

Baishihu, Taiwan

TEAM - Together Everyone Achieves More

Introduction

At 70 hectares in size, Baishihu, an out-of-ways farm village nestled in the mountainous, northeastern corner in Neihu District has sustained itself with growing rice, tea and tangerines for about 200 years. Yet with the shift in economic activities and the promise of better living in the fast-expanding city nearby, youths in Baishihu began to emigrate elsewhere. With no one to work the farms, the community deteriorated and the farms were left to rot.

Years of neglect turned out to be a blessing in disguise for the rolling hills around Baishihu: the natural landscape, wildlife habitats and historic relics were left undisturbed. Inspired by the potential of these resources and a hope to revive the place they called home, a group of concerned citizens set up a "Baishihu Community Development Committee" in 2007 to help turn over a new leaf for their homestead. The project attracted attention and support from the Taipei City Government and a year later, the joint effort of private citizens and the public sector began to bear fruit. Baishihu is now a paragon of environmentally-sustainable, community-based industries that empower the locals and encourage eco-tourism.

1. Enhancement of the Natural and Built Landscape

Ecological engineering was the core of the landscape improvement project co-piloted by the Development Committee and the government. Residents chose locally-sourced raw materials to build new facilities, encourage new industrial development without distressing the natural environment. Private landowners volunteered their lands to facilitate landscaping projects for the public, saving the government tremendous expenses to expropriate idle properties.

2. Arts, Culture and Heritage

Baishihu's historic and natural relics are celebrated for the folk tales associated with them. In preserving these wonderful tourist resources, the Community Development Committee organizes various festivals, fairs and temple parades to encourage resident participation in community projects. These initiatives - including eco-friendly art workshops, handicraft displays - are widely supported by community elders.

3. Environmental Best Practices

The community has designated the first Sunday as the environmental day to address waste and sewage problems caused by a new influx of tourists. On that day, residents gather to clean their mountains and rivers as part of a hiking trip to both better their environment and encourage physical activity.

4. Community Participation and Empowerment

The Community Development Committee started out in 2007 with just 55 members, but the number of participants began to rise over the years and their age noticeably younger. Committee members also collaborated with government agencies to renovate their homestead. To the pleasant surprise of the community, the project also inspired participation from the younger generations who have emigrated to the city.

5. Healthy Lifestyle

Pesticides used to be in prevalent use in Baishihu, a farming village that could no longer stand up to the price-driven market economy. Worst of all, the elderly farmers began to suffer from the extensive use of pesticides. To save their farms, the Development Committee began to promote organic farming in the community, and the number of farmers grew to apply for organic farming certification.

6. Strategic Planning

Knowing that they have the full power to turn things around for their hometown, residents in Baishihu formed a “Community Cultural Task Force” with the help of the community college, focusing on heightening consensus and teamwork to encourage residents in the community to better understand the history, the culture, and the ecological makeup of their home in hopes of training capable, grassroots community reform guides. With a consensus in place, the Task Force sought support from the Taipei City Government to promote agricultural improvement projects, acquire lands from private owners, set up tourist hotspots and increase employment.