



2020 TOP 100 GOOD PRACTICE STORY

Title of the Story: Sustainable tourism management in Shirakawa-go Gassho-zukuri Village through reservation system

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

Shirakawa-go Gassho-zukuri Village, a World Heritage Site

Country: Japan

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

- Culture & Communities
- Environment & Climate
- Nature & Ecotourism
- Islands & Seaside
- Immediate responses in dealing with the COVID -19
- Post COVID -19 recovery
- One of the 17 SDGs* *(if yes, which one)* GOAL 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities

*The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, were adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030. The 17 SDGs are integrated—that is, they recognize that action in one area will affect outcomes in others, and that development must balance social, economic and environmental sustainability. What are the Sustainable Development Goals? <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals.html>

For further information on Tourism for SDGs: <http://tourism4sdgs.org/>

Find detailed instructions for submitting good practices [here](#)



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 number of tourists to Shirakawa-go Gassho-zukuri Village has increased since its World Heritage designation in 1995 and the opening of the entire Tokai-Hokuriku Expressway in 2007, and tourism's negative impacts on landscape and traffic safety became an issue. In addition, some village residents converted farmland into private parking lots also accelerated the increase of tourists entering the village. In 2007, the annual visitation exceeded 1.5 million, and now more than 2.15 million people visit Shirakawa village, which holds less than 1600 residents. Due to its location, tourists visiting Shirakawa-go Gassho-zukuri Village mainly use buses and private cars, and this has resulted in traffic congestion and deterioration of the landscape. Furthermore, because of serious traffic congestion and crowds, especially during the major holidays, there is a need to increase the number of guiding staff and maintenance staff including public toilets and public facilities, which increases the costs. For a small village with a population of less than 1,600, these costs have become a major financial burden.

Methods, steps and tools applied

With the increase in the number of tourists, especially during peak seasons such as Japanese Golden Week and Obon (Ancestral memorial), Shirakawa-go Gassho-zukuri Village is overflowing with people and cars, which obstructs the landscape and causes problems for pedestrian safety as well as for the access of emergency vehicles in case of a disaster.

In April 2009, large buses were restricted from entering the village, and in March 2012, the public parking was eliminated. From April 2013, large busses were restricted to enter the village mainly on weekends and during the holiday seasons; in 2014, private tourist cars were regulated - there is no access through the central village road between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. daily.

Currently, private parking lots are no longer available. Public parking lots are located in the area adjacent to the village and, during busy times, a public parking lot about a kilometer away is also used with a shuttle bus service for the convenience of tourists. As a result, the dispersal of tourist vehicles has been achieved.

There was no noticeable confusion at the starting of the regulation, as guiding staff stood at the entrance to the regulated section to direct tourists' cars to the parking lots outside the village. Over time, this became well understood by residents and tourists as an important measure to maintain the landscape, and it continues to be implemented today.

On April 1, 2017, village parking fees were increased from ¥500 to ¥1,000 per vehicle. The fee includes a cooperative fund for the preservation of the World Heritage Site, which is to be utilized as maintenance fee and other tourism related costs.

The biggest remaining and unsolved challenge is the congestion during the Shirakawa-go Gassho-zukuri Village light-up event, which started over 30 years ago. It is a very popular event in Japan and around the world as one of the "Japan's Best View you must see before you die", but the burden of maintenance costs has been significant for



the local residents with a declining population.

In response to these challenges of improving visitor satisfaction while addressing the concerns of residents, the community had decided to introduce a full reservation system for the light-up event. The winter light-up event, which attracts a large number of tourists, introduced a lottery system for the viewing deck as of 2019. The system allows visitors to make advance reservations for the viewing deck as well as the parking lot. Management was outsourced to a private company, using the event management app, "Peatix" which can deal with the entire process from reservation application, lottery, payment, and reservation information.

<Shirakawa-go Light-up Event 2019>

Date: 14th, 20th and 27th, January/ 3rd, 11th and 17th February

Time ; 17:30 ~19:30

Place : Ogimachi, Shirakawa Village

*Shirakawa-go Tourism Association

[https://shirakawa-](https://shirakawa-go.gr.jp/en/events/2020%e5%b9%b4%e7%99%bd%e5%b7%9d%e9%83%b7%e3%83%a9%e3%82%a4%e3%83%88%e3%82%a2%e3%83%83%e3%83%97%ef%bc%9a12%e6%9c%881%e6%97%a5%e6%9b%b4%e6%96%b0/)

[go.gr.jp/en/events/2020%e5%b9%b4%e7%99%bd%e5%b7%9d%e9%83%b7%e3%83%a9%e3%82%a4%e3%83%88%e3%82%a2%e3%83%83%e3%83%97%ef%bc%9a12%e6%9c%881%e6%97%a5%e6%9b%b4%e6%96%b0/](https://shirakawa-go.gr.jp/en/events/2020%e5%b9%b4%e7%99%bd%e5%b7%9d%e9%83%b7%e3%83%a9%e3%82%a4%e3%83%88%e3%82%a2%e3%83%83%e3%83%97%ef%bc%9a12%e6%9c%881%e6%97%a5%e6%9b%b4%e6%96%b0/)

✂ Shirakawa Village HP http://shirakawa-go.org/kankou_info/11576/

Key success factors

- Well planned and implemented discussing issues and solutions with communities.
- Well planned based on survey among visitors to understand their needs
- Decrease burden on communities including cost and volunteer work posed on residents.
- Well noticed the new system among residents and visitors.
- Collaboration with private sectors with know-how.

Lessons learned

- By raising parking fees, certain amount of financial resources can be secured.
- It was shown that the introduction of a reservation system could reduce congestion at events.
- Outsourcing the event management to the private sector leads to smoother operations and reduces the burden on the village government.
- There were also concerns about the decrease in visitors due to fee increases and the reservation system. In addition, also there were concerns if the reservation system worked for foreign tourists. However, as a result, there were many benefits for both tourists and residents. New management techniques on the part of the destination to control the quality of tourists were understood.



Results, achievements and recognitions

The main benefits include the following;

- Reduced congestion

Crowding has decreased as the light-up is now fully reserved. The number of visitors, which used to close to 8,000 visitors has come to the park, compared to a capacity of about 5,000 at any one light-up event, has decreased to about 5,000 people in 2019. No major disruptions was reported concerning the introduction of a full reservation system.

- Improved visitor satisfaction

According to the Shirakawa-go Tourism Association, tourists said that "I had heard from my friends that the event is overcrowded, but I really enjoyed the beautiful scenery this time", "I would like to come back at a different time of year", "The trip to the viewing deck went smoothly". It was well received. The Association added that some people said "it was normal to wait for an hour or two for parking. In 2019 it was better as we were able to get into the parking lot relatively quickly".

- Reduce the burden on local residents
- Managing the number of visitors
- Increased financial revenue through collection of event cooperative fund

Adding value of collecting cooperative fund (30,000 yen for a bus, 4,000 yen for a car, and 1,000 yen for an observation deck) for each event booking enabled "control of quality of the tourists" as well as contributing to raising the operating cost.

- Improved satisfaction of local residents

Many residents said that the manners and rules of the tourists have improved compared to previous years. In a survey conducted with tourists and residents, more than 80% of tourists and 90% of residents were in favor of continuing the reservations system for the light-up event.

Additional references

- In recent years, the number of experienced independent travelers has increased, and their expectations have also risen. In a post-event survey, 30% of respondents gave a negative response that they would not recommend the event to their family and friends. It is necessary to respond to customer expectations for the events with an admission fee and improve customer satisfaction at the venue as a whole.

- It is necessary to find a way to make people aware of the pre-reservation system as there were some tourists who visited unaware of the system.

