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Exemplary Cases

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of the Development

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of Sustainable Tourism Regions

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Japan Sustainable Tourism



# Greeting



**Shigeki Murata**  
Commissioner,  
Japan Tourism Agency

In recent years, efforts toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been underway around the world, and in the tourism sector, many countries have set sustainable tourism as a policy goal. Furthermore, as the international tourism market continues to grow, certain destinations experiencing concentrated visitor flows are facing challenges such as overcrowding and inappropriate tourist behavior making it difficult to balance accommodating tourists with ensuring the quality of life for local residents.

Against this backdrop, the Japan Tourism Agency, in collaboration with the UN Tourism Regional Support Office for Asia and the Pacific, has developed the “Japan Sustainable Tourism Standard for Destinations (JSTS-D)” — a set of sustainable tourism indicators in compliance with international standards — as a support tool for each region to implement sustainable destination management. Additionally, since fiscal year 2020, we have supported regional initiatives through the “Sustainable Tourism Promotion Model Project.”

This collection of case studies compiles cutting-edge initiatives in regions that the Japan Tourism Agency has supported to date, as well as know-how for advancing these initiatives. We hope that this collection of case studies will be of assistance to those working towards sustainable tourism destination management in the future.

The Japan Tourism Agency will work together with local communities to further strengthen our efforts toward achieving sustainable tourism.



**Tadashi Kaneko**  
Director, UN Tourism  
Regional Support Office  
for Asia and the Pacific

As the international tourism market continues to expand worldwide, achieving sustainable tourism has become a growing global priority. Our office supports destinations engaged in promoting sustainable tourism through various initiatives.

The Japan Sustainable Tourism Standard for Destinations (JSTS-D) is aligned with GSTC-D, an international standard developed by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) with the support of UN Tourism.

To effectively promote sustainable tourism, it is essential for destinations to utilize frameworks such as JSTS-D to assess their current status based on evidence, identify challenges, and reflect these findings in policy-making.

Our office hopes that local stakeholders will make use of this collection of case studies to further advance sustainable tourism in their respective areas. Our office remains committed to advancing sustainable tourism.

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# Initiatives to Promote Sustainable Tourism in Japan



## 1 What is sustainable tourism?

Sustainable tourism is defined by UN Tourism as “tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities.”

## 2 Why is the sustainable development of tourism regions necessary?

In recent years, a variety of problems have arisen in tourism destinations everywhere, including overtourism, labor shortages at tourism operators, and the fading and disappearance of local culture and traditions.

It is important to solve these problems, create a virtuous cycle for local societies and economies with consideration of both local residents and tourists, and realize the development of integrated tourism regions where it is pleasant to live and visit. To do that, it is necessary to simultaneously promote the preservation and use of aspects including the natural environment and cultural resources of tourism destinations, establishing a sustainable plan and value unique to Japan that will pass on these destinations to the next generation.

## 3 Initiatives to promote sustainable tourism in Japan

To realize sustainable tourism, the Japan Tourism Agency established its Sustainable Tourism Promotion Headquarters, headed by the Agency’s commissioner and overseeing the entire Agency, in June 2018. The Agency also considered trends and initiatives for the future. The Japan Sustainable Tourism Standard for Destinations, a set of sustainable tourism indices conforming to international criteria, was developed in 2020 as a tool to support sustainable destination management, based on the results of a multifaceted grasp on present circumstances from municipalities throughout Japan, Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs), and the like. In addition, support for initiatives based on the JSTS-D and countermeasures to case-by-case issues were implemented through initiatives such as the Model Project to Promote Sustainable Tourism.



The (Fourth) Tourism Nation Promotion Basic Plan determined by the Cabinet on March 31, 2023 established “sustainable tourism” as one of the keywords representing a qualitative improvement in tourism, and the goal for the number of regions with initiatives for the sustainable development of tourism regions was set at 100 (organizations acquiring the JSTS-D logo\*) by 2025. As of the end of December 2025, 118 regions have acquired the logo, and sustainable tourism initiatives have spread throughout Japan.

(\*Refer to Chapter 5 for organizations that have acquired the JSTS-D logo.)

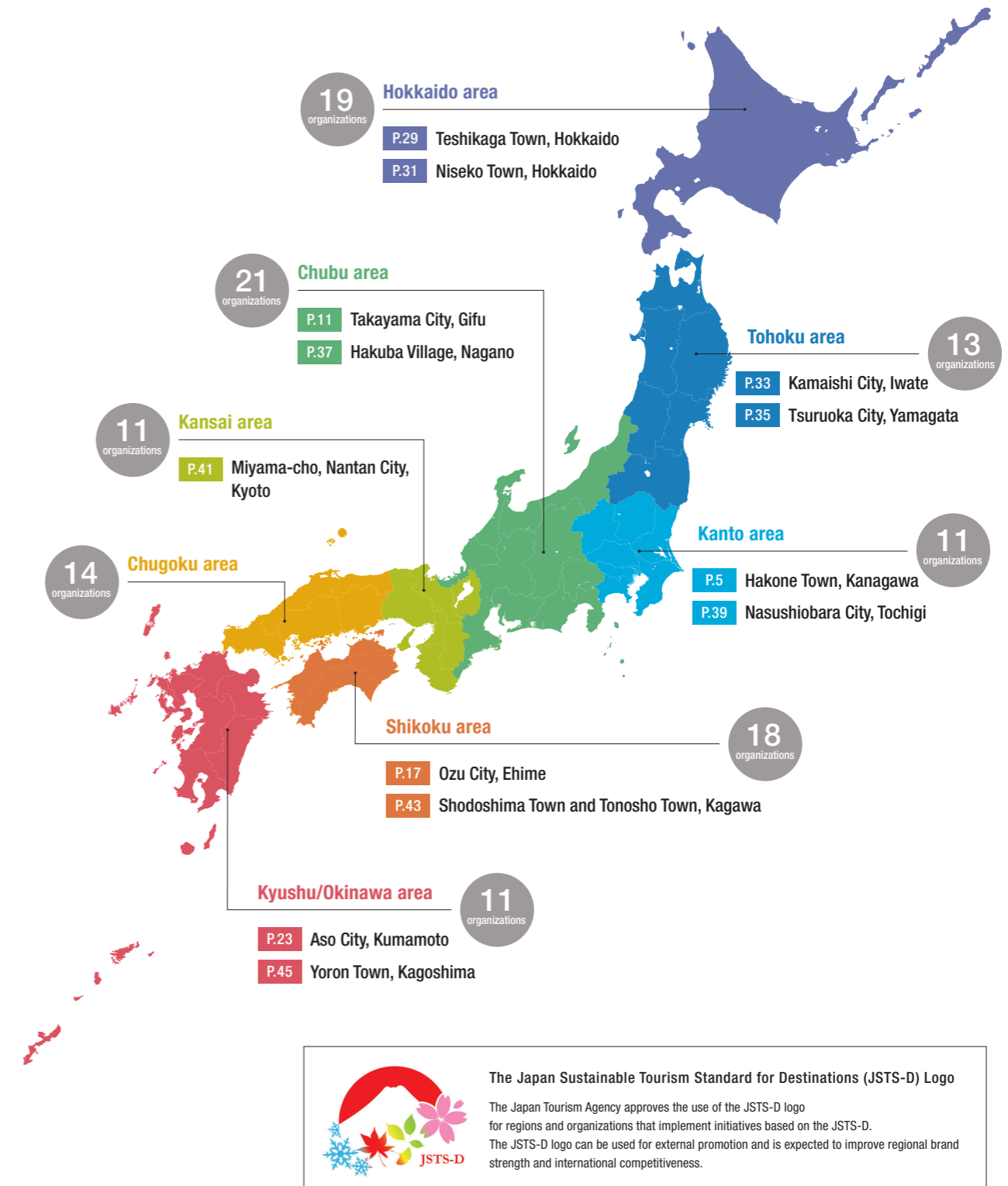
The following pages summarize specific examples of local communities promoting the sustainable development of tourism regions. We hope this pamphlet will serve as a reference going forward.

## Map Index

The regions introduced in this pamphlet are as follows.

The “●” symbol indicates the number of regions and organizations in each area that have acquired the JSTS-D logo.

(\*As of the end of December 2025)



Note: Some of the destinations featured here have been recognized in the Green Destinations Top 100 Stories and have received awards. As the application process may change from FY2026 onward, please check the official website for the latest information. <https://greendestinationsjp.org/>

Food Loss Held the Key to Balancing Tourism and the Environment

# The Possibilities of Resource Circulation to Protect the Future of Hot Spring Districts

## Hakone, Kanagawa

The problem of leftover food from accommodation facilities is an issue shared by tourism destinations throughout Japan. Combustible commercial waste currently comprises around 80% of all waste in Hakone Town, and about 48% of that waste is food waste. In order to confront this issue, Hakone Town has worked on a pilot project for resource circulation that recycles food waste from accommodation facilities into pig feed, then consumes the pigs raised on that feed in the local community.

The process has established a system and plan for more effective use of food waste while promoting understanding in the local community. The participating businesses include not only accommodation facilities but a wide range of other operators, such as recycling businesses and shipping companies, to thoroughly handle each process like waste sorting, collection, and transport.

In the future, the project will use the knowledge gained from demonstrations over the previous two years to consider methods of use promising even greater cost-effectiveness, as well as to strive to expand the areas of implementation in Hakone Town.

A look at the Japan Food Ecology Center (J.FEC) plant collaborating with Hakone Town. The plant uses its original technique to recycle food waste into high-quality fermented liquid pig feed.

## Sustainable Development of the Tourism Region Begins with the Hope of Protecting Hakone's Natural Landscape

Approximately 20 million tourists from Japan and abroad visit Hakone each year in search of rich hot springs and beautiful landscapes. However, due to the rise in tourists, measures against increased waste and environmental impact became an issue. Against this backdrop, Hakone Town took its vision of becoming "Environmentally Advanced Tourism Destination - Hakone" as an opportunity to commence discussions focused around its DMO, launching the "Regional Circular and Ecological Sphere Design Project" to create a sustainable future.



### Timeline of the Initiative

During repeated discussions within the project, the vision for the local community was aggregated into five themes, and a policy to work on resource circulation management was determined as one of those. The town learned about the Japan Food Ecology Center, specialists in food recycling, in the process, bringing the possibility of concrete implementation of food recycling into view. The town also utilized the Model Project to Promote Sustainable Tourism and founded a conference involving the local community. The food resource circulation scheme has been verified over the course of two years as a pilot project.

#### 2021-2022

○ "Regional Circular and Ecological Sphere Design Project" created within the Hakone DMO Strategy Promotion Committee using a subsidy from the Ministry of the Environment.

Under the theme of "continuing to be a sustainable Hakone," discussions were held starting from scratch, then the project was aggregated into five themes: resource circulation management, natural resource management as a tourism destination, urban planning from the viewpoint of tourism, transportation management, and publicizing Hakone Town's initiative.

#### 2023

Apr. ○ Possible measures for the Hakone DMO Strategy Promotion Committee were discussed and reviewed based on the five themes derived from two years of discussions.

Jun. ○ Contacts at the Odakyu Group introduced the Japan Food Ecology Center, which recycles food waste.

Oct-Mar. ○ Feasibility discussions began.

#### 2024

○ Hakone Town selected for the Japan Tourism Agency's Model Project to Promote Sustainable Tourism.

Oct. ○ Conference consisting of Hakone Town, business operators (accommodation facilities, the manufacturing industry, etc.), waste transport operators, recycling operators, etc., launched.

Nov. ○ Waste generation and composition surveys carried out at three accommodation facilities to ascertain the actual state of food loss.  
○ Second conference held, presenting progress on the composition survey.

Dec. ○ Food recycling demonstration carried out at six facilities in the Yumoto area by the Japan Food Ecology Center.  
○ Third conference held to inspect demonstration sites and exchange opinions.

#### 2025

○ Hakone Town selected for the Japan Tourism Agency's Model Project to Promote Sustainable Tourism.

Jan. ○ "Food Resource Circulation Roadmap" formulated based on survey results.  
○ Fourth and fifth conferences held to report the results of the pilot project.

Sep. ○ Kickoff meeting held.  
Dec. ○ Study conducted regarding the impact of the food resource circulation scheme on tourists and their willingness to cooperate with waste sorting.  
○ Awareness campaign implemented to generate momentum for promoting the initiative at operators in the town.

○ Food recycling pilot project carried out at 12 accommodation and other facilities in the Yumoto area.



The Regional Circular and Ecological Sphere Design Project began in 2021, focused around Hakone DMO, using a subsidy from the Ministry of the Environment. A vision for a sustainable Hakone was the topic of repeated discussions.

A mandara chart was used to derive five themes. The project was narrowed down to the theme of resource circulation management, and its name was changed to the "Environmentally Advanced Tourism Destination - Hakone Food Recycling Circulation Project."

Measures were determined to manufacture eco-feed from food waste in Hakone Town in cooperation with the Japan Food Ecology Center. 6 operators in the Yumoto area conducted the first pilot project.

The second pilot project was conducted implementing solutions to the problems identified in the first. Participating businesses expanded to 12 facilities. An experiment was implemented to find a system to optimize collection and transportation.

Hakone is one of Japan's leading onsen areas, about 90 minutes from Tokyo. Over 20 million tourists from Japan and abroad visit each year in search of a variety of tourism resources and beautiful natural features, including Lake Ashi, Owakudani Valley, the Sengokuhara Grasslands, and the 17 Hot Springs of Hakone. However, it is also true that the problems behind this tourism cannot be ignored. For Hakone Town, with its population of around 10,000, to welcome such a large number of tourists naturally comes with a negative

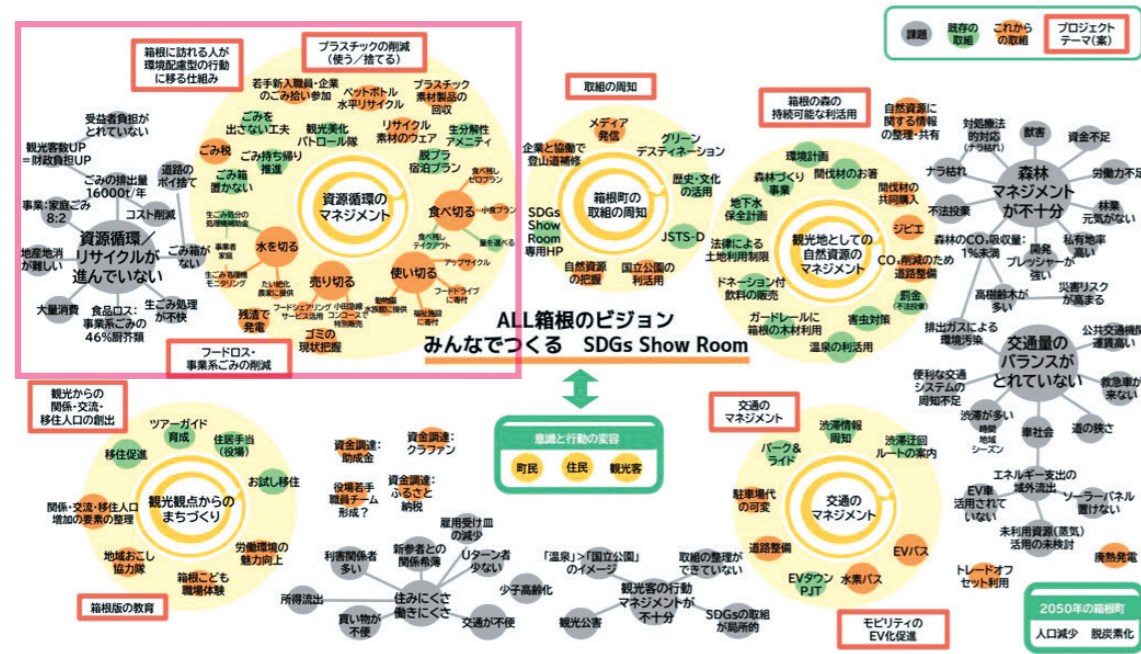
environmental impact. Hakone Town has therefore adopted the principle of becoming the "Environmentally Advanced Tourism Destination - Hakone" since FY2009, and has advocated various measures including promoting the use of electric vehicles and renewable energy. The "Regional Circular and Ecological Sphere Design Project" was launched in FY2021 to discuss the vision for a sustainable Hakone with stakeholders in the tourism industry, including the town's tourism bureau, major businesses, and the Chamber of

Commerce and Industry, focused around the Hakone Tourist Association ("Hakone DMO"). The significant issue of food loss faced by tourism destinations throughout Japan then emerged at the forefront. Accumulated food loss gives rise to a number of problems like CO<sub>2</sub> emissions during incineration, processing costs, and impact on the ecosystem. Hakone DMO focused on recycling food waste and began taking on the groundbreaking challenge of turning Hakone Town into a pioneering model of creating sustainable food circulation.

# Organizing the Town's Vision and Future Initiatives into a Mandala

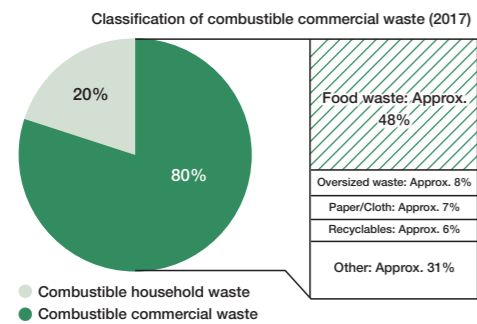
Under the theme of "continuing to be a sustainable region," Hakone Town created a mandala visualizing the challenges it faced and the vision of the future for which it should strive.

Of the five themes the town derived from that exercise, it focused on recycling the food waste that makes up a large percentage of the waste the town produces regarding the theme of resource circulation management.



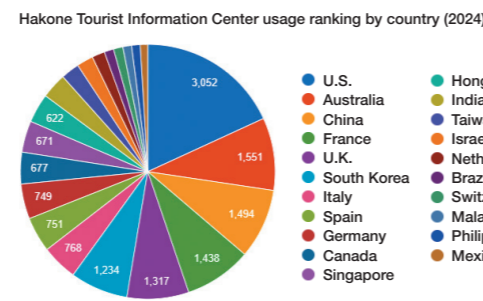
## Waste Classification Stirred Hakone DMO to Action

When researching waste classification, Hakone Town found that around 80% of its emitted waste was commercial, and around 48% of that was food waste. The town took those figures seriously as a region with tourism as a key industry and embarked on a new journey to reduce food loss.



## There Are Even Many Foreign Visitors Expected to Be Extremely Interested in Sustainability

Hakone Town was selected as one of the Top 100 Stories by Green Destinations, an international certification organization. The large number of tourists from Europe, the U.S., and Australia, where there is great interest in sustainability, also drove the initiative for the sustainable development of this tourism region.



At the end of discussions for the two-year "Regional Circular and Ecological Sphere Design Project," the five themes derived were resource circulation management, natural resource management as a tourism destination, urban planning from the viewpoint of tourism, transportation management, and publicizing Hakone Town's initiative. Data shows that Hakone Town has a large percentage of tourists from Europe, the U.S., and Australia, where people are interested in nature and the

environment, compared with other tourism destinations. In that context, the town decided first to focus its attention on resource circulation management in order to proactively implement a sustainability initiative. Then, when Hakone Town researched the classification of its waste, it determined that 80% of combustible waste was commercial, and 48% of that was food waste. The large quantity of commercial food waste is probably the status quo not only in Hakone

Town but also a shared problem in other local communities where tourism is a key industry. Members centered around Hakone DMO took this issue seriously and renamed their initiative the "Environmentally Advanced Tourism Destination - Hakone Food Recycling Circulation Project," embarking at the same time on a new journey toward a sustainable Hakone Town. Suggestions at meetings included trying to sell leftover food from accommodation facilities' buffets as bento meals and selling

# Implementing a Trial of the Circulation Model Using Food Waste from Accommodation Facilities

Recycling food waste into eco-feed and consuming some of the pigs raised on that feed in the local community. Hakone Town focused on this plan for circular resource use.

It conducted its first pilot project in 2024 with the cooperation of accommodation facilities, verifying everything from food waste-sorting operations to transport methods from accommodation facilities to the recycling plant.

## Six Facilities in the Yumoto Area Participated in the First Pilot Project

A total of six facilities in Hakone Town participated in the first pilot project: Yumoto Fujiya Hotel, Hotel Okada, Pax Yoshino, Ichinoyu, Hatsuhana (accommodation facilities), and Gora Brewery Public House (a brewery and restaurant). Leftover food waste from buffet tables was simply placed in dedicated containers, for which the data was managed, so that waste sorting would not be too difficult.



## Food Recycling to Convert Food Loss into Value

J.FEC takes in food waste delivered from food-related businesses as a resource for food circulation. Foreign substances are removed, and the raw materials are pulverized with water added to create gruel. Next, the gruel is stirred at a temperature of 90°C while undergoing a sterilizing treatment, and lactic-acid bacilli and other ingredients are added to improve nutritional value and shelf life as feed. The completed eco-feed is then transported to contracted pig farmers. Some of the pigs raised on this eco-feed become Yuton brand pork.

## The Initiative Also Leads to Protecting the Magnificent Scenery Created by Nature

Pictured on the left is Owakudani Valley, formed by volcanic activity around 3,000 years ago. A sulfurous odor drifts through this desolate landscape, and white smoke rises from the mountain surface. Pictured on the right is the view of Mt. Fuji across Lake Ashi. Addressing food loss reduces environmental burden, leading to the protection of beautiful natural scenery as a result. Those accumulated efforts will pave the way for Hakone to continue being a tourism destination sought by many people in the future.



## VOICE - Perspectives of Key Figures

"Recycling commercial food waste into eco-feed"

**Kazuyuki Takabe**  
Director, Sales Planning Department  
Japan Food Ecology Center, Inc.



"During the pilot project, we stayed at participating facilities all day, interviewing them about the sources of food waste, confirming the contents, and measuring their weight. J.FEC can use food waste effectively and also reduce incineration cost."

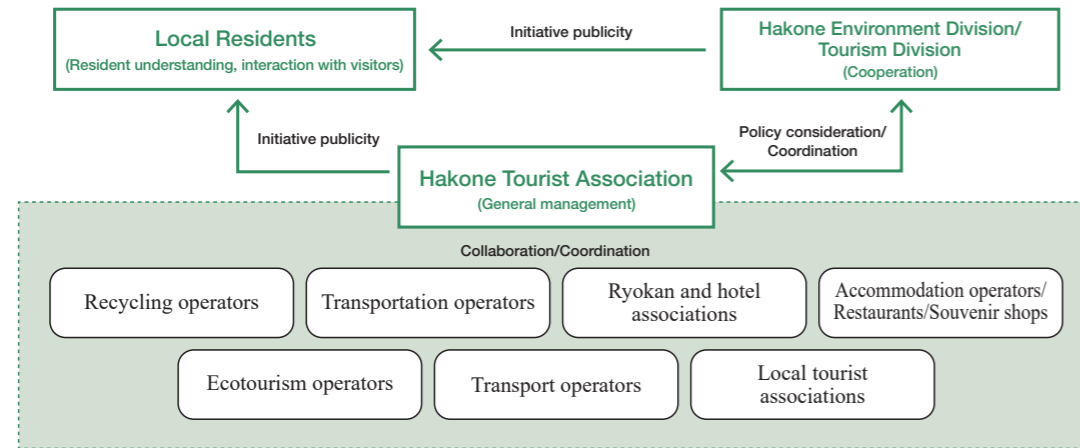
leftover bread in urban areas to create publicity for Hakone Town, but these ideas were abandoned due to problems like sales volume, sanitation standards, transport, labor cost, and disclosure. As the town was struggling to find another solution, Odakyu Electric Railway heard about its initiative and introduced the Japan Food Ecology Center (J.FEC), which had a plant about a one-and-a-half-hour's drive from Hakone Town in Sagami-hara City, Kanagawa. J.FEC's business of converting food waste

that would otherwise be incinerated into high-quality eco-feed (fermented liquid feed) and providing it to pig farmers was a perfect solution to Hakone Town's problem. The town approached J.FEC for cooperation and met with ready agreement. In this way, the first pilot project was held in December 2024. After inspecting J.FEC's plant, a total of six facilities in Hakone Town, namely, Yumoto Fujiya Hotel, Hotel Okada, Hakone Pax Yoshino, Tonosawa Ichinoyu Honkan,

Hatsuhana (accommodation facilities), and Gora Brewery Public House (a brewery and restaurant), carried out the recycling pilot project, analyzing types of waste, output, and possibilities for recycling. As a result, although the experiment showed that around 70% of the food waste was recyclable and without quality issues, problems were also found such as odor, insects, the difficulty of transport on narrow streets, cost of transport to J.FEC, and processing cost.

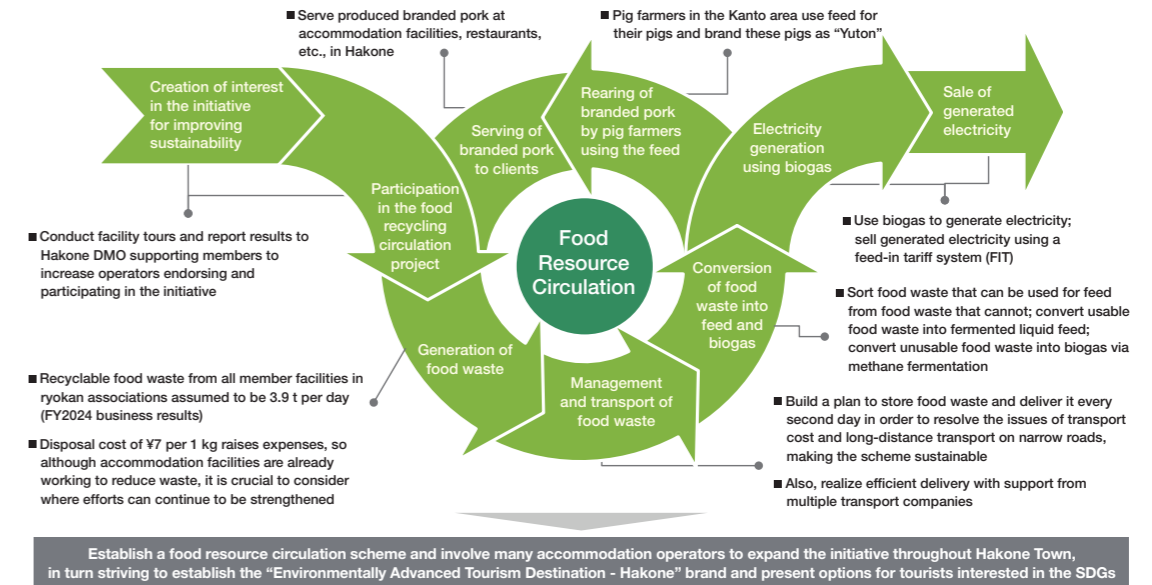
## Working on Resource Circulation Management with Hakone DMO as the Foundation

The “Environmentally Advanced Tourism Destination - Hakone Food Recycling Circulation Project” is promoted through the cooperation of various parties such as municipalities, accommodation and restaurant operators, transport operators, and recycling operators, with Hakone DMO as its foundation. Of these operators, Hakone DMO plays a major role in determining the direction of the project and driving the initiative while bringing together relevant parties.



## Establishing a Food Resource Circulation Scheme and Aiming to Expand It Throughout Hakone Town

The second pilot project, implemented in 2025, expanded the number of participating facilities. The initiative will expand to all areas of Hakone Town going forward, involving even more accommodation operators. As for the future, the initiative is working on establishing a food resource circulation scheme by aiming to serve the branded pork raised on the eco-feed made from food waste at various facilities in the town.



### VOICE - Perspectives of Key Figures

“Becoming a role model for building a circular food economy”

**Takeshi Mano**  
General Director, Hakone Tourist Association  
(pictured second from right)



“Some people think towns should cover everything themselves, but that poses significant obstacles for continued promotion. I think it is important to leave some aspects of the problem to experts, just as we collaborate with J.FEC and entrust them with the process of converting food waste into eco-feed. We would love for Hakone Town’s initiative to provide some hints for other local communities concerned about the issue of food loss.”

### Not Forcing Businesses to Change Their Operations Is Also Important

Participating in the pilot project is difficult if it increases work for facilities. Leftover food waste containing foreign substances cannot be recycled, so sorting is a significant hurdle. That is why Hakone DMO sought the cooperation of participating facilities that had adopted sorting into their regular operations, such as limiting collection of food waste to leftovers on buffet tables and introducing waste disposal units.



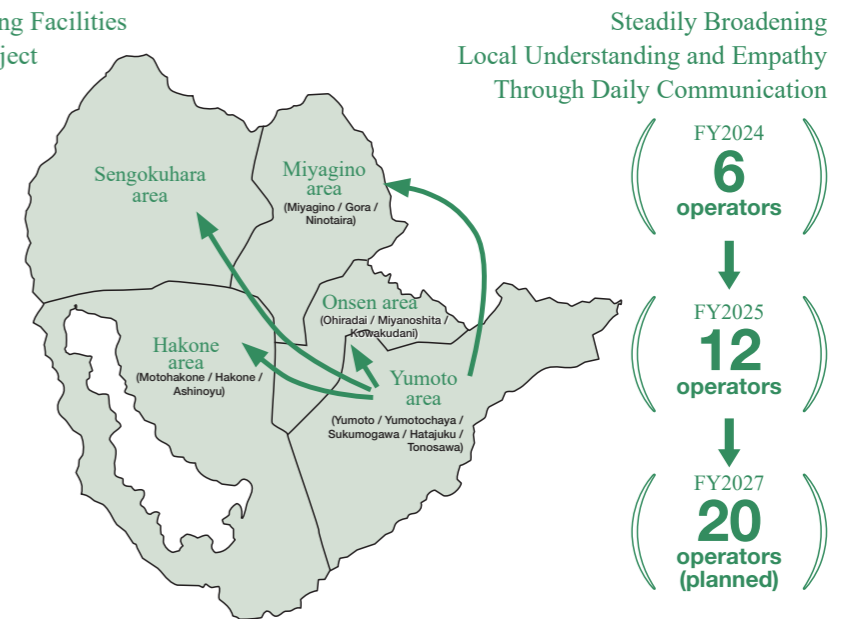
The second pilot project held in December 2025 was expanded to 12 facilities. As a solution to the issues made clear in the first pilot project, waste was collected in compact vehicles, reloaded onto large refrigerator trucks, then transported to J.FEC once every two days, making the plan more efficient. Consolidated cargo trucks from multiple operators also ran on a trial basis in anticipation of further expanding the scale of the project. This was a way of searching for a system that would avoid increasing costs for operators as

much as possible. Incidentally, only items that would not pose a problem for humans to eat were recyclable, such as leftover food, ingredient scraps, and malt lees. The food waste was treated not as garbage but as raw ingredients for feed, so leftovers with any risk of contamination could not be used from a safety standpoint. The “Environmentally Advanced Tourism Destination - Hakone Food Recycling Circulation Project,” with Hakone DMO as the applicant organization, was selected for the

Japan Tourism Agency’s Model Project to Promote Sustainable Tourism consecutively in FY2024 and FY2025. The results of the pilot project suggested feasibility. Hakone DMO’s Takeshi Mano described the project’s vision as follows: “The pilot project has been carried out in the Yumoto area until now, but our latest goal is to expand the area and participating facilities. In the future, we would like to build a circular economy by recycling food waste from throughout Hakone into eco-feed, branding the pigs raised on that feed,

### Expanding the Participating Facilities and Areas in the Pilot Project to Eventually Encompass All of Hakone!

The total number of guest rooms at accommodation operators in the Yumoto area participating in the second pilot project represented 18% of all guest rooms throughout Hakone. The more this scale expands, the greater will be the expectations of success after full-scale introduction.



and serving that pork at accommodation facilities and restaurants in Hakone Town.” Hakone DMO, which regularly collaborates with organizations like tourist associations, operators, and chambers of commerce and industry in every local community and has established trusting relationships, prides itself on creating a consensus between relevant parties. It also demonstrated that strength in this project, taking the lead in approaching participating facilities, communicating with J.FEC, publicizing to local com-

munities, and setting up conditions for the pilot projects. “Hakone DMO is essential in the leader role when looking ahead at the initiative throughout Hakone. Our cooperation with Hakone Town, which attracts many tourists from environmentally conscious Europe, the U.S., and Australia, also had a huge ripple effect in expanding the ‘eco-feed recycling loop’ we are developing. We aim to make this a model case for implementation in other tourism destinations, and I would like this project to pay off no matter what,” says

J.FEC’s Kazuyuki Takabe. He also cites plans for one day expanding participation to other onsen areas around Hakone and constructing a simplified version of J.FEC’s plant for communal use. If that is realized, extensive recycling of food waste, as well as effective reduction of transport cost and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, should also be achievable. These efforts as “Environmentally Advanced Tourism Destination - Hakone” are shining a light on the future beyond regional borders.

Food Hospitality That Meets Visitors' Needs

# Toward Strengthening the Reception Environment in Response to Diverse Food Culture

## Takayama, Gifu

In northern Gifu lies the ancient city of Takayama, surrounded by the Hida Mountain Range and the Ryohaku Mountains. Known as one of Japan's premier tourist destinations, this area welcomes approximately 980,000 international overnight visitors annually.

To ensure a highly satisfying stay for all visitors, establishing a well-prepared food reception environment was indispensable. With this in mind, Takayama City conducted a survey of the city's restaurants on their reception environment, as well as an investigation into the needs of international visitors.

Based on these results, a reporting session was held for local stakeholders to align recognition of the challenges involved and to build a shared understanding of concrete measures moving forward.

Currently, initiatives to accommodate diverse dietary needs are becoming increasingly active, led by local businesses.

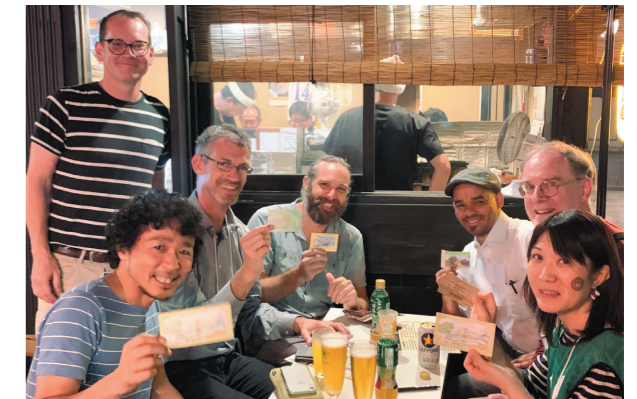
To remain a destination that continues to be chosen into the future, Takayama City will carry on its region-wide, integrated efforts toward the sustainable development of the tourism region.

Lined with traditional merchant houses, sake breweries, retail shops, and more, Sanmachi-suji strongly retains the atmosphere of the Edo period. After nightfall, many international tourists can be seen enjoying evening strolls and searching for places to have dinner.

## Ensuring Meals That Satisfy All Visitors to Takayama City

Takayama City is host to visitors from many countries and regions, with approximately 980,000 international visitors staying annually.

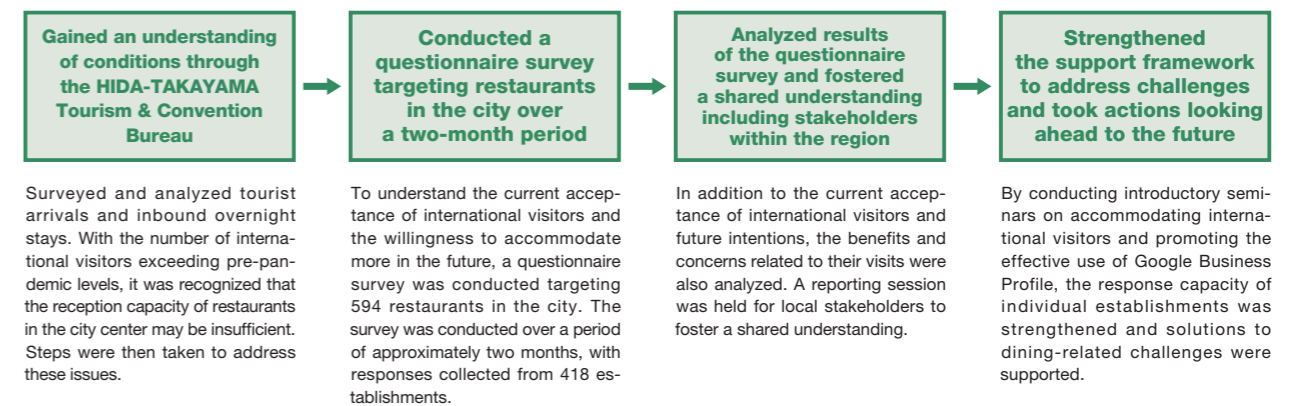
As many visitors arrive with diverse dietary practices, including vegetarianism and veganism, Takayama City aims to become a destination that can provide meals visitors can enjoy with confidence and peace of mind, with the DMO, the city government, local associations, and private-sector operators working together to strengthen the food-related reception environment.



### Timeline of the Initiative

To assess the state of visitor reception, a survey was conducted targeting restaurants within the city. Through analysis involving experts, the direction and specific actions for concrete measures were examined. The results were then shared with stakeholders across the city to foster a common understanding throughout the region of the challenges related to the food reception environment. Currently, initiatives to accommodate diverse food cultures are being steadily implemented, led by local businesses.

- 1986** **Apr.** International Tourism City Declaration
- 2014** **Jun.** Muslim Friendly Project in Hida Takayama launched.
- 2016** Number of international overnight visitors surpassed 400,000.
- 2020** **Oct.** Takayama City and Nagoya University signed the Agreement on Cooperation for Community Development Utilizing ICT.
- 2021** Selected for the Japan Tourism Agency's Model Project to Promote Sustainable Tourism.
- Apr.** Hida Takayama Food Barrier-free Association launched.
- 2023** **Nov.** As part of the Japan Tourism Agency's Model Project to Promote Sustainable Tourism, conducted the "Survey on Attitudes Toward Tourism in Takayama City."
- Feb.** Continuing on from the above efforts, conducted a reporting session for stakeholders in the city on the survey on attitudes.
- 2024** Selected for the Japan Tourism Agency's Model Project to Promote Sustainable Tourism.
- Sep.-Nov.** Conducted a survey of current conditions for restaurants in the city.
- Oct.** Awarded the Green Destinations Silver Award.
- Aug.-Dec.** Students from Nagoya University and Hida Takayama High School led study sessions on the utilization of Google Business Profile for restaurants.
- 2025** **Jan.** Reported on results of projects including questionnaire survey results.
- Apr.** Commenced the "Lantern Project" to disperse visitors concentrated in the city center.
- Aug.** Conducted the "Survey on Attitudes Toward Tourism in Takayama City" for city residents.
- Oct.** Cooperated with local supermarkets to begin sales of vegan bento lunches.



Located in the Hida region of Gifu Prefecture, Takayama has preserved the townscape that it developed as a castle town during the Edo period. Known as one of Japan's leading tourist destinations, it has also long enjoyed strong popularity among inbound travelers. Although accommodation figures declined from 2020 with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, they rebounded sharply in the post-pandemic period. Accommodation figures in 2025 reached approximately 160% of 2019 levels, marking the highest level ever recorded.

Now that visitor numbers have recovered, how to meet tourists' demand for evening meals has become a key challenge. Although new accommodation facilities continue to open, most hotels offer breakfast only or room-only plans with no meals provided. As a result, guests were compelled to seek out places in the city center where they could have dinner. However, due to staff shortages caused by pandemic-related job departures and an aging workforce, many establishments operate only at lunchtime or as cafés, closing by early evening. During peak periods

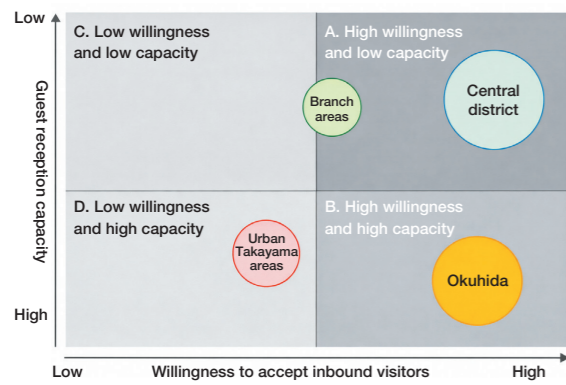
such as Golden Week, situations arise where visitors' needs cannot be met, with long lines forming at the limited number of open restaurants and many guests resorting to simple meals purchased from convenience stores. In response, Takayama City and its DMO, the HIDA-TAKAYAMA Tourism & Convention Bureau, launched initiatives to address the issue. Taking a multifaceted approach through public-private collaboration, they tackled the issue while also pursuing the food diversity sought by inbound visitors.

# Assessment of Current Conditions via Questionnaire and Development of Four Proposed Measures

Two types of questionnaire surveys were conducted, one targeting restaurants in Takayama City to assess their capacity to receive customers and scope for further accommodation, and another targeting international visitors to identify their needs and expectations for Takayama. Restaurants were visited in person, yielding responses from approximately 70% of establishments. Based on the survey results, options for subsequent measures were examined.

## Regional Differences in Willingness to Accept Inbound Visitors Highlighted

The diagram below shows the survey results on the capacity and willingness of restaurants in Takayama City to accept inbound visitors, broken down by area. In the central district, which accounts for approximately 60% of the total, willingness to accept visitors is high, but capacity is low due to congestion and other factors. Conversely, in urban Takayama areas outside the central district, capacity is available but willingness is relatively low.



Survey results showing the capacity and willingness of restaurants to accept visitors, broken down by area

## Investigating Factors Leading to Dissatisfaction Among International Visitors via Questionnaire

The figure below shows the results of a questionnaire of international visitors regarding difficulties they experienced at dining establishments. "The restaurant was closed" accounted for 26%, while "the restaurant was full or involved a long wait" accounted for 14%, prompting consideration of measures to make restaurant information more visible, such as providing accurate dining information.

The restaurant was closed	26%
The restaurant was full or involved a long wait	14%
Couldn't find a restaurant or had great trouble finding one	7%
I went to a restaurant but the service was inadequate	5%
Lack of accommodation for diverse dietary needs (e.g., vegetarian, vegan)	3%
Price of food was expensive	3%
I couldn't understand Japanese manners	2%
I felt unwelcome	2%
I went to an establishment but was refused entry	2%
I was not allowed to stay very long	1%
Nothing in particular	59%

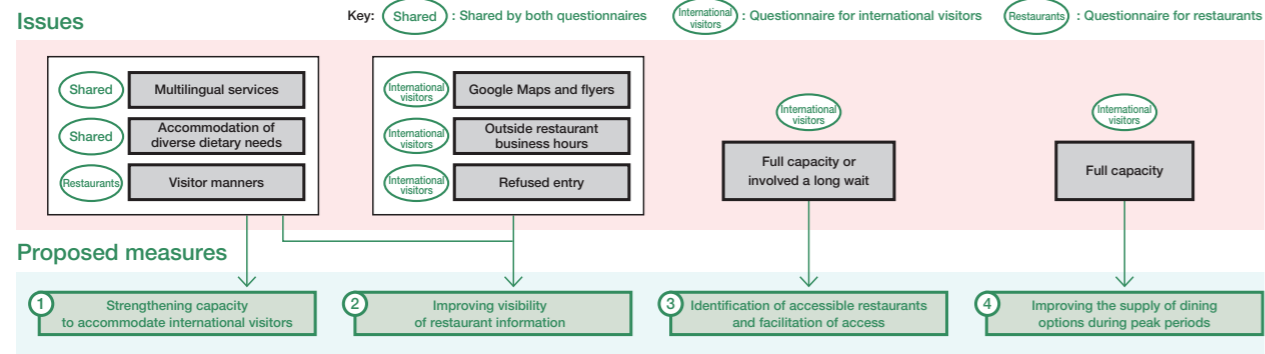
Answers to questionnaire of international visitors regarding difficulties they experienced at dining establishments

Based on the aggregated results, an analysis was conducted to identify the factors affecting satisfaction with dining establishments. It became clear that the factors that most strongly decrease satisfaction with dining establishments were restaurant being closed, being refused entry, and lack of accommodation for diverse dietary needs.

Analysis: Professor Hideki Furuya, Faculty of International Tourism Management, Toyo University

## Development of Four Proposed Measures Based on Analysis of Surveys of International Visitors and Restaurants

A questionnaire survey was conducted of 594 restaurants in Takayama City. In addition, face-to-face surveys of international visitors were conducted to identify issues affecting satisfaction with dining establishments. Based on analysis of these surveys, four proposed measures were developed. Details can be found on the page to the right (P. 14).



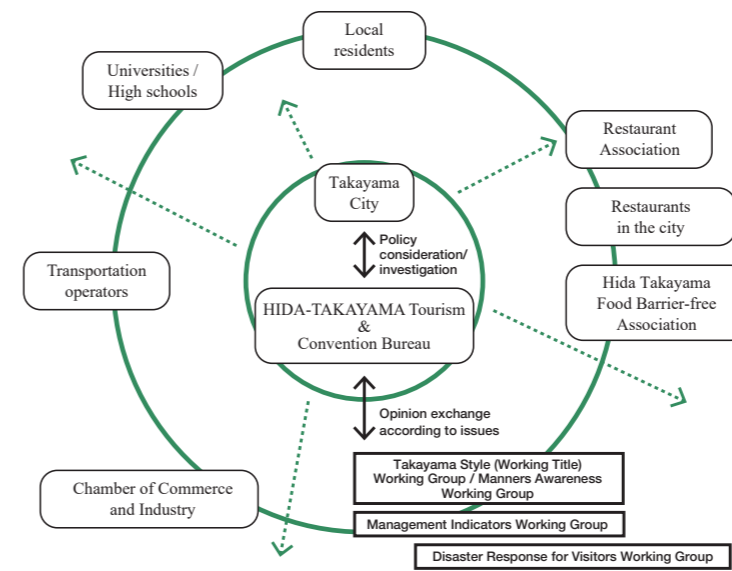
What is the current state of dining availability for visitors? The key to answering this question lies in the questionnaire surveys conducted among restaurants and visitors. The restaurant questionnaires were given to 594 establishments in Takayama City. The questionnaire included items on methods of providing restaurant information, visitor characteristics, willingness to accept and serve inbound travelers, current conditions, and challenges and concerns related to accommodating them. In addition to mailing the questionnaires, the

regional network of food service operators was fully utilized to conduct interviews with individual establishments. While the questionnaire survey alone yielded responses from only about 40% of restaurants, combining it with direct outreach to individual establishments succeeded in obtaining responses from approximately 70% of all restaurants. One finding from the analysis of the survey responses was the capacity to accommodate visitors on weekends and public holidays. Across Takayama City as a whole, the proportion report-

ing available capacity fell by half compared with weekdays, to just 9%. In particular, 46% reported having no capacity in the evening, significantly higher than during other operating hours. In addition to the restaurant survey, face-to-face surveys were also conducted with international visitors. A total of 412 responses were obtained at locations such as JR Takayama Station. Analysis revealed that travelers' satisfaction was strongly affected by factors such as restaurants being closed, being refused entry, lack of accommodation for diverse dietary needs, and

# Building a Shared Regional Understanding Led by the DMO and the City

Based on the survey results, a briefing session was held for stakeholders, including local restaurants, to share awareness of challenges related to the food service reception environment. Based on the results of the surveys and pilot projects, proposed measures were organized, and efforts are underway to align perspectives across the region in preparation for future initiatives.



## Details of proposed measures

- Strengthening capacity to accommodate international visitors**
  - Conduct introductory seminars on accommodating international visitors
  - Create a framework for restaurants to consult on accommodating international visitors
- Improving visibility of restaurant information**
  - Support for registration on Google Business Profile and promotion of its use
  - Creation of an "Inbound Welcome" icon and its introduction at dining establishments
- Identification of accessible restaurants and facilitation of access**
  - Demonstration project for providing real-time congestion information
  - Demonstration project for directing international visitors to restaurants outside the city center
- Improving the supply of dining options during peak periods**
  - Improving the supply of dining options during periods of exceptionally high demand, such as Golden Week and Obon

**VOICE - Perspectives of Key Figures**

"Improving visitor satisfaction without losing sight of the residents' perspective"

**Kazushige Yamakoshi**  
Senior Managing Director, HIDA-TAKAYAMA Tourism & Convention Bureau (right)

**Akihiko Yamakoshi**  
Section Chief, Hida Takayama Promotion Strategy Department, Takayama City (left)

"The survey of nearly 600 restaurants has informed the development of vegan bento boxes and support for listing on Google Business Profile. We also hope to achieve harmony between residents' daily lives and tourism promotion by installing signage to promote proper visitor manners and other means," says Akihiko. "Previously, we focused on marketing to attract visitors, but now management is more important. With accommodation facilities expected to increase, securing sufficient staff for dinner service is also a challenge," says Kazushige.

## A Forum for Sharing Outcomes Across the Region

The results briefing session was attended by municipal officials, including the mayor, as well as representatives from the HIDA-TAKAYAMA Tourism & Convention Bureau, the Society of Commerce and Industry, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the restaurant association, and other stakeholders. Participants gathered across organizational boundaries to foster a shared understanding of issues and initiatives related to dining, and to build momentum for future action.



the availability of information. Based on the analysis of these surveys, the following measures were proposed: strengthening capacity to accommodate international visitors, improving visibility of restaurant information, identification of accessible restaurants and facilitation of access, and improving the supply of dining options during peak periods. To conclude the project, a briefing session was held, attended by municipal officials, representatives from the HIDA-TAKAYAMA Tourism & Convention Bureau, the Society of Commerce and

Industry, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the restaurant association. Proposed measures for the next fiscal year based on the analysis were shared, discussed, and further examined. This succeeded in generating momentum for promoting coordinated, region-wide initiatives to address dining-related challenges. Over the next three years, conditions related to achieving harmony between residents' daily lives and tourism promotion will be assessed and analyzed, and necessary measures will be considered and implemented as part of efforts for the

sustainable development of the tourism region. With respect to the dining environment for visitors, concrete measures based on the project outcomes will be implemented and continuously monitored, with the aim of creating a better dining environment for both visitors and food service operators. From the next fiscal year onward, measures will be implemented toward the mid- to long-term goal of providing dining opportunities that meet the needs of each visitor, and efforts to improve the dining acceptance environment will continue.

## Restaurants' Efforts to Achieve Dietary Diversity, Led by Local Businesses

Led by the Hida Takayama Food Barrier-free Association, initiatives are underway to improve the environment for accommodating diverse dietary needs in Takayama City. Local supermarkets have developed vegan bento boxes, and restaurants in the city are also beginning to serve halal-certified Hida beef.

Universities and local high schools are also working together to share information about restaurants, reflecting the growing development of a region-wide collaborative framework.

### DMO and Local Supermarkets Collaborate to Develop Vegan Bento Boxes

Vegan bento lunches have been developed to respond to the rapid increase in diverse dietary needs. From local vegetables to soy meat, they are both rich in flavor and satisfyingly filling. Options include the Gorotto Saisai Bento (left) from Surugaya Asumo/Honmachi, the Meat Hamburg Ratatouille Sauce (right) from BOSS FOODS MARKET, and the Veggie Kochi Bento (bottom) from Family Store Satoh in Kokubunji.



### Halal-Certified Hida Beef, a Takayama Specialty

At Creative Local Sushi Kyoushi, the menu includes halal-certified Hida beef. It has been well received by Muslim visitors, who appreciate being able to enjoy local foods while observing their religious requirements. The photo below shows a halal Hida beef steak rice box. Its rich flavor differs in no way from standard Hida beef. Takeout is also available.



### Support for Sharing Restaurant Information in Partnership with a Local High School

At Hida Takayama High School, study sessions on data analysis and its use were held, featuring graduate and undergraduate students from Nagoya University as instructors. Using their acquired digital skills, the high school students guided city officials and local businesses in effectively using platforms such as Google Business Profile and Instagram, supporting their information outreach. This also raises interest in sustainable development of tourism regions.



Efforts to accommodate the diverse dietary needs of visitors, along with problem-solving initiatives led by tourism-related businesses and high school students, are also gaining momentum. As inbound demand recovered following the COVID-19 pandemic, establishing a system to accommodate visitors' dining needs became a pressing issue.

Established in 2021, the Hida Takayama Food Barrier-free Association serves as the central body responsible for building this system. It is an organization that developed from the

Muslim Friendly Project in Hida Takayama, established in 2014 by Daichi Shimizu, who runs a food wholesale business in the city.

One example is promoting the use of halal-certified Hida beef, famous as a regional premium brand, at restaurants across the city to accommodate the growing number of Muslim visitors. In 2025, to better address diverse dietary needs and inbound demand, the DMO, the Association, and local supermarkets jointly launched the Vegan Bento Development Project. The animal-product-free bento lunches, which make

full use of Hida's vegetables and seasonings, have been well received not only by tourists but by local residents as well. A wide range of other initiatives are also being promoted by the Association, including support for the development of vegan-friendly menus, the provision of information on halal-friendly dining establishments, training for businesses on dietary diversity, and the improvement of foreign-language menus.

Support for information outreach for restaurants is carried out with local high schoolers as instructors supported by university students

## Striving for Vibrant, Sustainable Development of the Tourism Region into the Future

The "Lantern Project," which involves hanging LED lanterns outside restaurants, has been implemented as a measure to guide visitors to areas surrounding the city center. The initiative is steadily growing, with 25 establishments now participating.

Dekonaru Yokochi, home to 21 establishments with distinct concepts, serves as a hub that helps accommodate dining demand. Further development is expected in the future.

### The Lantern Project Was Launched to Guide Visitors to Areas Outside the City Center

Kayo Okuda, owner of Café Bar BOLS, was troubled to hear that international visitors had been turned away at other establishments and proposed a project to guide customers by displaying a series of identical lanterns throughout the area. With support from the DMO, she applied to the city government for a subsidy. Scanning the QR code on a lantern displays information about the establishment, creating a system that allows first-time visitors to enter with confidence.



### Establishing a Food Stall Village to Revitalize Takayama City Center

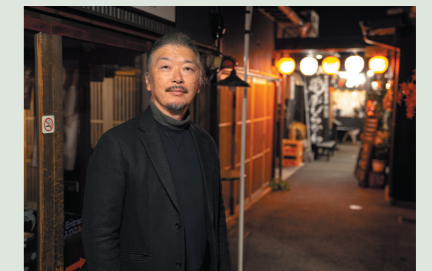
Dekonaru Yokochi is a food stall village established in 2015. They have implemented initiatives to support those wishing to start independent businesses with lower initial costs and reduced startup budgets. 21 establishments, including Chinese and charcoal-grill restaurants, are in operation. "We ensure that restaurants are open during the peak dinner hours of 18:00 to 22:00," says Michiyasu Ito.



### VOICE - Perspectives of Key Figures

"Expanding capacity for visitors while nurturing emerging restaurants"

Michiyasu Ito  
Representative Director and President, Tri-win Co., Ltd.  
(Dekonaru Yokochi operating company)



"Since the initial investment is far lower than for conventional premises, starting an independent business is easier, and the compact shop size allows operators to hone their customer service skills. Some establishments are open until late at night and receive a large number of inbound visitors. So far, five restaurants have 'graduated' from the Yokochi and opened their own establishments nearby. I hope this Yokochi will help strengthen the restaurant base in Takayama City."

outside restaurants along streets slightly off the main tourist routes. QR codes have been attached to lanterns produced by students at a local technical high school, providing information on the restaurant's interior and menu. 25 establishments are participating, and the sight of the lanterns glowing in a line creates a sense of safety, encouraging visitors to circulate through and disperse across wider areas. Dekonaru Yokochi plays a role in accommodating dining demand within the city center.

These initiatives go beyond merely accommo-

dating visitors' needs. By embracing diverse food cultures, promoting circulation and dispersal, and fostering local stakeholders, these efforts are creating a comfortable environment for both residents and visitors. With the DMO and city government at the core, private-sector organizations and educational institutions are collaborating while leveraging their respective strengths, and the initiatives are becoming established as a sustainable framework. The accumulation of these efforts will propel Takayama's distinctive tourism development to the next stage.

Turning the Cultural Resources That Remain in a Castle Town into Sustainable Tourism Resources

# A Model for Renovating Traditional Japanese Houses to Protect and Hand Down Historical Resources

## Ozu, Ehime

Across the nation of Japan, the gradual deterioration of abandoned houses is becoming an increasingly serious issue. In Ozu City, Ehime, the repurposing of historic machiya townhouses into accommodation facilities has created a new model for regional regeneration.

Local government, financial institutions and operators have coordinated their efforts around the regional DMO to develop a unified framework for everything from procurement of funding, land leasing, repairs to traditional houses, all the way to management of accommodation facilities. This has succeeded in creating a sustainable mechanism by promoting the project while clearly delineating each party's role.

Even more, 2020 marked the beginning of a unique tourism option known as "castle stays." While boosting public recognition of the town, the project has also established a system that channels part of the revenue into preserving traditional culture and shares benefits with local residents.

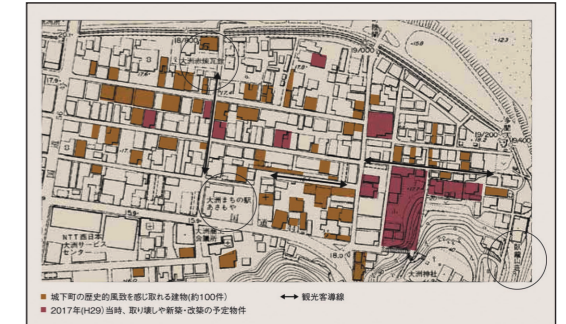
At present, with a view to further expanding the project, efforts are also being made to address the shortage of secondary transportation and to attract new residents as well as those seeking a dual-residence lifestyle.

This report traces Ozu's current progress in the sustainable development of the tourism region.

## A Model for Renovating Traditional Japanese Houses That Was Born from a Strong Desire to "Preserve the Townscape"

The appearance of the townscape from its heyday as a thriving castle town was in the process of being lost to the mists of time. But what if it could be passed on to the next generation? It was from this strong desire that a renovation project began, jointly conducted by local government, local financial institution and local operators.

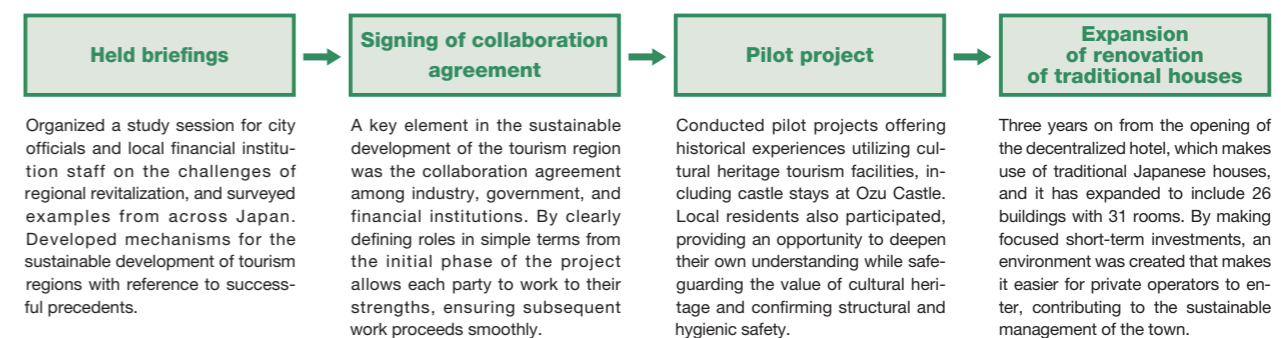
The figure to the right shows the condition of buildings in and around Ozu's former castle town (as of 2017). The areas shown in yellow indicate buildings that retain a sense of historic character, while the areas shown in red indicate buildings scheduled for destruction, new construction, or renovation.



### Timeline of the Initiative

The project's first step was to survey previous cases from around Japan that fit well with Ozu's unique situation. Building on those insights, a collaboration agreement was concluded between industry, government, and financial institutions, leading to the establishment of KITA MANAGEMENT, the legal entity that would act as the central axis of initiatives. The movement to renovate traditional Japanese houses very quickly gained momentum. The first location, Nipponia Hotel Ozu Castle Town, was opened in 2020. As a decentralized hotel making use of traditional Japanese houses, it has now expanded to include 26 buildings with 31 rooms, generating tangible benefits not only for the preservation of the townscape but also for the local economy.

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| <p><b>2017</b></p> <p><b>May</b> ○ NPO Yatsugi began cleaning activities for traditional Japanese houses.<br/>○ Requested dispatch of experts to the Public-Private Partnership Team for Destination Management Utilizing Historical Resources.<br/>○ Started study meetings with Regional Vitalization Division, Iyo Bank.</p> <p><b>Jul.</b> ○ Value Management CEO Tarikino and NOTE Representative Director Kinno of the Public-Private Partnership Team visited Ozu.</p> <p><b>Sep.</b> ○ Visited Tamba-sasayama City for an observation and decided to use the Sasayama Castle Town Hotel Nipponia scheme for reference.</p> <p><b>Nov.</b> ○ Held the "Joka no MACHIBITO" event, making use of traditional houses.</p> | <p><b>2018</b></p> <p><b>Apr.</b> ○ Signing of collaboration agreement between Ozu City, Value Management, NOTE, and Iyo Bank.</p> <p><b>Aug.</b> ○ Established KITA MANAGEMENT.</p> <p><b>Oct.</b> ○ Established KITA, a company specializing in real estate business.</p> <p><b>2019</b></p> <p><b>May</b> ○ Launched the Review Committee for Historical Experiences Utilizing Cultural Heritage Tourism Facilities, and conducted over 35 briefings for local residents.</p> <p><b>Aug.</b> ○ Phase one development of Nipponia Hotel Ozu Castle Town.</p> <p><b>Nov.</b> ○ Historical experiences pilot project (Castle Stays in Ozu Castle pilot project).</p> <p><b>2020</b></p> <p><b>Jul.</b> ○ Oki, Sada, and Tune buildings open for Nipponia Hotel Ozu Castle Town.<br/>○ Castle stays in Ozu Castle commenced.</p> | <p><b>2021</b></p> <p><b>Aug.</b> ○ Selected as a JSTS-D Model District Case Study under the Model Project to Promote Sustainable Tourism, and conducted GSTC training.</p> <p><b>2023</b></p> <p><b>Jan.</b> ○ Obtained the JSTS-D logo.</p> <p><b>Aug.</b> ○ Developed "Sustabi" (Ozu Stories - The Story of Revitalizing Ozu Castle Town) as part of the Japan Tourism Agency's FY2023 Model Project for Building Positive Cycles that Contribute to Sustainable Tourism.</p> <p><b>2024</b></p> <p>○ Held Ozu Sustainable Week in collaboration with local operators.</p> |
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Ozu, in south-west Ehime, boasts a townscape rich in historical character. Once a town flourishing around Ozu Castle, it was nicknamed The Little Kyoto of Iyo and drew visitors from across Japan and the world. The preservation and use of traditional Japanese houses as historic assets is a challenge faced by local governments across Japan. Ozu may serve as a good model in this context.

The initiatives took their first step in 2016. The abandonment rate of historical machiya townhouses was on the rise, due to difficulties in-

involved in their maintenance, such as aging owners and the rising costs of repairs and inheritance. Abandoned houses would fall into ruin or be torn down and left as vacant plots of land, so that the townscape of the former castle town was on the verge of disappearing altogether.

In response, young people from the local area, including members of the Regional Revitalization Cooperation Team and city officials, took the initiative to clean and repair vacant houses. Before long, support grew, and an NPO was established to manage preservation efforts and

share information. Local government initiatives also went ahead, driven by the mayor at the time. A policy was established for Ozu based on the example of Nipponia Hotel, a decentralized hotel in Tamba-sasayama City, Hyogo that made use of traditional houses. A public-private collaboration agreement was signed between Ozu City and hotel operators, with the city establishing a regional DMO to serve as an intermediary organization between public and private sectors. 2019 to 2023 saw the systematic and intensive revitalization of these traditional houses.

Situated at the foot of Ozu Castle, LE UN, the restaurant of Nipponia Hotel Ozu Castle Town, occupies a renovated Taisho-era residence. As the sun sets, the latticework silhouettes take center stage.

## Balancing Preservation of Traditional Houses with Maintenance of the Historical Townscape

Respecting their historical background, Ozu preserves former warehouses and traditional merchant houses without unnecessary alterations, passing down their time-honored character as a piece of Japanese culture. These buildings are used as accommodations, capitalizing on their inherent value. Restored guest rooms, restaurant, and shops are scattered throughout the town, and by treating the entire castle town as a decentralized hotel, a system has been created that naturally encourages guests to explore the streets.

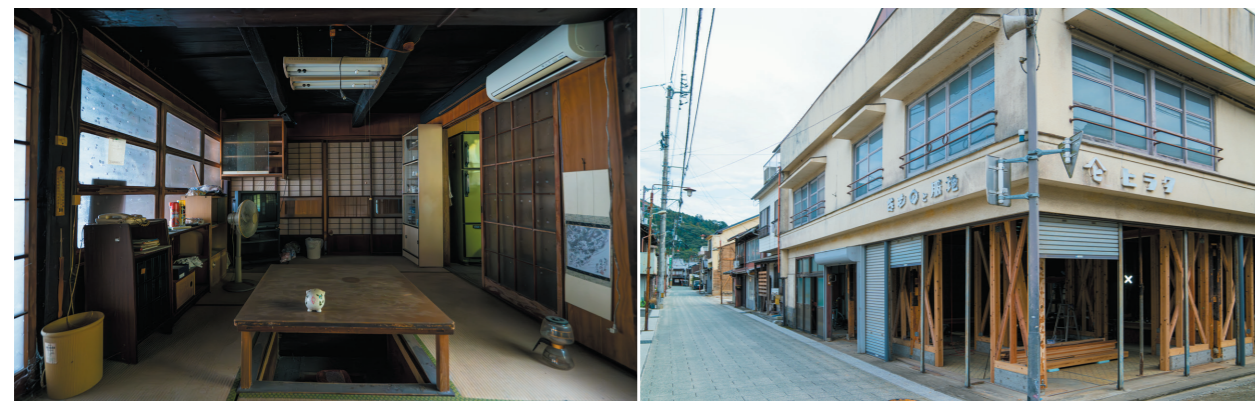
### A Decentralized Hotel That Encourages Guests to Explore the Town and Builds an Engaged Population

(Left) A traditional Japanese house prior to renovation. Some of these houses were built in the Edo period. (Right) Nipponia Hotel Ozu Castle Town, comprising multiple buildings throughout the old town center. Renovated to enhance functionality, while preserving the building's memory through elements such as the tokonoma alcove and inner courtyard. By dispersing buildings such as the front and restaurant over a wide area, guests are encouraged to explore the town center. The initiatives provided a catalyst for creating an engaged population in the region.



### The Preservation and Utilization of Historical Assets Scattered Throughout Ozu Is Still Ongoing

(Left) A former soy sauce brewery and residence is now yet another vacant house. While occasionally airing out the house, efforts are ongoing to find ways to put it to use. (Right) Proactive efforts have been made to secure more than 100-year-old buildings located along the main road. Corner buildings have a particularly strong impact on the townscape. This former kimono fabric store has been retrofitted for earthquake resistance and is set to be transformed into a gallery for Taiwanese artists.



To turn vacant houses into accommodation. This idea took form in Nipponia Hotel Ozu Castle Town. Warehouses and merchant houses from the Edo through the Showa periods were refurbished with new wet areas and air conditioning installed, and retrofitted with earthquake-proofing. Guided by the motto “before & before,” the buildings were brought back to life for the modern age while preserving as much of their original character as possible. This restoration approach enables historic buildings to continue being used as places to

stay. While ensuring the functionality and safety required for a comfortable stay in line with current standards and regulations, the buildings themselves were altered no more than was necessary. Instead of homogenizing the buildings, renovations were carried out in a way that respected each structure’s accumulated history and character, achieving harmony with the historic townscape. As a result, diverse buildings such as machiya townhouses and warehouses have been utilized as a distributed hotel scattered around the town, making the townscape

itself part of the experience. Also, by using the ground floor for kominka-style shops run by local operators and the second floor as hotel guest rooms, renovation work is kept to a minimum, allowing the buildings to be restored without making major structural alterations. These efforts promote coexistence with the local community and lead to the sustainable development of tourism regions. This takes the form of a decentralized hotel, with the front desk, guest rooms, restaurant, and shops scattered around the town area. The front desk and

## Raising Awareness Through Castle Stays and Nurturing the Next Generation Through Tourism Education

As an initiative to raise awareness of the region, overnight stays were introduced at Ozu Castle, the symbol of the town. Additionally, local schools are implementing tourism education to foster civic pride and cultivate the next generation of leaders for the town’s future development.

### Creating the “Castle Stay” Tourism Experience and Safeguarding Ozu’s Cultural Assets

(Left) Abandoned during the Meiji period, Ozu Castle underwent a wooden reconstruction project starting in 1994, and was completed in 2004. This marked the start of a new era for the region. (Right) During a castle stay, a ceremony is held which reenacts the 1671 entry into the castle of its lord, Kato Sadayasu. The welcome by his retainers is a particular highlight. Afterward, guests are treated to an extraordinary night, experiencing the wooden castle keep in complete privacy.



### Ozu Is Also Implementing a Tourism Education Initiative to Pass On Sustainable Tourism Promotion to the Next Generation

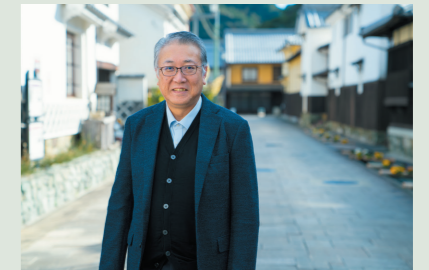
The students of Ozu High School are participating in tourism education. Through these opportunities to learn about the town they live in and consider how to engage with it, they develop pride in and attachment to their local community. The staff of KITA MANAGEMENT visit the city’s elementary, junior high, and high schools, and hold lectures on destination management.



### VOICE - Perspectives of Key Figures

“Adding value to cultural assets with the support of the government”

**Norihisa Kono**  
Executive Director, KITA MANAGEMENT



“When the idea of a ‘castle stay’ at Ozu Castle arose, it faced strong opposition from the city council and various organizations, so a total of more than 50 briefings were held to patiently and persistently explain the plan. Having personally served as a director at city hall, I made a point of maintaining careful communication with municipal officials, including the mayor. I believe I was able to carry out these negotiations smoothly.”

restaurant are about 800 meters apart, naturally encouraging guests to stroll through the town. Most hotels are vertical and compact, but here the concept has been expanded horizontally, with the entire castle town, roughly 800 meters across, functioning as a hotel. Another challenge was the question of raising the town’s profile. Following discussions, the idea of offering stays at Ozu Castle emerged. However, Ozu Castle’s wooden keep is open to the public during the day, strictly forbids any open flames, and offers no bath or toilet facilities.

After overcoming numerous hurdles, Japan’s first castle stay opened for reservations in 2020. The impact was great, with news quickly spreading both domestically and internationally. During the arrival ceremony, guests can relive the historical entry into the castle, making it a venue for cultural preservation as well. In addition, the initiative contributes back to the local community, allocating roughly 20% of revenue to the preservation of traditional culture, such as kagura, and about 10% to the maintenance and management of cultural assets. To hand down

the framework for sustainable tourism to the next generation, tourism education programs have been launched in schools across the city. Staff from the regional DMO serve as instructors, guiding students through research projects and hands-on fieldwork. Through the program, students gain experience creating a community people want to return to, while fostering civic pride from an early stage. The initiative is attracting attention as a means of cultivating the next generation of community development leaders.



What Are the Future Sustainable Tourism Goals for Grasslands, Local Communities, and Tourists?

# Circular Tourism Benefiting All Parties to Pass the Thousand-Year Grasslands Down to Future Generations

## Aso, Kumamoto

An approach that protects the natural environment and the culture rooted in the natural community, passing these things down to future generations, is essential for working on tourism that leverages regional resources.

Aso City, with the Aso Caldera Tourism Promotion Council at its heart, has connected a wide range of stakeholders including municipalities, operators, and local residents to build a circular tourism model benefitting all parties, with advantages for the grasslands, local community, and tourists.

Having put in order rules for grassland use and a guide system with the aim of creating a virtuous cycle of grassland conservation, the city offers special experiences for tourists against the backdrop of the grasslands and returns part of the activity fees to the local community as fees to conserve the area, creating a new source of funds.

As a result, a system has been put in place to protect the grasslands while they are being used, and the Aso Grasslands Restoration Project has made steady progress.

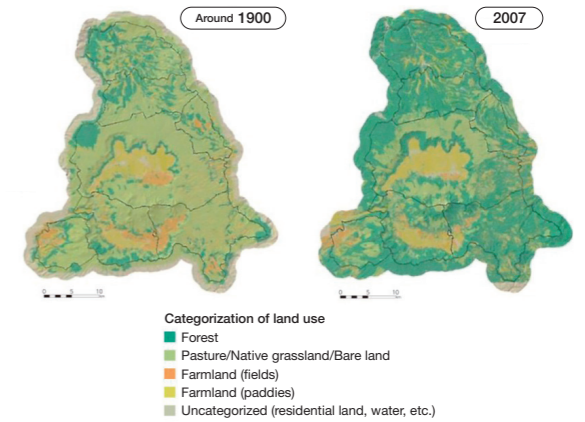
The initiative continues even now for the purpose of establishing a model that will pass on the Thousand-Year Grasslands, handed down thanks to the knowledge of our predecessors and the guardians of the grasslands, for the next 1,000 years.

The caldera, dynamically emitting smoke, is a symbol of Aso. The changing landscape from season to season is yet another lovely aspect of this land. The golden, waving pampas grass in fall and the blanket of snow in winter have their own particular beauty.

## Passing Down Aso's Continuously Shrinking "Thousand-Year Grasslands" to Future Generations

The grasslands of Aso, home to a sprawling caldera that is one of the world's largest, have become difficult to maintain due to the worsening labor shortage.

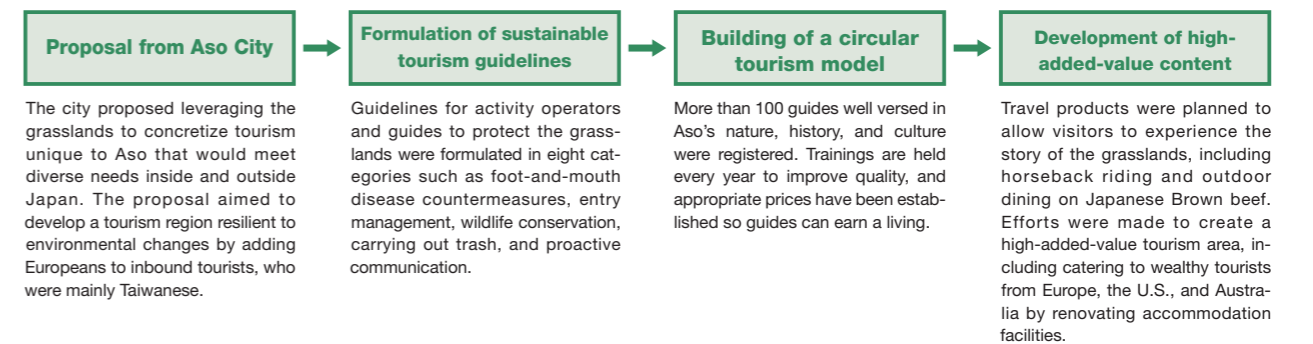
The figures on the right show changes in the grassland area from 1900 to 2007: the area has shrunk by approximately half over a century. With work to protect the grasslands at a crossroads, the value of Aso was reconsidered, and an initiative for the sustainable development of the tourism region began.



### Timeline of the Initiative

The Aso Caldera Tourism Promotion Council was founded in 2020 to connect the government, local community, and tourism-related operators across different viewpoints. The Council is working to promote the Aso Grasslands Restoration Project, centered on formulating guidelines for grassland use, adding high value, and sharing information suited to its targets, and to build a circular tourism model benefitting all parties, with advantages for the grasslands, local community, and tourists.

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| <p><b>2020</b></p> <p><b>Jul.</b> ◎ Aso Caldera Tourism Promotion Council founded as one-stop point of contact for connecting relevant parties in the city.</p> <p><b>Aug.-Dec.</b> ◎ Sustainable adventure tourism content developed using the grasslands.</p> <p><b>2021</b></p> <p><b>May</b> ◎ Plan formulated for creating sustainable bases for long-term stays throughout the city.</p> <p><b>Oct.</b> ◎ Implemented GSTC training and training for local tour guide-interpreters.</p> <p><b>Nov.</b> ◎ Began formulation of Sustainable Tourism Guidelines Using the Thousand-Year Grasslands.</p> <p><b>2022</b></p> <p><b>Feb.</b> ◎ Completely overhauled the Aso-City Tourism Association website, aiming to manifest the value of the Thousand-Year Grasslands.</p> <p><b>Sep.</b> ◎ Began formulation of the Aso Plan to Promote Nature Experience Activities</p> <p><b>Dec.</b> ◎ Circular tourism model built for Aso Caldera, "Crown of the Grasslands," commercializing electric mountain bikes, horseback riding, and dining. Part of the fees for the experiences returned as grassland conservation fees.</p> | <p><b>2023</b></p> <p><b>Jan.</b> ◎ Systems built for product development, reservation arrangements, and inventory management to meet the needs of diverse foreign tourists.</p> <p><b>Feb.</b> ◎ "2023 Sustainable Tourism Guidelines Using the Thousand-Year Grasslands" published.</p> <p><b>Mar.</b> ◎ Aso, Unzen, and Kagoshima selected for Japan Tourism Agency's "Plan for Creating High-Value-Added Inbound Tourism Destinations in Regional Areas."</p> <p><b>Apr.</b> ◎ Economic circulation initiative began, including sales of grassland products.</p> <p><b>Sep.</b> ◎ Aso Plan to Promote Nature Experience Activities certified by the Ministry of the Environment (first in Japan).</p> <p><b>Oct.</b> ◎ "Sustainable Tourism Strategy for Accommodation Facilities" seminar implemented for around 40 operators striving for sustainable tourism.</p> <p><b>Nov.</b> ◎ Specific content and practical on-the-job training for the international environmental certificate Green Key implemented for the purpose of having individuals work toward the sustainable development of the tourism region.</p> | <p><b>Dec.</b> ◎ As the result of a survey, individual interviews held for 13 operators with the intention to work enthusiastically toward the sustainable development of the tourism region.</p> <p><b>2024</b></p> <p><b>Jan.</b> ◎ Conference held for accommodation operators to formulate a future action plan themselves.</p> <p><b>Feb.</b> ◎ Action plan for accommodation operators and the local community published on the Aso-City Tourism Association website.</p> <p>◎ Aso-Unzen-Kagoshima Master Plan formulated.</p> <p><b>Jul.-Dec.</b> ◎ Product development, sales, and PR for the East Asian market; foreign-language interpreters expanded; invitations to foreign media in Japan for PR, etc.</p> <p><b>Aug. onward</b></p> <p>◎ Project combatting overtourism implemented to contribute to improving tourism infrastructure, consideration of decentralization through stay-based content using the grasslands, and enhancement of nighttime stores.</p> |
|--|---|--|



Aso is located in northeastern Kumamoto. The appeal of this region is its nature: vast grasslands stretch across one of the largest calderas in the world, taking up most of Aso-Kuju National Park. These grasslands were not naturally created but are a cultural landscape maintained over the span of 1,000 years through human effort, such as cattle and horse grazing, mowing, and controlled burning. The immeasurable bounty of this area includes nurturing a unique ecosystem, providing feed for fields, and storing rainwater

to serve as the source of six important rivers in Kyushu. Above all, the magnificent Aso landscape has captivated many people both in Japan and abroad. However, it has become difficult to maintain the grasslands due to the labor shortage that is worsening each year. Japan has a humid subtropical climate, unlike Mongolia or the savanna, where grasslands are maintained in their natural state. This means that the grasslands will change to forest without human effort, and once they are lost, they can

never be reclaimed. The grasslands that once made up 10% of the country have now been reduced to below 1%. This is a problem that does not only affect the grasslands maintained with human effort throughout Japan but that is shared with foreign countries like the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. Aso's initiative holds the key to a solution. Faced with the sense of crisis that the grasslands could be lost, Aso City is refining the appeal of the grasslands and aiming to create circular tourism with high added value.

# Creating a System and Rules for Grassland Conservation Using Tourism That Unites Pasture and Farm Staff with Activity Guides

The Aso Grasslands are also referred to as “Kyushu’s Water Jug.” In order to protect the nature of the Aso region and pass its beautiful appearance down to future generations, an initiative was begun to solve social issues by using the grasslands for tourism. Aso aims to create a virtuous cycle of grassland conservation through tourism and has created a system of usage rules for tourists and businesses, a guide system, and returns part of the fees for activities to conservation. Welcoming visitors while protecting the grasslands passes Aso’s unique value down to the next generation.

## Formulation of Sustainable Tourism Guidelines to Continue to Protect Aso’s Grasslands

Repeated discussions were held on the Aso-Kuju National Park Enjoyment Project’s Aso Region Grassland Utilization Subcommittee with stakeholders including municipalities in the Aso region, pasture associations, and tourism operators. In February 2023, the “2023 Sustainable Tourism Guidelines Using the Thousand-Year Grasslands: For Activity Guides,” as well as explanatory materials, were formulated. These documents summarize behavioral principles for activity guides, as well as rules and matters of compliance for these guides (rules including foot-and-mouth disease countermeasures, entry management, conservation of plants and animals, and carrying out trash), and they have fostered understanding from stakeholders including tourism operators. They have also gained the understanding of travelers at the stage before their trip, when they apply for activities, by explaining the value of the Thousand-Year Grasslands and conservation initiatives. The figures below show the pictograms from the “Useful Illustrations for Interpreters” section of the explanatory materials and give a look at training for pasture guides.

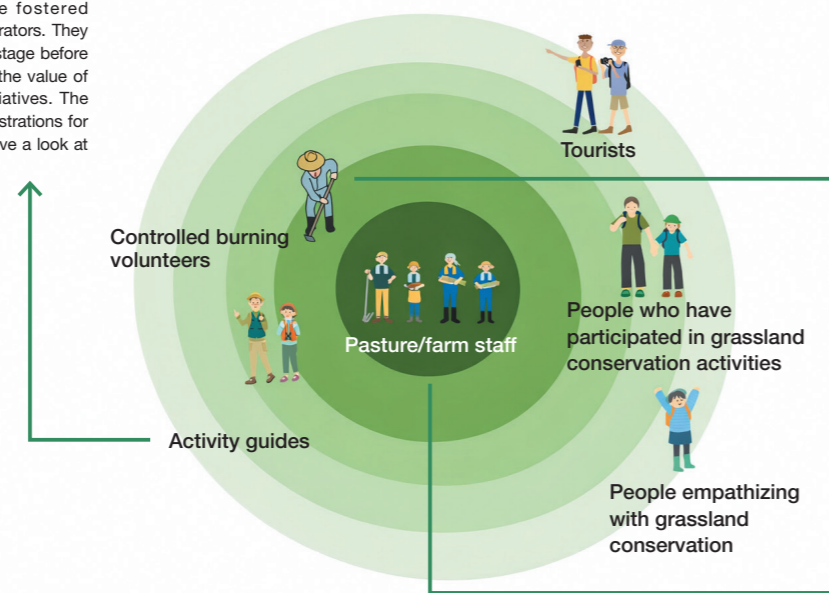
- 1) Pictogram indicating that unauthorized grassland entry is prohibited
- 2) Pictogram indicating that picking plants is prohibited
- 3) Training for pasture guides



## Offering Special Activities to Tourists While Carrying Out Conservation as Grassland Guardians

People involved with pastures and farming, as well as activity guides, work to conserve the grasslands as “grassland guardians.” To welcome tourists to the grasslands, a “Certified Pasture Guide System” was first established, and a rule was formulated that permits ordinary people to enter only on the condition that they are accompanied by a pasture guide. Tourists follow that rule and can enjoy special experiences, such as activities, in Aso’s wonderful nature.

### Depiction of future grassland guardians



Some type of involvement/knowledge of the grassland conservation initiative → Respect, empathy, and support conservation initiative

Aso’s grasslands are a group of pastures independently managed by around 160 pasture associations. A system for pasture/farm staff and activity guides to take on the role of grassland guardians was launched to protect Aso’s grasslands due to their current state: their area has shrunk to half of what it once was. First, the “Certified Pasture Guide System” was established as an initiative to solve Aso’s social issues by using the grasslands for tourism, recognizing people with expert knowledge and experience regarding

grasslands. Aiming for both safety and conservation, a rule was created that permits ordinary people to enter only on the condition that they are accompanied by a certified guide. The “2023 Sustainable Tourism Guidelines Using the Thousand-Year Grasslands: For Activity Guides” were also formulated in February 2023, stipulating behavioral principles and rules that must be observed by activity guides. Systematization also continues regarding funds. A system was built to return a part of

activity participation fees (a fixed rate of 5% or a fixed amount of 1,000 yen) as grassland conservation fees. These funds are allocated for trail maintenance and grassland conservation by pasture associations, realizing a cycle benefiting tourists, the grasslands, and the local community. The introduction of certified guides, formulation of guidelines, and system to include conservation fees in tour prices allow Aso to use tourism to contribute to grassland conservation.

## Dispatching Volunteers from Within and Outside the Prefecture to Help with Controlled Burning for Sustainable Grassland Conservation

Many of the dispatched volunteers helping with controlled burning come from outside the prefecture, with 60% from Kumamoto and 30% from Fukuoka. They receive beginner training in advance and work along with local people using safety equipment prepared for them. A system has also been built to encourage continued participation, including a stamp card that earns Japanese Brown hamburger steaks depending on the number of times a volunteer has joined.



### VOICE - Perspectives of Key Figures

“Building a new system to expand understanding and scope”

**Taiki Masui**  
Managing Director, Aso Green Stock

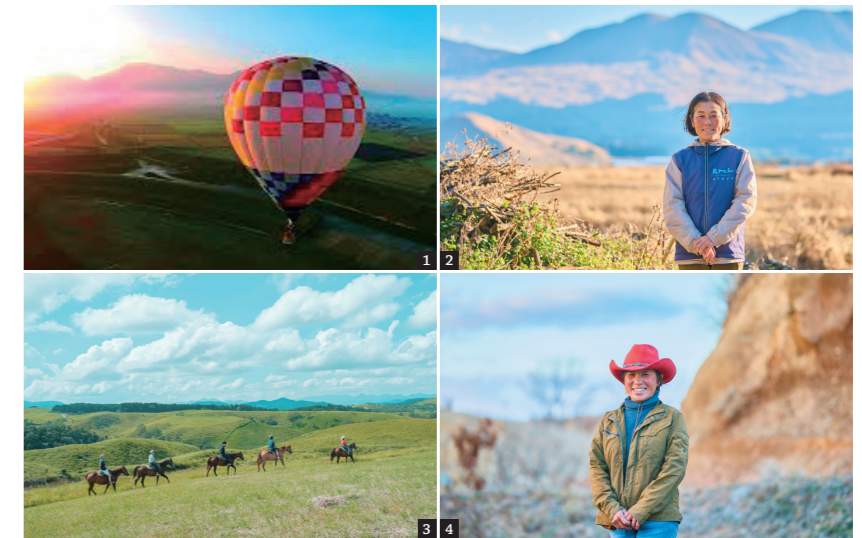


“We have made an effort to build a system including classroom training to further understanding of controlled burning, extremely safe work clothes, and obtaining fire extinguishers. And we proactively communicate with registered volunteers by sending out a newsletter three times a year and using social media. We also value the creative portion, including making pamphlets with an emphasis on understandability and expanding the network of empathy to the young generation.”

## Expanding Activities to Experience the Grasslands, Returning Part of the Fees to Grassland Conservation

1 and 2) Satomi Suehiro of Aso Nature Land says, “For over 30 years, we have paid part of the experience fees (1,000 yen of the 18,000-yen fee per person) and an annually fixed amount of usage and conservation fees to the pasture associations when pastures are rented for hot air balloons or paragliding.”

3 and 4) Naomi Umeki of Yume ☆ Daichi Green Valley says, “I inform participants of the historical background of the grasslands and that they must disinfect their shoes before entering, and they understand that the grasslands are a special place.”



## Emphasizing Protecting the Beauty of the Grasslands Not as Work but While Having Fun

Association President Ichihara of Machikoga Ranch says, “I feel like it’s important for people to support the grasslands while having fun, like by experiencing grassland treasures such as rare flowers.” The area has also made proactive efforts to maintain the grasslands through tourism, welcoming field trips and planning a “Trail Girls’ Academy” set in a part of the grasslands that was once a school route.



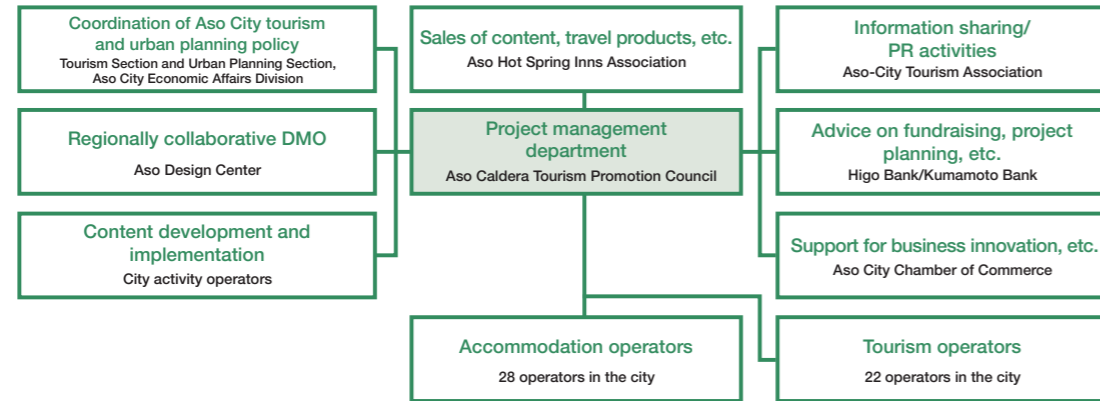
“Aso has grasslands on a large scale, and there are many stakeholders. It’s hard to grasp what everyone is thinking, but there is still so much to explore regarding utilization, business applications, and research on grasslands, so I feel the possibilities are significant,” says Aso Green Stock’s Masui. He continues, “Because of the labor shortage, I’ve even had discussions with people thinking about quitting cattle-raising on the grasslands. But if there are new ways to use the land, they might want to at least continue

controlled burning to maintain the grasslands. The scale of the livestock industry and agriculture using the grasslands has shrunk driven by the times, and it’s necessary to discover ways to use the grasslands in line with the era now that it’s hard to maintain the grasslands. I would like to strengthen the ability to support the local community in a sustainable way by further expanding our activities, such as consulting, which generate funds for the associations while solving regional problems.”

# Establishing a Project Promotion System with a Wide Range of Stakeholders, with the Aso Caldera Tourism Promotion Council at the Heart

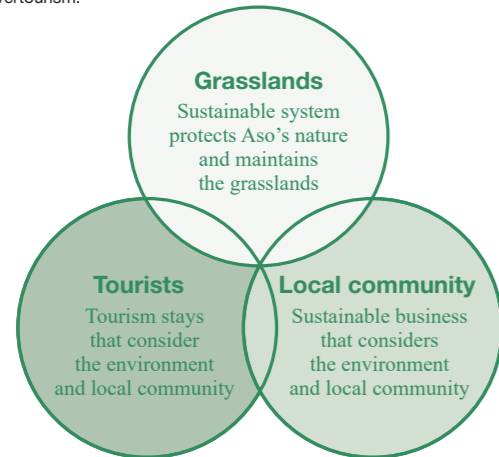
A wide range of stakeholders have collaborated, including tourism associations, activity operators, accommodation operators, and financial institutions, with the Aso Caldera Tourism Promotion Council at the heart.

Diverse projects have been developed to achieve benefits for all parties—the grasslands, the local community, and tourists—on the principle of each stakeholder doing what they want to do, with everyone becoming involved on their own initiative.



## Aiming to Benefit All Parties—the Grasslands, Local Community, and Tourists—with High Added Value

In order to realize sustainable development of the tourism region benefitting all parties, the city shares information about high-added-value tourism, not travel merely for pleasure. The sales maintain the grasslands and generate earnings for the local community, achieving a circular local model allowing for stays during which tourists can relax both mentally and physically. Improvement of tourism infrastructure, including toilets and parking lots, aims to eliminate overtourism.



### VOICE - Perspectives of Key Figures

“Turning locals into Aso fans and getting them to take on Aso’s issues as their own”

**Akinobu Ishimatsu**  
Former Section Manager, Urban Planning Section, Economic Affairs Division, Aso City (left)  
**Hirofumi Saeki**  
Section Manager, Urban Planning Section, Economic Affairs Division, Aso City (right)



“It’s important to value close communication with relevant parties and have people with the passion to want to work put themselves forward. The most essential thing is for people to take on these issues as their own.” (Mr. Ishimatsu) “I would like to collaborate with the local community to leave a deep impression of the value of the grasslands and share tourism that stirs the emotions. I feel a sustainable future lies ahead.” (Mr. Saeki)

Aso’s initiative benefits all parties, with merits for the grasslands, local community, and tourists alike. At the heart of this is the Aso Caldera Tourism Promotion Council, founded in 2020 and centered on Aso City. With the main inbound constituents being from Asian countries like Taiwan, the council was launched to aim to attract European tourists, like Germans and French, by offering high-added-value tourism. It has held many courses and trainings to involve a variety of stakeholders, including the government,

operators, and the local community, to consider the issues of the grasslands as their own. In addition, although the related departments range widely, the people involved collaborate directly with the council as a hub, allowing for quick decision-making. Each stakeholder has taken their own initiative to build a collaborative structure. Furthermore, the council formulated Sustainable Tourism Guidelines summarizing policies that should be shared by all, such as a vision for grasslands tourism, foot-and-mouth disease

countermeasures, and conservation of plants and animals. In this way, the council has created experiential content unique to Aso while conserving Aso’s nature and culture. This content includes, for example, grassland tours on electric mountain bikes and outdoor dining to delight in the grasslands’ bounty, like Japanese Brown BBQ. Every experience is sustainable and adds high value. The grasslands are used while being protected, which then become a source of earnings for

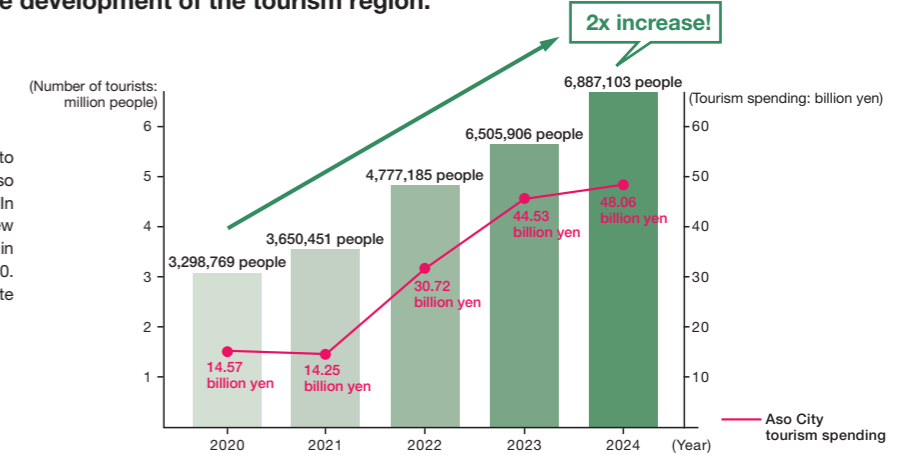
# A Circular Tourism Model Benefitting All Parties Has Increased the Number of Tourists and Their Spending, Helping Preserve the Beautiful Thousand-Year Grasslands for Future Generations

Aso’s initiative has led to concrete results such as increasing the number of visiting tourists and tourism spending, as well as securing and training guide personnel.

Thanks to the Aso Grasslands Restoration Project, the grasslands that are the pride of the local community, and the work on them, will be protected, and they will be shared with people who empathize with their value and securely handed down to the next generation. The process itself is a positive step toward realizing the sustainable development of the tourism region.

## Tourists and Tourism Spending Have Increased Year by Year

In the approximately five years from FY2020 to FY2024, the number of visiting tourists to the Aso region doubled from 3.29 million to 6.88 million. In addition, tourism spending in the region also grew along with the rise in tourists, to 48 billion yen in 2024, a significant increase compared with 2020. Aso’s bold efforts have brought about a definite change in the region.



### Results Achieved Through the Initiative

- ◎ **622** tourists participated in high-added-value, experiential tours using the grasslands, resulting in sales around **10 million yen** (2024)
- ◎ Approximately **1 million yen** returned as grassland conservation fees thanks to welcoming high-added-value, experiential tours using the grasslands (2024)
- ◎ Training guide personnel
  - Local tour guide-interpreters: **31** trained
  - Pasture guides to introduce the grasslands: **47** trained
- ◎ After high-added-value renovations to **50** accommodation facilities over three years, starting in 2021, tourism spending rose approximately **3,000 yen** per person
- ◎ Formulation of action plan involving **13** accommodation operators; publication of the action plan on the Aso-City Tourism Association website
- ◎ Aso City selected to be part of Green Destinations Top 100 Stories (2021/2022)
- ◎ Japan Tourism Agency’s Sustainable Travel AWARD Grand Prize (FY2023)

### VOICE - Perspectives of Key Figures

“Continuing to search for answers about how to leverage and protect the grasslands”

**Junichi Inayoshi**  
Chairperson, Aso Caldera Tourism Promotion Council/  
President and CEO, Aso Plaza Hotel



“At the Aso Plaza Hotel where I serve as president, I not only strive to improve tourists’ satisfaction but also confront issues in the natural environment of the local community. As chairperson of the Aso Caldera Tourism Promotion Council and chairperson of the Inns Association, I collaborate with Aso City on conservation activities and organize the Aso Volcano Trail competition to give back to grassland maintenance.”

the local community, and tourists can have a special experience fully enjoying the grassland culture. This circular tourism model benefitting all parties has been rated highly in Japan and abroad, being selected for the Green Destinations Top 100 Stories in 2021 and 2022, and winning the Japan Tourism Agency’s Sustainable Travel AWARD Grand Prize in 2023. In the approximately five years from FY2020 to FY2024, the number of visiting tourists to the Aso region doubled from 3.29 million to

6.88 million. Tourism spending rose from 14.5 billion yen in 2020 to 48.0 billion yen in 2024. In 2024, 622 tourists participated in tours organized by the Aso Caldera Tourism Promotion Council. Of 10 million yen in sales, 1 million yen is returned to the grasslands as conservation fees, leading to greater motivation in the local community. However, hundreds of millions of yen per year are needed to conserve the grasslands, and further sales expansion is required.

Akinobu Ishimatsu, former Section Manager of the Urban Planning Section, Economic Affairs Division of Aso City, as well as a key figure in the Aso Caldera Tourism Promotion Council, declares: “It has been 1,000 years since Aso’s grasslands were mentioned in the Engi-Shiki code of law compiled in the Heian period. I would like to leave behind the grasslands that have been protected through human effort for the next 1,000 years.” Aso will make steady progress going forward to pass the grasslands down to the future.

# Development of Regional Tourism Led by Local Residents to Create “A Town Worth Visiting, a Town Worth Living In”

Environmental Conservation and Use, and Publishing Sustainability Reports

Management Socioeconomic Environmental

## Development of Regional Tourism Led by Local Residents

Implementing Body

Teshikaga Town, Hokkaido

2-3-1 Chuo, Teshikaga Town, Kawakami District, Hokkaido  
Tel: 015-482-2191  
<https://www.masyuko.or.jp>



### Creating “A Town Worth Visiting, a Town Worth Living In”

Teshikaga Town is home to Akan-Mashu National Park, which covers about two-thirds of the town’s area. To protect this vast natural environment, a source of pride for residents, while also utilizing it as a tourism resource, the town is continuing its initiatives under the slogan “A Town Worth Visiting, a Town Worth Living In” This aims to revitalize industries and the region while ensuring its legacy for future generations.

### Restoring Past Vitality While Protecting Nature

As natural attractions like Lake Mashu and Lake Kussharo gained popularity, the area developed as a destination for group tours. However, after peaking in 1991, visitor numbers plummeted due to factors including the collapse of Japan’s economic bubble and changes in tourism patterns. The decline of the tourism industry had a significant impact on local businesses and the economy, making it essential to implement measures to revitalize industries while protecting the natural resources that serve as the town’s tourism assets. In response to this situation, the Teshikaga EcoMachi Promotion Conference was established in 2008 to consider the future of tourism and community development. The conference established a framework involving participants from a wide range of backgrounds, including tourism-related businesses, office workers, homemakers, farmers, restaurant owners, and municipal employees, to work toward the sustainable development of the tourism region. **▶ CLOSE UP 1**

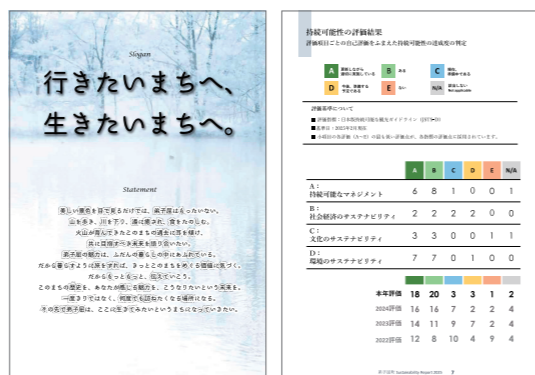
### Protection and Utilization of Valuable Tourism Resources

The Teshikaga-style Ecotourism Promotion Overall Concept was formulated to utilize the natural environment while also ensuring its preservation, subsequently receiving national certification. Later, the fumaroles of Atosanupuri, a valuable tourist resource in Teshikaga Town, were designated as a Specified Natural Tourism Resource. As a result, most of Mt. Atosanupuri was designated as an access-restricted area under the Ecotourism Promotion Act. Therefore, to allow tourists to enjoy this precious natural environment, a certified guide system was established, and sales of the Atosanupuri Trekking Tours, led by certified guides, began. **▶ CLOSE UP 1**

### Toward Sustainable Destination Development Based on International Standards

In 2022, the Teshikaga Town Tourism Promotion Plan was formulated, establishing the sustainable development of the tourism region based on international standards as town policy. The town is enhancing its efforts to communicate information to residents and businesses and build understanding through initiatives such as conducting sustainability training for guides and lodging operators, assigning coordinators, implementing assessments based on the Japan Sustainable Tourism Standard for Destinations (JSTS-D), and publishing the Teshikaga Destination Sustainability Report (below, the “Sustainability Report”). **▶ CLOSE UP 2**

Teshikaga Town Tourism Promotion Plan (Left)  
Teshikaga Destination Sustainability Report 2025 (Right)



Atosanupuri Trekking Tour with Certified Guides



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## 1 A variety of initiatives underway, led by the Teshikaga EcoMachi Promotion Conference

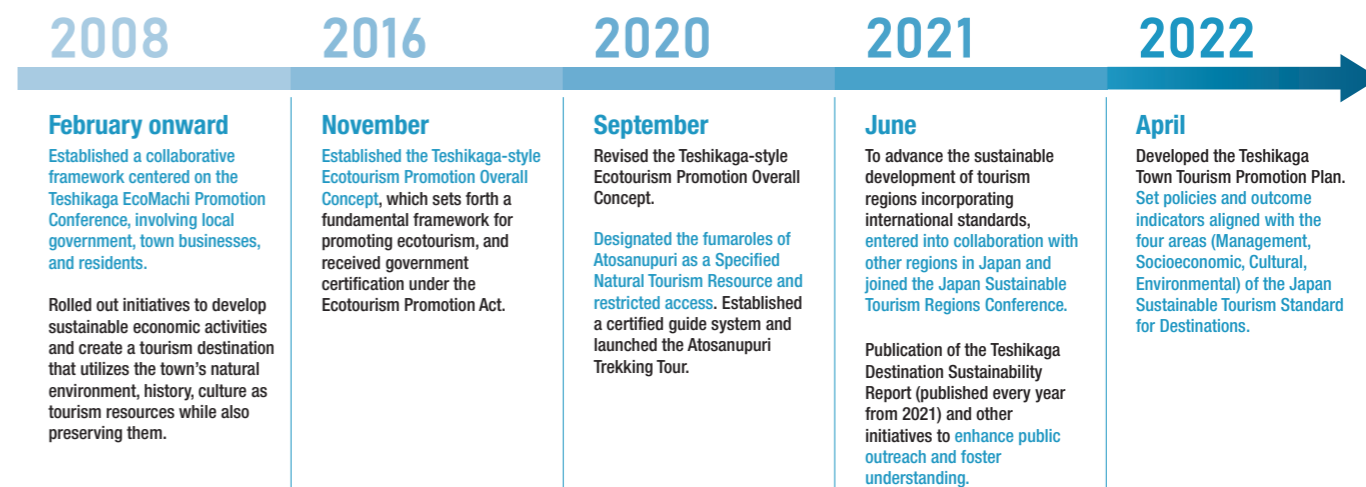
In pursuit of its vision of “a town everyone can take pride in,” the Teshikaga EcoMachi Promotion Conference holds the annual Teshikaga Tourism Seminar, attracting participants from across Japan, as well as conducting various initiatives, including seminars by specialized committees, publishing pamphlets, conducting research projects, and developing human resources. Additionally, the Lake Mashu Tourism Association, a DMO, began offering an “Atosanupuri Trekking Tour” in 2020. The tour operation system, which promotes both nature conservation and mountaineering safety through access restrictions under the Ecotourism Promotion Act and a guide certification system administered by the Teshikaga EcoMachi Promotion Conference, is the first of its kind in Japan. A portion of the tour fees is returned to Teshikaga Town as an environmental conservation charge.

CLOSE UP

## 2 Sharing actions for evaluating initiatives and solving challenges

In Teshikaga Town, surveys are being conducted to assess the current state of sustainability and address any challenges. Each year, the Sustainability Coordinator evaluates progress across four areas—management, socioeconomic, cultural, and environmental—using a five-tier assessment system and prepares a Sustainability Report. Specific actions to address issues identified during the evaluation process are proposed as “Next Steps” within the Report. The Sustainability Report is then shared internally within the town office and DMO, while a summary version is also published on the official tourism website.

### Timeline of the Initiative



### Results Achieved Through the Initiative



### Future Initiatives

Selected for the Green Destinations Top 100 Stories 2023, Teshikaga plans to enter the Green Destinations Awards in FY2026 to have its community development efforts evaluated by an international certification body. Currently, a regional status assessment is being conducted based on the Green Destinations Standard (GDS), which consists of 84 criteria derived from GSTC-D. Annual assessments using the JSTS-D will also continue.

## VOICE

Perspectives of Key Figures

“Community building, like preparing the soil in a field, requires steady, persistent effort”

Kenichi Moriya, Head of the Teshikaga Town Office Tourism and Commerce Division

We have continued our ecotourism initiatives to promote the conservation of the natural environment and the development of tourism. The underlying principle of these initiatives is the belief that “advancing community development, not for tourists, but for local residents to live with vitality and pride, will naturally enhance the region’s appeal.” Community building is like preparing the soil in a field: it takes time, and you must keep tilling it year after year. By steadily building upon each successive achievement, communicating the region’s appeal, and passing it on to the next generation, we believe we can create new value for Teshikaga.

# Mutual Cooperation and Understanding Between Residents and Tourists

## Plan Development and Policy Creation Involving the Entire Local Community



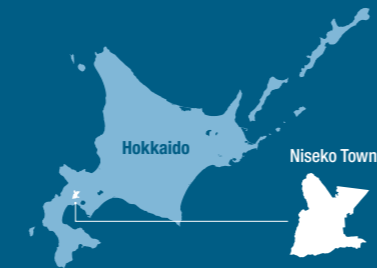
Management Socioeconomic

### Promoting Resident Understanding

Implementing Body

Niseko Town, Hokkaido

55 Fujimi, Niseko Town, Abuta District, Hokkaido  
Tel: 0136-56-8843  
<https://www.town.niseko.lg.jp/>



### Mutual Recognition to Build an International Resort That Residents Can Be Proud Of

Efforts are continuing to achieve the vision of a community where “tourists, tourism-related businesses, and residents acknowledge one another, understand the appeal of the region’s nature and culture, and act with consideration for the environment,” and a community where “residents can feel tangible benefits from tourism.”

### Toward Harmony Between Residents and Tourists

Around 2019, Niseko Town Office began its initiative for “sustainable development of the tourism region,” further refining the SDG-related efforts it had already been engaged in. This was driven by the growing global focus on creating sustainable tourism destinations, the significant proportion of tourists made up by overseas visitors, and the nature of the region’s tourism resources. As the initiatives progressed, **concerns arose from residents about the impact of increased tourism on their living environment**, highlighting the need to foster understanding among residents and improve communication. Subsequently, following selection for the Model Project to Promote Sustainable Tourism (2020), efforts to achieve harmony between residents and tourists got fully underway.

### Priority on Understanding the Situation and Aligning with Residents’ Aspirations

A 2017 survey of town residents found that only about half of them viewed tourists visiting the Niseko tourism area favorably. To improve residents’ perception of tourism, **the town first conducted questionnaires and interviews with tourism-related businesses to understand the sustainable tourism initiatives they had implemented.** The responses were used to **create a leaflet for town residents** (2021), aiming to help them gain a better understanding of sustainable tourism.

▶ CLOSE UP 1

### Creating a Framework Where Both Residents and Tourists Can Participate and Enjoy Themselves

To continue protecting the town’s rich natural environment and local resources, a group of local volunteers launched the NIS-ECO Project (2022). Government, businesses, and the Local Revitalization Cooperation Group worked together to implement initiatives such as selling eco-friendly products and using donations for tree planting and environmental education. In this way, **the project is implementing community activities that both residents and tourists can participate in and enjoy together.**

▶ CLOSE UP 2

Additionally, to help residents rediscover Niseko Town’s appeal and make the town somewhere they can take pride in, discount services and special offers for residents provided by tourism-related businesses are announced on the official website. Furthermore, numerous events centered on sustainable tourism were held, including information sharing at the Residents’ Town Development Lectures and opinion exchanges at the Tourism Café. This sort of sustained, close communication with residents is helping to foster a better understanding of tourism.

Goal/Future Vision

Goal A sustainable international resort that earns the trust of residents and tourists alike

Future Vision for the Area

A fully developed year-round international resort

A high-quality, high-value-added international resort

An international resort that residents can be proud of

Leaflet for Town Residents



CLOSE UP

### 1 Using questionnaires and feedback from businesses as tools to engage residents

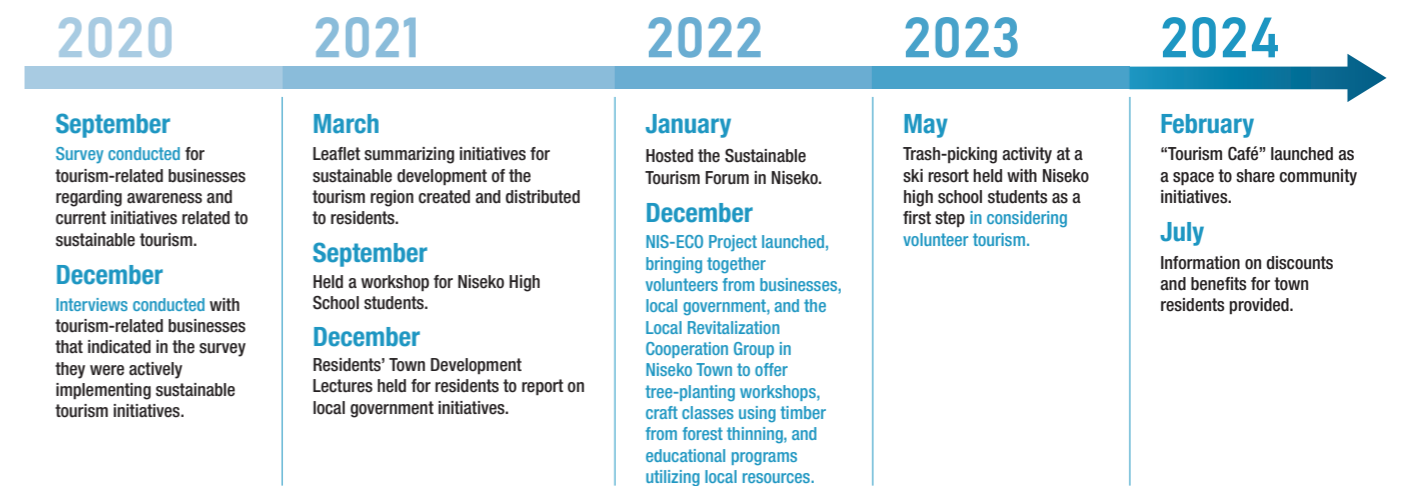
In Niseko Town, where agriculture and tourism are the core industries, many businesses have long been conscious of nature and environmental protection. **A survey and interviews were conducted with these businesses to investigate the details of the sustainable initiatives they are actually implementing, the reasons behind them, and the activities they undertake to contribute to the community.** This provided valuable insights into sustainable initiatives and their actual progress. Furthermore, this information was used to **create a leaflet aimed at enhancing residents’ understanding of sustainable tourism.** Niseko Town has a large number of people moving to the area, so awareness of these initiatives has not been sufficiently widespread. Leaflets have been created to encourage as many residents as possible to take an interest, such as by participating in local litter cleanup activities.

CLOSE UP

### 2 The NIS-ECO Project, engaging both residents and tourists

The NIS-ECO Project involves participants from the forestry sector, restaurants, and government agencies, promoting various initiatives through public-private partnerships. Members themselves encourage participation from residents and neighbors, **engaging the entire town in activities such as introducing forestry practices that protect the forests, holding tree-planting workshops led by experts, and implementing educational programs utilizing local resources.** Additionally, businesses among the project members serve as initiators, selling donation-based products like eco-bags. As such, **funding is secured primarily by businesses themselves, not by the government.** The funds raised are being used to support activities such as tree-planting workshops, serving as resources to preserve the beauty of Niseko Town for future generations of children.

Timeline of the Initiative



### Results Achieved Through the Initiative

Percentage of town residents who believe “tourism enriches our lives” rose from 40.0% to 48.5% (FY2019–2023)

Over 100 people participated in the NIS-ECO Project’s tree-planting activities

Over 50 participants attended Residents’ Town Development Lectures on sustainable tourism (3 lectures total)

Future Initiatives

Currently, the number of tourism-related businesses and residents interested in sustainable tourism is limited. Therefore, plans are in place to boost motivation across the entire community by providing more opportunities to report on the progress of Niseko Town Tourism Promotion Vision and initiatives within the town, and by sharing actions individual residents can take through events like the

Tourism Café and Residents’ Town Development Lectures. Furthermore, due to insufficient online initiatives to encourage responsible behavior among tourists, the town will create an official tourist website aimed at promoting proper etiquette. This effort supports the goal of becoming a “sustainable international resort that earns the trust of residents and tourists alike.”

## VOICE

Perspectives of Key Figures

“We want to maintain Niseko’s distinct character”

Fumihiko Nakano, General Director, Niseko Resort Tourism Association



What we value most is Niseko’s distinct character. Exchanges of ideas and activities with residents and students gave us insight into what that character is, laying the foundations for sustainable tourism. I believe that this approach of valuing the people who live here is what leads to destination development they can trust.

# Increasing Earning Power and Evolving on Our Own

## Creating a New Tourism Industry for Small-Scale Destinations



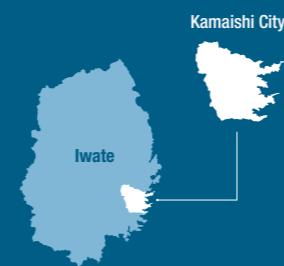
Management Socioeconomic

## Creating a New Tourism Industry

Implementing Body

Kamaishi DMC Ltd.

3-3 Uogashi, Kamaishi City, Iwate  
Tel: 0193-27-5260  
<https://kamaishi-dmc.com/company/company1/>



## Expanding Exchange Through “Earning Power” Based on GSTC Standards

The ultimate goal is to leverage Kamaishi’s strengths to expand domestic and international exchanges. This will involve sustainable development of the tourism region that enhances revenue-generating ability by utilizing the GSTC Standards, which are international benchmarks for sustainable tourism, and the creation and refinement of stay-and-interact tourism programs.

## The Kamaishi Open Field Museum Vision: Utilizing Local Treasures

The challenges facing the Kamaishi region were recovery from the extensive damage caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011 and the decline of industry due to a shrinking population. Furthermore, Kamaishi also faced the reality that it lacked signature tourist attractions with strong visitor appeal, making it difficult to envision a viable future based solely on tourism-driven community development. In response, a new vision was launched: moving beyond event-centered visitor attraction to an approach of “fostering sustainable tourism region development that cultivates repeat visitors by authentically conveying the area’s treasures—its nature, culture, ways of life, and the people who live there.” Under this vision, both visitors and local residents serve as key players in tourism. During the development of the tourism promotion vision, they learned of the existence of the GSTC standards and decided that “given that we are starting from scratch, we should challenge ourselves to meet international standards.” Ultimately, the decision was made to adopt the GSTC standards, and efforts got fully underway.

## Kamaishi DMC, the Driving Force Behind Various Initiatives

In preparation for hosting the Rugby World Cup in 2019, a plan for the establishment of a DMO was approved by the mayor, aiming to enhance the city’s infrastructure for receiving overseas visitors. Taking this as an opportunity, Kamaishi DMC Ltd. was established as the DMO in 2018 to advance the Kamaishi City Tourism Vision (formulated in 2017). The company adopted a management philosophy of “uncovering the region’s attractions and promoting them globally to increase the number of visitors.” To this end, it worked to increase tourists from outside the region and the number of people with ties to the area, undertaking initiatives such as selling Kamaishi’s specialty products outside the region as a local trading company. Furthermore, focusing on Kamaishi’s natural and cultural “treasures,” the company collaborates with various partner organizations to implement initiatives such as sustainable tourism forums, disaster prevention learning programs, and cross-border training programs for large corporations. It is also actively working to attract talent from outside the region. **▶ CLOSE UP 1**

## Securing Funding Through Hometown Tax Donations and Sales of Products Outside the Region

In Kamaishi City, where the tourism market is small, securing stable sources of funding remains a challenge. To address this challenge, Kamaishi DMC has proactively undertaken various initiatives since before its establishment. It has proposed the hometown tax donation program to the city government as a key revenue source and launched learning workations aimed at companies, taking the lead in boosting the region’s “earning power.” **▶ CLOSE UP 2**

### The Kamaishi Open Field Museum Vision

Envisioning the entire city as an “open-air museum,” showcasing its people and livelihoods as exhibits for visitors to experience



### Sustainable Tourism Forum



CLOSE UP

## 1 Kamaishi DMC leads the implementation of cross-border training programs for large corporations

Kamaishi DMC provides corporate training and training facilities for large enterprises. By recruiting local practitioners as instructors, it capitalizes on the region’s treasures to provide hands-on learning experiences across the entire Kamaishi area. Additionally, it conducts cross-border training programs to cultivate on-site capabilities and organizational collaboration, focusing on attracting corporate talent from outside the region. As a result, its corporate training initiatives and related activities have generated approximately 260 million yen in local consumption (Oct. 2021 to Oct. 2025). Furthermore, the company develops data-driven marketing and promotional strategies, examining from a medium-to-long-term perspective how each business initiative impacts the regional economic cycle and whether it makes a cultural or environmental contribution.

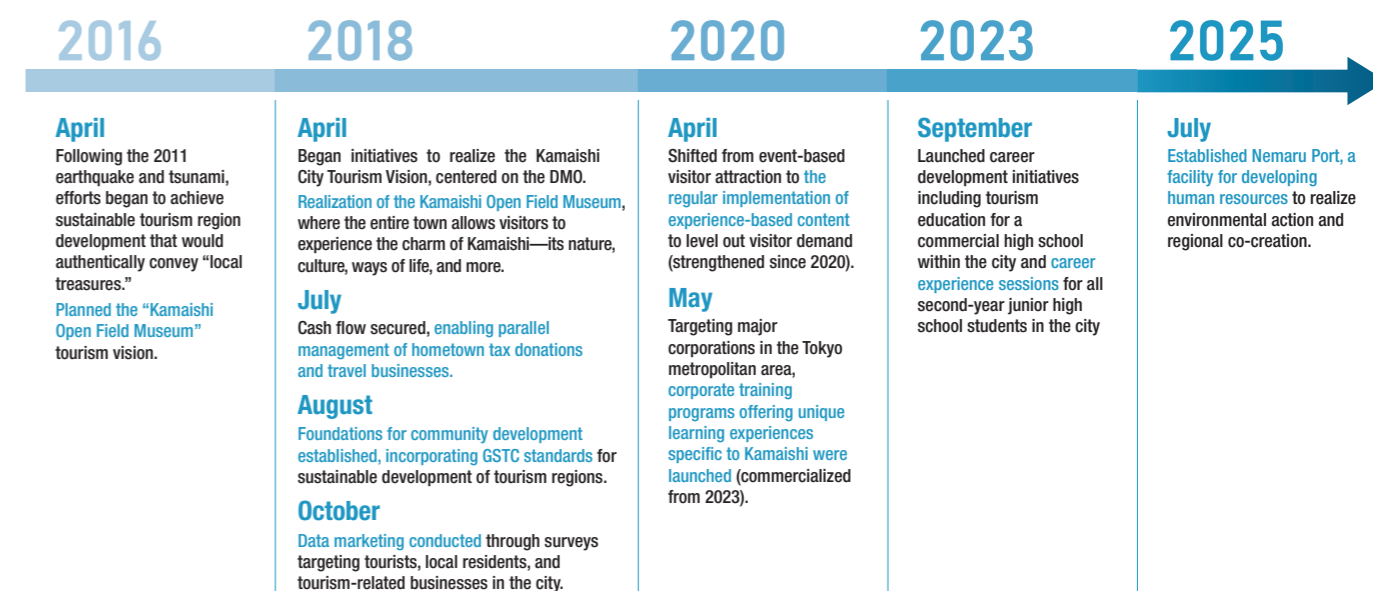
CLOSE UP

## 2 Numerous initiatives to achieve both community contribution and monetization

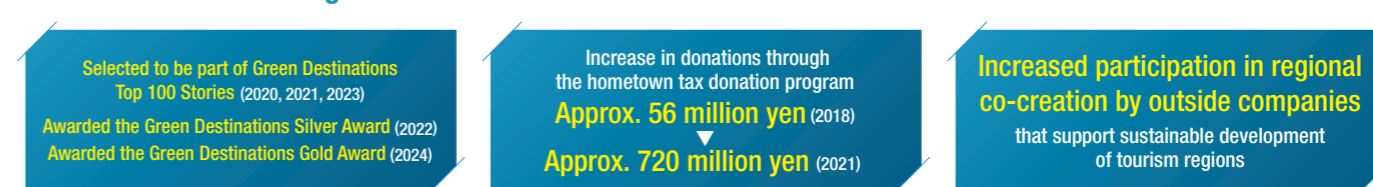
In order to contribute to the community as a DMC and generate profits as a small business, the DMC strives to practice “monetization” and take the lead in enhancing the region’s revenue-generating ability. By actively seeking external capital inflows through measures such as introducing hometown tax donations, implementing high-value-added experience programs, and selling products outside the region, even regions with small tourism markets can strengthen their “earning power” to build a sustainable business foundation. As a result, donations through the hometown tax donation program surged from approximately 56 million yen to about 720 million yen within three years of the DMC’s establishment, and a portion of these funds is now allocated to its operational resources.

\* DMC stands for “Destination Management Company.” This refers to a region-specific travel agency that collaborates with various organizations to promote regional revitalization by utilizing local tourism resources, engaging in management and resource development.

### Timeline of the Initiative



### Results Achieved Through the Initiative



### Future Initiatives

Initiatives to foster residents’ pride in their community and enthusiasm for welcoming visitors will be implemented. These will build upon insights from resident surveys, specifically enhancing the creation of learning opportunities in Kamaishi and the tangible benefits of tourism promotion. Beyond preserving and utilizing Kamaishi’s unique natural and cultural “treasures,” the aim is to create new demand

for local resources by incorporating the value of learning, thereby connecting them to the future. Furthermore, to address the challenges facing the region, proactive efforts will be made to promote regional co-creation projects between local businesses and metropolitan-area companies, while also considering the establishment of related subsidiaries to stimulate the local economic cycle.

## VOICE

Perspectives of Key Figures

“Start with what you can do!”

Hidetaka Kato, Representative Director, Kamaishi DMC Ltd.



Our approach eschews one-off “viral” events. Rather, we are constantly thinking about what constitutes sustainable visitor attraction and environmental development for the region. As such, we are actively engaged in activities that can lead to sustained attraction of visitors or enable gradual business expansion, even when starting small. Each venture will begin on a small scale, with plans to expand operations incrementally under the guidance of staff deeply committed to sustainability, while ensuring tangible progress is made.

# Handing Down the Cultural Value of Japan's Largest Religious Community to Future Generations

Creating a System to Reconcile the Preservation and Development of Culture



Management Cultural

## Establishing a Framework for the Preservation of Cultural Value

Implementing Body  
Toge District Community Development Company Preparatory Committee

55 Toge, Toge, Haguro-machi, Tsuruoka City, Yamagata  
Tel: 090-2981-7251



### Becoming "A Town Worth Visiting, a Town Worth Living In"

In the Toge district of Tsuruoka City, the local government, residents, and businesses are working together to achieve the vision of "A Town Worth Visiting, a Town Worth Living In."

### The Importance and Difficulty of Accurately Communicating Cultural Value

While recognized for its outstanding cultural value as the largest existing mountain worship community in Japan, a challenge arose when attempting to develop this culture as a tourism resource: differing understandings and perspectives on the culture among the tourism-related businesses involved. There were also instances where promotional materials diverged from historical facts, raising concerns that not only might the true cultural value fail to be conveyed accurately, but could even be damaged. Therefore, to ensure the Toge district remains a genuine sacred site for Shugendo and continues to be chosen as a destination, efforts were required to protect and revitalize the mountain worship culture that still resonates in the daily lives of the district's residents, along with the social structures and natural environment that underpin it.

### Sharing Perspectives Through Communication and Seminars

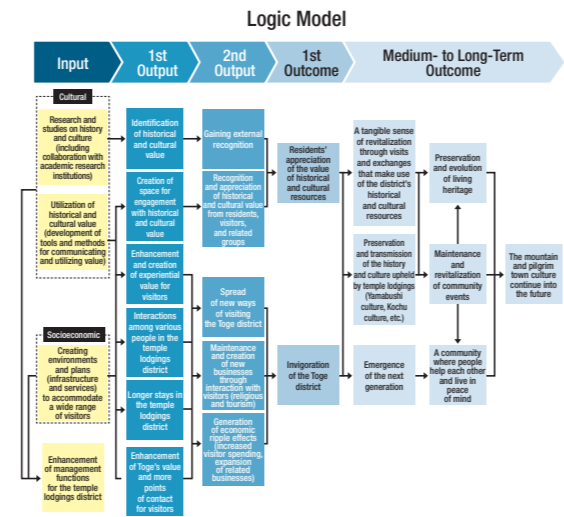
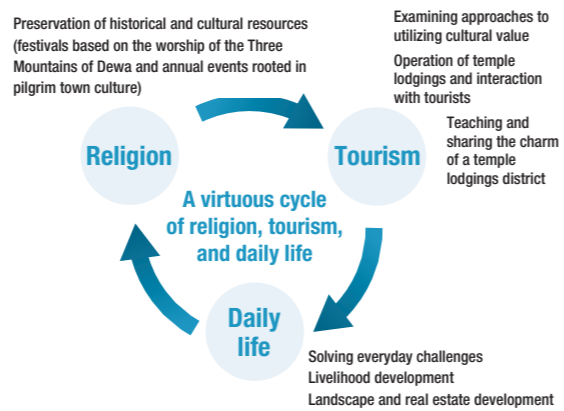
Around 2019, the benefits of promoting tourism were not yet clearly visible, so efforts were limited to only a few temple lodgings and businesses in the Toge district. However, through initiatives such as the Sustainable Tourism Seminar, held around 2020 featuring invited experts, and the sharing of information on sustainable tourism efforts with residents, efforts to preserve and pass on cultural value gradually gained momentum within the community. Building on this momentum, businesses took the lead in exploring an implementation framework and specific actions (2022).

### Significant Progress Made by Developing the Logic Model and Concluding an Agreement

To align perspectives within the community on these specific action plans, initiatives for passing on cultural values over the medium to long term were visualized using the logic model (2024). Actually implementing the initiative required a core organization to spearhead the effort. Accordingly, stakeholders including temple lodging operators within the community were brought together to establish the Toge District Community Development Company Preparatory Committee (2024).

Furthermore, to further advance discussions and efforts for the preservation and transmission of cultural resources, an agreement was concluded under local government leadership, committing both the government and businesses to protect and utilize cultural resources (2025). This agreement has enabled further collaboration between the two sides.

### The Virtuous Cycle Envisioned by the Toge Community Development Project



CLOSE UP

### 1 Working closely together to share common challenges and become a dynamic organization

By working backward from "mid- to long-term desired outcomes and results," a framework for preserving and passing on cultural value was systematically established. Concerns arose that advancing initiatives based on the logic model would lead to fragmented responsibility within existing organizational structures, compromising agility. Therefore, volunteers from the district (operators of temple lodgings and private businesses) took the initiative to establish the Toge District Community Development Company Preparatory Committee, comprising key figures from temple lodgings, shrines, and the community development association. This organization increased opportunities for dialogue among stakeholders who had previously operated separately. This allowed a vision for the district to be shared and challenges to be identified, facilitating the progress of initiatives.

CLOSE UP

### 2 Agreement to promote initiatives through mutual cooperation

The FY2023-2024 Model Project to Promote Sustainable Tourism built a foundation for local government and businesses to collaborate in preserving and passing on the cultural resources of the Toge district. Efforts have also been made to create sustainable tourism content that draws on the area's religious culture. As achievements steadily accumulate, momentum is building on the part of both public and private organizations to make proper use of the area as a tourist resource while preserving its religious character. A five-party agreement was concluded to promote collaborative initiatives between the local government and four organizations, aiming to preserve cultural resources, revitalize the local economy, and ensure that these resources are passed on to future generations.

### Timeline of the Initiative

2020	2022	2023	2024	2025
"Sustainable Tourism Seminar" held, information on sustainable tourism initiatives shared with city residents.	A promotion framework led by businesses was established and discussions on specific actions began.	December Taking GSTC training as an opportunity, consideration began on initiatives for preserving and passing on cultural value.	January Based on an examination of matters to be addressed and the promotion framework for safeguarding the cultural value of the Toge district in an appropriate manner over the medium to long term, a logic model serving as a guideline for the next fiscal year and beyond was set out. March Toge District Community Development Company Preparatory Committee established as the core organization within the region to implement specific actions based on the logic model. September onward Discussions held on the division of responsibilities between local governments and businesses for preserving and passing on the cultural value of the Toge district, and studies conducted on formulating plans and legal frameworks to provide official protection for this cultural value. October onward Developed an action plan to preserve and utilize the cultural value of the Toge district. December onward Sustainable tourism content based on the mountain worship practices of the Toge district was developed and piloted.	January Roles and responsibilities in preserving and passing on the cultural value of the Toge district clarified. August Agreement on promoting sustainable historical and tourism-based community development signed by Tsuruoka City, the Toge District Community Development Association, the Haguro Tourist Association, the Temple Lodgings Association, and the Toge District Community Development Company Preparatory Committee.

### Results Achieved Through the Initiative

- Establishment of a community-wide framework to utilize and preserve cultural resources while promoting sustainable tourism
- Selected to be part of Green Destinations Top 100 Stories 2024
- Agreement reached between local government and businesses to advance collaborative initiatives

### Future Initiatives

The division of responsibilities between the local government and businesses regarding the preservation and transmission of cultural resources was the subject of ongoing discussions starting in FY2024, and these have now been clarified. Based on the agreement to protect and utilize the cultural resources of the Toge

district, discussions will continue regarding initiatives for the sustainable development of the tourism region. This will involve the government protecting cultural resources through administrative mechanisms while working hand-in-hand with local businesses to utilize these resources appropriately.

### VOICE

Perspectives of Key Figures

"Let us share the challenges and think about them together"

Kazuhiro Hayasaka, Vice Chairperson, Haguro Tourist Association (left)  
Takeharu Kato, CEO, Megurun Inc. (right)



Toge is a community proud to preserve its history and culture, but challenges have surfaced with the changing times. The five-party agreement has yielded significant results by creating a forum for sharing challenges. It has also communicated the region's value and issues to the outside world, providing residents themselves with an opportunity to reflect. Going forward, we also intend to advance proposals for sustainable community development and tourism that leverage this system.



## Toward a Sustainable Mountain Resort

### Establishment of Ordinances on Destination Management

Management Socioeconomic

## Independent Tourism Revenue/Ordinance Formulation

Implementing Body

Hakuba Village, Nagano

7025 Hokujo, Hakuba Village, Kita-Azumi District, Nagano  
Tel: 0261-72-5000  
<https://www.vill.hakuba.lg.jp/gyosei/index.html>



### An All-Season Stay-Focused Resort That Offers a Welcoming Experience for Every Visitor

Hakuba Village is characterized by the beautiful mountain scenery of the Northern Alps and slopes renowned for their exceptional snow quality. Building on these world-class attractions, Hakuba aims to become an all-season stay-focused mountain resort that offers a welcoming experience for every visitor by preserving the rich culture and way of life developed in this region.

### Challenges Including Labor Shortages, Financial Constraints, and Global Warming

Hakuba Village, known as the birthplace of guesthouses in Japan, faced various challenges, including insufficient ownership succession among lodging businesses and low labor productivity. Furthermore, the risk of a decline in customers is increasing due to factors such as reduced snowfall caused by global warming and the impact of torrential rains. To address these challenges, the resort aimed to become an “all-season stay-focused resort” that would attract an even distribution of visitors throughout the year. However, since much of the tourism funding relied on general government revenues, this approach lacked sustainability. Full-scale efforts aimed at speeding up the sustainable development of the tourism region, including securing sources of revenue, began in around 2018.

### Moves Toward the Introduction of Independent Revenue Sources

After repeated discussions, the need for new funding sources was agreed upon within the community. While efforts had been made to ensure these funds were used solely for tourism promotion measures, there were many matters still to be decided, and discussions did not progress as smoothly as hoped. Therefore, starting in 2023, the meeting body was divided into two separate meetings: the “meeting on purpose and organization” and the “meeting on tax introduction system design.” As a result, the introduction of an accommodation tax was decided upon as a new revenue source. **▶ CLOSE UP 1**

### Developing Ordinances to Ensure That Progress Doesn’t End with the Introduction of an Accommodation Tax

Ensuring that the accommodation tax is used effectively to promote tourism requires clarifying its purpose and establishing an operation framework. Hakuba Village held repeated meetings, including the mayor, and enacted the Ordinance on Sustainable Tourism Destination Management (2025). This set out not only how the accommodation tax is used, but also the decision-making process and the framework for participation. The ordinance thus ensured flexibility and sustainability, keeping residents informed while also allowing the purpose and tax allocation of initiatives to be maintained regardless of future organizational changes. **▶ CLOSE UP 2** Furthermore, to help accommodation operators themselves embrace this initiative as their own, a dedicated Accommodation Innovation Team, which holds regular study sessions, symposiums, and working groups, has been established.

The Vision for Hakuba Village



Flyer for Study Sessions and Symposiums Targeting Accommodation Operators



CLOSE UP

## 1 Meeting bodies divided up according to discussion topics

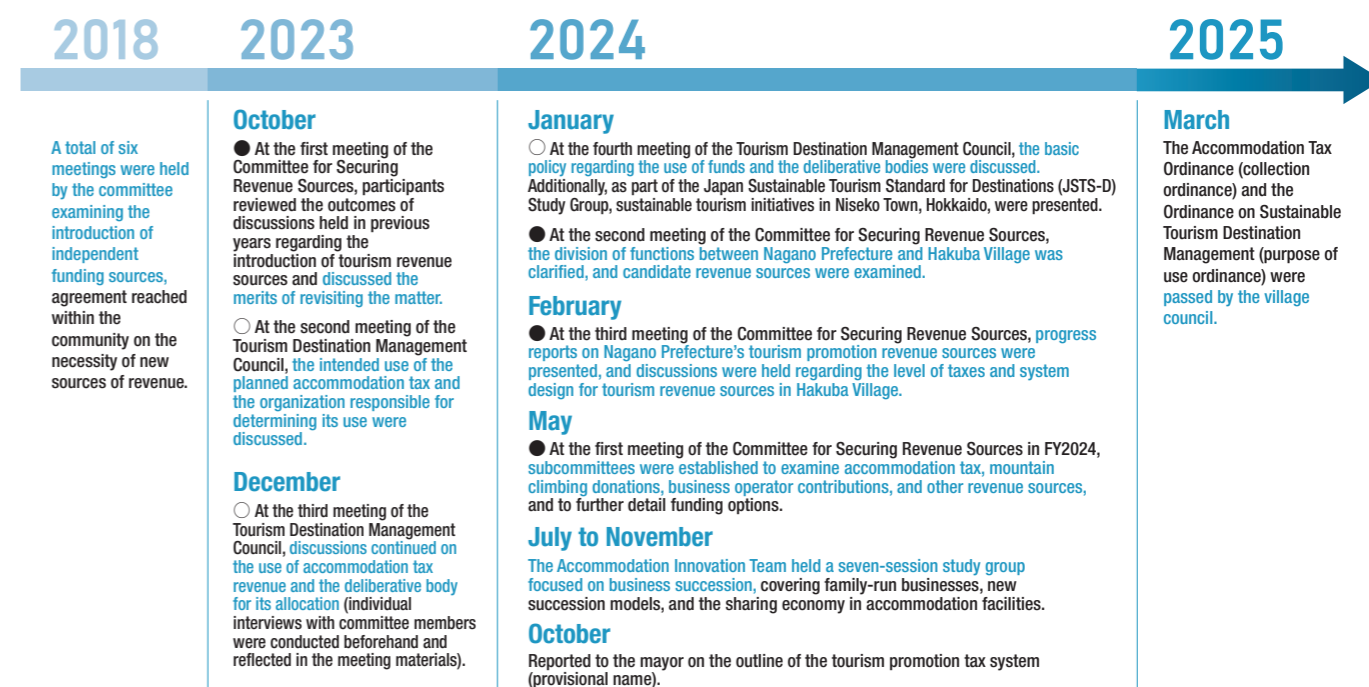
Discussions were held in two meeting bodies: the Tourism Destination Management Council, which deliberated on the use of accommodation tax revenues and the structure of the expenditure review body; and the Committee for Securing Revenue Sources, which discussed the design of systems related to the tax's introduction. Simulations of tax revenue projections were conducted, and specific policy measures were thoroughly examined. While mountain climbing donations and contribution from businesses were initially considered as revenue sources, a flat-rate accommodation tax was ultimately chosen based on principles of fairness and benefit-based taxation (four flat-rate tiers for stays over 6,000 yen per person per night, excluding tax, for room-only stays).

CLOSE UP

## 2 Ordinance on Sustainable Tourism Destination Management in Hakuba Village

An ordinance has been established to clearly define the goal of achieving sustainable tourism management while maintaining a balance between Hakuba's nature, culture, and economy. This stipulates the obligation for comprehensive and systematic measures to achieve sustainable tourism management, while also giving consideration to securing the necessary funding. It also includes measures such as awareness campaigns involving local residents, tourism-related businesses, and local government; the preservation of local culture; and the strengthening of disaster response systems. By clearly codifying these measures into the ordinance, a system has been established to sustainably support the development of the tourism region.

Timeline of the Initiative ●: Committee for Securing Revenue Sources ○: Tourism Destination Management Council



### Results Achieved Through the Initiative

Establishment of the Ordinance on Sustainable Tourism Destination Management, start of accommodation tax collection (starting June 2026)

Clarification of roles and responsibilities for the village, villagers, visitors, etc., under the Ordinance on Sustainable Tourism Destination Management

Resident satisfaction (attitudes toward tourism) set as a KPI (key performance indicator) for measures contributing to improving the social impact of tourism

### Future Initiatives

A Tourism Destination Management Vision (2026–2036) is scheduled for release, and the introduction of the accommodation tax is planned (to be implemented simultaneously with Nagano Prefecture starting June 2026). As part of these efforts, the village will further expedite initiatives aimed at business succession and improving labor productivity for accommodation operators. Furthermore, while

existing organizations such as a DMO, which handles hometown tax donation programs, and the Hakuba Village Promotion Public Corporation, which manages designated tourist facilities, already exist, plans are in place to establish a regional public corporation after coordinating for-profit and non-profit operations, thereby building a sustainable ecosystem.

## VOICE

Perspectives of Key Figures

“I want to move the discussion forward, however slightly”

Hiroki Yaguchi, Tourism and Commerce Section, Tourism Division, Hakuba Village, Nagano



Discussions on introducing independent funding sources began in 2018, but the debate stalled because the purpose and allocation of the accommodation tax became entangled

with the discussion of the system itself. By dividing the discussions between separate meeting bodies and clearly explaining to the participants the goals of each, things gradually started to run more smoothly. During the ordinance drafting stage, each issue was clearly defined, which made setting things out easier, among other advantages.



## Following the Fundamentals to Build a Wealthy and Healthy Region

### Implementing the PDCA Cycle Based on the Tourism Master Plan

Management Socioeconomic

## Destination Management

Implementing Body

Nasushiobara City, Tochigi

108-2 Kyokonsha, Nasushiobara City, Tochigi  
Tel: 0287-62-7156  
<https://www.city.nasushiobara.tochigi.jp/>



### Building a Region That Is Wealthy and Healthy for All

While maintaining the four dimensions of wealth and health (the health of the environment, including regional resources; the physical and mental well-being of tourists; the well-being of the local community; and the economic health of local industries), the city aims to build a region that enriches the lives of all its people. This effort is guided by two fundamental principles: **Creating a tourism destination that enhances the lives of those who visit, live, and work there, and promoting wellness tourism, a form of tourism that supports visitors' physical and mental well-being and overall life enrichment.**

### Toward the Creation of the Basic Tourism Master Plan

While Nasushiobara City is rich in tourism resources, including its onsen, it faced challenges such as insufficient mechanisms for effectively utilizing these resources and limited coordination among operators. **The restructuring following the inauguration of the new mayor in 2019 provided an opportunity for the city to fully showcase its strengths, such as food, agriculture, and history, and to begin developing its Tourism Master Plan in 2020,** with the aim of responding flexibly to changes in society and travel trends. A total of seven Study Committee meetings were held, bringing together local tourism associations, the Shiobara Onsen Hotel Corporation, and citizens for in-depth discussions. In addition, the Master Plan incorporated suggestions from committee members that the sustainable development of tourism regions should be made a central focus. Although the efforts were still in an exploratory phase at this stage, they gained momentum following their adoption into the Model Project to Promote Sustainable Tourism in 2021.

### Carefully Reviewing Progress and Applying Lessons Learned to Future Efforts

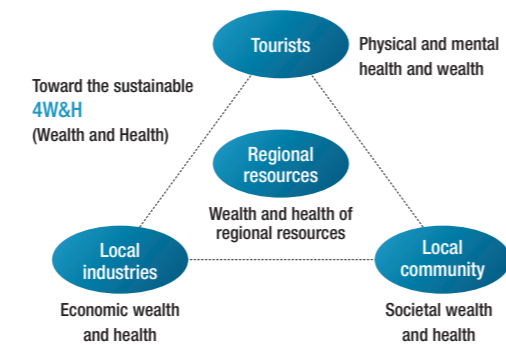
Based on the Nasushiobara City Tourism Master Plan formulated in 2021, the city has promoted region-wide, integrated initiatives. Every year, the DMO hosts the Nasushiobara City Tourism Strategy Meeting, attended by local authorities and the Hotel Corporation. **At these meetings, the previous year's Master Plan KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) are reported on, and progress management and action is reviewed through the PDCA cycle to guide consideration of the next measures before budget requests.**

▶ CLOSE UP 1

### Working Together to Protect the Natural Environment

Kinomata Enchi Park, known for its beautiful clear streams, faced issues with crowding due to high visitor concentration. In response, and in line with the Master Plan's basic policies, **an ordinance was enacted in 2022 with the objectives of conserving the natural environment and clarifying rules of use.** The ordinance also defined restricted and hazardous activities within the park, and established fees for parking. These fees serve as an important source of funding for the park's conservation efforts.

The Four Dimensions of Wealth and Health for Wellness Tourism



The Nasushiobara City Tourism Master Plan FY2021–2027



## Addressing Shortages in Human Resources to Build a More Robust Organizational Framework

Nasushiobara City faced concerns over human resource shortages and the adequacy of its organizational framework in sustainable development of tourism regions. Since 2023, **in line with the master plan's basic policy of "establishing a resilient foundation for destination management," the city has also focused on securing and developing human resources for tourism.**

▶ CLOSE UP 2

CLOSE UP

### 1 Be transparent with progress and results, and share them widely

To maintain the PDCA cycle, **the city publishes annual updates on the master plan's KPI Results (Key Performance Indicators) and Status of Policy Implementation on the official Nasushiobara City website.** In addition, the master plan explicitly stipulates that progress management be addressed in the tourism strategy meetings of the Nasushiobara City Tourism Bureau. It also stipulates that the Nasushiobara City Tourism Bureau, the various tourism associations, and tourism operators are to **engage in discussions while striving for appropriate KPI evaluation, improvement, and coordination.**

CLOSE UP

### 2 Cultivating the next generation of talent through training programs and practical workshops

The city is implementing initiatives to foster local interest and attachment while **addressing shortages of tourism personnel.** These include the Shiobara Onsen Town Tour Guide Training Program, which **develops tourism guides, and hands-on "career experience" workshops for elementary and junior high school students, in which they create their own tourism PR videos.** In addition, in order to help local residents and operators (local government included) understand the significance of working toward sustainable development of tourism regions, **the city is conducting training sessions and briefings led by local government.** In FY2024, the city conducted briefings for industry operators on the Green Destinations Awards Program, which promotes sustainable tourism. As a result, stakeholder understanding of the initiative has shown marked improvement.

### Timeline of the Initiative

2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
<p><b>April</b> Formulated the Nasushiobara City Tourism Master Plan.</p> <p><b>July</b> Adopted into the Model Project to Promote Sustainable Tourism, and conducted a GSTC training program.</p> <p><b>October</b> Established the Nasushiobara City Non-Statutory Purpose Tax Review Committee and began reviewing taxes for non-statutory purposes. Selected to be part of Green Destinations Top 100 Stories 2021.</p>	<p><b>March</b> With the aim of conserving Kinomata Enchi Park and clarifying its rules of use, the city enacted an ordinance establishing restricted and prohibited activities, as well as fees and operating hours for the parking facilities.</p> <p><b>September</b> Selected to be part of Green Destinations Top 100 Stories 2022.</p>	<p><b>July</b> The Sustainable Nasushiobara City Tourism Model Initiative was developed and published for accommodation providers in the city.</p>	<p><b>March onward</b> The Nasushiobara Station Area Urban Development Council held four meetings (Mar. and Jun. 2024, and Mar. and Jul. 2025) to discuss the desired spatial image of the station front. In addition, the council's working group met three times (Aug. and Dec. 2024, and Feb. 2025).</p> <p><b>August onward</b> The city held a total of three briefings (Aug. and Dec. 2024, and Jan. 2025) for industry operators on the Green Destinations Awards Program, which promotes sustainable tourism.</p>	<p><b>March</b> A draft of the Nasushiobara SDGs Tourism Guidelines was prepared based on the Japan Sustainable Tourism Standard for Destinations (JSTS-D). To enhance visitor satisfaction while ensuring the safety and peace of mind of users of tourism facilities, the city formulated the Phase 1 Nasushiobara City Tourism Facility Long-Term Maintenance Plan.</p> <p><b>December</b> Awarded the Green Destinations Silver Award.</p>

## Results Achieved Through the Initiative

Secured **4,186,400 yen in funding** for environmental conservation through parking fees at Kinomata Enchi Park  
(Jul. and Aug. 2022)

Awarded diplomas to **13 students** following the Shiobara Onsen Town Tour Guide Training Program  
(FY2024 and FY2025)

Awarded the **Green Destinations Silver Award**  
(FY2025)

### Future Initiatives

Receiving the Green Destinations Silver Award is evidence that Nasushiobara City's efforts in sustainable tourism have been recognized internationally, and represents a highly significant achievement. Going forward, the city will build on this

recognition to develop a tourism destination that balances the preservation of natural and cultural assets with regional development, and will continue striving to achieve an even higher standard of sustainable tourism.

## VOICE

Perspectives of Key Figures

**"It took many long briefings, but everyone is on board now"**

Hiromi Waki,  
Director of the Tourism Promotion Division,  
Industrial Tourism Department,  
and Sustainability Coordinator, Nasushiobara City



To foster a shared understanding of sustainable tourism, the city has held a series of briefings for industry operators on the Green Destinations Awards Program, which promotes sustainable tourism. Although there was some initial hesitation, continued discussions revealed opinions that the initiative could enhance regional value, and industry operators began offering constructive and proactive suggestions. Going forward, we will continue working with local residents to develop a tourism destination that enriches the lives of all.

# The Surest Path to Destination Management Is Protecting Local Life

## Sustainable Destination Management Led by Local Residents



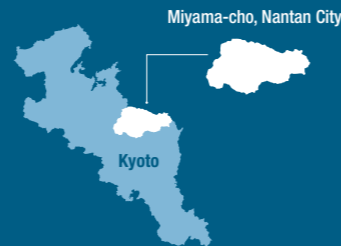
Management Environmental

### Locally-Driven Destination Management

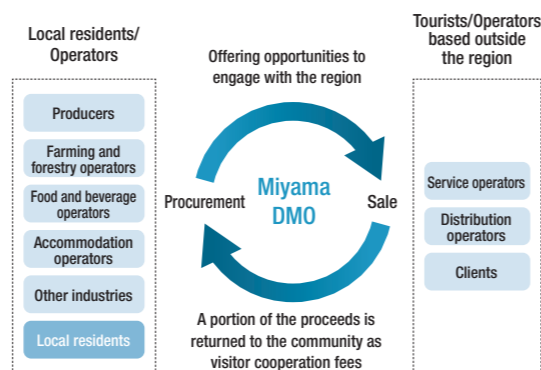
Implementing Body

Kyoto Miyama Tourism Association

23 Shimo, Agake, Miyama-cho, Nantan City, Kyoto  
Tel: 0771-75-9030  
<https://miyamanavi.com/information/aboutDMO>



#### Building Mechanisms to Ensure Tourism Benefits Are Returned to the Community



Ashiu Forest Tour Led by Local Guides



### Prioritizing Local Residents and Their Way of Life

The entire thatched-roof village of Kayabuki no Sato in Miyama-cho, Nantan City, where local residents continue to live, was recognized in 2021 as one of UN Tourism's Best Tourism Villages. At the heart of this were **the residents and community who treasure their way of life, maintained over long years**, and this spirit will continue to guide the future vision of Miyama.

### Community Development Led by Local Residents

While Miyama is blessed with a wealth of tourism resources, including Kayabuki no Sato, the Ashiu Research Forest, and the Yura River, it has faced problems since the 1970s with its declining population leading to shortages in the manpower needed to conserve these resources. Accordingly, **efforts toward rural and mountain village development were undertaken, and from 1989 in particular, policies centered on urban-rural exchange were launched**. While these initiatives were initially led by local government, the designation of Kayabuki no Sato as an Important Preservation District for Groups of Traditional Buildings, together with the establishment of a regional promotion association, **served as catalysts for their evolution into resident-led efforts to advance community development**.

### How to Balance the Community as a Place of Residence and a Tourist Destination

A key feature of Miyama is that its beautiful natural environment, including Kayabuki no Sato, is **not only a tourist destination showcasing traditional culture but also a place where local residents live**. It is essential to protect the living environment of local residents while preserving the landscape and its richness for future generations. With this goal in mind, the **Nantan City Miyama Ecotourism Promotion Council was established in 2010, bringing together local businesses, Nantan City officials, and experts from relevant organizations**. In 2014, the **Overall Concept for Promoting Ecotourism was also certified by the Ministry of the Environment (No. 6 within Japan, and the first within the Kansai Region)**.

### Toward Securing Stable Funding to Ensure Sustainability

Under this Overall Concept for Promoting Ecotourism, promoting the tourism industry, including enhancement of tourism resources, development of visitor reception infrastructure, and dissemination of information, was essential to achieving both cultural preservation and landscape protection, as well as tourism-driven regional economic revitalization. **This led to the establishment in 2016 of the Kyoto Miyama Tourism Association (DMO), in cooperation with the Nantan City Miyama Ecotourism Promotion Council and the Miyama Tourism Association, with local residents and operators at its core**. This greatly strengthened the foundation for promoting the tourism industry.

▶ CLOSE UP 1

In addition, ensuring sustainable promotion of the tourism industry by the DMO requires the securing of stable funding. Consequently, initiatives were implemented to strengthen destination-based tours and educational travel, planned and operated by local residents, **as tourism products with a high rate of local procurement**.

▶ CLOSE UP 2

CLOSE UP

### 1 Responsible for a wide range of activities, from environmental management and industrial promotion to information dissemination

As a DMO, the Kyoto Miyama Tourism Association serves as a **core organization for promoting the tourism industry, undertaking activities such as enhancing the town's tourism resources and improving the visitor environment**. In addition, it is responsible for disseminating information within and beyond the region about the initiatives it implements and the tourism products it offers, including through a dedicated website on sustainable destination development. As a result of promoting these initiatives, media coverage has increased, contributing not only to attracting visitors but also to drawing in the businesses that play a key role in implementing initiatives and providing tourism products.

CLOSE UP

### 2 Destination-based content that achieves high procurement rate

The DMO took on the role of a land operator, implementing **destination-based tours and educational trips in Miyama that turn the activities themselves into experiential content, while strengthening the town's capacity to host these programs**. For educational homestays in particular, residents of Kayabuki no Sato were asked to host visitors, and **all tourism resources required for the initiative were sourced locally**. Additionally, **a mechanism was established to return approximately 70% of all revenue to the host families**. They also contribute to **landscape preservation** by allocating a portion of guided tour revenue to the conservation of thatched roofs, and by carrying out community activities, such as collective reed-cutting for thatching, in which local organizations, businesses, residents, and visitors work together.

#### Timeline of the Initiative



#### Results Achieved Through the Initiative

**Established a tourism promotion framework** in collaboration with local government, businesses, academic institutions, and resident organizations

**Implemented destination-based tours** with high local procurement rates, including educational homestays in which 70% of revenues are returned to host households

Backbone of the initiative and tourism products:  
**No. of accommodation providers: 23 ▶ 36** (increase: 13)  
**No. of facilities: 34 ▶ 50** (increase: 16)  
(Figures shown are comparisons between 2019 and 2025)

#### Future Initiatives

In promoting the sustainable development of tourism regions, challenges remain, including shortages of personnel in the tourism industry and securing funding for environmental conservation and landscape preservation. In particular, due to an aging population and declining numbers of residents, the region faces challenges such as an insufficient workforce to handle both peak and off-peak seasons, as well as limited growth in visitor spending caused by the high proportion of day-

trippers. Going forward, Miyama plans to continue maintaining forums such as its conferences in which local residents can participate in community development, and to use these forums to develop and evaluate plans such as the Tourism Vision. This will clarify the town's objectives, the initiatives to be implemented, and the stakeholders responsible, thereby supporting the promotion of the tourism industry.

### VOICE

Perspectives of Key Figures

**"Community development leads to destination management"**

Masaki Aota,  
Director, Miyama DMO (4th from the left in photo)



Receiving BTV certification helped foster awareness among local residents that sustainable community development leads to destination development. In addition, the establishment of a network among BTV regions has promoted the sharing of challenges and expertise, further clarifying their mission of sustainable community development through tourism.

# Uniting Islanders' Aspirations and Efforts

## Developing a Unified Operational Framework for Two Towns



Management

### Building the Operational Framework

Implementing Body

Shodoshima Town and Tonosho Town, Kagawa  
Shodoshima Tourism Association

Olive Navi Shodoshima, 1896-1 Ko, Nishimura, Shodoshima Town, Shozu District  
Tel: 0879-82-1775  
https://shodoshima.or.jp/



### From a Consumable Island to a Sustainable Island

Under the Shodoshima Tourism Vision, jointly formulated in 2024 by public and private stakeholders across the island, the goal of becoming “an island sustained by tourism rather than one consumed by tourism” has been established as the desired future state, and initiatives are being pursued accordingly.

### Coordination Between Two Towns as a Pathway to Solving Challenges

Shodoshima Island comprises two towns, Shodoshima Town and Tonosho Town, each of which has pursued its own distinct tourism policies. This led to a variety of challenges, such as visitors being confused by the presence of multiple tourism counters on the island, as well as the lack of coordination between the two towns. Moreover, declines in population and in visitor numbers due to COVID-19 heightened the island’s sense of urgency, not only for tourism, but for the island’s overall sustainability. It became clear that, to revive tourism, the island’s main industry, and to promote sustainable tourism development, the island needed to act in unison.

### Understanding the Current Situation and Challenges, and Shaping the Future Together

To support sustainable tourism initiatives in both towns, the Organization for Promotion of Tourism in SHIKOKU (Tourism Shikoku) engaged with Shodoshima Town. As a first step in its initiatives, Shodoshima Town applied for the Model Project to Promote Sustainable Tourism and was selected in 2021. The following year, Tonosho Town was also selected for the Model Project to Promote Sustainable Tourism, marking the official start of the initiatives. Assessments of Shodoshima’s current situation and challenges were conducted from the perspective of sustainable tourism, and planning for a tourism strategy was advanced, with GSTC training also held in each town. Through learning about GSTC standards and shifts in traveler awareness within the context of sustainable tourism trends, local government officials and tourism operators reaffirmed the importance of sustainable tourism. In addition, discussions were held to formulate a tourism vision for the two towns, and the initiatives to be undertaken once the towns acted in unison gradually became more concrete.

▶ CLOSE UP 1

### What Becomes Possible When Three Parties Act as One

In 2023, the island’s multiple tourism contact points were consolidated into the Shodoshima Tourism Association, and GSTC training was held jointly by both towns. The following year, the Shodoshima Tourism Vision was formulated as a unified tourism plan by Shodoshima Town, Tonosho Town, and the Shodoshima Tourism Association, establishing a tripartite framework for the sustainable development of tourism regions.

▶ CLOSE UP 2

With the island’s two towns acting in unison, stakeholder engagement and decision-making became smoother, accelerating initiatives for sustainable destination development. As a result, tangible achievements, such as obtaining international certification, have steadily accumulated, providing a foundation for future initiatives.

▶ CLOSE UP 3

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### 1 Steadily proceeding by building a clear understanding of the current situation and challenges

At the proposal and request of Tourism Shikoku, a situational assessment based on the Japan Sustainable Tourism Standard for Destinations (JSTS-D) was conducted in both towns. In 2021, challenges were re-acknowledged, including the need to develop a unified tourism plan for the two towns and the currently insufficient capacity to measure and publicize the economic impact of tourism. These initiatives and shared understandings have led to the formulation of a tourism vision and the submission of a DMO application from 2024 onward.

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### 2 Accelerating progress through a unified point of contact

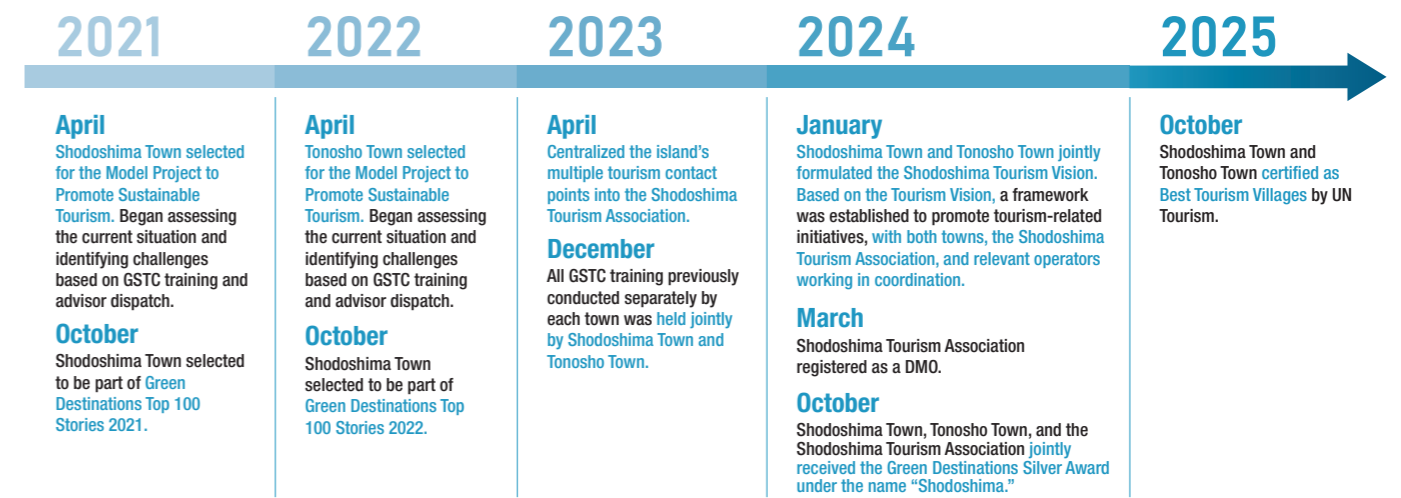
In consolidating the tourism contact point, the Shodoshima Tourism Association assumed the coordinating role, taking over the operations previously handled by the organizations that had served as points of contact. Under the guiding principle of “One Island,” this new framework accelerated progress. This enabled a smooth start to assessing the island-wide situation and identifying key challenges based on international standards for sustainable tourism.

CLOSE UP

### 3 Achieved firsts both in Shikoku and nationwide

Shodoshima took on the challenge of applying for the “Green Destinations Awards,” which recognize sustainable tourism destinations. Initiatives by a wide range of stakeholders, including local government, tourism associations, private-sector businesses, and resident organizations, were organized and clearly documented across fields such as the environment, socioeconomics, and culture and tradition, contributing to the award. In addition to being the first such award in Shikoku, this achievement also marked a national first, with both Shodoshima Town and Tonosho Town receiving the award together.

### Timeline of the Initiative



### Results Achieved Through the Initiative



### Future Initiatives

Based on the Shodoshima Tourism Vision, the island's public and private sectors will continue to work in unison on initiatives in the following 10 areas. (1) Promotion of sustainable tourism, (2) Attracting visitors from the Kansai region, (3) Attracting visitors during the winter season, (4) Strengthening the visitor reception framework with a view to expansion of inbound demand, (5) Strengthening film tourism, (6) Strengthening food tourism, (7) Strengthening sports tourism, (8) Improving

experience-based content unique to Shodoshima, (9) Installation of next-generation mobility facilities, (10) Promotion of private-sector investment to take advantage of unused facilities on the island. Additionally, as priority initiatives, they plan to introduce an accommodation tax by FY2028 to secure a stable source of funding, while giving precedence to improving secondary transport and securing human resources. They will also continue efforts to promote understanding of sustainable tourism.

### VOICE

Perspectives of Key Figures

“Working together for the benefit of the entire island”

Shodoshima Town / Tonosho Town / Shodoshima Tourism Association



While guided by the principle of “One Island,” each town has its own distinct tourism resources and challenges. To ensure alignment under these circumstances, it is important to maintain close communication among those in charge, prevent gaps in information sharing, and implement initiatives that, while maintaining balance, contribute to the overall benefit of the entire island. I think it was thanks to these continued initiatives that we were able to maintain the cooperation framework and relationships built on trust even when there were changes in the personnel in charge.

# Protecting the Island's Natural Environment, Culture, and Way of Life

## Introducing a Percentage-Based Accommodation Tax as a Stable Source of Independent Revenue



Management Socioeconomic

### Independent Tourism Revenue

Implementing Body

Yoron Town, Kagoshima

1418-1 Chabana, Yoron Town, Oshima District, Kagoshima  
Tel: 0997-97-3111  
<https://www.yoron.jp/default.html>



### Aiming for a Sustainability Cycle That Benefits All

The first step is to cultivate a stronger sense of pride and attachment to the island among residents. Next, the goal is to enhance visitor satisfaction and, in turn, promote the development of the tourism industry, thereby creating a win-win-win cycle. Yoron Town continues its efforts toward sustainable destination management, with the goal of becoming Japan's first GSTC-certified destination in sight.

### Promoting Development While Preserving Resources and Culture

There was a challenge faced by Yoron Town with its economy centered upon the tourism industry. Namely, how to balance development with preservation. While developing the tourism industry, it was also essential to preserve the island's rich natural environment and culture, as well as the way of life of its residents. The first initiatives launched to address these challenges were voluntary beach cleanup activities and coral reefs conservation efforts carried out by local residents. Subsequently, with support from local government and tourism associations, these activities expanded, marking the full-scale launch of initiatives toward sustainable development of tourism regions.

### Introduction of a Flat-Rate Accommodation Tax as a Stable, Independent Source of Funding to Sustain Activities

Sustaining these initiatives requires a stable, independent source of funding. Initially, entry fees and environmental conservation charges for Yurigahama Beach were also considered; however, because these would rely on levies collected from visitors to a specific area, there was a concern that they would not provide a stable and sustainable source of revenue. Furthermore, given that over 90% of visitors to Yoron Town require overnight accommodation, it was decided to introduce an accommodation tax. The 5% flat-rate system was chosen with the aim of covering the costs necessary for the intended purposes, while improving the quality of visitors given the island's limited capacity.

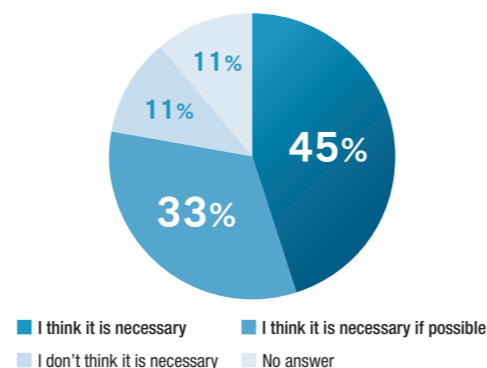
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### Building Understanding Through Close Communication with Operators

Multiple round-table discussions and small-group meetings were held in preparation for the introduction of an accommodation tax. With participation from members of the inn associations, valuable insights were also gained regarding on-site operations and the intended use of the tax. Close communication with operators helped build understanding of the introduction of the accommodation tax. However, many accommodation providers were uneasy about increased workload relating to tax collection, and so test experience sessions via a demonstrational app were conducted. Having accommodation providers gain hands-on experience allows them to gain a greater understanding of digitization, as well as provide feedback, including requests and suggestions for improvement.



The Need for New, Independent Revenue Sources  
(November 2024: Survey of accommodation providers)



CLOSE UP

### 1 Identifying challenges through interviews with local governments that have implemented an accommodation tax

Interviews focusing on practical challenges and considerations in setting the tax rate yielded valuable insights, such as, "When accommodation prices fluctuate significantly, the perceived burden differs between high-end hotels and homestays, making it challenging to explain the tax to operators," and "For long-stay facilities, the tax amount increases with the length of stay, which can lead to dissatisfaction among guests."

CLOSE UP

### 2 A 5% flat tax, based on its intended use

The local government calculated a flat 5% tax rate that would be acceptable to visitors while covering the costs necessary for sustainable initiatives, including resource conservation, improving convenience, developing future tourism stakeholders, and establishing a DMO framework. Even compared with cases overseas, this represents a comparable tax burden. Assuming a 5% accommodation tax and based on past visitor numbers, projected tax revenue is approximately 45 million yen, providing an important source of funding for initiatives. Although there were concerns that introducing an accommodation tax might reduce visitor numbers, a 2025 visitor survey found that over 90% of respondents supported the tax, indicating a strong level of acceptance.

### Timeline of the Initiative

2020-23 2024

2025

#### March 2020

Held the first study session on non-statutory purpose taxes and gathered input from local government and tourism stakeholders.

#### February 2023

Held the second study session on non-statutory purpose taxes with relevant administrative departments and tourism associations.

#### September

Held the third study session on non-statutory purpose taxes and conducted a survey to assess participants' understanding.

#### October

At the first review committee meeting, the merits, drawbacks, and primary intended uses of non-statutory purpose taxes, including entry fees, implemented in various regions were presented and discussed by tax type.

#### November

Interviews were conducted with a total of three regions implementing or considering non-statutory purpose taxes, and a visitor survey was carried out regarding their support for the tax and its intended uses.

At the second review committee meeting, presented survey results and interview findings from local governments that had already implemented non-statutory purpose taxes, covering tax rates, payment methods, and support for tax-collecting operators. The merits, drawbacks, and intended uses of each tax type were discussed, and the decision was made to move forward with consideration of implementing an accommodation tax.

First briefing for accommodation providers.

#### December

Conducted interviews with three local governments that have already introduced an accommodation tax, and three neighboring local governments that are considering its introduction.

Second briefing for accommodation providers.

Reported on review progress to all-members' council meeting.

#### January

To reduce the administrative burden on taxpayers responsible for collecting the tax, a demo app session was held to simulate the procedures required after the accommodation tax is implemented.

At the third meeting, discussed projected tax revenues based on a 5% flat rate, a proposed implementation schedule, and a draft ordinance.

#### March

Conducted a questionnaire survey of tourists on their understanding of the introduction of an accommodation tax, perceived burden of the proposed tax rate (5% flat rate), and potential impact on their decision to visit.

#### April

A total of eight small-scale round-table discussions, each with five or fewer participants, were held for all accommodation providers.

To promote understanding among accommodation providers and gather their feedback, local government officials and officers of the Ryokan Association coordinated to provide progress updates and facilitate discussions.

#### May

At the fourth review committee meeting, the draft ordinance and draft report were reviewed and finalized.

Submitted an advisory report to the mayor, based on the findings of the review committee's deliberations.

At the Tourism Association's general meeting, reported to tourism-related businesses (including accommodation providers) on the progress of the review committee's deliberations and the contents of its advisory report.

#### July onward

Reported on review progress to all-members' council meeting.

Held preliminary consultations with the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (MIC).

### VOICE

Perspectives of Key Figures

#### "First-hand experience helped build confidence"

Maki Yanagita, accommodation provider



I was worried about the extra work and complicated calculations involved in collecting and remitting the accommodation tax. But by taking part in the app's test experience sessions, I was able to understand the workflow and tasks required after implementation, and even came to feel that the digital system could be easier to use than handling cash. However, there are elderly members of staff, so I do feel there is a need to consider a broader range of ages.

### Results Achieved Through the Initiative

Selected to be part of Green Destinations Top 100 Stories 2021 and 2023

Briefings (round-table discussions etc.) were held for 38 of 45 accommodation providers, fostering a greater understanding of the accommodation tax implementation

After a total of four review committee meetings, an advisory report on the implementation of the accommodation tax was submitted (May 2025)

### Future Initiatives

Round-table discussions for the 2027 implementation of the accommodation tax are ongoing. Consideration of more substantive solutions is still needed to overcome concerns about increased workload from tax collection. Additionally, although the tax is planned as a 5% flat rate, Yoron Town intends to clarify its intended uses and present this information

to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications to demonstrate its validity. As many visitors to Yoron Town stay long-term, another challenge is to gain the acceptance of visitors on longer stays. Going forward, the town plans to work with local operators to explore solutions and continue advancing initiatives for sustainable destination development.

### “A switch to representation and sales: the key point is to focus on regular use”

For local communities that have participated in initiatives, the next step might be placing the focus on finding business partners to improve B2B sales. Appealing to overseas agents with accomplishments like international certification or GSTC training is also effective. In addition, focusing on things that are part of everyday life for local residents to develop selling points that integrate descriptions, experience, and sales will raise the added value of the content. In order to effectively involve relevant parties, communities should first have cooperation from supporters with a collaborative system already in place, concentrating to raise the value of the content and the region. Then, they should bring in participants who will flock to that value.



**Kazuhiro Arai**  
Representative Director  
Daisetsuzan Nature School

### Making Japan's Tourism Areas Sustainable

We asked six experts who have engaged up to now in supporting local communities in the “Model Project to Promote Sustainable Tourism” about the key points of what each community can do going forward to accelerate the sustainable development of tourism regions, based on regional realities pertaining to Japan's development of tourism regions and their knowledge in each of their specialized fields.

### “Using tourism as a way to develop communities: acting now with several generations in mind”

What results has tourism up to now produced for local communities? Local communities have made efforts with visitors in mind, like the establishment of ski slopes and golf courses some time ago, so they could welcome groups of tourists. Jobs were promised in exchange for investments in tangible assets, but the result was that local communities turned into tourist destinations that lost their individuality and became businesses that only cared about sales. The roots unique to local communities are the resources that attract tourists, so will tourism that jumps on the bandwagon of whatever sells really enrich these communities? The birth rate is dropping and the population aging more rapidly, and more residents are unaware of the value of their regions, so is it true that Japan's tourism industry cannot survive unless it relies on foreign visitors? Sustainable development of tourism regions means exploring ways to use tourism to aid in solving problems in local communities, and creating tourism that emphasizes quality over quantity, placing importance on the degree of contribution to the region and of resident support.



**Masaru Takayama**  
Chairperson  
Japan Alliance of Responsible Travel  
Agencies (JARTA)



**Takeshi Kitamura**  
Representative Director  
Sakura Quality Management Co., Ltd.

### “Protecting, sharing, and capitalizing on Japanese culture by appropriately managing KPIs”

Appropriately managing KPIs is the most important aspect of regional management for sustainable tourism. Appropriately managing KPIs will create opportunities to clarify what local communities want to represent, leading to the formation of stories for each region. I would like each region to clarify the story it wants to communicate to tourists through regional management, since there is a demand not only to protect Japanese culture but to capitalize on and share it. In addition, environmental initiatives can lead to sustainable regional development by appealing not only to businesses but also to tourists to preserve ecosystems, so I would like communities to strive with this awareness.



**Mami Futagami**  
Professor Emerita  
Faculty of Foreign Studies,  
Meijo University

### “Regional development in collaboration with stakeholders: the world will take an interest in Japanese tourism”

It is important for communities' existing efforts to reach a more advanced level. Until now, national initiatives (the introduction of the Japan Sustainable Tourism Standard for Destinations and the promotion of acquiring the JSTS-D logo) have granted incentives to local communities and cultivated opportunities for sustainable tourism. From now on, we are in an era in which the world will take an interest in how Japan will strive toward sustainable tourism. It is necessary to create a system that will allow local communities to continue their activities in collaboration with national policies, and I believe the key is continuing to approach stakeholders.

### “Promotion capability and profit generation are the keys to making the development of tourism regions sustainable”

After the system and basis for the development of sustainable tourism regions is in place, promotion capability and the ability to transform that into economic value are needed to proceed to the next step. The initiatives themselves will end without leading to sustainable development unless they take a concrete form, so it is extremely important to consider how to develop promotional activities and build a system to create earning power and money circulation. Refinement of content by region and attempts to create high-value products are underway, but a profit-generating system and public relations deployment will be the challenges going forward. I would like local communities to give more consideration to how to establish their own initiatives in the future.



**Hidetoshi Kobayashi**  
Guest Professor  
Center for Advanced Tourism Studies,  
Hokkaido University

### “Fostering common understanding between shareholders by building a logic model”

It is important to establish KGIs corresponding to the sustainable development of tourism regions as well as to establish the KSFs and KPIs necessary to achieve those KGIs, and to consider this goal by piecing together a business logic while creating a logic model demonstrating the relationship between those indicators. There are also precedents quantitatively demonstrating that accreditation of accommodation facilities and waste reduction lead to improved profits. Nurturing a common understanding between stakeholders, starting with sharing the merits of efforts toward sustainability, is also absolutely essential.



**Hideki Furuya**  
Professor  
Department of International Tourism  
Management, Toyo University

# List of Regions and Organizations That Have Acquired the Japan Sustainable Tourism Standard for Destinations (JSTS-D) Logo

(118 regions and organizations as of the end of December 2025)



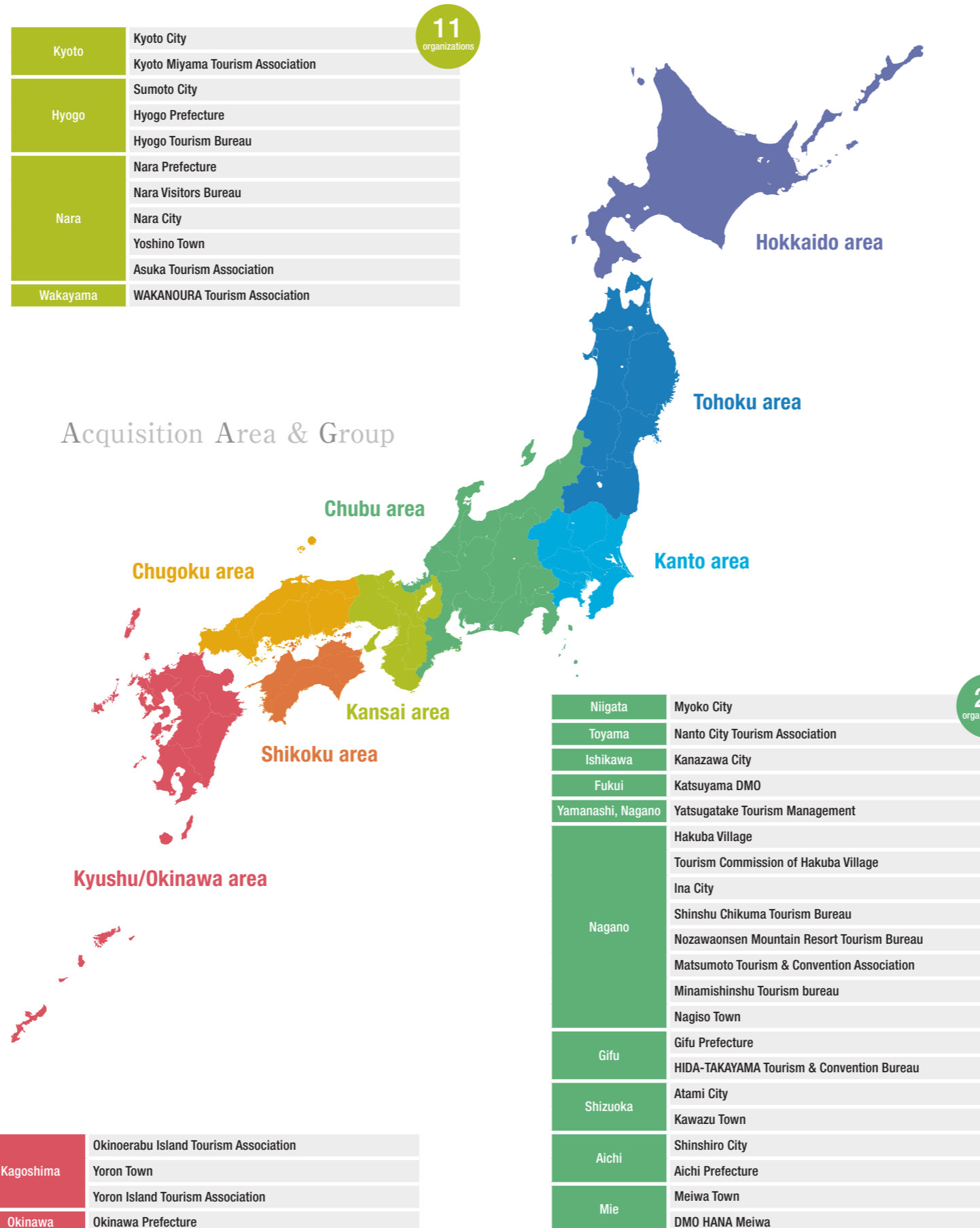
The Japan Sustainable Tourism Standard for Destinations (JSTS-D) Logo

The Japan Tourism Agency approves the use of the JSTS-D logo for regions and organizations that implement initiatives based on the JSTS-D. The JSTS-D logo can be used for external promotion and is expected to improve regional brand strength and international competitiveness.

Hyogo, Okayama, Hiroshima, Yamaguchi, Tokushima, Kagawa, Ehime	Setouchi Brand Corporation	14 organizations
	The Inland Sea, SETOUCHI Tourism Authority	
Tottori, Hyogo	Kirinnomachi Tourism Bureau	
Shimane	Matsue City	
	Oki Islands Geopark Management Bureau	
Okayama	Tsuyama City	
	Tsuyama City Tourism Association	
Hiroshima	Hatsukaichi City	
	Discover East-Hiroshima Inc.	
	Shobara Tourism Promotion Association	
	Miyoshi Tourism Authority (Miyoshi DMO)	
Yamaguchi	Tourism KURE	
	Nagato City	
	Hagi Tourism Association	

Kyoto	Kyoto City	11 organizations
	Kyoto Miyama Tourism Association	
Hyogo	Sumoto City	
	Hyogo Prefecture	
Nara	Hyogo Tourism Bureau	
	Nara Prefecture	
	Nara Visitors Bureau	
	Nara City	
	Yoshino Town	
Wakayama	Asuka Tourism Association	
	WAKANOURA Tourism Association	

## Acquisition Area & Group



Hokkaido	Otaru City	19 organizations
	Furano City	
	Niseko Town	
	Teshikaga Town	
	Sapporo City	
	Biei Town	
	AKAN Tourism Association	
	STAY BIBAI DMO	
	Akaigawa International Resort Promotion Association	
	Lake Mashu Tourism Association	
	Wakkanai Tourism Association	
	Taisetsu Kamuimintara DMO	
	Nanae Onuma International Tourism and Convention Association	
	Niseko Promotion Board	
	Abashiri City Tourist Association	
	karch Co., Ltd.	
Obihiro City		
Tsurui Village		
Kutchan Tourism Association		

Tokushima, Kagawa, Ehime, Kochi	Organization for Promotion of Tourism in SHIKOKU	18 organizations
	Miyoshi City	
Tokushima	East Tokushima Tourism Authority	
	Minami Awa Tourism Bureau	
	Marugame City	
Kagawa	Mitoyo City	
	Tonosho Town	
	Shodoshima Town	
	Shodoshima Tourism Association	
Ehime	Imabari City	
	KITA MANAGEMENT	
	Kumakogen Town	
	Uchiko Town	
Kochi	Uchiko Tourism Association	
	Kuroshio Town	
	Kuroshio Town Tourism Network	
	Hata Region Tourism Bureau	
	Tsuno Town	

Aomori	Shirakami Tourism Co.	13 organizations
Iwate	Kamaishi City, Kamaishi DMC Ltd.	
	Tono City	
Miyagi	Higashimatsushima City	
	Sendai Tourism, Convention and International Association	
	Shiogama City	
	Zao Town	
Akita	Akita Inu Tourism	
Yamagata	Iide Town	
	Obanazawa City	
	Yamagata City	
Fukushima	Koriyama City	
	Aizuwakamatsu City	

Fukuoka, Yamaguchi	KANMON DMO (KANMON Straits Tourism Association)	11 organizations
	Yanagawa City Tourism Association	
Fukuoka	Aso City	
Kumamoto	Oita Prefecture	
Oita	Hyuga City	
Miyazaki	Amami Oshima Tourism and Products Federation	
Kagoshima	Kagoshima Convention & Visitors Bureau	

Kagoshima	Okinoerabu Island Tourism Association	11 organizations
	Yoron Town	
	Yoron Island Tourism Association	
Okinawa	Okinawa Prefecture	

Niigata	Myoko City	21 organizations
	Nanto City Tourism Association	
Toyama	Kanazawa City	
Ishikawa	Katsuyama DMO	
Fukui	Yatsugatake Tourism Management	
Yamanashi, Nagano	Hakuba Village	
	Tourism Commission of Hakuba Village	
	Ina City	
	Shinshu Chikuma Tourism Bureau	
	Nozawaonsen Mountain Resort Tourism Bureau	
	Matsumoto Tourism & Convention Association	
	Minamishinshu Tourism bureau	
Nagano	Nagiso Town	
	Gifu Prefecture	
	HIDA-TAKAYAMA Tourism & Convention Bureau	
Gifu	Atami City	
Shizuoka	Kawazu Town	
	Shinshiro City	
Aichi	Aichi Prefecture	
Mie	Meiwa Town	
	DMO HANA Meiwa	

Tochigi	Nasushiobara City	11 organizations
	Nasu Tourism Association	
Saitama	Chichibu Area Tourism Organization	
	Kawagoe City	
Chiba	Abiko City	
Tokyo	Sumida City	
	Sumida Tourism Association	
	Ome City	
Kanagawa	Miura Peninsula Tourism Association	
	Hakone Tourist Association	
	Kamakura City	