

# Challenges of Kyushu Olle as a sustainable tourism resource: A questionnaire-based survey in Japan

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## Abstract

Extensive research has been conducted on Jeju Olle in South Korea; however, studies on Kyushu Olle in Japan, which was launched as a sister trail course to Jeju Olle in 2012, are relatively scarce. This study aimed to examine the challenges facing Kyushu Olle as a sustainable tourism resource. At present, around 18 walking trails are operated across Kyushu. However, compared with Jeju Olle, Kyushu Olle is facing several challenges, such as course management, sluggish growth in the number of visitors, and collaboration with local stakeholders, including residents. We analyzed the data from a questionnaire survey conducted at the Olle Festival in March 2023. Findings revealed that certain facilities, such as toilets, course preparation, and festival management, need to be improved. Study findings are contributive in that they offer insight into the challenges faced by Kyushu Olle as a sustainable tourism resource and provide future research direction.

## Keywords

Kyushu Olle  
Walking tourism  
Tourist satisfaction  
Sustainable tourism  
Data analysis

## 1. Introduction

A considerable amount of research has been conducted on the sustainability of tourism resources. Studies on walking tourism or trekking tourism is one instance, with such examples as Santiago in Spain, the Long Trail in the United States of America, and Jeju Olle in South Korea. These studies have offered valuable insight into the role of walking tourism in regional development. As the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) indicated, walking tourism, which is gathering attention as a research field, can be developed anywhere as a sustainable form of tourism with relatively low investment (UNWTO, 2019). In addition, if properly managed, it can provide social and economic benefits to local people and communities. Furthermore, through walking tourism, tourists can enjoy all five senses and become more familiar with the region by experiencing it more closely

(UNWTO, 2019). While presenting its benefits, the UNWTO (2019) also discussed some concerns regarding the development of walking tourism. The essential factors to consider include characteristics, such as the level of difficulty and safety of trail routes, such facilities as signs and toilets, and maintenance, which are essential for sustainable tourism resources (Table 1.).

As a well-known trekking course, ample studies have been conducted on South Korea's Jeju Olle (Choi, 2022; Irie et al., 2018). While much research has focused on Jeju Olle, studies on Kyushu Olle (Japan), which was launched as a sister trail course to Jeju Olle in 2012, are rather inadequate. This study aimed to examine the current status and challenges of Kyushu Olle as a tourism resource, 10 years after its establishment, and consider the potential of Kyushu Olle as a sustainable tourism resource in the future.

Table 1. Benefits and considerations of walking tourism (Source: UNWTO, 2019)

Benefits of walking tourism	Factors to be considered
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Easy to develop with small investment</li> <li>▶ Does not require special assets</li> <li>▶ High market potential</li> <li>▶ Complements other tourism resources</li> <li>▶ Sustainable if developed and managed properly</li> <li>▶ Creates local economic benefits</li> <li>▶ Promotes residents' well-being</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Route characteristics (attractiveness, safety, level of difficulty, access)</li> <li>▶ Essential facilities (signage, toilets, benches)</li> <li>▶ Maintenance system</li> <li>▶ Economic opportunities (accommodation, transport, retail market)</li> <li>▶ Marketing and commercialization</li> </ul>

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## 2. Overview of Kyushu Olle

Kyushu Olle was established as a sister trail course to South Korea's Jeju Olle in February 2012, and since then, 18 courses have been operated and managed throughout Kyushu, Japan.<sup>1</sup> In 2011, facing a sharp decline in the number of international tourists due to the Great East Japan Earthquake, Kyushu Olle was launched through an agreement with South Korea's Jeju Olle to increase visitors, especially from South Korea. According to the Kyushu Tourism Promotion Organization (KTPO) data, Kyushu Olle had 511,193 visitors over the 10-year period from 2012 to 2021. In 2015, a total of 97,610 people visited Kyushu Olle, including 40,740 visitors from Korea, the highest number in the past 10 years. The latest data shows that 24,686 people visited Olle in 2021, partly due to the impact of coronavirus disease 2019 (Kyushu Tourism Organization, 2023).

## 3. Data

A questionnaire survey was conducted to examine the issues faced by Kyushu Olle. Data were collected during the Olle Walking Festival on March 20, 2023. We evaluated satisfaction on a 10-point scale and compared differences in satisfaction levels by gender, age, and participation experiences. In addition, we asked participants to describe their positive and negative points in a free-text format. A total of 619 responses were received, including 209 men (33.8%), 405 women (65.4%), and 5 non-binary individuals. By age, respondents were in their teens (n=21, 3.4%), 20s (n=41, 6.6%), 30s (n=36, 5.8%), 40s (n=103, 16.6%), 50s (n=179, 28.9%), 60s (n=136, 22.0%), 70s (n=92, 14.9%), and 80s and older (n=11, 1.8%). By region, 159 respondents (25.7%) were from the host region and 460 (74%) were from other areas.

## 4. Analysis

### 4.1. Differences in satisfaction by gender

We compared the satisfaction levels of male and female participants (Table 2). Satisfaction was evaluated on a 10-point scale, and the overall satisfaction of all participants with the Olle Walking Festival was high, with an average of 7.96 points. The average level of satisfaction was 7.99 and 7.96 points for men and women, respectively, and the difference in satisfaction between men and women was 0.03 points. The difference by gender was not statistically significant.

**Table 2.** Differences in satisfaction by gender

	Average	Number	(S.D.)
Male	7.99	209	2.08
Female	7.96	402	2.10
Other	7.20	5	3.70
Total	7.96	616	2.11

Note: S.D. = standard deviation

### 4.2. Differences in satisfaction by age

We compared the satisfaction level of participants by age. It was highest for those in their 80s and older, followed by those in their 70s, 20s, 30s, and teens. Table 3. shows that the level of satisfaction among people in their 40s, 50s, and 60s, who accounted for the majority of the participants, tended to be relatively low; however, no statistically significant differences were found.

**Table 3.** Differences in satisfaction by age

Age	Average	Number	(S.D.)
10s	8.05	21	2.18
20s	8.29	41	1.05
30s	8.08	36	2.09
40s	7.96	103	2.37
50s	7.90	179	2.18
60s	7.56	134	2.10
70s	8.30	91	1.89
80s and above	9.18	11	0.98
Total	7.96	616	2.11

Note: S.D. = standard deviation

### 4.3. Differences in satisfaction by participation experience

We compared the satisfaction level of participants with their participation experience (Table 4.). In evaluating participants' experience and satisfaction with Olle, satisfaction was highest among those who had completed the walking trail 10 or more times (8.18), followed by those who had walked Olle for the first time (8.07) and those who had walked the entire course (8.00). It was evident that the satisfaction level of those who participated in the second Olle walking course was the lowest at 7.69. No statistically significant differences were found.

**Table 4.** Differences in satisfaction by participation experience

Participation experience	Average	Number	(S.D.)
1 <sup>st</sup>	8.07	272	2.04
2 <sup>nd</sup>	7.69	74	2.29
3 <sup>rd</sup> –5 <sup>th</sup>	7.82	136	2.09
6 <sup>th</sup> –10 <sup>th</sup>	7.83	58	2.15
Over 10 <sup>th</sup>	8.18	45	2.25
Full course master	8.00	23	2.28
Total	7.95	608	2.16

Note: S.D. = standard deviation

<sup>1</sup> Source: Kyushu Tourism Organization [Saga prefecture (3): Takeo course, Karatsu course, Ureshino course; Kumamoto (2): Amakusa Iwajima course, Amakusa Matsushima course; Oita (2): Okubungo course, Saiki Onyujima-island course; Fukuoka (6): Munakata Oshima course, Yame course, Kurume Korasan course, Miyama Mt. Kiyomizu course, Chikuhō Kawara course, Fukuoka Shingu course; Nagasaki (3): Minami-Shimabara course, Shimabara course, Matsuura-Fukushima course; Kagoshima (1): Izumi course; Miyazaki (1): Miyazaki Omarugawa course]

#### 4.4. Other factors

Participants were asked to share their feedback in a free-text format. Responses were received from 291 participants. Among the free-format responses, 195 comments indicated satisfaction, 88 comments indicated dissatisfaction (areas for improvement), and 8 comments did not indicate any specific feelings (Table 5.). The table explicitly categorizes comments into those related to course management, event management, Olle courses, and hospitality. The majority of comments were related to the hospitality provided by the organizers of the Olle Walking Festival (92 comments, 82 satisfied and 10 dissatisfied), followed by 82 comments about the course (48 satisfied and 34 dissatisfied), 25 comments (9 satisfied and 16 dissatisfied) about the event operation by the organizers, and 10 comments about interactions with people. Among the 82 comments related to course maintenance, some pertained to interest in the course and how well it was being managed. In addition, 15 comments were regarding the lack of toilets.

Table 5. Other factors

	Satisfied	Dissatisfied
<b>Factor</b>		
<b>Course maintenance</b>	Course maintenance 48	Course maintenance 34
	Course creation 7	Course difficulty 8
<b>Event Operation</b>	Staff responses 5	Lack of toilets 15
	Operation 9	Operation 16
<b>Hospitality</b>	Lunch 82	Lunch 10
<b>Interaction with others</b>	Interactions with people 9	Excessive crowd 1

#### 5. Conclusion

This study investigated the current status of Kyushu Olle as a sustainable tourism resource, including its challenges and future potential. Results indicated that satisfaction among individuals in their 40s, 50s, and 60s, who are the main target age groups, was relatively low. Moreover, participants who experienced Kyushu Olle for the second time reported low satisfaction. Furthermore, 10 years have passed since it began operations, and course maintenance and lack of equipment were identified as the major issues. The UNWTO (2019) noted that the availability of facilities and course management are important factors for development. At Kyushu Olle, volunteer course maintenance activities, such as Clean Olle and Help Olle, are conducted as part of the course management efforts. However, cases where courses have actually been closed due to natural disasters have been reported. As a sustainable tourism resource, safe course management is one of the important elements, and securing funds through donations from companies and other similar organizations is considered an essential element for the sustainability of Kyushu Olle. Finally, there may be challenges related to opportunities to create economic benefits, although this factor was not considered in this study (from the data on day trip participants, approximately 89% of participants responded that they spent

less than 5,000 yen per day trip). The creation of economic opportunities is also cited as an essential development factor (UNWTO, 2019). Regarding economic effects, compared with Jeju Olle, Kyushu Olle requires further efforts in terms of visitor stay, meal options, and collaboration with local businesses, including product development, which is considered a crucial issue.

In this study, although the present findings were not statistically significant, understanding the challenges faced by Kyushu Olle as a sustainable tourism resource could provide a crucial foundation for future research.

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