



2020 TOP 100 GOOD PRACTICE STORY

Title of the Story: Okinawa, the Birthplace of Karate

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

Okinawa Prefecture

Country: Japan

Submitter name: Kenichiro Tamayose

Email address: tamayoke@pref.okinawa.lg.jp

Position: Chief of Tourism Policy Division, Culture, Tourism and Sports Department, Okinawa Prefecture

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)* Click or tap to choose

*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/>

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Issues faced

Okinawa Prefecture situates tourism as a leading industry. The number of tourists in the prefecture in 2017 increased to equal that of Hawaii. However, in comparison to Hawaii's tourism revenue, which was approximately 1.9 trillion yen, Okinawa Prefecture was only about 700 billion yen. While there is not much difference between Hawaii's 23,000 yen and Okinawa's 20,000 yen in daily spending, the average length of stay in Hawaii was 8.94 days, compared to 3.68 days in Okinawa Prefecture. It was therefore essential to extend the average number of days spent in the prefecture.

Meanwhile, karate was adopted as an official sport for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. There are more than 130 million enthusiasts in 194 countries, and the average length of stay for karate enthusiasts visiting the prefecture to receive karate instruction is 11 days.

Although karate is a potential tourist attraction, it was surprisingly unknown that the karate's birthplace was in Okinawa. Also, dojos (martial art training halls) in Okinawa Prefecture that are responsible for the preservation, succession, and education of Okinawan karate faced a lack of successors and a decrease in the number of trainees.

Methods, steps and tools applied

In April 2016, Okinawa Prefecture established a Karate Promotion Division within the prefectural government office as a dedicated section to preserve, pass on, and develop the world-class traditional culture.

In March 2017, the Karate Promotion Division began using the "Okinawa Karate Training Hall " as a base facility to welcome karate enthusiasts from all over the world, as well as carrying out a variety of projects to promote "Okinawa, the birthplace of karate" both inside and outside the country.

Key success factors

Before the establishment of the Karate Promotion Division, the support for Okinawan karate was implemented as a single-year project without a clear vision, planned processes, and performance indicators to objectively demonstrate the project's effectiveness.

Therefore, Okinawa Prefecture decided to formulate a vision of Okinawan karate, and conducted a "Fact-Finding Survey on Okinawa Traditional Karate and Kobudo (old martial arts) to understand the current situation and the challenges of karate dojos in 2016.

As a result of the survey, many issues emerged, such as difficulties of dojo management, shortage of successors, decrease in the number of students, and the state of the ranking system, as well as a lack of awareness of "Okinawa, the birthplace of karate" among the people who are not karate practitioners or experts.

Based on the issues, Okinawa Prefecture formulated the "Okinawa Karate Promotion Vision" in March 2018 as a vision for the future 20 years from now and promotion measures to achieve it, and the "Okinawa Karate Promotion Vision Roadmap" in March 2019, which includes specific steps to achieve the vision.

These efforts made it possible to strategically implement initiatives for the preservation, succession, and development of Okinawan karate while clarifying the organization's plans and roles and closely cooperating with related stakeholders.



Lessons learned

In terms of "Okinawa, the birthplace of karate," the dojos serve as a place to preserve the memories of those who practiced there and a core community where people of diverse background, gender, or age, gather. In today's society, where urbanization is progressed, and the living environment and values become diverse, the dojos are essential for connecting people. On the other hand, the survey revealed 386 dojos in Okinawa Prefecture, which are facing problems such as a lack of successors and a decrease in the number of students. It was considered that the increase or decrease in the number of dojos that function as core community centers would have a significant impact on the local community, the willingness of international karate practitioners to visit Okinawa Prefecture, as well as, preservation, succession, and development of Okinawan karate. In light of these considerations, the "Okinawa Karate Promotion Vision" and "Okinawa Karate Promotion Vision Roadmap" were established.

Results, achievements and recognitions

With the establishment of the Karate Promotion Division and the planned opening of the Okinawa Karate Hall, the Okinawan karate community gathered momentum to collectively perform the same karate kata (patterns of movements) in October 2016, thus breaking the Guinness World Record for "Karate Kata by the most people" with 3,973 people. This record was later broken by India in March 2018, with 5,797 people. However, the fact that Okinawa Prefecture (population: 1.4 million), competed with Indian (population: 1.3 billion) on an equal footing, was a great achievement that can be proudly shown to the world.

The 1st Okinawa Karate International Tournament, held from August 1-7, 2018, was a great success with 1,109 participants from 50 countries and regions (except for participants from the prefecture). The tournament was a great success, not only because karate practitioners from all over the world gathered in Okinawa Prefecture, but also because the karate communities in the prefecture united under the same goal, which enabled it to exchange between the various schools of karate.

Besides, there are currently 101 karate related sites and monuments in Okinawa Prefecture. The prefecture began to create karate tourism programs that encourage karate enthusiasts coming to Okinawa Prefecture to visit these sites from 2018. Furthermore, the prefecture promotes "Okinawa, the birthplace of karate" both domestically and internationally to preserve, pass on, and develop the Okinawan karate.

Although there is an absolute requirement for a trade area, theme parks and other tourist facilities can be built anywhere in the world as long as lands, capitals, and labor are available. However, the only way to experience the history and culture of a place is to visit the site and experience it firsthand, not something that can be replicated.

In the case of Okinawa Prefecture, it was karate. We believe that karate can enrich the lives of Okinawans while preserving its value as a cultural asset that was nurtured and passed on by our ancestors.

Additional references

- Karate Tour Map

