dual feast for both the eyes and the soul."

● Partner and Promoter Visions (Professionalism and Sustainability)
1. Director General of the Taichung City Government Tourism Bureau:
"The transformation of Houli Horse Ranch is a gentle revolution that translates 'military heritage' into a 'living space.' We overcame the constraints of immense funding and military walls through an 'event-driven' strategy. By introducing private-sector vitality and a rigorous animal welfare system, this historic venue proves that cultural assets can not only be preserved but can also coexist in perfect harmony with the sustainable development of a modern city."
2. CEO of the Private Operator (OT Team): "Equestrian sports have often been perceived as exclusive and distant. Our goal is to create an accessible, 'people-friendly' equestrian environment while safeguarding the historical identity of this land.