

Alps Village, Chungcheongnam-do, South Korea¹

Alps Village, Chungcheongnam-do, nestled in the scenic, forested mountains of west central South Korea, enjoys a four season climate, a flowing stream, rural character, and a strong network of social relationships. However, the mountainous location and the short growing seasons limited agricultural production and jobs. As a result, the community of less than 200 offered few employment opportunities and experienced an out-migration of young people. Faced with these challenges, community leaders and residents implemented a rural tourism development strategy that focused on seasonal festivals as a way to use its existing assets. Local leaders created a non-profit, co-op business model in 2004 and sought central government funds from the Korean Agency for Education, Promotion, and Infrastructure (EPIS) to construct buildings and facilities for the business. They built a community center, which served as a common kitchen and dining area, office spaces, boarding rooms, and a tourist education complex. Over time, they constructed an athletic field, swimming pool, restaurant, aerial lift, guest houses, and other tourism amenities.

The first annual Ice Festival was held December through February 2008 with seven different themes. Every corner of the venue has ice fountains, snow sculptures, an ice cave that add a winter ambience to the festival. A multi-color lighting event opens each evening. Snow and ice sledding and a bobsleigh are available for visitors to ride. In addition, activities such as sledding on a rice-planting machine, eating roasted chestnut picked from Chilgapsan Mountain, building snowmen, drawing on gourds, and catching fish barehanded offer a rural experience. Traditional foods such as rice and soup, tteok-guk, udong, tofu, pork cutlets, and seafood pancakes are available.

Between 2010 and 2014, the number of visitors to the Ice Festival jumped from 21,100 to 250,000 with commensurate increases in revenues. The event has become renowned throughout Korea, with tourist buses coming from several larger cities (www.alpsvill.com). The community received numerous national awards for their efforts, including the Best Village Award from the Korean Department of Agriculture, Forestry, Food, and Livestock. Given the success of the winter Ice Festival, similar events have been implemented for spring (Beauty Festival), summer (Pumpkin Festival), and autumn (Soybean Festival).

Given the volume of tourist traffic, the community needed to address environmental and infrastructural pressures, as well as changes in the community's rural character and social structure. However, the rural tourism development also resulted in increased employment opportunities for residents throughout the region, increased incomes, return net-migration of young families, and an overall increase in quality-of-life. The community's project additionally brings tourists to other local attractions such as the Cheonjangho Lake shaking bridge, Chilgapsan observatory, Janggoksa temple, Chilgapsan trekking course, and the Rural and Urban Interchange Center. The rural tourism efforts in Alps Village represents a partnership between community self-help, bottom-up efforts and government, top-down assistance, which is representative of South Korea's current rural development approach since its earlier Saemaul Undong approach.

¹ Special thanks to the residents of Alps Village and Mr. Hwang Jun-Hwan, President, Alps Village co-op. Written by Duk-Byeong Park (Department of Community Development, Kongju National University) and Gary A. Goreham (Department of Sociology and Anthropology, North Dakota State University).



Community Center



Athletic Field



Mountain Stream Running through Alps Village



Winter Events Aerial Lift



Community-owned Cabins



Structure for Gourd Festival



Traditional Kimchi Pots



Stairs for Mountain Hikes



Roasting Chestnuts from Chilgapsan Mountain



Ice Festival Traffic



Queue to Ride the Toboggan



Riding on a Traditional Toboggan



Roasting Sweet Potatoes



Ice Festival



Snow Sculptures



Guests at the Ice Festival



Night Lighting Ceremony



Catching Fish Barehanded at the Ice Festival



Autumn Soybean Festival