



2021 TOP 100 GOOD PRACTICE STORY

Title of the Story: Toward the Establishment of a Sustainable Tourism Model

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

Nasushiobara City

Country: Japan

Submitter name: Yoshinori Yamaguchi

Email address: y.yamaguchi02@city.nasushiobara.lg.jp

Position: Chief, Commerce, Industry and Tourism Division, Industry and Tourism Department, Nasushiobara City

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

Nasushiobara City, located in the northern part of Tochigi Prefecture, has two different types of hot springs: Shiobara Onsen and Itamuro Onsen. Shiobara Onsen has a history of more than 1,200 years, with a rich quality of its hot spring water, making it very attractive. Shiobara Onsen, with a history of more than 1,200 years since its opening, has an appeal with its rich quality of spring water. Visited by many literary giants and noble families since ancient times, it has a high historical value as the official residence of Emperor Taisho was built here. Itamuro Onsen, called "the medicinal hot spring of Shimono" and known as a hot spring suitable for hot spring cures, was designated as a national hot spring resort in 1971. Nasushiobara City, located only two hours away from the Tokyo metropolitan area, has magnificent range of nature such as ravines, marshlands and clear streams, making it one of the most popular tourist destinations in the prefecture. The number of tourists visiting Nasushiobara City has been on a recovery trend after a temporary decline due to the Great East Japan Earthquake (March 11, 2011). Various measures are being taken to achieve the goals of attracting 9,500,000 annual visitors and generating 1,000,000 annual overnight visitors. However, the tourism industry was severely affected by the COVID-19 infection that is raging around the world. In response to the spread of the COVID-19, the government declared a state of emergency, with the city also declaring its own state of emergency from April 24, 2020 to May 6, 2020. In order to curb the movement of people across prefectures, we requested lodging businesses to close for the same period. However, due to the extension of the national emergency declaration due to the number of infections in the city, the city's emergency declaration was extended until the end of May, forcing accommodation facilities to close until the end of May. As a result, the number of tourists in April and May 2020 decreased by about 80% compared to 2019, resulting in a significant drop in revenue.

Methods, steps and tools applied

It was feared that if this situation continued, it would lead to the decline of the tourism business and eventually prompt the stagnation of economic activities in the city as a whole. As an independent measure, the city implemented a program to subsidize a part of the accommodation fee for citizens staying at facilities in the city from June 1 to July 31, 2020. The aim of the campaign was to support the lodging businesses in the city's hot spring resorts and at the same time to alleviate the mental burden of the citizens who were forced to refrain from going out. As a result, the number of people who stayed overnight during the campaign exceeded 6,000, of which about 44% were first-time visitors to lodging facilities in the city. However, this was only a temporary measure, with tourists from outside the city that fundamentally supported the tourism business. Amid this Coronavirus pandemic, it was necessary to create a mechanism to continuously invite and accept tourists. It was necessary to change the structure of the city, where local residents shunned the tourists who come to the city to seek healing. Therefore, we decided to formulate our own "sustainable tourism model" to implement



various measures using "trust," "wellness" and "responsibility" as keywords. We have decided to develop our own "sustainable tourism model" and implement various measures.

Key success factors

The key points of the "sustainable tourism model" are "visualization" of infection control measures for the safety and security of both tourists and local residents, and "responsible tourism" in which tourists take a certain amount of responsibility.

As part of the "visualization" program, we have a certification system for establishments that take measures based on standards established under the supervision of the "Effort Certification Committee" -- consists of doctors and experts in infectious disease countermeasures -- as well as periodic PCR inspections for accommodation businesses. The standards for the certification system includes 36 mandatory items and five recommended items, such as installation of anti-droplet equipment and documentation of each measure, which are divided into two classes: high-premium class and premium class, according to the level of efforts. Currently, four inns and hotels in the city have been certified, while six are undergoing audits. Certified inns and hotels are able to publicize their efforts with a certificate and a certification sticker, which are also published on the city website. Currently, only inns and hotels are eligible for certification, but the number of eligible facilities will be expanded in the future. As for the regular PCR testing of lodging businesses, the city has concluded agreements with inns and hotels that take measures in accordance with the "Mutual Aid Model for Lodgers to Prevent Infection with the New Coronavirus" presented by the city. In principle, the PCR test is conducted once a month. A collection point is set up in the hot spring resort area, where inns and hotels bring in specimens for collection by a designated time.

As part of the "Responsible Tourism" program, the city has set up a system to encourage tourists to assume a certain level of responsibility for the costs of the visualization certification system and PCR testing, and to cooperate in the prevention of infection. Specifically, the city of Nasushiobara is tentatively raising the bath tax collected at mineral baths as a source of funds.

Lessons learned



There were various opinions from business operators against and in favor of raising the bath tax to fund a sustainable tourism model (countermeasures against COVID-19 infections). Since this is an unprecedented initiative, it was picked up by many media outlets, generating various opinions from within Japan, including opposing opinions such as, "The cost of PCR testing should be borne by the facility operator; and it is questionable to have the tourists bear the cost." Supporting opinions such as, "If we can confirm safety and security even with monthly PCR testing, we can stay at the facility without anxiety." While conveying the image of future tourism, we held multiple briefing sessions for business operators and discussions among the government, business operators and the assembly to come up with answers to work on a sustainable tourism model.

Results, achievements and recognitions

There are very few initiatives based on the concept of "responsible tourism" in Japan, with no example of such an initiative focusing on COVID-19 infection. We have received almost no complaints from tourists about our efforts, but on the contrary, we have received favorable comments from tourists who feel that our efforts are contributing to the countermeasures. We will continue to raise awareness among businesses and tourists to further promote "responsible tourism" in the future. Currently, our efforts are focused on the COVID-19 infection, but we will work to introduce a permanent tax dedicated to environmental conservation, etc., based on the concept of "responsible tourism" that we were able to establish this time.

Number of tourist arrivals and overnight stays in Nasushiobara City (Unit: persons)

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Number of tourist arrivals	9,989,935	9,757,318	9,355,910	9,425,301	8,811,708	6,758,270
Number of tourist nights	958,220	935,342	957,208	947,162	917,940	503,325

Additional references

- ▶ Sustainable tourism model flyer
- ▶ A model for mutual assistance in the prevention of new coronavirus infection among guests
- ▶ Agreement
- ▶ Minutes of the briefing session
- ▶ Information on bath tax
- ▶ Sustainable Tourism Model Newspaper Article
- ▶ Certification system newspaper article.

