Botan-nabe: Keeping a Food Culture Alive

Tanba sasayama city, Japan
Tambasasayama city tourism association
Local Destinations (including villages, cities, municipalities, islands)
Culture & Heritage

Summary of Good Practice Story

Tamba-Sasayama, a satoyama farming town in Japan's Hyogo Prefecture, built its winter tourism around Botan-nabe, a wild boar hot pot whose appeal was long tied to the meat's local origin — until an outbreak of classical swine fever made it impossible for restaurants to legally serve wild boar caught in Tamba-Sasayama, threatening to sever the culture's connection to hunters, farmers, restaurants and inns. Rather than letting the dish disappear, the Tamba-Sasayama Tourism Association worked with local restaurants and inns to reframe Botan-nabe's story around everything beyond the meat itself — miso, broth, sansho pepper, winter vegetables, cooking skill and respect for satoyama life — so restaurants could keep serving and explaining the tradition honestly even while sourcing boar meat from elsewhere. This kept the culture, culinary knowledge and visitor demand alive through winter tourism, ensuring restaurants, cooks and customers would still be there whenever local wild boar meat can legally return. The lesson: a food culture is stronger when understood as more than a single ingredient, and sometimes protecting a tradition through crisis means honestly reinterpreting its story rather than waiting silently for the crisis to pass.

Setting the Scene: Destination & context
Tamba-Sasayama is a rural destination in Hyogo Prefecture, Japan, where satoyama landscapes, farming, castle-town culture, and seasonal food traditions remain closely connected.

Botan-nabe, a wild boar hot pot, is one of its winter food traditions. Wild boars live in the surrounding mountains, but when they enter farmland, they can seriously damage crops, sometimes causing farmers to lose a year's work in a single night.

In Tamba-Sasayama, captured boars have long been prepared with care and respect, connecting hunters, farmers, restaurants, inns, and local food producers.

The Turning Point: Why change was needed
The turning point came when classical swine fever made it impossible for restaurants to serve wild boar meat from Tamba-Sasayama. Until then, Botan-nabe had often been promoted as a dish made with local wild boar, and this local origin was seen as one of its greatest strengths.

When that became impossible, some restaurants stopped offering Botan-nabe. The crisis threatened not only a winter tourism product, but also the connection between hunters, restaurants, inns, farmers, and local food culture.

At that moment, we realised that Botan-nabe could not survive if its value depended only on the origin of the meat. We needed to redefine it as a broader food culture: one shaped by miso, broth, sansho pepper, local winter vegetables, cooking skills, respect for life, and the relationship between people and satoyama.

The Vision: What you set out to do
Our vision was to keep Botan-nabe alive as a food culture, not let it disappear as a product that depended only on local wild boar meat.

The Tamba-Sasayama Tourism Association worked with local restaurants and inns to share Botan-nabe as a story of satoyama, farming, winter vegetables, miso, cooking skills, and respect for life. This mattered for the future because the culture must remain visible if the local hunting, distribution, and food economy are to recover one day.

The Journey: How change happened
The journey began with a difficult question: if Botan-nabe could no longer be promoted as a dish made with local wild boar meat, what value could we still share with visitors?

The Tamba-Sasayama Tourism Association started by listening to local restaurants and inns that had long served Botan-nabe. Some had stopped offering it, while others continued by using

wild boar meat from other regions. Through these conversations, we realised that each restaurant still carried important local knowledge: the choice of miso, the balance of broth, the use of sansho pepper, winter vegetables, and the way the dish is served and explained to guests.

We then changed our communication. Instead of focusing only on the origin of the meat, we began presenting Botan-nabe as a food culture connected to satoyama, farming, hunters, cooking skills, and respect for life. This allowed restaurants and inns to continue sharing the tradition honestly, even under the restrictions caused by classical swine fever.

The biggest challenge was accepting that the story had changed. Botan-nabe was no longer only about “local wild boar meat.” It became a story about how a community keeps a culture alive during crisis, so that the people, skills, and demand will still be there when local wild boar meat can return.

The Breakthrough: What you achieved
The breakthrough was not that the crisis disappeared. Local wild boar meat from Tamba-Sasayama still cannot be served in restaurants. However, Botan-nabe did not disappear with it.

By redefining Botan-nabe as a food culture rather than a dish dependent only on local meat, restaurants and inns found a way to continue serving it honestly. Visitors can still experience Tamba-Sasayama’s winter tradition through miso, broth, sansho pepper, winter vegetables, cooking skills, and the story of satoyama.

This changed how the community understood its own heritage. Botan-nabe became more than a local specialty; it became a symbol of resilience. It continues to attract visitors in winter, helping to spread tourism beyond the busy autumn season.

Most importantly, the culture, knowledge, and demand remain alive. When local wild boar meat can return in the future, there will still be restaurants to serve it, visitors who understand its value, and a community ready to welcome it back.

Reflections: What you learned and what others can learn
We learned that a food culture is stronger when it is understood as more than one ingredient. At first, we feared that Botan-nabe would lose its value without local wild boar meat. However, through conversations with restaurants and inns, we realised that the culture also lived in the miso, broth, sansho pepper, winter vegetables, cooking skills, and the way people spoke about satoyama and respect for life.

The most difficult lesson was accepting that preservation does not always mean keeping everything unchanged. Sometimes, to protect a tradition, a community must reinterpret it honestly and carefully.

Our advice to other destinations is not to wait until a crisis is over. If a local tradition is threatened, keep its story visible, involve the people who carry the knowledge, and look for the deeper values that can survive change.

If we could do more, we would document local recipes, voices of hunters, farmers, restaurants, and inns earlier, so that the knowledge behind Botan-nabe can be passed on more clearly to the next generation.

The Ripple Effect: Lasting impact
The ripple effect of this work is a new way of speaking about local food. Botan-nabe is no longer presented only as a winter specialty, but as a story that connects satoyama, farming, hunters, restaurants, inns, local ingredients, and respect for life.

This perspective has encouraged us to look at other food traditions in the same way: not only as products for visitors, but as living cultures supported by people, landscapes, and seasonal rhythms. It has also strengthened our motivation to promote winter tourism, helping Tamba-Sasayama become less dependent on the busy autumn season.

The challenge is not over. Local wild boar meat has not yet returned to restaurant tables. Still, the culture, knowledge, and demand for Botan-nabe remain alive. When the day comes for local wild boar meat to return, Tamba-Sasayama will still have the people, places, and story ready to welcome it back.

Awards or Certifications
Botan-nabe has been recognized by the Agency for Cultural Affairs of Japan as one of Japan's "100-Year Food" traditions. It also received the Special Jury Award in the same initiative.

Web Articles
https://www.bunka.go.jp/seisaku/shokubunka/foodculture/hyakunenfood/jirei/list_hyogo.html

Other Relevant Links
https://tourism.sasayama.jp/visit/foreigner_post/tambasasayama-botan-nabe-guide/

Quotes or Testimonials
"Botan-nabe is not only about wild boar meat. It carries the memory of our winter, our farmers, our hunters, and the way we respect life. Even during difficult times, keeping this dish on the table means keeping our local culture alive."

— Tetsuya Hiwada, owner of Ryori Ryokan Takasago, a traditional Japanese restaurant inn; Chairperson, Tamba-Sasayama Restaurant Association