Alps Village, Chungcheongnam-do, South Korea

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.

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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