



2021 TOP 100 GOOD PRACTICE STORY

Title of the Story: Passing on the Culture of the Nagara River Basin

Destination Name: *(include any state, province or region)*

Nagara River Basin, Gifu Prefecture

Country: Japan

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Nomination Category: *(Please check the boxes that indicate the focus of your story)*

Please find detailed information for the categories below in the Top 100 training module 'Good Practice Story'.

- ☐ Localizing the destination supply chain
- ☐ Decarbonizing the destination supply chain
- ☒ Culture & Communities
- ☐ Environment & Climate
- ☐ Nature & Ecotourism
- ☐ Tourism Reset & Recovery

Find detailed instructions for submitting good practices in the Top 100 training module "Good Practice Story".

Should you have any questions on your submission please refer to our FAQ page or contact top100@greendestinations.org

DESCRIBE YOUR GOOD PRACTICE STORY

Address each aspect of your good practice story in the different sections being specific including relevant quantitative and qualitative information.

Issues faced

The Nagara River, one of Japan's three largest yet clean rivers, has nurtured a lifestyle and culture unique to the people of Gifu Prefecture. The lifestyle with these clear waters can be represented by traditional crafting industries called "takumi no waza," where artisans continue their various traditions by using river water to make things like Mino Washi Paper, Seki Blades and Gujo Honzome Dye. Cormorant fishing, a traditional method of catching ayu sweetfish with a history of 1,300 years, and the lifestyle wisdom of "waju," which is used to protect villages from flooding, are also aspects unique to the local river culture.

However, with an aging population the number of people responsible for preserving and passing on the techniques that have been handed down in the Nagara River basin is decreasing, dangerously threatening the existence of the techniques.

With the World Agricultural Heritage Ayu of the Nagara River, the lives of ayu-dependent people, the water environment and various fishing resources are mutually linked. Nagara River System has been established in order to start the cycle of sustainable practices. Thus, efforts are being made to conserve and utilize resources, but the number of fishery cooperatives in Gifu Prefecture has decreased from a peak of 64,000 in 1986 to 36,000 in 2017.

On the Nagara River, the traditional fishing method of using birds known as cormorant fishing has been handed down through generations for 1,300 years. However, there are only two craftsmen in the prefecture who can make the special fishing boats from which the master fishermen control the cormorants. There are no blueprints for building these cormorant fishing boats because the special process is handed down orally among boat builders. The six boats owned by the cormorant fishermen are aging rapidly, but with few builders and no blueprints, repairs are not easy.

Also, in the Mino Washi Paper industry, which is a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, demand for washi is decreasing due to changes in lifestyle practices. Washi artisans are switching to other industries or closing their businesses due to a lack of successors, making the initial aging problem even more serious.

Wagasa, a traditional parasol craft that has continued in Gifu since around the Edo period, has incredibly complex structures with more than 100 steps in its production process and the work is normally divided and carried out by many different specialized artisans. There is a shortage of successors for the artisans who make the frames, the foundation of the umbrella and those who make the "rokuro" -- a key component of the parasol that binds the bamboo together. The situation of the rokuro artisans is particularly dire as there remains only one artisan left. If this situation continues, the production of traditional Japanese parasol will come to a halt not only in Gifu, but all of Japan.

In all these cases, the reason behind the decline of artisans is because the demand for traditional crafting products is dropping, resulting in the lowering of their earning power and making it less appealing as possible a career to young people.



Methods, steps and tools applied

In the Nagara River basin, Gifu Prefecture is working together with both public and private sectors of the four cities of Seki, Mino, Gujo and Gifu City to promote and strengthen the brand power of the area in order to utilize the resources nurtured by the Nagara River and promote multi-municipality sightseeing.

Additionally in 2019, the World Agricultural Heritage "Ayu of the Clear Nagara River" Promotion Council formulated the Second Stage World Agricultural Heritage Conservation Plan, which examines issues in the fields of agriculture, forestry, fisheries, tourism and the environment, and sets numerical goals while implementing projects to achieve them at the same time.

【Initiatives to secure people who can carry on the various river-basin cultures】

- The Nagara River Central Fisheries Cooperative Association has been working to foster future leaders by holding ayu-sweetfish fishing classes for children.
- In order to provide visitors and children with hands-on learning programs to familiarize themselves with the Nagara River and the culture it fosters, we established the MINO-WASHI Museum in 1994, the Nagara River Ukai Museum in 2012 and in the Nagara River Ayu Park in 2018.
- The training of both 1) workers such as tourist guides who can explain about the Nagara River basin's sweetfish, traditional fishing methods and traditional crafts such as Mino Washi paper; and 2) instructors who can educate future generations about local cultures.
- Organizing Nagara River Onpauku events for successful, local Japanese DMO tourism boards (that are non-profit organizations) in order to deepen the understanding of local industries and culture through hands-on experiences, thereby securing the necessary human resources for the future by allowing participants to learn about and experience the traditional culture, history and food of the Nagara River basin.
- Mino City has established the Nurturing Successors of Hon-Minoshi Initiative as an option for Japan's hometown tax scheme and developed a system to collect donations by setting up funds to train workers.
- Additionally, the Mino Washi Preservation Association was established to accept trainees and provide technical guidance.
- In regards to cormorant fishing boats, the two existing artisans are providing technical training to younger ship builders in a local shipyard.
- For Japanese parasols, the Gifu Wagasa Association was established to train successors for the craftsmen who make wagasa frames and "rokuro." Funds were raised through crowdfunding services to help train these successors.



Key success factors

- The establishment of a diverse council consisting of stakeholders from different fields such as agriculture, forestry and fisheries organizations plus various municipal government in order to promote the agriculture, forestry and fishery industries in the Nagara River basin, to pass on traditional fishing methods and culture, to conserve the river and its environment on a community-wide basis, and to attract tourists to the Nagara River basin.
- The prefectural government formulated the Second Stage World Agricultural Heritage Conservation Plan, which incorporates the values of SDGs and sets numerical goals, has implemented projects to achieve these goals.
- Residents within the river basin have been receiving environmental education about the Nagara River since their childhood, which in turn has allowed them to develop an awareness toward environmental protection and conservation of the Nagara River and be more open to actively participating in river purification activities.
- Nagara River basin DMO has played a central role in promoting projects such as providing programs to experience the history and culture of the Nagara River basin and developing Nagara River brand products with the cooperation of the government, private sector and local communities.
- The use of crowdfunding and other methods to raise funds for business operations is becoming more diverse, with private businesses and individuals starting new initiatives.

Lessons learned

Cormorant fishing and other traditional crafting industries that use the waters of the Nagara River like Mino Washi Paper, Seki Blades and Gujo Honzome Dye have been nurtured by the clear waters of the Nagara River and continue to develop to this day.

Since ancient times the life, economy and culture of the people of the Nagara River basin have been deeply connected to the river. For local residents, maintaining the clear waters of the river is both expected and essential to maintaining their livelihoods.

However, the lack of successors to maintain the culture of the Nagara River has become an issue, making it necessary for the government, private-sector entities and local communities to continue to work together.

In recent years, funding methods such as the hometown tax payment and crowdfunding have become more diversified. By deepening the understanding of the culture and traditional industries of the Nagara basin, including the various problems involved, it has become possible to collect funds and receive ideas and advice from people all over the country who are interested in supporting this area.

Results, achievements and recognitions

In the Nagara River basin, people have been managing the river, preserving its environment, and utilizing its blessings since ancient times so that the river and locals can coexist. Additionally, municipalities, the private sector and local communities have worked together to promote efforts that preserve the river for future generations, and as a result, have received the following global recognitions:

- Ayu of the Nagara River System, which closely links the lives of people, the water environment and fishery resources in the Nagara River basin, was recognized as a Globally Important Agricultural System in 2015 for its sustainable values in terms of environmental conservation, resource management and securing of workers.
- Among Mino washi, the hand-made washi technique of Honmino paper, for which its raw materials and



manufacturing methods are strictly regulated, was registered as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2014.

- Four young Mino hand-made washi artisans have established their own workshops, with the number of members of the Hon Mino Paper Preservation Society increasing by two.

- Hon-Minoshi is used in the restoration of national treasures owned by the Smithsonian Institution in the U.S., the British Museum in the U.K. and the Louvre Museum in France.

- Mino Washi is also being used for the official award certificate paper of the Tokyo 2020 Olympics.

Additional references

GIAHS -Ayu of the Nagara River System-
<https://giahs-ayu.jp/en>

Second Stage World Agricultural Heritage Conservation Plan
https://giahs-ayu.jp/data/giahs_action_14-3.pdf

The Official English Tourism Channel of Gifu Prefecture
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCrrWcgUNXEoYka-Gu7Kt8IA>

