



2020 TOP 100 GOOD PRACTICE STORY

Title of the Story: Destination Risk Management by Shirakawa-go community

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

Shirakawa-go Gassho-zukuri Village, a World Heritage Site,

Country: Japan

Submitter name: Ozaki Tatsuya

Email address: ozakitatsuya1102@gmail.com

Position: Assistant Director of Tourism Promotion Division, Shirakawa Village Office

Nomination Category: *(Please check the boxes that indicate the focus of your story)*

- Culture & Communities
- Environment & Climate
- Nature & Ecotourism
- Islands & Seaside
- Immediate responses in dealing with the COVID -19
- Post COVID -19 recovery
- One of the 17 SDGs* *(if yes, which one)* Click or tap to choose

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

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

Find detailed instructions for submitting good practices [here](#)



DESCRIBE YOUR GOOD PRACTICE STORY

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

Issues faced

In the Shirakawa-go Gassho-zukuri Village, a World Heritage Site, there are 114 thatched Gassho-zukuri houses, 59 of which are main houses used as the living quarter. These houses have been preserved since conservation activities has started with the establishment of the "Preservation Society for the Natural Environment in Shirakawa-go Ogimachi Gassho-zukuri Village" in 1971. Along with natural disasters, people have long feared the fire. The Gassho-zukuri Village, as wooden houses with thatched roofs, has a particular high fire risk. If a fire breaks out, it can spread quickly to the other houses, causing a serious damage to the entire community. In fact, in the past several such large fires have occurred that threatened the whole community. For this reason, the village residents have always taken great care in handling of fire.

Year	Village	Extent of damage
1872	Iijima	9 houses lost
1883	Uchigato	A family resident
1887	Kazura	a temple
1887	Kitani	6 out of 7 houses lost
1890	Iijima	19 houses lost
1894	Ogimachi	4 houses, 2 storage lost
1896	Iijima	4 including a temple
1909	Kazura	A family resident
1912	Iijima	57 houses, extending to neighbouring village
1924	Kitani	6 houses lost
1928	Ogami	A family resident
1938	Koshirakawa	10 complex including 8 houses

Methods, steps and tools applied

In the Shirakawa-go Gassho-zukuri Village (Ogimachi), a World Heritage site, the fire patrol as a precautionary measure has been conducted four times a day since long ago. The first round, "Hino ban (Fire Watch)", is held from about 10:00 a.m. to midday, when each patrol group (like a neighborhood watch group) go around the village. The second and the third rounds, "yomawari (Night Watch)", held in the evening and at night. Both "Fire Watch" and "Night Watch" groups walk around the village, beating the clapsticks and calling out, "watch fire", reminding the residents to be careful with the fire. The final one is done around 11 p.m called "Omawari (Big Patrol)" and each group go around the village in pairs, beating the clapsticks. At that time, the persons in charge of the patrol on that day take out a stamp from a box placed at six different locations at each end of the village and stamp on the note and take over to the person who will patrol the next day. This careful patrol is done every single day of the year.

Official YouTube channel [「SHIRAKAWA-GO _ promotional video」](#)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LJgixi1R_C4&list=PL12Lcvy-Bz9IWv66nXetKgZM9yRJR8fiS&index=3



A number of other measures have been taken to protect the thatched Gassho houses from the fire. Over the six years from 1977 to 1981, and to 1989, 273 million yen was invested to equip the village with fire hydrants facilities, including 59 water cannons, which can reach 30m, using the 80-meter-long natural down-flow gun from a 600-ton water reservoir using the abundant water stored in the mountains. Local residents have been practicing water discharge training every year since the first drill in 1987 to ensure that they are fully prepared to deal with emergencies.

40mm Water spray gun with fire hydrant	59 pieces
65mm Outdoor fire hydrant	34 pieces
40mm Indoor fire hydrant	28 pieces
Water tank natural flow pressure type 60t	1 piece

Official YouTubeChannel 『SHIRAKAWA-GO _ promotional video』

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=okRaa_d2z-0&list=PL12Lcvy-Bz9IWv66nXetKgZM9yRJR8fjS&index=4

Official You Tube Channel 『Shirakawa Village』

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=36&v=po4SpMhCr_o&feature=emb_title

Key success factors

In November 2019, a fire broke out in a shed in the parking lot located 500 meters from Shirakawa-go Gassho-zukuri-Village, which destroyed two huts. The village, which is visited by about 2.15 million tourists a year, was temporarily in turmoil, but the fire was contained in about an hour, and no one was injured. Residents immediately discharged the water using all 59 water cannons, and 114 Gassho houses were survived without any damage. The fire sparks on the roof would have been a major fire hazard, but the residents' high awareness of fire prevention and the constant training prevented the fire from spreading. The firefighting drills training conducted among residents every year helped the residents to act quickly.

Life in the Shirakawa-go Gassho-zukuri Village has been maintained through the cooperation of individual households since ancient times. The villages are located in the mountainous areas and residents are isolated from each other especially during winter with heavy snow. Shirakawa-go Gassho-zukuri Village, where the natural conditions are severe, there are many opportunities for communal activities in various aspects of life throughout the year. Mutual cooperation is needed and unique relationship of mutual aid has been established in Shirakawa-go Gassho-zukuri Village. Such relationship helps quick response to disasters seen in this case.

In order to preserve the historic landscape and life with Gassho-zukuri style architecture in Ogimachi ward, "Resident's Charter" based on three principles of "not to sell" "not to lend" and "not to destroy" was formulated in 1971. Since then, preservation activities have become part of the villagers' daily life. The principle of "not to destroy" includes renovation and disaster prevention. Patrol of the area by residents on duty system and installation of 59 water cannons in Ogimachi ward are part of such preservation activities. In addition, the simultaneous discharge of water cannons during the annual fire prevention campaign in the late fall, which has become popular among the tourists as one of the Shirakawa-go Gassho-zukuri Village seasonal events, is an important part of the firefighting drill training.

Lessons learned



Once in the past, a fire broke out when a firework display fell onto the roof of a Gassho-zukuri house. Nowadays, the use of fireworks, including sparklers, is banned in the Ogimachi ward, where the World Heritage site is located, and signs prohibiting bonfires and smoking are posted on the thatched-roof buildings. On the busy days during summer holidays in July when many tourists visit, the firefighting team is assigned to patrol the area to alert tourists about the importance of heritage preservation and fire prevention.

The basis of these preservation activities is the strong community bond called "yui" that has been passed down from generation to generation in Shirakawa-go Gassho-zukuri Village. The village's culture and natural landscape have been preserved by the "unity and cooperation" of residents of the village, which have allowed the area's natural and cultural conservation, while maintaining the popularity among the tourists.

Strong bond "Yui" in Shirakawa-go Gassho-zukuri Village
<http://kankou.shirakawa-go.org/siru/760/>

Results, achievements and recognitions

In addition to fire-prevention equipment such as water cannons and fire hydrants, the community works on daily night watch and regular emergency drills. As the result, there were no significant fires in recent years.

Shirakawa Gassho-zukuri Village has become even more conscious of preserving its natural resources in the wake of the November 2019 fires. With the full implementation of the revised Health Promotion Law, Shirakawa Village and Philip Morris Japan signed a comprehensive agreement to reduce the fire risk and unwanted passive smoking. As of April 2020, new smoking regulation is being implemented, including the installation of smoking areas for heated cigarettes. This public and private partnership is extending to other initiatives that aim to preserve the Shirakawa-go Gassho-zukuri Village to the future as an universal asset.

The dedicated smoking area for heated cigarettes is designed not to interfere with the original townscape of the Ogimachi traditional buildings preservation area. In addition, the map and manner guidebook, which lists dedicated smoking areas for heated cigarettes, has been revamped to change the smoking environment. Shirakawa village hopes to create a place where local residents and tourists can coexist in harmony while raising awareness of environmental protection among the local community and the tourists.

<https://prtimes.jp/main/html/rd/p/000000020.000043993.html>

Additional references

Provide links to further information. Pictures and videos should be available for download either from Youtube, Vimeo or other Cloud-based (Google/ One Drive) download URL.

