2020 TOP 100 GOOD PRACTICE STORY

Title of the Story: Niseko Rules

Destination Name: (include any state, province or region)
Niseko Town, Hokkaido

Country: Japan

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Nomination Category: (Please check the boxes that indicate the focus of your story)
☐ Culture & Communities
☐ Environment & Climate
☒ Nature & Ecotourism
☐ Islands & Seaside
☐ Immediate responses in dealing with the COVID-19
☐ Post COVID-19 recovery
☐ One of the 17 SDGs* (if yes, which one) Click or tap to choose

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

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

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Address each aspect of your good practice story in the different sections being specific including relevant quantitative and qualitative information.

**Issues faced**

Niseko, with its lush natural environment and scenic view of Mount Yotei, is an internationally renowned resort with excellent powder snow. Mt. Niseko Annupuri (1,308m) is located at the base of the Niseko Shakotan-Otaru Coastal National Park, about 100km south of Sapporo, and at the eastern end of the Niseko mountain range, which extends from the Sea of Japan. With five ski resorts (Niseko Hanazono Resort, Niseko Mountain Resort Grand Hirafu, Niseko Village Ski Resort, Niseko Annupuri Ski Resort, and Niseko Moiwa Ski Resort), its rich terrain and beautiful winter forests, it offers the best skiing experience for beginners and experts alike.

On the other hand, as blizzards from the Sea of Japan bring moderately wet but firm snow that is ideal for new runs, many skiers in Niseko began to go out of the roped areas to look for fresh snow. Such back country skiing became common despite the avalanche threats in the area. Since the 1980s, as the number of skiers increased, so did the number of fatal accidents involving skiers entering off-course areas. This became a long-lasting problem. In 1984, a liaison council for safe use of the Niseko ski area was established and measures were discussed. The ski resorts increased their patrols and broadcasted warnings, but the accidents continued year after year, and neither the ski resorts nor the government could find any effective means to deal with the problem.

**Methods, steps and tools applied**

While many local officials were concerned about the spate of accidents, it was Akio Shinya, a lodge owner and adventurer in Niseko Town, who led the effort to address the issue. Since 1994, Mr. Shinya has been providing avalanche information to ski resorts. Starting in 1995, he also organized "avalanche meetings" led by the private sector to debate counter measures. The meetings were held to discuss how to protect the safety of ski area users while respecting their skiing freedom. After lengthy discussions, the "Niseko Local Rules" were created in 2001 (renamed the "Niseko Rules" in 2008) to allow off-course skiing with conditions, rather than simply banning it. The Niseko Rules were posted around each ski resort in multiple languages, and information from the Niseko Avalanche Institute was sent out every morning. Exits from the slopes to the "back country" are limited to gates set up in each ski area. This ensures that the minimum rules are followed to avoid hazards while still opening up the off-course areas.

**Key success factors**
1. The avalanche meetings were led by the private sector, which contributed diverse opinions to the development of the Niseko Rules.
2. The rules respect skiers' freedom to ski off-course with conditions.
3. The establishment of the rules enhance skiers' safety.
4. The rules are written in multiple languages to meet the demands of foreign tourists.

Lessons learned
Although many people have different viewpoints regarding the Niseko Rules, the reason the rules work is because of their fairness. The rules do not discriminate between skiers based on knowledge, experience, nationality, age or equipment. As long as they are followed, everyone has an equal opportunity to ski fresh snow off the slopes. Just "banning" does not eliminate accidents and does not solve the problem. The rules have won the support of users because they respect the users' freedom while protecting their safety. The creation, communication, and regulation of Niseko's own rules and regulations has enhanced the Niseko brand. The "Avalanche Meetings" are still held today and serve as a space where skiers, snowboarders and other community members work together to ensure safety by balancing freedom of skiing and accident prevention.

Results, achievements and recognitions
Since the enactment of the Niseko Rules, there have been no accidents that have resulted in fatalities. The Niseko Rules have increased confidence in the safety of the area, and the Niseko's popularity has grown even more among novice and family visitors alike. The Niseko Rules were created as a result of a private sector initiative, but even Niseko Town recognizes them as a regional rule. The Niseko Avalanche Institute was established in 2002 to investigate avalanches in the Niseko Annupuri area, and has since stepped up its efforts to ensure safety. Starting with the 2020-2021 season, helmets and beacons will be made mandatory. Niseko Town supports the activities of the Niseko Avalanche Institute and Niseko Annupuri Area Avalanche Prevention Council, which is consisted of stakeholders of ski resorts. Through initiatives including dissemination of Niseko Rules and delivering information that is as accurate as possible, Niseko Town and stakeholders have been continuously working on skiers’ safety while respecting their freedom.

Additional references
*Multilingual rules posted (See attachment no.1_reference1&2 )
*Mr. Akio Shinya https://www.town.niseko.lg.jp/iju/role_model/case3/
*Avalanche meeting https://www.town.niseko.lg.jp/information/2603/
*Information from Niseko Avalanche Institute http://niseko.nadare.info/