



2023 TOP 100 GOOD PRACTICE STORY

Title: Protecting and Using the Island's Local Resources through Tourism ~Starlight
Tourism Initiatives on Yoron Island~

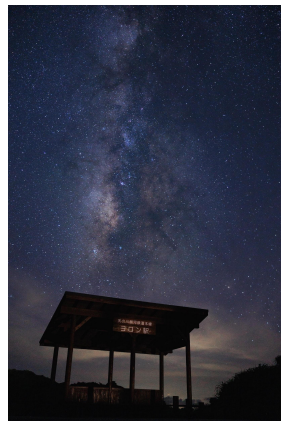
Destination, Country: Yoron Island, Japan

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In the category: Destination Management Environment & Climate Thriving Communities
 Nature & Scenery Culture & Tradition Business & Marketing

The Story in a picture:

The Milky Way experienced from Yoron Station, a famous star attraction



Summary:

1. Challenges Faced

Tourism on Yoron Island is centered on marine leisure activities, with visitors being concentrated in the summer season. In order to promote tourism, it was necessary to create contents other than marine leisure activities, attract visitors during the off-season, and increase visitor satisfaction and tourism consumption.

2. Main Solutions Implemented

Focused on the starry sky, which had not been focused on much until then. In collaboration with Wakayama University, a specialized institution, starry sky tourism was promoted as a new tourism attraction.





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In addition to building momentum among local residents and fostering star guides, the project is also working on measures to prevent light pollution in order to protect an environment conducive to star gazing.

In addition, local astronomy culture is being unearthed and utilized in tours to differentiate the area and make it more appealing.

3. Results

The number of tour guide businesses increased, creating new economic value.

Light pollution countermeasures were implemented and the beautiful starry sky environment, a local resource, was protected.

It has led to the preservation of the starry sky culture, which was being lost.



Good Practice Story:

Destination description

Brief background of the destination.

The Amami Islands, which include Yoron Island, are a group of islands located approximately 600 km out to sea between Kagoshima and Okinawa. Yoron Island, located at the southernmost tip of the archipelago, is a small island with an area of 20.58 square kilometers and an elevation of 97.1 meters, and a population of approximately 5,000. The coral reefs that surround the island, the white sandy beaches -- of which there are said to be about 60 on the island -- and the crystal-clear waters are so beautiful that they are called "Yoron Blue," attracting visitors. In particular, Yurigahama Beach, which appears offshore only at low tide, is famous for its phantom sandy beach, making it the most visited spot by tourists. The main tourist attraction of Yoron Island is marine leisure in summer that makes use of the sea, but there is a unique culture mixed with the culture of mainland Japan and Okinawa. There are the Yoron Jugoya Dance, a nationally designated Important Intangible Folk Cultural Property, and Yoron Offering, where visitors can enjoy interaction with local residents.

Issues faced

Problems/issues solved with the Good Practice Story.

There were few contents other than marine leisure, leading to tourists being concentrated in the summer. However, transportation such as airplanes and ferries and the capacity of accommodation facilities is limited. The impact on the island's life infrastructure and the environment due to the concentration at one time has become a problem. In addition, there are few contents that can be enjoyed other than marine leisure, and the economic ripple effect of tourism is limited. In order to promote a stable tourism industry, it has become an issue to create a mechanism to increase the amount of consumption and generate a bigger ripple effect of attracting tourists and tourism throughout the year

Methods, steps, and tools applied

Solutions implemented to address the sustainability problems or issues.

Yoron Island is blessed with an environment where there are few cars and city lights, making it conducive to seeing the beautiful starry skies from anywhere on the island. In addition, we focused on "starry skies" as a sustainable tourism content that does not require new development and does not consume natural and local resources.

However, the interest of residents and tourism businesses involving starry sky was low, and there were no paid star guides or star tours. There was no idea how the starry sky could become a tourism resource or that the starry sky could be converted into money, and there were almost no personnel or systems with specialized knowledge and experience.

It was also discovered that the environment for viewing the beautiful starry sky was deteriorating as more outdoor lighting and LEDs were being installed every year, making the sky brighter but limiting environment to view the beautiful starry sky.

Therefore, Yoron Town concluded a collaboration agreement with the Faculty of Tourism, Wakayama University, which studies astro-tourism, and decided to promote starry sky tourism in cooperation with the university.

Awareness-raising Activities for Local Residents

- First of all, it was necessary to let local residents know that the starry sky is a valuable local resource and to build momentum. We worked on attracting stargazers to a national stargazing convention and planning events.
- In cooperation with local schools, libraries and local children's groups, we held photo contests, introduced related books to libraries, and held regular stargazing events for residents and children.

Cultivation of Star Gazers

- We also began training star gazers, an activity that had never done before. As a satellite course of Wakayama University with the certification of "Starry Sky Guide" which is a nationwide starry sky guide certification system, a starry sky guide training course is held every year in the town. So far, 70 people have been certified, which is more than 1% of the population.

Currently, senior guides who have already been certified are involved in supporting the certification course.

- In addition, the government provides support for the introduction of equipment necessary for tours, as well as discount coupons for tours, which has led to an increase in the number of new star guides.

The university and the local study group collaborated to conduct research on astronomical legends, customs and island songs that remain on the island. By incorporating them into the curriculum of the starry sky guide training course, they are able to differentiate their tours. In the future, a certification system for original guides with knowledge of local culture is under consideration.

Preservation of a Starry Sky Environment

- With the cooperation of the university, the installation of outdoor lighting was surveyed and three automatic measurement points were set up on the island. Monitoring of the darkness of the night sky and analysis of the effects of outdoor lighting on daily life, industry, etc. are being conducted.
- In cooperation with local electric utilities and ironworks, we have built a prototype outdoor lighting system that meets international standards. Model areas were set up around stargazing spots, and

outdoor lighting was replaced. In addition, a resort hotel with which the company has a partnership agreement is also improving and replacing its outdoor lighting with the advice of the university.

- Based on the results of these efforts, a prototype was developed in cooperation with a security light manufacturer, and is scheduled to be introduced to the island, with the aim of applying for a starry sky protection zone that meets international standards.

- In addition, it is important to build consensus with local residents on the replacement of outdoor lighting. We are also working with star guides to provide programs that incorporate measures against light pollution in viewing parties and star tours for local residents.

Key success factors

Critical elements that led to successfully solving the issues.

- Interest in astro-tourism is growing worldwide. The number of tour participants is steadily increasing, as the content is highly compatible with visitors for marine leisure.
- Compared to the surrounding islands, there are fewer mountains and the terrain is flatter, so visitors can enjoy a panoramic view of the stars from anywhere on the island, and there are no poisonous snakes (habu), which are common on neighboring islands, so visitors can lie down and watch the stars in peace.
- Many tourists come to the island to "relax" in search of healing. In addition to famous spots, there are starry sky spots everywhere, and many small-group tours and private tours are available; a system to view the stars in a relaxed atmosphere has been established.
- The main reason for this is that we have been working in cooperation with a university that has expertise in this field from the very beginning. By using the knowledge and expertise of the university and providing it as a field, we were able to create a new industry and develop sustainable tourism content. The university was also able to accumulate research results and use the site as a field for student education and research.

Lessons learned

Challenges faced while implementing the Good Practice and their solutions.

- In order to level the playing field in terms of timing, the local community has reviewed its resources and selected "starry skies" as a sustainable and usable tourism resource. It has been working in an integrated manner to create content and develop a local acceptance system.
- In the process, the local community did not have the know-how, so it collaborated with the Faculty of Tourism at Wakayama University, which is a specialized institution, and has been working with local residents and businesses while making use of the university's knowledge and expertise.

- The "Night Sky Walking Guides Association" was established to guide stargazing, and has begun to take on some of the work that has been carried out by the government and the university, such as guide training, skill improvement support, and educational activities for local residents, and is making progress toward becoming self-supporting.
- The number of residents who are becoming aware of the need to protect the starry skies is increasing as a result of the awareness-raising activities in which they have also cooperated.
- The administration is aiming to apply for a starry sky protection zone and plans to improve outdoor lighting on the island, but many residents used to feel insecure about the darkness, so careful explanations and consensus building are necessary.

Achievements and Results

Direct and indirect results of the Good Practice.

- The number of tour participants is on the rise throughout the year. Some have started their own businesses as "starry sky guides," some have combined stargazing with marine leisure activities to increase their profits, and some have added value to their tours by making them an option at lodging facilities.
- Increasing momentum to protect the starry skies

With the rise of starry sky tourism, momentum is gradually building among tourism operators to protect the precious resource of the starry sky. The government plans to replace outdoor lighting with light-pollution-resistant lighting that meets international standards, and is aiming to apply for a starry sky protection zone.

Tips for other destinations

Your suggestions or recommendations for other destinations facing the same issues or implementing similar solutions

- In response to the clear challenge of a leveling tourism and creating new attractions, the project took a fresh look at local resources and worked to create content utilizing the "starry sky" as a sustainable tourism resource.
- The project was able to create a program based on solid evidence by collaborating with a university -- a specialized institution -- and utilizing the its knowledge and know-how.

- The university's advice encouraged us not only to create new tourism contents and develop tourism, but also to protect the landscape and nature by reducing light pollution as a result of our efforts.

- The program was not limited to the government and the university, but also included the involvement of local businesses (guides, etc.).

Recognitions and Additional references

Recognitions and awards the Good Practice received and supporting evidence.

- Starry sky tourism promotion: Model districts set up and security lights improved - The Nankai Nichinichi Shimbun (nankainn.com)

- Grand Prize "Looking for a broom star" and "Kimihiro" - Hoshi to Sora no Shima Photo Contest - Nankai Nichinichi Shimbun (nankainn.com)

- Starry sky as a tourism resource - The Amami Shimbun (amamishimbun.co.jp)

- Eleven students attend training course to become "star sommelier" - The Nankai Nichinichi Shimbun (nankainn.com)

-Wakayama University Thesis"Astrotourism and sustainable development"(http://repository.center.wakayama-u.ac.jp/ja/5031)