

Community Development in Yufuin-cho. District of Yufu City (Former Yufuin Town)

Introduction

Until the mid-1940s, Yufuin was a small rustic hot spring area. In 1955, Yufuin Town and neighboring Yunohira Village merged together to create new Yufuin Town, whose Japanese kanji spelling was a hybrid of the two merger partners' names as it began with the "Yu" character taken from Yunohira Village, instead of the one that featured in old Yufuin

Town. On October 1, 2005, Yufuin Town was involved in a wide-area municipal merger and became a district of Yufu City (Yufuin-cho). (Although Yufuin-cho is more like a super-district as it contains all the sub-municipal districts of former Yufuin Town, which are now sub-municipal districts of Yufu City, it is referred to as a "district" here for the sake of simplicity.) Former Yufuin Town was 128 km² in size and had a population of 11,402 (as of October 1, 2004).

Rising above the district as its symbol is Mt. Shuho Yufu, (1584m), dubbed "Bungo Fuji" for its Mt. Fuji-like appearance, with the Yufuin basin, famous for its morning fog, stretching from the foot of it. Hot springs well up across the basin, and the combined hot spring discharge of the district is said to be second, largest in the country.

Yufuin used to be a rustic hot spring area, which was totally overshadowed by neighboring Beppu, a major hot spring resort and entertainment area. The catchword of community development in Yufuin was: "Let's not become a little Beppu. Let's not become an entertainment-oriented hot spring resort."

Back then, community development leaders adopted "environmentally-friendly healing community development - a health and relaxation-oriented hot spring resort" as the guiding principle of community development.

Today, Yufuin is visited by a vast number of tourists (3,884 million in 2004), and is particularly popular with women.

Since October 2005, Yufuin has been the chief location site of a TV drama called "Kazeno Haruka", which is showing on the main Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK) channel, putting it in the national 'tourism spotlight.

1. Historical Background of Community Development

1970 The construction of a golf course in the Inosedo swamp, which spread from Yufuin Town to neighboring Beppu City, was proposed. A movement against golf course construction was launched to “protect these beautiful flowers”. The movement focused on the environmental issue of the protection of precious vegetation in the Inosedo swamp.

A questionnaire-based awareness strategy named “Questionnaire to 100 Local Dignitaries” proved successful.

The Association for Protecting the Nature of Yufuin was established under the Yufuin Hot Spring Tourism Association.

1971 The Association for Giving Thought to Tomorrow’s Yufuin, which was geared towards debating the nature and landscape of Yufuin as a community-wide issue, was launched.

Early June 1971 Three community development leaders left for Badenweiler, a German tourist town with a population of 4000, for an approximately 50 day-long study tour.

The travel, which cost ¥700,000, was paid for with a loan secured by nominating President Iwao of the agricultural cooperative as guarantor. The Town Government provided each participant with a 100,000-yen grant.

The three leaders were very inspired by the owner of their hotel in Badenweiler, who was also a member of the town assembly, and it is not an overstatement to say that those inspired moments made today’s Yufuin possible.

“For a town, the most important things are vegetation, space and tranquility. How much effort are you putting in to create, foster and protect them? You? You? and You?”

The faces of the three visitors turned red at the hotel owner’s question. It really fired them up.

Seven years later, they visited Germany again, this time as part of a two dozen-member group headed by the Mayor of Yufuin Town. The hotel owner, who was sick in bed, was delighted to see the three come back to his town with their colleagues. Filled with emotion, they recorded some of his words as follows:

“You kept your promise. You’ve started walking along a long road. ... It is important that as many people as possible have a look at other towns. They then need to meet the “earnest souls” who make those towns what they are.”

- 1972 The Association for Giving Thought to Tomorrow's Yufuin launched the One Cow Ranch Movement to help sustain local animal husbandry, which protected Yufuin's green fields.
<Information transmitted across the country >
- In a bid to increase the number of cattle to help protect these green fields, the movement recruited urban residents as joint owners of cattle for 200,000 yen per investment unit, and sent them Yufuin's local specialties each year as a substitute for interest. (A hundred and ten people became owners.)
- July 1975 Horse-drawn cabs were introduced in Yufuin.
<In April 1975, the Great Central Oita Earthquake hit the area. As the premature image of devastated Yufuin tourism somehow got out, the Tourism Association scrambled to action to keep the tourism torch alight in Yufuin.>
- August 1975 First Yufuin Music Festival.
A "Concert under The Stars" was held. This later developed into the Yufuin Music Festival.
- October 1975 Barbecue and Shouting Contest.
- August 1976 First Yufuin Film Festival.
<Media coverage was actively sought to obtain maximum free advertising.>
- November 1979 Governor Hiramatsu of Oita Prefecture proposed the One Village One Product Movement.
- November 1979 A six-member Japanese taiko drum band called "Yufuin Genryu Daiko" was formed.
- October 1981 Yufuin was designated as a national health promotion hot spring resort by the Environment Agency.
- November 1981 The Yufuin Hot Spring Tourism Association received the Outstanding Contribution to the One Village One Product Movement Award in recognition of its activities relating to the One Cow Ranch Movement. (Oita Prefecture One Village One Product 21 Promotion Commendation Program)
- March 1982 The Yufuin Film Festival won the Japanese Film Pen Club Award.

- October 1982 Yufuin received the Suntory Local Culture Award and the Western Japan Culture Award for "nature and culture-oriented community development".
- 1983 Yufuin received the Minister of Home Affairs Award for "a pleasant and relaxing town".
- December 1986 Yufuin received the Excellence Award in the Rural Village Amenity Contest (commendation by the Director-General of the National Land Agency).
- September 1990 Establishment of the Pleasant and Relaxing Town Development Ordinance.
- April 1991 Establishment of the Yufuin Human Resource Development Foundation with an endowment of ¥100 million.
- February 1997 Yufuin received the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Award for a thriving animal husbandry village.

2. Economic Statistics of Former Yufuin Town

Former Yufuin Town's Gross Agricultural Production, Merchandise Sales and Number of Tourists

Item / Fiscal year	1970	1980	1990	2000
Value of gross agricultural production (million yen)		1,191	1,543	1,610
Value of merchandise sales (million yen)		5,319	9,187	11,708
Number of tourists (1000)	1,097	1,899	3,621	3,843

3. Tourist Survey Results

Repeaters	60%
Women	70%
Lone tourist or group of up to four	80%
Want to come again	90%

Note: A 1998 survey of 2000 tourists conducted by the Yufuin Hot Spring Tourism Association

4. Contributing Factors to Successful Community Development in Yufuin

- (1) There were active and enthusiastic leaders who acted as the instigators of community development.
- (2) Three community leaders underwent progressive-area training in Badenweiler, Germany.
- (3) The public and private sectors made concerted efforts under a private-sector initiative.
- (4) Various “handcrafted” events aimed at invigorating the community were planned and put into practice, and efforts are ongoing.
- (5) Efforts are made to get a lot of interesting local information out across the country on an ongoing basis.

The longevity of the events geared towards community development and invigoration deserves special mention, with 2005 marking the 31st cycle for the Yufuin Music Festival and the Barbecue and Shouting Contest and the 30th cycle for the Yufuin Film Festival. In addition to existing events, new cultural events, including the Yufuin Documentary Film Festival and the Yufuin Children’s Film Festival, have been introduced.

5. Future of Yufuin

“Yufuin is now at the crossroads as large-scale investors and developers are making inroads into it, threatening the traditional Yufuin style.”

“The people of Yufuin have overcome numerous challenges before. There is no end to community development. To ensure the survival of the Yufuin style, the fruit of our labor of love, into the future, we must continue creating and improving things of real substance.”

<Words of Mr. Kunpei Mizoguchi, a Yufuin representative at the International One Village One Product Seminar in Xian>

In 1979, then Governor Hiramatsu, who proposed the One Village One Product Movement, praised community development in Yufuin as a model of the movement.

He identified the cultivation of community leaders, which was essential for community development, as one of the three principles of the One Village One Product Movement.