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## Study on the Current Status and Problems of Green Tourism in Japan

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study is to clarify how the municipal governments and private organizations throughout the country are currently dealing with green tourism projects through questionnaires and interviews and to examine the associated problems. The results of this study indicate that green tourism projects have helped stabilize and improve agricultural and forestry productivity and develop and introduce new farm products in suburban villages. In addition, green tourism projects have been, to some extent, as a measure in preventing the thinning-out of population in rural areas. To solve the problems, it is important to consider the possibility of designing green tourism activities as a part of exchange programs with urban cities, as well as attracting ordinary travellers. Additionally, it is also crucial to take into consideration possible measures to design green tourism activities to utilize run-down farm and forest lands for proper management to increase their productivity, to increase job opportunities to keep for young people in rural areas, and to find people newly engaged in farming and forestry.

### Study Goal

Recently, with the decline in the economic infrastructure in the agricultural, forestry, and fishing industries, rural areas have been becoming depopulated and face aging problem. As a result, economic activities in these areas have decreased markedly. In Europe, green tourism activities have been long considered as a means to stimulate economic activity in rural areas, and so they have been carried out enthusiastically. In Japan, on the other hand, green tourism activities such as participatory experiences in farming started in the beginning of the 1970's. The Ministry of Agricultural, Forestry, and Fisheries released the interim report giving a "Recommendation for participation in green tourism activities - Take holidays in rural areas for your relaxation." After the release of this report, regulations on green tourism were introduced, but green tourism projects have been still in the development stage. This study, therefore, aims at understanding how the municipal governments and private organizations are currently dealing with green tourism projects and then clarifying the problems that they are facing.

### Method of Investigation and Analysis

To define the term "Green Tourism" in this study, definitions of green tourism were extracted from various related literature. Their definitions are shown in the Table 1. Based on

these definitions, green tourism can be defined in this study as the tourist business which offers outdoor and indoor activities to urban residents by utilizing local natural resources and attractions in order to stimulate economic activities in rural areas. First, questionnaires were prepared based on this definition, covering quantitative information on the purpose of green tourism activities and their impact, participants in these activities, utilization of natural resources, and attractions and improvement of facilities. They were mailed to 150 municipal governments and private organizations. Among them, 89 were member of the Refresh Village Committee and the rest were the ones which appeared on the literature surveyed. The total eligible response rate was 49.3 %. The respondents were classified into two groups; those which started the projects before 1991 and those which started them after 1992. These two group classifications were also divided into two groups; specified rural areas and suburban villages. The four groups were analyzed by using the matrix method to make comparisons with one another.

Table 1. Definitions of green tourism

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
Henri Grolleau	⊙	⊙	⊙						
Yorimitsu Ryozo	⊙	⊙	⊙			⊙			⊙
Inoue Kazuei	⊙					⊙			⊙
Countryside Commission/England		⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙			
Ministry of Agricultural, Forestry, and Fisheries	⊙	⊙	⊙		⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙

A : Local residents take the leading part

C : Improve the value of host areas

E : Carry out natural environment-friendly development

G : Utilize exchange programs with urban cities

I : Carry out green tourism activities in rural areas rich in nature and cultural heritage

B : Stimulate local economic activities

D : Help conserve the natural environment

F : Utilize the natural resources and local attractions

H : Help travellers enjoy rural life

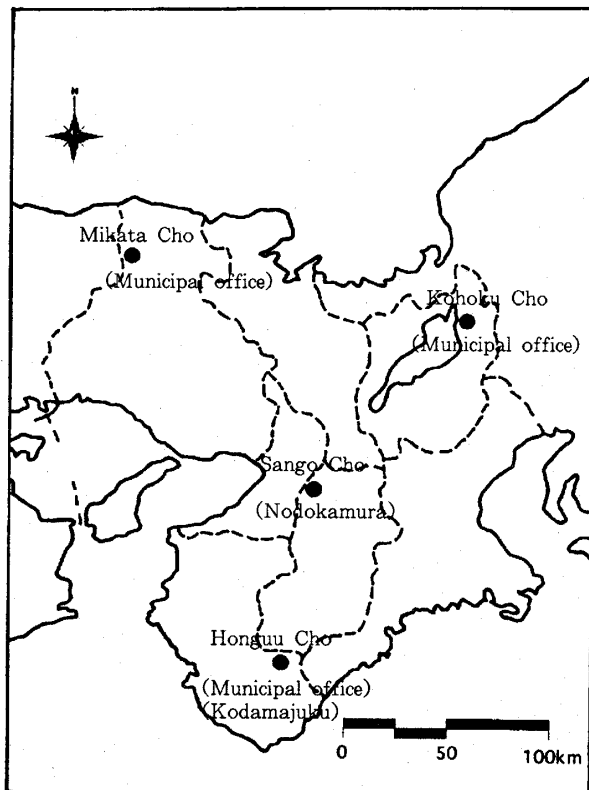


Fig. 1. Areas for case study.

Second, the case study was carried out. Mikata Cho (Hyogo Prefecture) and Honguu Cho (Wakayama Prefecture) were selected among the specified rural area groups. Sango Cho (Nara Prefecture) and Kohoku Cho (Siga Prefecture) were selected among the suburban village groups. Interviews with the persons in charge of green tourism projects in the municipal governments and representatives of private organizations were conducted in December 1996 (See Fig. 1) to collect quantitative information on their roles and problems, change in the direction of the project, and the impact of green tourism activities. Data obtained was analyzed using the KJ method.

### The current status of green tourism activities through questionnaires

#### (1) *The purpose of green tourism activities and their impact*

Fig. 2 shows purpose of green tourism projects. In both groups, an increase in the sales of specialties in local areas (60 %) and an increase in job opportunities (46 %) are shown. They indicate that stimulation of economic activities seems to be a result of green tourism activities. In the specified rural area group, prevention of the outflow of young people to urban areas (25 %) is remarkably higher, compared with the suburban village group. On the other hand, development and cultivation of new farm products and improvement in agricultural and forestry infrastructure are 16 to 18 % higher in the suburban village group than in the specified rural area group.

Fig. 3 shows the impact of green tourism activities according to purpose. More benefits were realized in the suburban village group than in the specified rural area group. Stabilization and improvement of agricultural productivity and development and cultivation of new farm products are higher in the suburban village group. Therefore, green tourism activities benefited the agricultural and forestry industries in this group. On the other hand, prevention of the outflow of young people to urban areas is highest in the specified rural area group. Green tourism activities are found to have a beneficial impact on the prevention of young people migrating to urban areas.

Prevention of the outflow of young people to urban areas  
 Acquiring and training successors  
 Training of potential farmers  
 Helping older people live a meaningful life  
 Stabilization and improvement of agricultural and forestry productivity  
 Increase in the sales of specialties in local areas  
 Development and cultivation of new farm products  
 Improvement of agricultural and forestry infrastructure  
 Improvement of living environment and infrastructure  
 Conservation of local natural environment  
 Securing of and increase in side incomes for farming families  
 Increase in job opportunities in local areas  
 Others

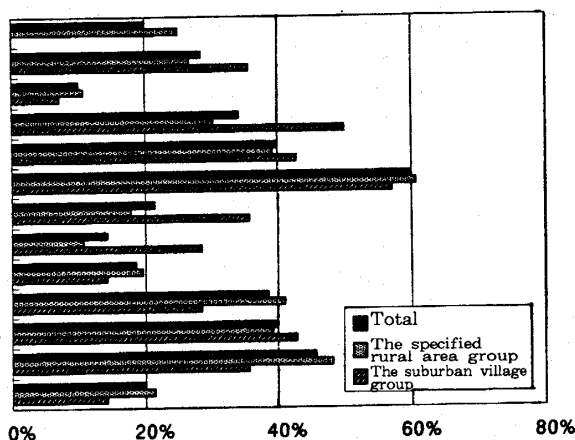


Fig. 2. Purpose of green tourism project.

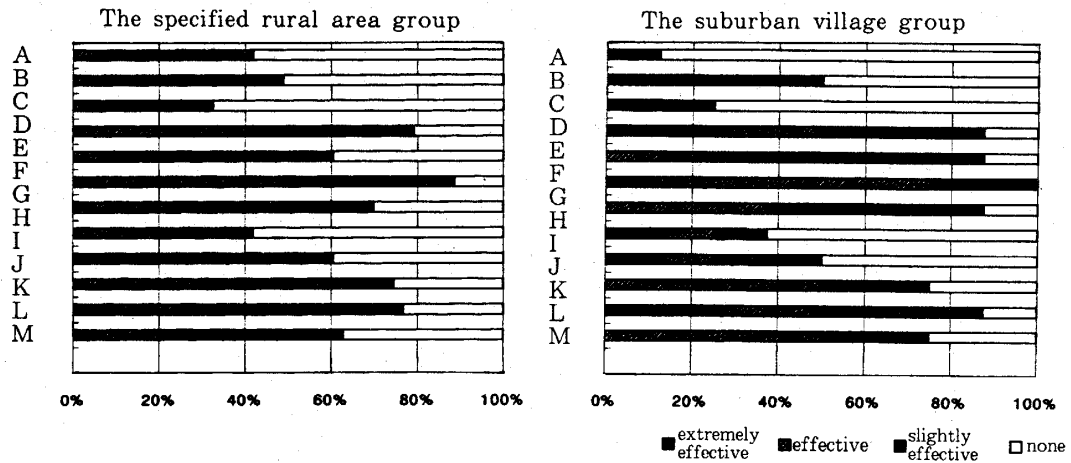


Fig. 3. Impact of green tourism activities.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| A: Prevention of the outflow of young people to urban areas                | B: Acquiring and training successors                       |
| C: Trainig of potential farmers  | D: Helping older people live a meaningful life             |
| E: Stabilization and improvement of agricultural and forestry productivity | F: Increase in the sales of specialities in local areas    |
| G: Development and cultivation of new farm products                        | H: Improvement of agricultural and forestry infrastructure |
| I: Improvement of living environment and infrastructure                    | J: Conservation of local natural environment               |
| K: Securing of and increase in side incomes for forming families           | L: Increase in job opportunities in local areas            |
| M: Others  |  |

(2) Participants in green tourism activities

Fig. 4 shows participants by the length of stay. The percentage of participants in green tourism activities on overnight or three-day trips is higher in both groups. Comparing with the two groups, the percentage of participants on a day trip is higher in the suburban village group, while that of participants on a one-week trip is higher in the specified rural area group. Fig. 5 shows group types. In both groups, families and individuals participating in green tourism activities account for 77 % and 53 % respectively, which are remarkably higher, while participants from specific groups and organizations account for less than 30 %. Families who participated through exchange programs with the specified rural areas and general elementary

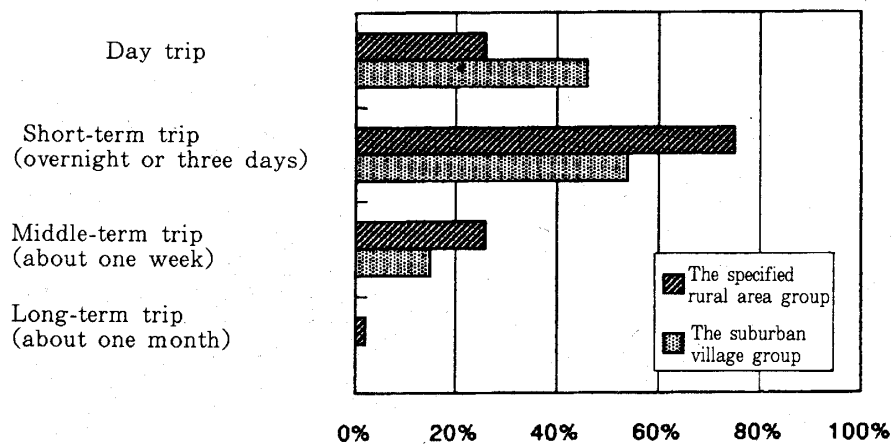


Fig. 4. Participants by the length of stay.

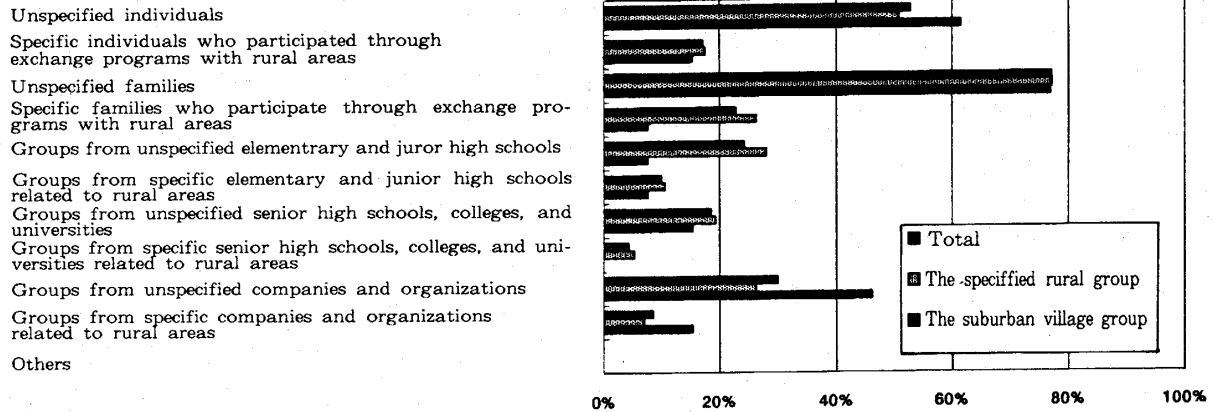


Fig. 5. Party types by group.

and junior high schools constitute higher percentage in the specified rural area group. On the other hand, general groups from companies and organizations are higher in the suburban village group. The suburban village group, therefore, tends to target travellers who place priority on more convenient, access to transportation.

(3) *Utilization of tourist attractions and facility establishment*

Fig. 6 shows tourist attractions by group. In the both groups, green tourism activities started by utilizing rustic rural environments and landscapes, which account for more than 73%. Additionally, festivals and traditional events, and historic and cultural heritages are higher in the specified rural area group. Fig. 7 shows the existing/newly-developed activity composition. The figure indicates that participatory experiences of farming through a one-year contract with farmers is 20 % higher, and host family system for children to stay in a rural area is 16 % higher in the specified rural area group than in the suburban village group. Thus, activities using local attractions tend to be more actively carried out in the specified rural area group. Fig. 8 shows existing/newly-established facility composition. In the both groups, shopping facilities for specialities and recreation facilities such as auto camp fields have a higher percentage. In the specified rural area group, 71 % of facilities established inns for travellers, which indicates that accommodation facilities for short- or long-term stay tend to be provided

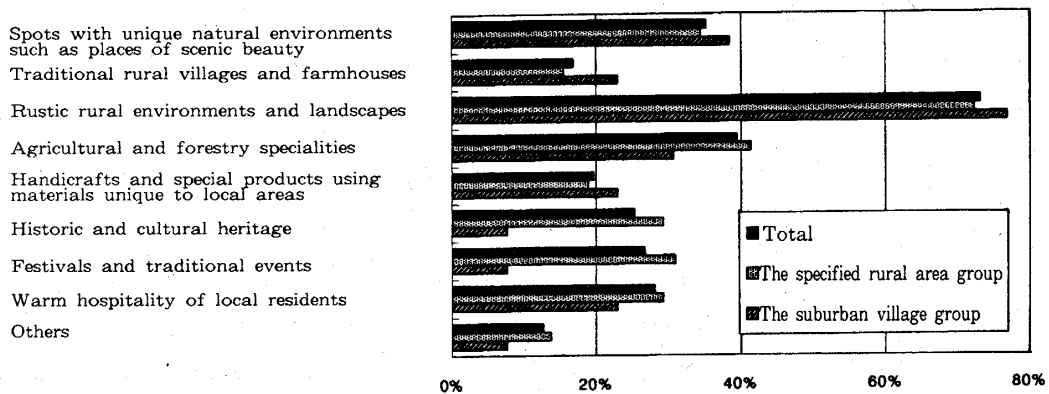


Fig. 6. Tourism attractions by group.

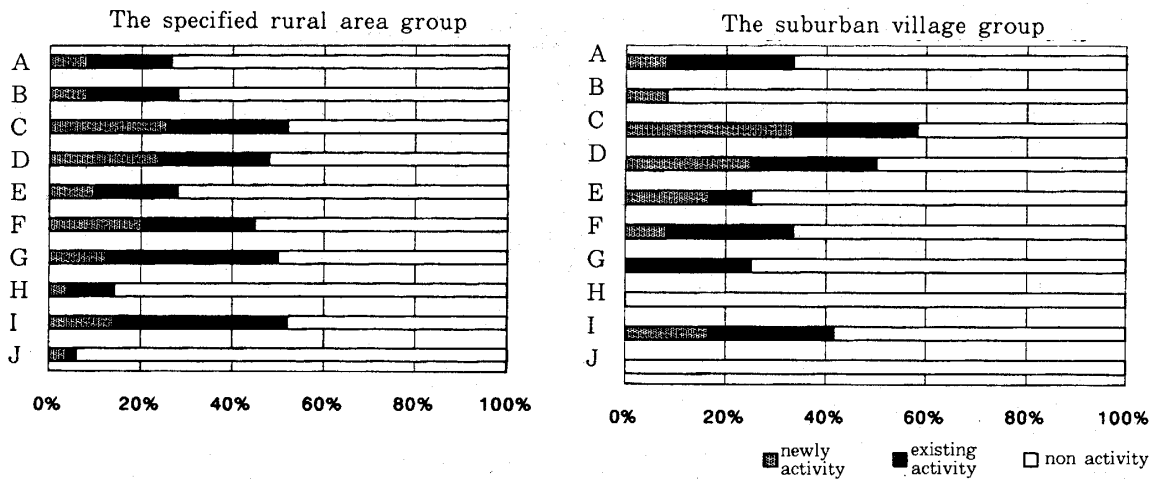


Fig. 7. Existing/newly-developed activity composition.

- A : Ownership program of livestock, fruit trees and fields
- C : Participatory experiences in farming work such as rice planting and cutting off dead or low branches
- E : Visit historical sites or study history of local areas
- G : Festivals
- I : Events through exchange programs with urban cities

- B : Participatory experiences in forming through one-year contract with farmers
- D : Nature observation and classes
- F : Classes for making handicrafts
- H : Host family system for children to stay in a rural area
- J : Others

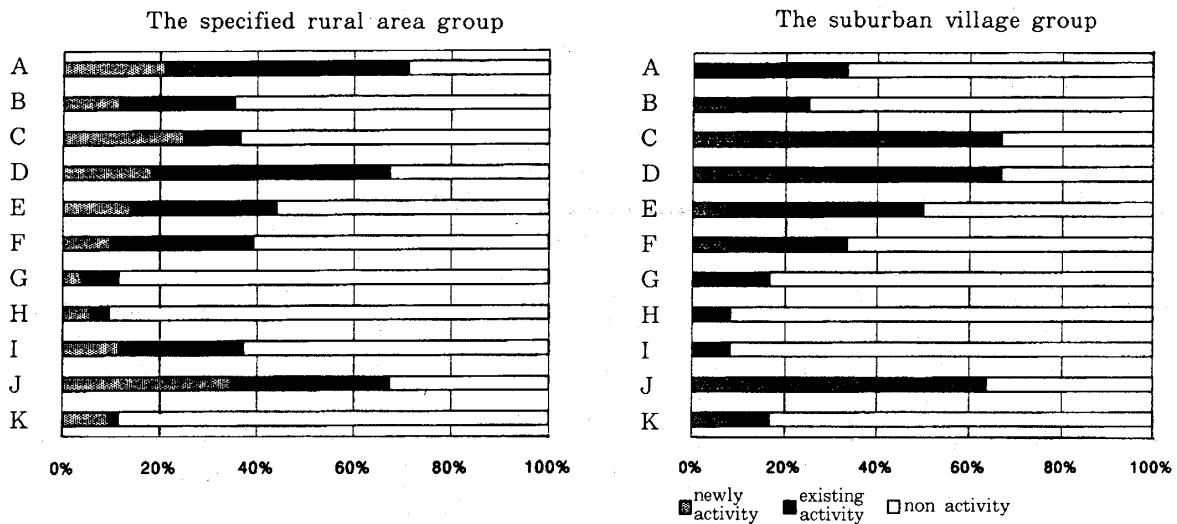


Fig. 8. Existing/newly-established facility composition.

- A : Small-scale accommodations such as inns
- C : Allotment gardens
- E : Sports and recreational facilities such as amusement parks
- G : Parks for wildlife viewing
- I : Tourist information centers
- K : Others

- B : Large-scale accommodations such as hotels
- D : Recreation facilities such as auto camp fields
- F : Educational facilities such as natural history museum and historical museum
- H : Centers or parks for studying local history and its climatology
- J : Shopping facilities for selling local specialities





20 young people stayed in the town to work in the facilities. New green tourism activities such as participatory experiences in farming started in the facilities. They also created roles that older people can play in teaching their skills to participants, leading them to have something to work toward. The problem is, however, that the project has not produced higher sales of local farm products.

The most popular activity in the town is skiing, but skiing is limited in the winter season. Therefore, the green activity season should be extended by utilizing natural resources and activities such as participatory experiences in forest management and farming which are in the planning stage. In addition, integration of these activities with proper forest management and increase in agricultural productivities is being considered.

### (2) *Sango Cho*

Sango Cho, a 20-minute drive from the cities of Osaka and Nara, is one of the suburban village group. The green tourism project there started with the project for Agricultural Area Improvement after the town was designated as one of agricultural promotion areas in 1971. The agricultural production corporation "Agricultural Park Shigisan Nodoka Mura (Nodoka Mura)" was set up with the capital of 52 local farming families in 1987 (8 new farming families joined in 1989). Subsequently, various facilities were constructed as public works, and then Nodoka Mura was opened in 1992. The corporation has been entrusted with the management of Nodoka Mura since then. Nodoka Mura is managed by about 25 employees, including 15 full-timers (See Fig. 9). The green tourism project has had a strong impact on the town. First, run-down farms resulting from lack of new farmers and aging owners are properly managed by entrusting their management to the cooperation, which uses them for green tourism activities such as participatory experiences in farming. Second, local older people help green tourism activities with their farming experience, and they find a new importance in their lives. The income of farming families has risen with the increase in agricultural productivity. One inherent problem is that the number of part-time employees has to be reduced because of fewer travellers in the winter season. In addition, the sale of agricultural products produced in Nodoka Mura accounts for only about 20 % of the total revenue, which is relatively low among agricultural parks. Therefore, a change of farm products to high-valued marketable ones is being considered. Furthermore, the corporation is seeking to be designated as one of the specified agricultural production corporations utilizing farmlands collectively.

### (3) *Honguu Cho*

Honguu Cho, a 4-hour drive from Osaka City, is one of the specified rural area groups. "Honguu Sutokku no Kai (Sutokku no Kai)" was established by people who returned to the town to design and carry out green tourism projects. It started with sending fresher farm products to urban residents who made a contract with it. In 1992, Suttoku no Kai was taken over by "Kodama Juku" through the project for Green Tourism Model Development Plan, and Kodama Juku was designated as an official organization. In addition to handing over the activity that Suttoku no Kai had held, Kodama Juku started new activities such as "the Yama no Kami Asekaki Tour" (See Fig. 9). The tour consists of participatory experiences in forestry work and home stays in farmhouses, targeting young urban women. The tour became a big hit and has been held every year since then. It has had various affects on participants. Some started to work at the forestry cooperative, others began to study forestry at a university or college. The

town expects that the organization will design and carry out additional activities to attract urban residents. The problem is that the tour does not yield a profit because host families tend to offer excess service to them.

#### (4) Kohoku Cho

Kohoku Cho, which is a 1 to 2-hour drive from Osaka, Kyoto, and Nagoya, belongs to the suburban village group. The green tourism project has been managed by the members of the committee organized through the project for Green Tourism Model Improvement in 1995. The committee consists mainly of members of various local private organizations. Although the project is under the control of the town, the members have participated in it from the start. The project is still in the planning stage (See Fig. 9). The committee plans not to focus on not only facility development but also on integration of limited facility development for local attractions using natural landscapes and environments with multipurpose management by farming families.

### Discussion

Currently, as one of the measures to stimulate rural economic activities, green tourism projects have been dealt with in many rural areas. The projects are successful to some degree, but there still remain many problems. One of the common problems is that most of the green tourism activities target only general travellers. As seen in Mikata Cho, green tourism projects should also be carried out as a part of exchange programs with urban cities. In addition, the projects place emphasis on new facility development. As seen in Honguu Cho and Sango Cho, the future direction of green tourism projects may be the integration of green tourism activities with proper management of abandoned farm and forest lands, prevention against the outflow of young people to urban areas, and encouragement of people newly engaged in farming or forestry work. Success in these areas would bring about an ideal status of green tourism projects. Moreover, educational activities such as participatory experiences in farming and forestry work would help older people find new meaning for their lives by offering them roles as instructors for these activities.

It is hoped that, like "Kodama Juku," green tourism projects will be not carried out under the control of the municipal governments, but by the initiative by local people. Then the projects may be successful with the cooperation of local people and the government.

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