

WPI

Regional Revitalization of Japan Through Rural Tourism

Interactive Qualifying Project Proposal

Project Team:

Bryce Lukens (Bachelor's in Computer Science): bclukens@wpi.edu

Nick Healy (Bachelor's in Mechanical and Materials Engineering): njhealy@wpi.edu

Joe Jiang (Bachelor's in Chemistry): wjiang2@wpi.edu

Dimitry Blazy (Bachelor's in Mechanical and Materials Engineering): dhblazy@wpi.edu

Project Advisors:

Professor Alex Sphar (Global School): jasphar@wpi.edu

Professor Padini Nirmal (Global School): pnirmal@wpi.edu

Project Sponsor:

Riku Iwanaga (SekaiCo President): tairiku1211@gmail.com



This report represents work of WPI undergraduate students submitted to the faculty as evidence of a degree requirement. WPI routinely publishes these reports on its website without editorial or peer review. For more information about the projects program at WPI, see <http://www.wpi.edu/Academics/Projects>.

Abstract

Japan's rapid urbanization of areas like Tokyo, Kyoto, and Osaka has caused a lack of interest in rural areas, leading to declining populations. The goal of this project was to analyze if one of these rural areas, Aisho town in Shiga prefecture, could be revitalized by bringing more foreign tourists to the area. We investigated this through interviews with local businesses, gauging tourists' interests in rural tourism, and finding tourist attractions in Aisho that could attract tourists. We created a brochure that promotes the tourist attractions in Aisho, to assist our sponsor in attracting foreign tourists to this location. From our interviews and experience there we concluded that tourism should not be the main way to revitalize Aisho, but that it is the ideal location for tourists who want to experience a part of Japan that has stayed closer to its traditions.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank our sponsor Riku Iwanaga for the opportunity to do a project in Aisho. Riku provided us with necessary connections in Aisho that assisted in setting up interviews.

We would also like to thank our advisors Professor Sphar and Professor Nirmal. We especially appreciate all the guidance given to help navigate uncertainties and the grand amount of feedback given throughout the project.

Finally, we would like to thank all the business owners we talked to in Aisho, the hospitality they gave us will never be forgotten. We felt less like tourists and more like residents of Aisho-cho.

Executive Summary

Japan's rapid urbanization of areas like Tokyo, Kyoto, and Osaka has caused a lack of interest in rural areas, leading to declining populations. The Japanese government uses the term Regional Revitalization as a strategy to "improve the Japanese economy by creating a flow of people from urban to rural areas, increasing income in rural areas ... , through such measures as reforms to tourism and agricultural industries" (*Regional Revitalization of JapanGov*, n.d.). Rural revitalization, in the form of tourism, has increased the quality of residential housing, increased income for local residents, preserved the ecological environment, and a range of additional benefits (An & Alarcón, 2020a). Our project is centered in Aisho town in Shiga prefecture in Japan, a rural town that is a place where rural revitalization through tourism could happen.

The group will be investigating rural revitalization by assisting our sponsor, SekaiCo, in creating a rural tourism program that emphasizes *ibunka-kouryu*, where the Working Holiday Visa holders (WHISA holders) can interact with locals during Japanese traditional activities hosted by SekaiCo. Therefore, the priority is to find foreigners with working holiday visas since they are likely to have a deeper engagement in Japanese culture. A second project of SekaiCo is to give international tourists an authentic Japanese cultural experience. For this purpose, the group will use methods consisting of auto-ethnography and conducting a variety of interviews. We interviewed businesses and organizations in Aisho to learn more about them and their perspective on foreign tourists. We also surveyed international tourists as well during the 7 weeks.

The group then gathered a general understanding of Aisho through autoethnography and interviewed a variety of local businesses to understand the local economy and their perception of

international tourism in Aisho. For the latter part of the project, the group attempted to contact WHISA holders through a variety of methods including online posts, offline posts, and phone calls. The group also collected tourist data using a survey with a list of questions that shape the general ideas of the demographic. Pooling together analysis from our autoethnography and interviews we discovered that Aisho is the ideal location for tourists who are looking for places in Japan that are more traditional when compared to Tokyo, Kyoto, and Osaka. Aisho businesses' desire to share their culture with other people comes first and foremost for them which makes this town so great. There may be downsides in terms of transportation and not having as much history as neighboring towns, however, Aisho still provides a unique experience unlike any other.

In the end, although mass tourism is not suitable for revitalization in Aisho, it is a great city for small-group travel and cultural exchange. It is due to Aisho's preservation of local history through the Bitemari Preservation Society, local festivals, and companies, that it has managed to keep so close to its traditions. As a result, it is the ideal location for tourists who are looking for places in Japan that are more traditional when compared to Tokyo, Kyoto, and Osaka, which have all been significantly modernized. Aisho businesses' desire to share their culture with other people comes first and foremost for them which makes this town so great. There may be downsides in terms of transportation and not having as much history as neighboring towns, however, Aisho still provides a unique experience unlike any other.

Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Acknowledgments	ii
Executive Summary	iii
List of Figures	ix
Introduction	1
2.0 Background	2
2.1 Aisho.....	2
2.2 Market for Tourism.....	7
2.2.1 Tourist Demographics.....	7
2.2.2 Covid and the Economy.....	9
2.3 Rural Tourism.....	10
2.3.1 Past Efforts.....	10
2.3.3 Niches of Rural Tourism (Eco/Agri-tourism).....	18
2.4 Ethics for Tourism.....	20
2.4.1 Morality and Effects.....	20
2.4.2 Mount Fuji.....	21
2.4.3 Ethical Takeaway.....	23
2.5.3 Transportation.....	23
2.6 About our Sponsor.....	24
2.6.1 Working Holiday Visa.....	25
3.0 Methods	26
3.1 Objective 1: Find and Interview WHISA Holders in Japan.....	26

3.2 Objective 2: Interviewing Aisho Business Owners.....	27
3.3 Objective 3: Gain an Understanding of Tourists’ Needs for Rural Tourism in Japan.....	28
3.4 Objective 4: Autoethnography - Sustainable Tourist Attractions in Aisho.....	28
3.5 Objective 5: Make a Deliverable for our Sponsors, SekaiCo:.....	29
3.6 Limitations.....	30
3.7 Scope of Project.....	31
4.0 Results.....	32
4.1 Businesses/Associations Interviewed.....	32
4.1.1 Aisho Tourism Association (ATA).....	32
4.1.2 Omi Jofu Museum.....	33
4.1.3 Fujii Honke Brewery.....	34
4.1.4 Kuyomon Farm.....	35
4.1.5 Omihachiman Association of Promoting Tourism & Local Products.....	36
4.2 Tourist Data.....	37
4.3 Autoethnography of Aisho and Shiga as a Whole.....	38
4.3.1 Transportation.....	38
4.3.2 Interactions with Locals.....	39
4.3.3 Kongorin-ji.....	40
4.3.4 Otsu.....	43
4.3.5 Omihachiman.....	44
4.4 Working Holiday Visa Holder Data.....	45

4.4.1 Kokoka (Kyoto Community International House).....	45
4.4.2 Facebook.....	46
4.4.3 Reddit.....	46
4.4.4 Sign Holding.....	47
4.4.5 Phone Calls.....	47
4.4.6 Tourism Pamphlet/Website.....	48
5.0 Analysis.....	49
5.1 Aisho Business Self-Sufficiency in Shiga Ecosystem.....	49
5.2 Aisho’s Niche for Small Group Tourism.....	49
5.2.1 Businesses in Aisho.....	49
5.2.2 Locals in Aisho.....	50
5.3 Problems with Mass Tourism in Aisho.....	51
5.4 Why Aisho is a Good Location for SekaiCo.....	52
5.5 Analysis of WHISA Data.....	53
5.6 Analysis of Tourist Data.....	54
6.0 Conclusion.....	56
6.1 Roadblocks.....	56
6.2 Recommendation 1: SekaiCo Website Contents.....	57
6.3 Recommendation 2: How to attract WHISA Holders and Tourists.....	58
6.4 Concluding remarks.....	58
Bibliography.....	59
Appendix.....	64
Appendix A:.....	64

Appendix B:.....	67
Appendix C:.....	70
Appendix D:.....	71
Appendix E.1:.....	72
Appendix E.2:.....	73
Appendix F:.....	75
Appendix G:.....	76
Appendix H:.....	77
Appendix I:.....	78
Appendix J:.....	79
Appendix K:.....	80

List of Figures

Figure 1. Pictures of local specialties and souvenirs in Aisho. Hatasho yam (top left), local sake brewery (top right), Omi Jofu (bottom left), Hatasho Tsumugi (bottom right).

Figure 2. Pictures of other souvenirs. Popular sweets from Kasho Kifukuan (top left), tanuki rice crackers (top right), Miyuki mochi (bottom left), and Marunaka soy sauce (bottom right).

Figure 3. Picture of Kongorin-ji Temple.

Figure 4. Pictures of tourism locations. Aisho Town History and Culture Museum (top left), Yamabiko Spring (top middle), Yamaubu’s Footprint (top right), Karuno Springs (bottom left), Usogawa Dam (bottom middle), Kanze Bodhisattva Waterfall (bottom right).

Figure 5. Destinations Chosen by Number of Visits ([*White Paper on Tourism in Japan, 2020, n.d.*](#))

Figure 6: World Economic Forum report (*World Economic Forum, 2022*).

Figure 7: (*World Heritage Sites in Japan, 2019*)

Figure 8: Liked foods by different countries. (*White Paper on Tourism in Japan, 2019 (Summary)*, 2019)

Figure 9: Gogome, Mount Fuji's Most Popular Hiking Station – Jozuka, E - CNN - Yamanashi Prefectural

Figure 10: (*The Working Holiday Programmes in Japan, n.d.*)

Figure 11: Businesses Interview Data.

Figure 12: Aisho landscape.

Figure 13: Jizo statues lining the path up to Kongorin temple.

Figure 14: Ukimido (Mangetsu-ji Temple) coin “Floating Hall.”

Introduction

Rapid urbanization across Japan's broad landscape, especially in metropolitan cities such as Tokyo and Osaka, has caused a lack of interest in rural tourism. The Japanese government uses the term *Regional Revitalization* as a strategy to “improve the Japanese economy by creating a flow of people from urban to rural areas, increasing income in rural areas . . . , through such measures as reforms to tourism and agricultural industries” (*Regional Revitalization of JapanGov*, n.d.). Rural revitalization, in the form of tourism, has increased the quality of residential housing, increased income for residents, preserved the ecological environment, and a range of additional benefits (An & Alarcón, 2020a; Yang et al., 2021a). Promoting revitalization requires ensuring sustainable tourism that fosters growth without impeding the rural community. In the case of overtourism, an increase in resident income will be largely present, but there is a possibility of detriment to the environment. Working with our sponsor, SekaiCo, we gave insight into the market for rural tourism in Aisho as well as analyzed Aisho's feasibility for mass tourism while keeping a key focus on sustainability, ethics, the preservation of Japanese culture, and Rural Revitalization.

2.0 Background

The beginning section delves into the historical and tourist importance of Aisho town. The next section looks into the current market of tourist, who is traveling, and the recent impacts of COVID-19. Due to the location of the project, it is crucial to understand rural tourism as a whole, the niches that exist, and the past efforts that have been made in Japan to make it a sustainable market. The next section delves into the morality of ethics, and recent developments in Japan in terms of ethics. The last section introduces who our sponsor is, why he started SekaiCo, and an explanation of what working holiday visa holders are.

2.1 Aisho

The project will be conducted in Aisho, a town located east of Lake Biwa and close to the center of Shiga prefecture. The town is approximately 13 km from east to west and 7 km from north to south and has an area of roughly 37.97 sq km. In 2020, Aisho's local government reported a population of 20,893 people with 7,841 households and a population distribution of 49.6% men and 50.4% women. The population census observed these trends; an increase in the elderly population, a recent increase in the foreign population, and a small increase in the total population. (統計情報|愛荘町, n.d.)

Aisho town is the product of merging various towns throughout history. The most recent merge occurred in 2006, with the towns of Eichigawa and Hatasho. The first kanji character from Eichigawa and the last kanji character from Hatasho were taken to make the name Aisho. In the 700s the Kongorin-ji Temple, a Buddhist temple, was founded by Gyoki at the request of Emperor Shomu. During this period, the Nakasendo, the ancient highway connecting Kyoto to Edo, began to form (*Japan Atlas: Nakasendo*, n.d.). This 553 km road with 67 stations was the

path the shoguns took when traveling from Kyoto to the new capital, Edo or Tokyo, in the 1600s (*Japan Atlas: Nakasendo*, n.d.). One of these stations is located in Aisho, called the Echigawa-juku, which is the 65th post station on the Nakasendo route, and brought prosperity to the area along with the county office, police department, and regional railroad called Omi Railway established in the Meiji era. (町の紹介|愛荘町, n.d.)

In Aisho, 50.3% of the employed population serves in the secondary industry (manufacturing), 45.6% serve in the tertiary industry (services), and 4.1% serve in the primary industry (harvest of natural resources). Recently, the town's agricultural and forestry industries have declined due to the reduction in the number of producers and quantity of products. However, there has been an increase in retail industry employees, and with the residents mostly shopping within the town as well as a steady influx of visitors, the town has a commercial market that makes up most of the income and is relatively larger than neighboring towns. (町の紹介|愛荘町, n.d.)

The town of Aisho has a variety of local specialties and souvenir products for tourists. One of the specialties is a special yam only grown in certain areas of Aisho due to the high mineral count in the soil. This yam is described as having less water content than Japanese yam, is rich in protein, vitamin B, vitamin C, and minerals, and has medicinal value. Another local product is the Hatasho sake, which is brewed by Echizen Nuka brewmasters using the Ginfubuki rice harvested locally, the underground water from the Suzuka Mountains. There are also two traditional crafts called Omi Jofu and Hatasho Tsumugi. Omi Jofu refers to the cloth woven by maidens from the villages near the Uso River from the Suzuka Mountains, it is described as having the songs and dreams of the village imbued in it and brings a cool feeling when worn during the summer. Hatasho Tsumugi is a type of Kasuri pongee, a special type of fabric, which

is typically woven using the steamed Omi Jofu technique on cotton pongee threads. However, Hatasho Tsumugi is made from 3,000 carefully chosen cocoons and dyed indigo while using techniques unique to the area. As for souvenirs, a shop called Kasho Kifukuan sells various Japanese sweets and western sweets with cookies made from local yam being especially popular. There are also other stores selling souvenirs like tanuki ricer crackers, Miyuki mochi, Marunaka soy sauce, and other unique snacks all made from local ingredients. (*Aisho Tourism Navi | Welcome to the Aisho Town Tourism Association Website, n.d.*)



Figure 1. Pictures of local specialties and souvenirs in Aisho. Hatasho yam (top left), local sake brewery (top right), Omi Jofu (bottom left), Hatasho Tsumugi (bottom right).



Figure 2. Pictures of other souvenirs. Popular sweets from Kasho Kifukuan (top left), tanuki rice crackers (top right), Miyuki mochi (bottom left), and Marunaka soy sauce (bottom right).

There are various attractions for tourists in Aisho, including shrines and temples, historical sites and museums, and natural scenery. The most famous attraction is the Kongorin-ji Temple, which was built in 741 CE by Gyoki under the order of Emperor Shomu. The main hall of this shrine is deemed a national treasure as a Japanese building representing the culture of the Kamakura period (1185 CE-1333 CE). The 14 Buddhist statues inside the main hall, the three-storied pagoda, and the Nitenmon Gate are all recognized as nationally important cultural properties.



Figure 3. Picture of Kongorin-ji Temple.

Other than Kongorin-ji, there are few notable tourist locations. Out of all the museums and historical sites, the most notable is the Aisho Town History and Culture Museum. The Aisho Town History and Culture Museum exhibits details on the ancient ruling family that developed the region, Buddhist arts from the Kongorin-ji Temple, local crafts, and holds special exhibitions three times a year to highlight hidden local culture. There are a few natural attraction sites in Aisho, they are the Yamabiko Spring, Yamaubu's Footprints, Karuno Springs, Usogawa Dam, and Kanze Bodhisattva Waterfall. The Yamabiko Spring is located near the source of the Uso River at the foot of Suzuka Mountains and it has famed water that has been passed down from generation to generation. Yamaubu's Footprints and Kanze Bodhisattva Waterfall are both locations tied to legends. The Karuno Springs is a protected wetland with man-made wooden pathways for visitors to observe the natural springs and rare vegetation. Finally, Usogawa Dam is a rockfill dam built with consideration for nature and is a place to relax and see the scenery change with the changing seasons. (*Aisho Tourism Navi | Welcome to the Aisho Town Tourism Association Website*, n.d.)



Figure 4. Pictures of tourism locations. Aisho Town History and Culture Museum (top left), Yamabiko Spring (top middle), Yamaubu's Footprint (top right), Karuno Springs (bottom left), Usogawa Dam (bottom middle), Kanze Bodhisattva Waterfall (bottom right).

2.2 Market for Tourism

2.2.1 Tourist Demographics

International Tourism is important for Japan's economy, representing 0.96% of the country's GDP in 2019. (*Japan International Tourism Revenue, Percent of GDP - Data, Chart*, n.d.) This 0.96% represents 46.1 billion USD in revenue from 31 million international travelers in 2019 with 68% of them being tourists (*Data List | 日本の観光統計データ*, n.d.). Eighty percent of the international visitors were from the Asian continent, with 70% being from East Asia alone, and China had the largest majority of visitors to Japan at 30.1%. Chinese visitors also represented the largest percentage of tourism consumption with 36.8% of the 32 billion USD consumed total. The age of international consumers is also important to observe, as the age of a visitor could relate to their purpose of visit and interest. Foreign consumers from the age of

25-34 made up around 29% of the foreign tourist population in 2021. (*Data List | 日本の観光統計データ*, n.d.)

However, Japan also hosts a significant domestic tourism market. In 2019, 311 million Japanese took domestic overnight trips and 275 million took domestic one-day trips. With the higher domestic tourist count, there was a higher total spending of 21.9 trillion yen. Domestic travelers also accounted for 441 million nights stayed in Western-style hotels and ryokan compared to the international visitors' 101 million nights stayed (*White Paper on Tourism in Japan, 2019 (Summary)*, 2019).

An important distinction in the market for international tourism in Japan is between rural and metropolitan areas. In 2019, the metropolitan prefectures of Tokyo, Kanagawa, Chiba, Saitama, Aichi, Osaka, Kyoto, and Hyogo represented 62% of the total 101 million nights of international visitor stay, while the rural areas of Japan, all the other prefectures, accounted for 39% (*White Paper on Tourism in Japan, 2019 (Summary)*, 2019). As demonstrated by the below graph, after their 1st visit South Korean, Taiwanese, and Chinese tourists, the largest populations of tourists, will visit more rural areas as opposed to re-visiting the metropolitan area. (*White Paper on Tourism in Japan, 2020*, n.d.)

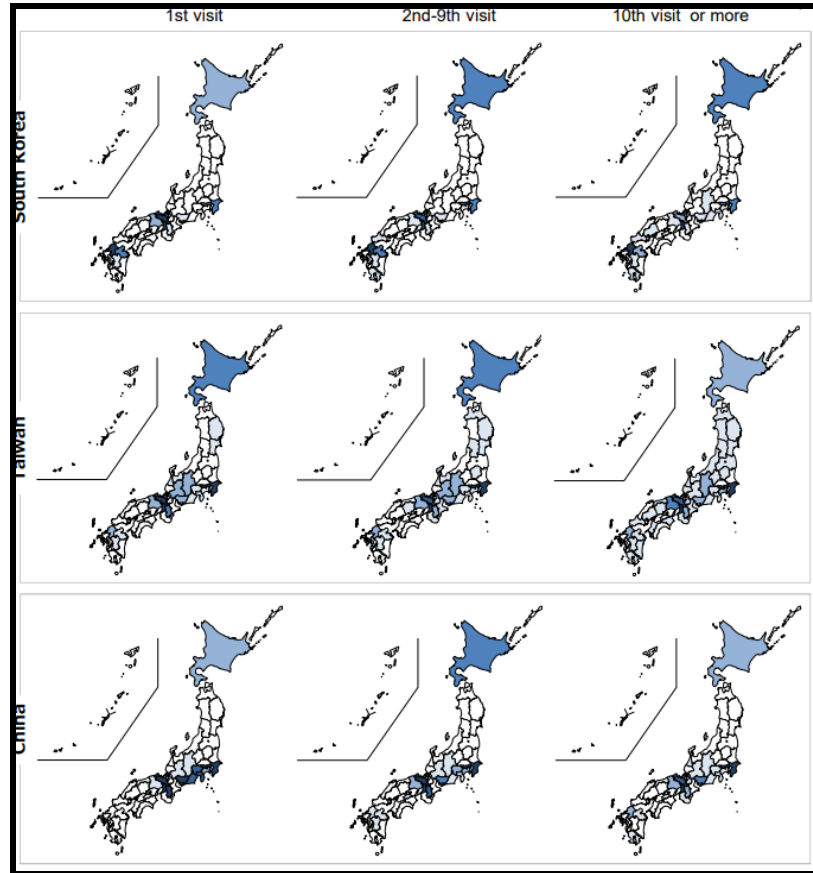


Figure 5. Destinations Chosen by Number of Visits ([White Paper on Tourism in Japan, 2020](#), n.d.)

2.2.2 Covid and the Economy

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the international tourism industry in Japan. The number of visitors to Japan peaked in 2019 at 31 million before the COVID-19 pandemic began. In the following years, Japan saw a significant decrease in the number of international visitors with 4 million in 2020 and 245 thousand in 2021. The number of international visitors has only recently started to increase with 4 million international visitors in 2022 and 10 million visitors as of June 2023. From February 2020 to June 2020, accommodation services saw a drastic change in both the annual change in total number of reservations received

and the change in sales. In February, only 2% of respondents of a 255 tourism business survey indicated that they had seen a 70-90% decrease in sales and reservations, but by June 90% of the respondents reported this decrease in sales and revenue. Major travel agencies were also significantly affected by the pandemic seeing a total revenue decrease in January, March, and April.

Although businesses suffered these decreases in sales during the COVID-19 pandemic, the survival of these businesses is likely due to the financial support of the Japanese Government. In 2020 55% of accommodation service operators applied for safety net loans and a further 31% of the operators considered applying. Forty percent of the major travel agencies surveyed for the Japan White Pages report applied for government financial assistance in April 2020, with 51% considering applying after seeing the revenue drop. (*White Paper on Tourism in Japan, 2019 (Summary)*, 2019)

The Japanese government is also supporting the market for tourism through funding multiple subsidies and tax breaks. One example of this is the National Travel Support campaign, where residents of Japan were offered 20% off domestic stays at participating properties. Domestic travelers were also able to receive coupons that could be spent on food and activities in the local area. The campaign lasted from April 1st to July 1st of 2023. (*White Paper on Tourism in Japan, 2019 (Summary)*, 2019)

2.3 Rural Tourism

2.3.1 Past Efforts

A key reason that tourism has exploded in recent years is due to government policies. Whether it is rural or urban, more and more tourists have been coming to Japan. Tourism has

been growing and is expected to continue to grow more rapidly than world economic output as a result of factors such as population growth, rising incomes and employment, shorter work weeks in many parts of the world, and the increasing integration of the world's economies and societies. Advances in technology have made traveling easier and more accessible to people as well. If not for covid Japan would have most likely hit an all-time high for how many tourists visited the country. In light of a declining population, Japan has been relying more and more on tourism to support a part of its decreasing economy (*Sustainability | Free Full-Text | Tourism as a Key for Regional Revitalization?: A Quantitative Evaluation of Tourism Zone Development in Japan, n.d.*).

The Tourism Zone Development Act was passed in 2008 to promote designated tourism zones and boost visitor numbers and length of stay. The modern standard for urban tourism is the “golden route” of Tokyo, Kyoto, and Osaka. Compared to rural tourism which didn't have a route, this policy at the very least made it a competitive alternative for rural enthusiasts (*Sustainability | Free Full-Text | Tourism as a Key for Regional Revitalization?: A Quantitative Evaluation of Tourism Zone Development in Japan, n.d.*). Over the first few years, 30 zones were approved across Japan. These were focused on rural areas of Japan that needed help with building infrastructure. An analysis of the initial zones found increasing visitor numbers after gaining tourism zone status. According to a study by Kim and Kim, eight of the first tourism zones saw a statistically significant increase in tourism trips after the implementation of the act (*Sustainability | Free Full-Text | Tourism as a Key for Regional Revitalization?: A Quantitative Evaluation of Tourism Zone Development in Japan, n.d.*). These included major destinations like Mount Fuji, Nikko, and Shiretoko which likely benefited from expanded marketing and facilities. However, visitor growth was not significantly higher in over half of the initial zones.

The research showed that tourism zones located within a single prefecture and covering a narrow geographic area saw the greatest impact. For example, the Ise-Shima zone in Mie prefecture experienced a large rise in visitors. In contrast, zones spanning multiple prefectures showed limited gains. Government subsidies for infrastructure improvements like traffic access and space formation appeared to have the greatest positive effect according to the analysis.

Meanwhile, funding for software programs like marketing had minimal impact initially, suggesting a lag in seeing benefits. By 2018, Japan had approved 91 tourism zones with 582 participating municipalities focused in rural areas (*Sustainability* | *Free Full-Text* | *Tourism as a Key for Regional Revitalization?: A Quantitative Evaluation of Tourism Zone Development in Japan*, n.d.). While the act aims to disperse tourists beyond major hubs, high visitor concentrations persist. Concerns also remain about commercialization and sustainability. The Japanese birth rate is decreasing and at the same time, people are leaving these rural areas. If not enough people are there to fill the jobs of public transport and restaurants then the tourism zone falls through. Continued monitoring of the employment rates and number of tourists is required to ensure tourism zone development achieves a balance of economic and social goals.

Another past effort includes the overall increase of public transport in Japan as a whole. The picture below shows that Japan has potential for tourism because of its developed infrastructure such as public transportation, hotels, commercial malls, parks, bathrooms, utilities, and proper waste management. This ranking took into consideration both the size of the country and how much infrastructure they have proportional to this size to be viable for touristic opportunities like attractions. Because of the faster-declining birthrate in the countryside, the viability of public transportation in rural Japan faces mounting challenges. Despite having this

potential, ridership and revenue on rural bus and rail lines have steadily decreased, making many services reliant on

WEF's Travel & Tourism Development Index (2021 edition; selected countries/regions)					
Rank	Country/region				
1	Japan	15	South Korea	52	Vietnam
2	U.S.	19	Hong Kong	54	India
3	Spain	27	New Zealand	75	Philippines
7	Australia	32	Indonesia	79	Cambodia
9	Singapore	36	Thailand		
12	China	38	Malaysia		

Out of 117 destinations; index, published in May 2022, measures set of factors and policies that enable sustainable and resilient development of travel and tourism
Source: World Economic Forum

Figure 6: World Economic Forum report (*World Economic Forum, 2022*).

government subsidies. For example, a 2020 World Economic Forum report found that revenue covers less than half of operating costs for 60% of rail lines in the Chugoku region. With rural populations projected to further shrink up to 20% by 2045, the outlook for public transit viability is problematic. Compounding the issue is an aging society, where reduced mobility makes public transit access increasingly essential for rural seniors. However, aging has also led to driver shortages, threatening reliable service. The average age of taxi drivers in Hiroshima prefecture is 63 and rising. To address viability, the report suggests rightsizing transit modes to fit lower demand. For example, replacing unprofitable rail lines with flexible on-demand shuttles could improve service at lower cost. Integrating transit services through mobility-as-a-service apps can also boost convenience and ridership. Emerging autonomous vehicle pilots may provide affordable solutions but require testing for rural conditions. Subsidies remain crucial to sustaining unprofitable but essential lines. Hiroshima municipalities subsidize on average

¥500-3000 per bus rider. More creative funding like corporate sponsorships can alleviate budget pressures. Ultimately, involving residents through volunteer drivers and tailored transit will be key to viability. Shiga prefecture in 2023 has introduced the possibility of a transportation tax to help fund viable public transportation in its rural areas (*[Governor of Shiga Pref.] Feb. 17, 2023*). While solutions exist, rural Japan must act urgently given unfavorable demographics. Tailored reforms that balance economic and social needs are required to sustain transit access. But with declining ridership stretching budgets, viable rural mobility will necessitate reimagining public transportation. (*Transforming Rural Mobility in Japan and the World, n.d.*)

One of the international efforts being made is the establishment of UNESCO heritage sites in rural Japan. UNESCO World Heritage Sites are a highly prestigious and globally recognized designation. The program helps bring attention and tourism plus funding to protect these sites of important cultural importance.



Figure 7: (*World Heritage Sites in Japan, 2019*)

The figure shows all the UNESCO World Heritage sites in Japan as of July 2021. The designation often comes with infrastructure improvements, visitor facilities, and access routes to handle increased traffic (De Simone et al., 2019). The government may invest in development to

highlight the UNESCO site as an asset. This benefits rural economies and transportation networks. With more tourists, local businesses like hotels, restaurants, shops, and guides can cater to the UNESCO site visitors. Agriculture and handicrafts also benefit from the tourism demand. With an organisation arriving this also opens up spots for more jobs which in turn brings in money for the local community. (*Japan and the Rise of Heritage in Cultural Diplomacy: Where Are We Heading? On JSTOR*, n.d.) There have been recent UNESCO heritage sites that have been inscribed within the last year in Japan, Oku-noto's agricultural landscape (2022), Historic Mining Sites in the Kamioka-Oya Region (2022), and Jomon Prehistoric Sites (2021) are all in rural areas and will most likely see benefit in the coming years from the new designation. Ojiya-chijimi uses techniques for making ramie fabric that are preserved for the sake of keeping cultural identity (*UNESCO - Ojiya-Chijimi, Echigo-Jofu*, n.d.). Similarly, the 600-year-old craft like Omi Jofu in Shiga prefecture also represents Japan's roots of fabric making with these same materials and methods (*Handmade Hemp and Ramie Fabrics Fit for the Summer Heat | August 2021 | Highlighting Japan*, n.d.).

Differences in Rural and Urban Tourism 2.3.2

Urban tourism has attractions like museums, aquariums/zoos, theaters, restaurants, and shopping. Cities in Japan offer a density and variety of attractions and infrastructure; their frequent metro and buses support tourism (Roman & Bury, 2022). Urban tourism relies on public transit, taxis, ride shares, and walking between these attractions clustered together. Activities highlight human-built environments, arts and culture, entertainment, dining, and shopping. Urban tourism accommodations include hotels, hostels, and short-term rentals. Marketing strategies target cultural enthusiasts, arts patrons, foodies, and shoppers. Urban tourism is the

bulk revenue of tourism in general because how the capacity that all of these prospective activities have (Roman & Bury, 2022). On the other side of the spectrum rural tourism depends on visitors having private transportation like rental cars or tour buses to reach dispersed attractions and accommodations. In the case of Japan public transportation covers most of the country, however once in a rural prefecture options for public transportation whittle out quickly. Bikes are a popular alternative when public transportation isn't available and in a rural town like Aisho, there is infrastructure for a bike path you can take to the local attraction of Kongorin temple. Around the world rural tourism promotes farm-to-table dining, pick-your-own produce, farmers markets, wineries, dude ranches, and cooking classes utilizing local ingredients. People who live in urban areas want to escape from urban life (Heins, 2004). In a 2020 study by Alarcon and An, they describe three types of rural tourists (An & Alarcón, 2020b). Occasional-driven visitors: tourists who view rural experiences as very special events such as weddings, family gatherings, and anniversaries. Active leisure seekers: tourists who like engaging in rural outdoor activities such as hiking trails, biking, or watersports. These tourists are attracted to the natural landscapes and rural surroundings that provide a backdrop for their active pursuits. These activities allow tourists to immerse themselves in the natural surroundings and local lifestyles. Rural immersion pursuers: they seek rural immersive hands-on experiences such as participating in local festivals, farm stays, and interacting with the people who live in the rural locations. It isn't uncommon for these preferences to overlap.

Aisho town has an annual festival at the end of August for the celebration of the Nakasendo which has traditional food stands like takoyaki, taiyaki, and yakitori (*Aisho-Cho, Shiga - PHOTOGUIDE.JP*, n.d.). Creating an authentic rural experience requires a focus on two important aspects: interacting with locals and engaging with the surrounding attractions. The

diverse range of hands-on activities offered in rural tourism plays a crucial role in attracting visitors and simultaneously generating economic benefits for local communities. Rural small towns can act as bridges connecting urban and rural attractions and infrastructure. (Tacoli, 2017) Small towns provide access points to outdoor recreation opportunities in surrounding regions. They offer accommodations, dining, shopping, and services in a quieter setting. Small towns are accessible from both rural and urban areas via busses and taxis. They provide tourists a place to stay with amenities while exploring proximity to both rural and urban attractions.

In Japan, different locations lend themselves to different types of tourists. Shiga prefecture is known for the treasures and history that it holds since it was the branch between Kyoto and Tokyo. Hokkaido up north is a popular place for winter sports and its natural beauty. Niigata prefecture has the most sake breweries.

Policies that support rural small towns' ability to attract tourists can benefit both urban and rural economies and food systems. Rural tourism often encourages tourists to stay longer in a destination than urban tourism for several reasons. There is a slower pace of life and more opportunities to relax compared to busy cities. The serene atmosphere of the countryside promotes longer stays as tourists can unwind and de-stress (C.-C. Chen et al., 2014). Hiking, cycling, or visiting farms allows visitors to immerse in nature and serves as an escape (An & Alarcón, 2020b). Rural tourism provides unique and authentic experiences rather than just taking pictures. Agritourism activities like participating in grape harvesting or milking cows offer hands-on experiences not found in cities. Learning traditional crafts and customs from locals also requires an extended stay. Tourists are motivated to prolong their trips to gain an in-depth understanding of rural life (Tacoli, 2017).

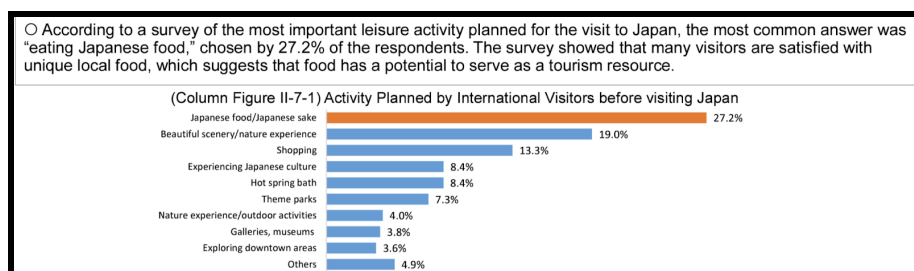


Figure 8: Liked foods by different countries. (*White Paper on Tourism in Japan, 2019 (Summary)*, 2019)

In the figure above food and the scenery are what international tourists look for. Because rural areas often have less developed infrastructure and transportation compared to cities; tourists may opt to stay longer due to the effort required to get to remote villages. Rural accommodation also tends to have fewer rooms, so booking longer stays may be necessary (Yang et al., 2021b). Rural destinations focus more on relaxation and nature while urban trips emphasize sightseeing and attractions. Rural tourism prioritizes unwinding and escaping busy modern life. This suits extended holidays rather than quick weekend getaways suited to cities. Tourists are not rushing to see sights, so they can take a more leisurely pace and stay longer.

2.3.3 Niches of Rural Tourism (Eco/Agri-tourism)

As tourism continues to grow in popularity, more travelers are seeking out niche tourism experiences that fulfill specialized interests and cravings, rather than simply visiting the most popular cities and sites. This trend is driven by the availability of knowledge and information online, which allows tourists to research and identify the specific experiences they desire when visiting a destination. Niche tourism caters to these specific desires by offering unique and tailored experiences (“The Emerging Trend of Niche Tourism,” n.d.).

Japan's rural areas offer several unique and niche tourism experiences for travelers looking to get off the beaten path. From spiritual retreats to agricultural experiences, Japan's countryside provides immersive opportunities to connect with nature, culture, and tradition. One growing niche is temple lodging, known as shukubo in Japanese. These overnight stays at Buddhist temples allow visitors to experience the lifestyle of monks. Guests can participate in spiritual rituals like meditation and sutra chanting, eating shojin ryori (Buddhist vegetarian cuisine), and finding calm through connecting with nature (Roman & Bury, 2022). For a more active experience, rice planting and harvesting programs have become popular agritourism activities. (Ammirato & Felicetti, 2013)

Ecotourism in Japan is common in the more rural and remote regions of Japan with activities like wildlife viewing, hiking, cycling, and diving. Ecotourism has grown as travelers to Japan seek more meaningful experiences in nature. Ecotourism benefits the areas it's in by having a low environmental impact, contributing to the conservation of the area, and immersing the tourists in natural experiences that are more about the lack of human touch. Agritourism in Japan usually tries to target kids since it provides a good hands-on learning experience for children outdoors. Activities usually include planting, harvesting, farm stays, and culinary classes using local produce. Agritourism provides an authentic rural experience with festivals like Hokkaido's Potato Festival and Nagano Apple Festival. The good news is that there are plenty of festivals that can satisfy the needs of tourists who are in these niches. (Ammirato & Felicetti, 2013).

United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) approves of the potential for sustainable growth which niche tourism plays a crucial role in by diversifying tourism offerings and spreading the economic benefits to a wider range of destinations and communities. Beyond

traditional attractions, reducing strain on popular international tourist sites and distributing visitor flows more evenly gives leeway to the infrastructure in place. This mitigates the risk of over-reliance on a single tourism product. Niche tourism also focuses on experiences closely tied to local cultures, traditions, and heritage. By promoting and supporting these authentic experiences, niche tourism contributes to the preservation of cultural practices, languages, arts, and crafts, maintaining the uniqueness and authenticity of a destination. There are direct interactions with local communities and small businesses, directly supporting the local economy and enhancing economic sustainability at the grassroots level. This support fosters a sense of pride and ownership among residents (Yang et al., 2021b). Lastly, niche tourism segments align with sustainable principles, emphasizing environmental conservation and respect for local cultures. By adopting sustainable practices, niche tourism contributes to the protection of natural and cultural assets, ensuring their preservation for future generations. (*UNWTO Annual Report 2017*, n.d.)

2.4 Ethics for Tourism

2.4.1 Morality and Effects

The principles of tourism acknowledge that while tourism can bring significant benefits, it also has the potential to adversely affect the geographical, social, and cultural aspects of a destination. When analyzing the ethics of tourism, whether on the side of the tourist, or the local/resident, it is important to consider the concept of morality. When traveling to a foreign country, cultural interactions can lead to both enriching exchanges and conflicts. This can raise moral dilemmas and prompt discussions about the ethical implications of various aspects of tourism, both from an international and local perspective.

2.4.2 Mount Fuji

Japan's most famous dormant volcano, deeply rooted in Japanese culture and religion, has been experiencing a major tourism increase in the summer of 2023. Government officials and rangers both express their concern for its overcrowdedness and the cross-affects the mass amount of tourists could have on the sacred land beloved by not only Japan but the world. Masatake Izumi, an official of the Yamanashi Prefecture, noted that “the hordes of hikers are ... putting the mountain’s limited toilet facilities and four medical stations under increasing pressure” (Jozuka, 2023). With this influx of tourism, an unnecessary, uncontrolled amount of stress is being applied to the mountain's resources and infrastructure. Rescue requests were up 50% when compared to the 2022 hiking season (Katsumura & Katsumura, 2023). Masatake Izumi adds that “[t]ourists can just come and leave. Local people are left to deal with it - that’s the problem” (Kaneko, 2023). Some issues stemming from tourism persist even after the departure of tourists. Longer-lasting environmental changes are left in the hands of local residents. Shoichi Osano, a souvenir shop employee, expressed “[w]hat Mount Fuji should be like in the future is something that we (local residents, government and stakeholders) need to discuss together” (Kaneko, 2023).



Figure 9: Gogome, Mount Fuji's Most Popular Hiking Station – Jozuka, E - CNN - Yamanashi Prefectural

Moving forward, what can be done to reduce the impact of tourism places on Mount Fuji? Jun Shibazakia, a 62-year-old who arrived at the mountain for a tour expressed that, "[Mount Fuji is] so crowded. Limited entry might be something we have to live with" (Katsumura & Katsumura, 2023). During the 2023 climbing season, around 221,000 people hiked the mountain, an increase of approximately 38% from 2022 and approximately 93.9% of the volume from 2019 (Tanno, 2023).

All signs point towards another increase in the 2024 hiking season. Even with the stress that tourism applies, positive stimulus is present. It was reported that at one of the routes on the Shizuoka Prefecture side, there was a 67.4% increase in conservation cooperation donations (1,000 yen) when compared to 2019 (Tanno, 2023). Moving forward, attracting so-called “quality tourists” over quantity will be vital in reducing the over-tourism expected in the future. Working directly with local residents and individuals who survive off the stimulus brought by

Mt. Fuji's tourism will not only relieve stress on already taught infrastructure but improve visitor satisfaction as well.

2.4.3 Ethical Takeaway

Promoting tourist development in rural locations has been observed “to conserve natural capital and to a certain degree, has slowed the deterioration of natural resources in the surrounding areas” (B. Chen et al., 2018). To preserve not only Mount Fuji but other rural landmarks and businesses, promoting sustainability in the form of social, human, or financial capital is essential.

When traveling to a different country, there is a clash in values between the residents and tourists. On the other hand, “The internal conflict of values is [also] inherent in tourists as consumers of the tourism product, in organizers of tourism activities, in workers in the tourism sector, and local residents” (Turov, 2022). The ethical component of rural activities should incorporate the values of “maintaining the authenticity of everyday rural life, accepting the interests of the local community, and ensuring the principles of sustainable (including ecological) development of the area” (Doronina et al., 2018).

2.5.3 Transportation

For domestic public transportation in Japan, there are three primary methods for travel. The Shinkansen, which is the Japanese bullet train, is commonly used for long-distance travel between prefectures. The railway system is suitable for transit between and within cities. The local buses are commonly used for getting around within the city. Most urban cities are connected by the Japanese Rail System (JR), which is the largest railway group in Japan (*Trains*,

2023). However, rural locations do not offer enough transportation coverage for the entire town, so walking and taxis are the only ways to travel in this situation (*Taxis in Japan* | *Japan Transportation* | *Travel Japan* | *JNTO*, n.d.). Due to the scarcity of taxi services in rural areas, many tourists refrain from visiting small towns and villages.

2.6 About our Sponsor

The goal of SekaiCo is to connect with people from overseas who are eager to practice a true cultural exchange. Functioning as a community center for people overseas; SekaiCo plans to serve as a headquarters for foreigners who want to practice cultural exchange. SekaiCo plans to serve as a beginning for rural revitalization in Aisho. It is something that can't be just described as cultural exchange but rather in Riku-san's words (the owner) it is “異文化交流” or *ibunka-kouryu*. An exchange isn't just going somewhere practicing the traditions that are there. It is the emotional translation across cultural borders that creates a special type of relationship of both sides wanting to learn about each other. The next big part is the comprehension translation of cultural exchange. A person's understanding of other people begins to broaden. It opens their mind to diverse perspectives, fostering empathy and a broader worldview. By learning another language, they gain direct access to people's thoughts and emotions, enabling more meaningful connections. Cultural sensitivity develops as they navigate social norms, preventing misunderstandings and promoting respect. He wants to target two types of people: Working holiday visa holders and tourists who want a hands-on cultural experience. Out of both groups, Working Holiday visa holders stay up to a full year which allows for the most potential in *ibunka-kouryu* while the other tourists who want a hands-on experience can experience the

authenticity in Aisho town. In Aisho with its extensive rich history hopefully, this cultural exchange will garner attention and bring more people to this town.

2.6.1 Working Holiday Visa

	Countries/regions	Year of initiation	Maximum number that could be issued per year
1	Australia	1980	no limit
2	New Zealand	1985	no limit
3	Canada	1986	6,500
4	Republic of Korea	1999	10,000
5	France	2000 [Note]	1,500
6	Germany	2000	no limit
7	The United Kingdom	2001	1,000
8	Ireland	2007	800
9	Denmark	2007	no limit
10	Taiwan	2009	10,000
11	Hong Kong	2010	1,500
12	Norway	2013	no limit
13	Portugal	2015	no limit
14	Poland	2015	500
15	Slovakia	2016	400
16	Austria	2016	200
17	Hungary	2017	200
18	Spain	2017	500
19	Argentina	2017	From Japan to Argentina: 200 From Argentina to Japan: 400
20	Chile	2018	200
21	Iceland	2018	30
22	Czech	2018	400
23	Lithuania	2019	100
24	Sweden	2020	no limit
25	Estonia	2020	From Japan to Estonia: no limit From Estonia to Japan: 100
26	Netherlands	2020	200
27	Uruguay	2023	100
28	Finland	2023	From Japan to Finland: no limit From Finland to Japan: 200
29	Latvia	2023	100

Figure 10: (*The Working Holiday Programmes in Japan*, n.d.)

Working Holiday Visas aren't available for all countries. The main purpose of this type of visa is that it is for young travelers (age 18-30) who want to spend time learning about the culture of another country. Learning the nuances of culture takes time, so this visa extends their stay for a whole year while confirming that they have the healthcare, funds, and a job lined up to integrate into the country well without problems. Working holiday visas function as an alternative to finding a company that does work sponsorship in another country or going on expensive college exchange programs (*The Working Holiday Programmes in Japan*, n.d.).

3.0 Methods

The group will be investigating rural revitalization by assisting our sponsor, SekaiCo, in creating a rural tourism program that emphasizes ibunka-kouryu, where the Working Holiday Visa holders (WHISA holders) can interact with locals during Japanese traditional activities hosted by SekaiCo. Therefore, the priority is to find foreigners with working holiday visas since they are likely to have a deeper engagement in Japanese culture. A second project of SekaiCo is to give international tourists an authentic Japanese cultural experience. For this purpose, the group will use methods consisting of auto-ethnography and conducting a variety of interviews. We will interview businesses and organizations in Aisho to learn more about them and their perspective on foreign tourists. There will also be interviews with international tourists to learn about their preferences for a rural tourism experience.

3.1 Objective 1: Find and Interview WHISA Holders in Japan

The first objective is to give our sponsor a better understanding of how to reach WHISA holders, what difficulties they encounter in acquiring a visa, and why they got this visa for Japan. As an extremely niche group, identifying, locating, and interviewing was difficult and to best solve this problem we will attempt to reach as many eyes as possible. Creating and holding up signs in popular locations such as Kyoto station will expose us to an exceedingly large audience. Creating posts on online forums such as Facebook and Reddit is how we plan to digitally attract attention. Our sponsor is looking for WHISA holders because they can stay at SekaiCo house for a longer amount of time and can connect with Japanese culture. With a whole year, they can learn to understand the intricacies of people and language during their day-to-day lives to establish a more profound connection to Japan as a whole.

The questions directed towards Working Holiday Visa holders focused on figuring out how the visa holders had found information on the working holiday visa, how difficult it was to acquire this visa, and where visa holders gathered to talk about the visa online. We interviewed visa holders individually as well as, surveyed them online through google forms QR codes posted in Kokoka, a foreign language learning center in Japan.

3.2 Objective 2: Interviewing Aisho Business Owners

The business owners' opinions on tourism are an important factor to consider when researching the international tourism industry in Aisho. Certain businesses might consider foreign tourists a nuisance, especially related to recent events like the overtourism of Mt. Fuji. To address that concern, there are a few important points to make clear when interviewing Aisho business owners. This includes their opinion on foreign visitors to their business, opinions on foreign tourists coming to Aisho, and the background of their business, which will be included in the brochure the group will create.

To locate business owners in Aisho, the group has walked around the town and scheduled interviews with business owners after walking into open shops. Iwanaga-san from SekaiCo has also provided local businesses for interviews. For each business, the group drafted specific questions with a general focus on four major topics, the business background, personal suggestions of locations in Aisho for tourism, opinions on international tourists as a business, and opinions on international tourism in Aisho as a local resident.

3.3 Objective 3: Gain an Understanding of Tourists' Needs for Rural Tourism in Japan

We need to understand which type of international tourists want and need in rural Japan when they visit. This will help SekaiCo understand what type of tourists (culinary tourists, ecotourists, cultural tourists, etc) they need to target to be the most successful. Many tourists wouldn't think to go to a location with sub-par lodging, and difficult accessibility. Since SekaiCo is focusing on cultural-based experiences most of the interview questions will be focused on the type of cultural experiences they prefer or want to have. There will be qualitative questions about the same topic on why they like that specific activity. We will also ask tourists if they would be interested in an experienced-based tourism program and the expectations they have for such a program. We will be directly asking tourists we see in Kyoto and Aisho. The general data gathered will be collected by quick interviews or a Google form-style submission. International visitor preferences can also be narrowed down to certain activities. We will be analyzing the data for trends and maximums to give a thoughtful and definitive answer to SekaiCo on international tourist needs organized in nationality and age demographic groups. There will be both quantitative data summarizing demographic data of international tourists, and qualitative data on their opinions.

3.4 Objective 4: Autoethnography - Sustainable Tourist Attractions in Aisho

To convince international tourists to visit Aisho, it is important to identify the existing tourist attractions, any location or item that would interest an international tourist, in the local areas and understand the demographic they target. For a better understanding of the tourism experience in Aisho, the group has gone to attractions suggested by the Aisho Tourism

Association (such as the Kongorin-ji temple) and other attractions based on our investigation and research. The group will travel to these popular locations and assess the potential of attracting international tourists as well as take a record of their experiences to be reflected on and included in the results section. The group will use the information gathered to formulate a list of the premier destinations to visit in Aisho. The information about these sites will be written and presented on the brochure for SekaiCo to advertise a rural tourism experience in Aisho. It is important to consider the types of international tourists that will visit, since they could be traveling for sightseeing, want to experience the native culture, or both.

3.5 Objective 5: Make a Deliverable for our Sponsors, SekaiCo:

The intention behind creating a brochure for SekaiCo is to have a streamlined way for tourists to see and read about available attractions in Aisho. A key factor to a tourist's experience is having information on rural tourism in the form of a guidebook (Ohe, 2013). A guidebook would be in the form of a physical brochure. A 2004 survey by MAFF of 100 individuals in their 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, and 60s (500 total) asked "What is necessary for rural tourism development". The results showed that 27% said a guidebook, 18% said low price and 16.5% wanted more information on agro-tourism (Ohe, 2013).

The deliverable will contain the following information for each attraction: location on a map, a picture to put a visual reference if the tourist is not familiar with the activity, and a brief description of each activity. Since SekaiCo currently does not have a website, we feel digitally displaying not only what SekaiCo can offer but also making it so their business is reachable online will be largely beneficial for all stakeholders involved (SekaiCo, businesses, tourists). We will create an extensive list of recommendations for a potential website SekaiCo will have based

on the information we collect. Physical brochures can be distributed to tourist information centers making the content accessible to tourists and further exposing SekaiCo to prospective customers.

Specific attractions and their respective information will be gathered through the prior execution of the objectives above. While communicating with SekaiCo, we can address their concerns, recommendations, and requests regarding specific content wanted on a brochure.

3.6 Limitations

- Language Barrier (Cannot target all demographics of tourists due to a language barrier, or interview with locals/ business that don't speak English)
 - Solution: Relying on translation software, translators, and personal translation.
 - During interviews with businesses, we will ask if someone who speaks English is present/ can be present for the interview and could take the place of the business owner or translate on the business owner's behalf.
- Businesses not wanting to Interview (Not interested in tourism, Does Not have the time, Does have the time but doesn't fit into the schedule)
 - Solution: Extend a survey version of the interview questions.
- Businesses and tourists not wanting the information from the interview shared.
 - Solution: We can use John Doe and other monikers to ensure that the information shared is not related to a specific business name or tourist name
 - Solution: If they specify further that even that is too much, we will not directly quote them at all in the paper.
- Not getting enough sample size

- Survey Solution: Try to hit the largest market (amount of tourists) we can with the survey by using QR codes.
- Businesses Solution: While convincing businesses to agree to a sit-down interview, make sure we pitch the benefits rural tourism adds to their business and the surrounding lands.
- Residents Solution: While convincing residents to agree to a sit-down interview, express the cultural presence, and local stimulus derived from rural tourism.
- The problem in getting tourists to take the initiative in taking the survey
 - Solution: Express inviting body language without being a nuisance to people. When applicable approach tourists (Surveyors take the initiative over the surveyee)

3.7 Scope of Project

There are multiple projected outcomes for our project, including a list of suggestions for SekaiCo's potential website, data for WHISA holders and tourists, as well as a brochure for Aisho. Data on foreign tourists and working holiday visa holders will give our sponsor a better idea of how to attract these groups of people to Aisho for work, or tourism purposes. Qualitative data on the businesses that are friendly towards foreign tourists is important to determine where tourists should visit to experience Japanese culture and will allow us to understand how foreign tourists could affect businesses in Aisho. Using all this data we will create a brochure that displays the businesses tourists should visit in Aisho.

4.0 Results

During the 7 weeks spent in Kyoto, the group gathered a general understanding of Aisho through autoethnography and interviewed a variety of local businesses to understand the local economy and their perception of international tourism in Aisho. For the latter part of the project, the group attempted to contact WHISA holders through a variety of methods including online posts, offline posts, and phone calls. The group also collected tourist data using a survey with a list of questions that shape the general ideas of the demographic.

4.1 Businesses/Associations Interviewed

4.1.1 Aisho Tourism Association (ATA)

The Aisho Tourism Association is the official tourism information center of Aisho. The group interviewed a senior employee to learn more about tourism, tourist destinations, and the tourist population in Aisho. In the interview, they mentioned the peak seasons for domestic tourism are in the summer for fireworks, the fall for the red leaves at Kongorin-ji, and rarely any tourists in the winter due to snow. The main attractions for domestic tourism are the Bintemari Museum, Toyomitsu Shrine, Omi Jofu Museum, and the old Nakasendo trail. Bintemari is the traditional craft of Aisho and a preservation society is in place to protect and pass on the craft to future generations. The town also hosts a three-day-long event every year to make a bin-temari. Aisho town has a special festival on the last Saturday of August every year, where the town celebrates Aisho being a post on the Nakasendo, where a large Bin-temari ball is rolled around town. The employee mentioned seeing some foreign tourists before the COVID-19 pandemic but has not seen many afterward. The employee expressed fondness and pride for Aisho and hoped more visitors could experience Aisho and everything it has to offer.

4.1.2 Omi Jofu Museum

Omi Jofu refers to high-quality hemp and ramie fabric that are handwoven in Aisho town. This fabric is special due to the production technique dating back 600 years and its utilization of a special loom, jibata, that is rare even in Japanese traditional weaving productions today. The land around Aisho was also the home of the Omi merchants, which were merchants that traded with the entire nation of Japan through the various ancient highways and one of their merchandise was the Omi Jofu due to its high-quality fabrics. The museum offers purchases of products made from Omi Jofu as well as the original fabric and holds learning programs to teach visitors traditional techniques.

The group interviewed Yumiko Tanaka, the Secretary-General, and Reiko Yamaguchi, from the Human Resource Development department, to gain a deeper understanding of the traditional practice and the museum, as well as gain information on tourism at Omi Jofu. According to Tanaka-san, the museum experiences its highest influx of domestic tourists during the period spanning from May to August, while the number of foreign tourists visiting the museum remains comparatively low. They believe that foreign tourists are more interested in Otsu and Lake Biwa as they are more popular. They want more foreigners to visit their museum and try their program where hoppers can experience cloth making using their traditional machines and techniques. With the advancements in technology, Tanaka-san explained that they were very worried about traditional crafts losing value since machines could make higher-quality products. They want to preserve their craft so tradition is not forgotten. There is currently an Omi Jofu preservation society that the Aisho branch is a part of. There is a fear of a loss of cultural identity due to Westernization in Japan because of the Western-styled clothes more and more

people wear. At the end of the interview, Tanaka-san said that Aisho is a special place where true Japanese culture remains and it is more traditional than Kyoto and Nara because the shrines and temples are original and not decorated for tourism.

4.1.3 Fujii Honke Brewery

Fujii Honke is a family-run sake brewery that started in 1831 and has been passed down from generation to generation. The brewery offers tours for visitors to see the production process of their sake as well as free taste testing before purchases. The sake they brew is unique because they use aquifer water from the snow and rain of the Suzuka mountains that surround Aisho and they use sake rice, which is twice as tall as regular rice, planted and harvested by local farmers.

When the group interviewed the president of the brewery, Fujii-san, he expressed pride in sake brewing and thankfulness to his ancestors for such a wonderful trade. Fujii-san was keen on the history and cultural value of sake. He believes sake is not only a beverage but also a way to convey culture and history, so it should be enjoyed properly. For sake tastings their clients are predominantly domestic tourists. Fujii Honke sees very few foreign tourists but welcomes them to tour their brewery and hopes the tourists can do research beforehand for a better appreciation of the history and process. Fujii Honke mainly sells their products in Shiga Prefecture and have few exports to other countries due to strict alcohol import laws. Fujii-san expressed worry about the loss of cultural value and quality due to improper handling and incorrect drinking methods of the exported products. Fujii Honke is open all year with most domestic tourists visiting in spring and fall. They have faced lower tourism after the Covid-19 pandemic. Fujii Honke also opened up a restaurant a year ago with the tables, chairs, booths, and more all being made of recycled

sake barrels, and would like to welcome more visitors since it is not as well known as the main brewery.

4.1.4 Kuyomon Farm

Kuyomon Farm is a family-run business that consists of farmlands and a shop that sells their produce. Kuyomon farm is named after Mr. Kuyomon, the father of the current owner, Hisashi Kubota. The family started with 30 acres of land and gradually expanded to 300 acres, which is managed by their 4 full-time employees and 2 part-time workers. The family absorbs abandoned farmland left by other farmers after they retire, as a result, they own farmlands scattered throughout Aisho. Unlike American farms, which specialize in one product, Kuyomon Farm produces vegetables, fruits, and rice and also makes fermented products like miso, koji, and pickled side dishes.

The group interviewed Hisashi Kubota-san, the current owner of Kuyomon farm. Kubota-san said most of their customers are locals and have never seen any foreign tourists. However, they welcome foreign visitors to taste their food and experience picking vegetables and fruits on their farm along with mochi and miso making in February. They are willing to hire foreigners to work on their farm, but they think it might be difficult with language issues, machinery operations, and the need to drive a car to travel between different farmlands. Kubota-san said it is difficult to manage 300 acres of farmland, but he feels an obligation to take in abandoned farms and support his country by providing food to help with food insecurity in Japan.

4.1.5 Omihachiman Association of Promoting Tourism & Local Products (OTA)

The OTA is the official tourism information center in Omihachiman. The group interviewed one of the tour guides with the assistance of a local artist, who volunteered to translate. From the interview, it was understood that Omihachiman was one of the most popular tourist cities in Shiga prefecture with lots of historical sites, specialty cuisines, and festivals. Omihachiman has Mt. Hachiman, which has a historical castle, and shrine, and allows tourists to view Lake Biwa and the greater Shiga region. It also embraces its history with figures like Oda Nobunaga, a general who tried to conquer all of Japan at once, and William Vorris, a successful entrepreneur from America who started a famous medical company. The traditions and stories in Omihachiman are passed down from the elderly to the young through word of mouth. Near the OTA is a moat that surrounds Mt. Hachiman Castle. The moat and the housing lining the moat are specifically preserved for its traditional image and likeness. The moat and the buildings are famous for their history of film production. Omihachiman has the most tourists during spring and fall, and the interviewee said most foreign tourists were from Hong Kong and some from the U.S. and Europe. She also mentioned that many foreigners come to the yearly burning festival for pictures. Due to COVID-19, the tourist count has dropped significantly, which has significantly impacted the town's income.

4.2 Tourist Data

Tabulated Interview Data - Core Takeaways:

	History	Specialty	Peak Tourism Season	Opinion on Foreign Tourism	Covid-19 Pandemic Impacts	Hopes for Foreign Tourists	Ways of Advertisement for Foreign Tourism	Preservation Plans/Actions
Omi Jofu Museum	600 year old traditional craft	Hand woven strings using hemp, ramie, linen. Rare traditional weaving machine	Summer (May to Aug.)	Welcomes foreign tourists, has weaving experiences for visitors		Want more foreign tourists. Shiga prefecture is more original and traditional than Kyoto/Nara	Hopes to live stream to other countries as promotion. Pamphlet at ATA. Has a website, also advertised on ATA's website	Lessons for interest groups. Training programs
Fuji Honke Sake Brewery	Started in 1831 to provide delicious sake to locals	Traditional sake	Spring and Fall	Welcomes foreign tourists, has a brewery tour for visitors	Less visitors after Covid-19 pandemic	Hope foreign tourists can do some research before touring the brewery for better immersion	Pamphlets at ATA. Has a website	Pass down through the family
Kuyomon Farm	Generation farm (2 generation)	Local fruits, vegetables, rice. Self-made miso, koji, amazake, and side dishes		Welcomes foreign tourists, has picking experiences for visitors		Want more foreign tourists to visit. Considers hiring but many obstacles exist	Pamphlets at ATA. Has a website	Pass down through the family
Aisho Tourism Association (ATA)			Summer: fireworks Fall: Kongorin-ji (red leaves) Winter: not a lot of visitors due to snow	Hopes more tourists (international and domestic) will come to Aisho	Some foreign tourists before Covid-19, but less afterwards	Wants more tourists in general, but did not specify foreign	No ATA advertisement, but variety of pamphlets and booklets regarding events in Aisho and greater Shiga area. Has a website	Bin-temari, the town's traditional craft, has a preservation society
Omi-hachiman Association of Promoting Tourism & Local Products			Spring (cherry blossom season), Fall (Red leaves)	Welcomes them, hoping that more people from around the world can visit and see omi-hachiman	Far fewer tourists post Covid and as a result	"Waiting" for the tourists to come back) Especially the tour-busses	Pamphlets at the omihachiman tourism association building	Traditions passed down through word of mouth, and certain areas in Omihachiman are specific for preserving the architecture there

Figure 11: Businesses Interview Data.

29 tourists responded to our tourist survey and one working holiday visa holder responded to our working holiday visa survey. Of the 29 respondents, 32% were first-time visitors to Japan and 32% had visited Japan over 5 times. For the motive behind traveling to Japan, food and sightseeing were among the most popular with survey results showing 82.8% and 79.3% respectively. The three most accessible ways for respondents to get tourism information were through a website, social media sites, and other applications with 72.4%, 13.7%, and 10.2% respectively. Out of all the respondents, 48% were Thai and 41% were American, furthermore, 59% of the respondents were aged 50-60, and 24% were aged 20-30.

72% of respondents said they would be interested in a tourism program where you have hands-on activities that bring you closer to Japanese Culture. Finally, 100% of the respondents said they would like to visit Japan again.

4.3 Autoethnography of Aisho and Shiga as a Whole

4.3.1 Transportation

To maximize the work time in Aisho, the group needed to arrive at Kyoto station at around 8 AM to catch a special rapid service train. Special rapid service skips some of the stops making it faster to get to further locations. We would usually hit rush hour and be on a train with a mixture of students going to school and then the salary workers going to work. In our experience, we never saw another tourist on our trip to and from Aisho. On the train to Aisho, more and more people would get off at places like Otsu, Kusatsu, and other industrialized towns. Notogawa station is where we usually get off and transfer to an hourly bus to reach Echigawa station, the center of Aisho town. On our walks or bike rides through Aisho, we would predominantly see single or two-story houses with plenty of small farms along the way. Occasionally, we would get off the train at Inae station, one stop after Notogawa station, and walk straight to our sponsor's house while from Notogawa station we would take a bus to Echigawa station to rent bikes.

Having a sense of direction in a rural part of Japan when we had only been in Japan for a week was difficult. There were no English street signs and no locals spoke any English. On our first time taking the bus, there were multiples lined up with similar kanji signifying the stops. We were very uncertain about which bus we should take and took a chance on one of them. We would routinely use navigation apps to get around Aisho. The group had difficulty in utilizing

the bus system because the directions of the bus were written in kanji, but there were English translations on the bus. Walking around in Aisho destroyed our feet and was difficult to do for the whole day. Biking was a good alternative to driving, but it required expertise due to the lack of sidewalks on some streets and certain attractions were far from the town, which takes a long time to reach. At the end of the day, we would have to get back to Inae station before 7 pm, to get back to Kyoto at 8 pm, or wait half an hour for the train since in the rural areas they don't come frequently. When on our way back to Kyoto from Aisho, we would see individuals who appeared to be students and working-class individuals get off at Inae station.

4.3.2 Interactions with Locals

Through our limited interactions with locals, they made a kind effort to help us even if we didn't ask and were more inviting than locals we encountered in Kyoto. During our first day in Aisho, we coincidentally found Fujii Honke and requested an interview from the old lady managing the store, who we assumed was the mother of the business. Through the usage of Google Translate and the help of a younger employee who knew some English, we were successful in explaining our project and the wish for a business interview during the later weeks. They happily agreed to the interview and immediately invited us to go on a tour of the brewery, which we accepted. Other encounters in Aisho include an old man talking to us about the hot weather with an even warmer smile on his face, another encounter was when we were trying to find Kongorin-ji and a local eagerly helped us with directions. Throughout our entire time in Kyoto we were never approached or engaged with, but while in Omihachiman and Aisho we were engaged on multiple occasions. The businesses we interviewed were more than willing to help us out and were very happy when we tried to speak even just a little Japanese. Our

experience with locals made the group feel more welcomed in rural places than in popular locations in Kyoto that face over-tourism.

4.3.3 Kongorin-ji

Kongorin-ji is a Buddhist temple located at the east corner of Aisho town, near the Suzuka mountains. After passing the front gate, there were various gardens and small traditional buildings before arriving at the main hall. Getting to Kongorinjin itself required a 45-minute bike ride from Echigawa train station. It took around 10 minutes to get to the actual bike path and from there we were greeted with open fields, blue sky, and very far away, the Suzuka mountain range.



Figure 12: Aisho landscape.

Since most of Aisho is flat and the air quality is much better than the cities you can see extremely far. As we got to our destination the infrastructure for the bike path became more rugged and the trees that were over us bent down close to the ground. The taller ones of the group, Nick and Bryce, had to bend down to not get a face full of the spiders that decided to make their home on these low branches. Towards the end of the path, we face a steady incline as we start climbing the mountain on which Kongorin-ji stands.

Before reaching the temple, there was a small village that we passed through. The locals here greeted us with smiles and as we reached a dead end, we asked them for directions to Kongorin-ji's location. In Japanese, they say to take a left, right, left, and then 5 meters later take a right to where the path will lead you straight to the temple. At the entrance of the temple, we noticed that the people visiting Kongorin-ji were all locals. It seemed that we were the only tourists around. In the parking lot, these locals had come in Mercedes, BMWs, Audis, and other luxury vehicles. Unlike any of the other temples and shrines we had visited in Kyoto, Hiroshima, Osaka, or Tokyo, some plants have grown in between the stones that make up the path. The stones are uneven and moss covers some of the rocky walls that guide our path up to the temple. We paid for our ticket and were given a pamphlet in English which showed us the whole map of the Kongorin temple and its gardens. While visiting the shrine we felt more connected with the past worshipers and the religion as a whole.

The garden and the path are lined by moss, giving a stately feel of nature. The only things you can hear are the rustling of the leaves and the occasional bird chirping due to the lack of tourists. Out of the people we did see, they mostly consisted of older individuals, and one kid under around 5 years old. We presumed they were domestic tourists or locals, as they all arrived in cars. We say zero foreign tourists.

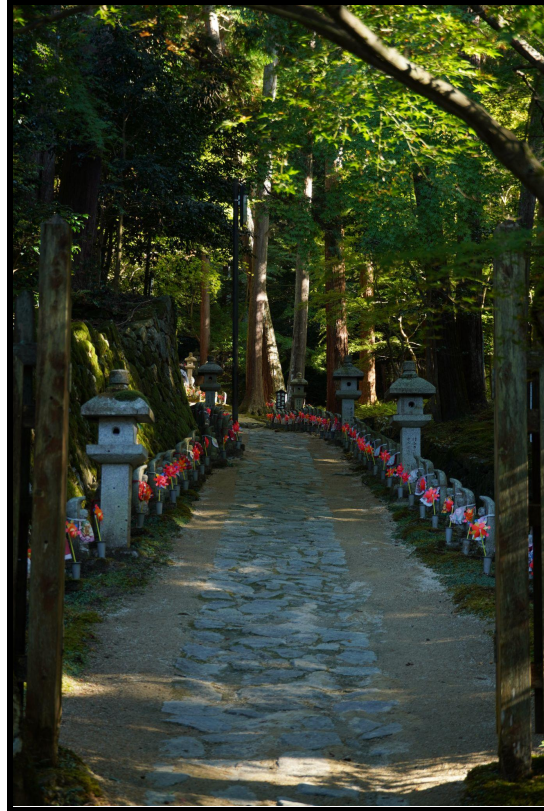


Figure 13: Jizo statues lining the path up to Kongorin temple.

When walking up we are greeted by Jizo statues with assorted bibs. Some of the bibs feature art from *Sailor Moon* and *Hello Kitty* but others have intricate patterns that we presume were hand-woven. There seemed to be hundreds of Jizo statues as we walked up the mountain. Nearing the top we start smelling incense and finally see the Kongorin-ji temple. Going inside we replaced our shoes with slippers to access the inside of the temple, where we saw Buddhist deity statues lining the walls. Throughout the temple, there were prayer locations with small Buddha statues and saisen boxes (wooden coin boxes) where individuals would give an offering before prayer. Since it was getting dark and we had to catch the train, we left soon after. The journey to get to Kongorin-Ji temple with no car is a long journey being in a wide and open rural town to a high up secluded temple with many trees surrounding it.

4.3.4 Otsu

One of the smaller trips we planned was to visit Otsu in Shiga Prefecture. We planned to look around the northern part of Otsu, where the Ukimido (Mangetsuji Temple) is, and then visit a local restaurant for tsukemen. We immediately noticed multiple foreign tourists at the station that were also headed to Ukimido. Otsu felt like a mix of suburban and urban. Around Ukimido were suburbs, houses were closer together and there were small side streets that we could go down. Once we arrived at Ukimido the first thing that we noticed was there was almost no one at the shrine, even though this was the most famous tourist attraction in Otsu. There was one couple that spoke in French and then a few other young couples plus some elderly tourists. It was a very serene and calm sightseeing location especially since we also managed to get there at sundown.



Figure 14: Ukimido (Mangetsu-ji Temple) coin “Floating Hall.”

The next stop was a local ramen restaurant where we would try tsukemen for the first time. The restaurant area felt more urban as there were plenty of taller buildings and businesses, with the train station nearby as well. Tsukemen is similar to ramen, instead of noodles and the rest of the ingredients being in broth the broth is thicker and is in a separate bowl. You dip the

noodles in the broth to get the taste of the broth. In the beginning, according to tradition, you supposedly eat the noodles first without dipping to appreciate the flavor that broth can give to plain noodles. Ramen is a staple of Japanese cuisine and can be found around the world but tsukemen is a much more traditional and rare noodle dish. The restaurant had a long line outside, the inside was cramped, but it was quiet and felt homely. Upon heading back to the station it became dark out, however, one building we passed by was holding a small jazz concert for locals and we recognized a couple of songs they played. One of us forgot our bag at the restaurant and coming back they were very nice and had kept our bag off to the side for us.

4.3.5 Omihachiman

Omihachiman was significantly different from Aisho, it felt sub-urban compared to Aisho because of its more modernized roads and the lack of farms around us. Even when first getting off the train, I immediately heard someone speaking in English, who turned out to be a foreign tourist. We also immediately saw a McDonald's outside the train station, when we had not seen any fast food restaurants in Aisho. We ended up going on the Hachimanyama ropeway gondola to get a good view of Omihachiman from the top of Mt. Hachiman, and once we got there we saw a parking lot for tour buses that were empty except for one bus. Once we reached the top, the view we got of the entire town was beautiful, we were speechless. The gondola was busy enough that it had been full on our way up, and we ended up around a small group of tourists when looking at the different views around the mountain. We also visited a Shinto shrine at the top of the mountain where we folded small origami cranes that had messages of what we wished for about the world, which we put in a box to be donated to the Hiroshima Peace Memorial. The

experience of folding the cranes made us feel closer to the culture there because they had English instructions which allowed us to contribute to the large pile of cranes that had already accumulated from other people making them.

4.4 Working Holiday Visa Holder Data

Trying to find working holiday visa holders came with complications. Initially, the group tried posting to reach WHISA holders on communities online like Facebook, and Reddit as well as the nearby language school, Kyoto International Community House (Kokoka). After not receiving any data, the group decided to try holding signs with survey QR codes at Kyoto station. However, the group discovered that it was illegal to solicit at the station, so the group decided to try the method at a busy intersection nearby. Unfortunately, this method also did not yield any data and after consulting with our sponsor and advisors, we decided to call language schools and share houses all over Japan to ask them to help advertise our survey for WHISA holders.

4.4.1 Kokoka (Kyoto Community International House)

Due to Kokoka being a center for cultural events, hosting Japanese language classes, being located close to our project center, and having an accessible community board, the group utilized their public message board and posted our project's description and WHISA survey QR code. This effort generated our only WHISA survey result. Due to a lack of data volume, no valid inferences can be made.

4.4.2 Facebook

We attempted to make multiple posts in a Working Holiday Japan Facebook group we found online. All of the posts we made to the Facebook group were delayed for weeks until being mass-approved on December 2nd. Two of the posts were made from the perspective of a student asking the community to contact us if they could be interviewed on their experience as a Working Holiday visa holder in Japan, neither post garnered any results. The last post was made from the perspective of a prospective WHISA holder asking what the group recommends for accommodations, to understand if this would be a successful way to gauge the opinion of a majority of the Facebook group. The post got some general recommendations in the comments, such as looking at Craigslist, doing a share house, or working at a conversational school (eikawa). The group also reached out to individuals in the Working Holiday Japan Facebook group through Facebook Messenger. We received zero messages back.

4.4.3 Reddit

We made four Reddit posts on different subreddits, two in r/movingtojapan, one in r/japan, and one in r/japantravel. The first post was made on r/movingtojapan from the perspective of a student asking to interview current WHISA holders, but the post was taken down for soliciting. The rest of the posts were made from the perspective of a potential WHISA holder asking questions about how others found accommodations, jobs, and any useful information. Unfortunately, all posts were taken down due to the moderator of the subreddits claiming that our questions could be found on Google Search.

4.4.4 Sign Holding

We made two different signs on A2-size cardboard, one contained a QR code for a tourist survey and the other sign contained a QR code for the WHISA holder survey. Both signs were decorated with country flags representing the major demographics of each sign. (Appendix J) We initially spent one hour in Kyoto Station advertising the signs before learning we could not advertise there. We then spent another 2 hours that day on the busy intersection in front of Kyoto Station holding the signs. We returned the next day to do more advertising at the same spot. In the end, no survey results came from the advertising. At Kyoto station, people would stop and read the sign, but would not scan the survey, and at the corner of the intersection, we experienced little to no interactions like this.

4.4.5 Phone Calls

The final method of contacting WHISA holders that we tried was through calling. We called a total of twenty-six Japanese language schools and share-houses, using a Skype cell phone plan, to ask if there were WHISA holders that we could interview or survey. Seven companies agreed to help us. We emailed each company our project description, which described our project in greater depth, as well as attached the survey. Some offered to ask their managers before contacting WHISA holders. We do not have any verification of their attempt to advertise our survey or extend our project description to any working holiday visa holders. The seven successful calls have not resulted in any further contact with WHISA holders. The rest of the calls were unsuccessful due to language barriers, connection issues, rejection due to the inability of the company to give private information of their clients, the company being unfamiliar with the Working Holiday visa or not wanting to take part in our research study.

4.4.6 Tourism Pamphlet/Website

To have a physical culmination and description of Aisho's tourist attractions we created a brochure (Appendix K). The brochure describes Aisho, and major tourist attractions, and displays them on a map. We made a draft of our website for the sponsor to build on, further recommendations that were viewed from other rural experiences and share-houses, are located in 6.2 Recommendation 1: Website Contents.

5.0 Analysis

5.1 Aisho Business Self-Sufficiency in Shiga Ecosystem

Aside from the beautiful sights, Aisho has culturally rich generational businesses. Excluding Kongorinji, Fujii Honke, and Omi Jofu, tourists were a rare sight. We saw zero foreign tourists in Aisho, this included attractions, transportation to and through Aisho, and while walking around. We were the first tourists seen at Fujii Honke this year and their sake-tasting events have a clientele predominantly consisting of domestic tourists. Their products are also sold across Japan but predominantly in Shiga prefecture. Omi Jofu's clientele is also predominantly Shiga residents. Kuyomon's farm-stand directly serves locals, their events are advertised domestically, and their produce is mainly sold throughout Aisho, including at schools. Due to Aisho businesses being self-sufficient in their local economy, they are not dependent on foreign tourism, as a result, international tourists are not viewed as part of their core client base. When walking into their place of business, the initial thought is not that "I need to persuade these tourists to buy my product", instead it is the opposite, they would rather share their culture and craft. This desire generated a more genuine exchange of culture even with a language barrier.

5.2 Aisho's Niche for Small Group Tourism

5.2.1 Businesses in Aisho

Due to Aisho businesses being self-sufficient in their local economy, they are not dependent on foreign tourism, as a result, international tourists are not viewed as part of their core client base. Their initial thought is not that "I need to persuade these tourists to buy my product", instead it is the opposite, they would rather share their culture and craft.

The desire of a business to share their craft generated a genuine exchange of culture, Fujii Honke is one business where this fact was extremely evident. When we showed up at their door with no reservation they treated us with the utmost enthusiasm eagerly welcoming us to an unscheduled tour of their brewery. Their motivation was rooted in their clear passion to teach the process of brewing sake and its cultural implications. Their business incentive was later verified during our interview with the president of the brewery, Fujii-san, where he expressed his passion for teaching others about sake. Omi Jofu, while also not reliant on international tourism, is dependent on domestic tourism from Aisho and the greater Shiga prefecture. Similarly, Yumiko Tanaka and Reiko Yamaguchi were eager to show us the process of weaving and dyeing their products rather than presenting the products like saleswomen. Weaving with hemp and ramie was part of their identity. There was more focus on teaching the historical importance than just the exchange of business.

We inferred that the eagerness of business owners in Aisho was due to the lack of presence of international tourists. Despite encountering a significant language barrier, our shared enthusiasm formed a powerful connection that enabled us to grasp the essential emotional aspects of their message. Both Fujii Honke and Omi Jofu expressed that in this post-COVID world, they see fewer tourists, domestic and foreign. They share the common wish to see more international visitors in Aisho to share their traditional crafts and express the uniqueness of the Japanese culture in Aisho.

5.2.2 Locals in Aisho

The friendliness of locals, the natural beauty, and the authenticity of its traditions add to Aisho being the perfect destination for small-group tourism. The town's shrines and temples, free

from tourism-oriented embellishments, provide a truthful glimpse into its rich spiritual heritage. The local shrines and the Kongorin-ji temple showcase the captivating natural beauty that tourists can immerse themselves in.

Aisho locals take great pride in their historical preservation societies, which are dedicated to safeguarding the rich heritage of its history as a stop on the Nakasendo route. They have events to promote generational traditions that represent the roots of Aisho such as their own Bintmari making or Nakasendo post festivals. The locals also are extremely friendly towards foreigners, on the first day we were there an old man passing by us talked to us about how hot it was outside. A similar experience occurred on the way to Kongorin-ji where when we thought we were lost, two old men told us the directions to the temple. These interactions confirmed our initial conclusion that Aisho is friendly even to foreigners. By having the town centered around these traditions, Aisho remains deeply connected to its roots, showcasing an authenticity that foreign tourists can experience through their friendliness. This makes Aisho a great location for small groups of tourists who can engage in authentic Japanese culture in a welcoming community.

5.3 Problems with Mass Tourism in Aisho

Omihachiman and Otsu are two examples of successful mass tourism in Shiga towns. The public transportation in these towns is drastically more accessible than in Aisho as they contain JR train stations and have more frequent buses. These train stations in Omihachiman and Otsu also have separate small tourist centers that have English pamphlets describing the town and surrounding area. Due to these towns having wider roads, they allow large tourist groups to travel in tour buses. Furthermore, Otsu and Omihachiman have a higher prevalence of English

speakers and bilingual signs making it more accommodating for international tourists.

Omihachiman and Otsu also boast a greater number of specialty shops, businesses, and tourist attractions compared to Aisho. Consequently, Omihachiman is dependent on tourism for income, unlike Aisho. As a result, Omihachiman has domestic investment in the form of hotels, restaurants, malls (EDION), and fast food restaurants such as McDonald's. The presence of large companies and fast food chains further indicates their modernization which appeals to a wider range of tourists.

The current Aisho town lacks accessible public transportation, several attractions, and the necessary amenities to host a large group of tourists. The proximity of these larger, more popular towns close to Aisho will also act as a magnet that steers visitors away from Aisho. Therefore, mass tourism is not the most optimal way for the rural revitalization process in Aisho.

5.4 Why Aisho is a Good Location for SekaiCo

SekaiCo being based in Aisho, allows Riku to facilitate traditional activities in a rural, authentic Japanese setting. SekaiCo benefits from its location as it specifically caters to the niche they're targeting. This benefit is not devoid of drawbacks. To catch the attention of broad markets and spark interest in the rural experience, the location poses challenges. Due to the close-knit nature of the residents, their passion for teaching the riches of Aisho, and their eagerness to converse, SekaiCo's goal of maintaining a community center in Aisho is viable.

SekaiCo's goal of creating a place for working holiday visa holders is also plausible. WHISA holders are better candidates than the typical tourists due to them being more adamant about learning and experiencing the entirety of Japanese culture instead of just seeing it at a temple or restaurant. The community center allows the WHISA holder a way to assimilate into

the Japanese way of life and build relationships with the people of Japan. The community center gives WHISA holders the chance to connect with people from different ages and disciplines as other shared houses might not offer a way to connect with others besides fellow WHISA holders.

SekaiCos' final goal of creating a place for tourists to experience Aisho seems less plausible. Riku's desired demographic for this goal is as follows: Second-time tourists who want to stay for a week to a month and be immersed and assimilate with the culture. When targeting second-time tourists, you run into a similar predicament to the above. While second-time tourists aren't as niche as WHISA holders, it immediately limits the clientele to a smaller tourist population. On the other hand, second-time tourists are typically interested in the rural experience as they have already hit the golden route of Tokyo, Kyoto, and Osaka and want a more meaningful experience, making them desirable. While tourists do tend to spend a week to a month on their vacation, similarly to WHISA holders, it is typical to travel around the other parts of Japan and not be locked in one place. For tourists spending a limited amount of time, and a large quantity of money with no ability to work in Japan, staying in a singular location that doesn't have enough sights to garner such a long stay, is a tough sell.

5.5 Analysis of WHISA Data

We have found that it is extremely hard to find WHISA holders by holding up signs near train stations, asking people in restaurant lines or who are on the street, calling share house companies, and calling language schools. From our experience calling businesses that house or teach WHISA holders, there is a hesitancy to give out the personal info of their customers. However, eight out of 26 of the schools and share houses we called agreed to attempt to connect us with any WHISA holders they knew. Although we have not received further results from this

method, it could provide more results in a continuation of the project. Our best result came through putting a QR code on a community board at the Kokoka community center in Kyoto. This result is likely due to the building being both a language school and a cultural hub. Although this was our best result, it only was one response to our survey and after asking the respondent to share the survey with other WHISA holders, we did not receive any further results. When speaking to people we met around Japan who spoke English we only found student visa holders. There were also some events for WHISA holders in the larger cities in Japan, however, these events are outside of the time scope of this project. Overall the group has found that WHISA holders were hard to find through all the methods we tried, and even when found, it was unlikely that they would respond to our survey.

5.6 Analysis of Tourist Data

We attempted four ways to gather survey data on tourists in Japan, with two of them being unsuccessful. Collecting survey data through sign-holding at Kyoto station was one of these unsuccessful methods. We infer the reason was that the average tourist has a full agenda and they are busy traveling to the next destination. Similar to sign holding, approaching tourists and asking questions was unsuccessful due to the same reason. The public culture in Japan is built off of order and respect and because of this international and domestic tourists are averse to being approached by random people. As we are college-aged foreigners, approaching other foreigners in a country where we do not look native and are not part of an official data collection agency, gives the view that we have no credibility.

The only successful method for getting tourist survey data was by asking people who did take our survey to share it with others who they know have been to Japan as well. The next best

method was through incentives by helping tourists with a task in return for a survey result.

Otherwise, tourists did not bother themselves with taking a survey because they had no reason to spend time with us.

With the scope of our project and budget limitations within 7 weeks we did not gather enough valid data for a legitimate conclusion on the entire tourists population. However, the data we did gather may provide small insights into tourist demographics. From this data, we came to multiple conclusions about tourists in Japan. One of the most important data points we received was that food and sightseeing were the main reasons tourists visited Japan. We concluded that this was due to 41.4% of our respondents being from the United States where the diet is significantly different from Japan. We also learned from our survey that most tourists find information on tourism from websites as opposed to social media. This is likely due to 58.6% of the age group of our respondents being 50-60, which is a demographic less connected to social media.

6.0 Conclusion

Although mass tourism is not suitable for revitalization in Aisho, it is a great city for small-group travel and cultural exchange. It is due to Aisho's preservation of local history through the Bitemari Preservation Society, local festivals, and companies, that it has managed to keep so close to its traditions. As a result, it is the ideal location for tourists who are looking for places in Japan that are more traditional when compared to Tokyo, Kyoto, and Osaka, which have all been significantly modernized. Aisho businesses' desire to share their culture with other people comes first and foremost for them which makes this town so great. There may be downsides in terms of transportation and not having as much history as neighboring towns, however, Aisho still provides a unique experience unlike any other.

6.1 Roadblocks

Throughout the project, many difficulties were encountered. Initially, there was a lack of direction on how to find WHISA holders. Surveying WHISA holders was extremely difficult due to the inability to post to popular subreddits and a Facebook group consisting of over 7,500 WHISA holders. We also had to wait for weeks to get our posts accepted, which led to data collection being unrealistic in a seven-week project. Aisho is a very rural location, it was difficult to get to and travel around Aisho. We were limited by how long we could be in Aisho and how many times we could go per week since the round trip for travel took 3 hours out of our day. Communication in Aisho was difficult as we met no one who could speak English.

6.2 Recommendation 1: SekaiCo Website Contents

Using the culmination of Facebook, Instagram, Reddit, and X (Twitter), as advertisement, funnels applicants to the website, where they can see SekaiCos' mission. Make sure that the website can be translated via Google due to SekaiCo needing to access multiple different cultures and languages. The landing page should show a picture of Aisho and contain quick information on what makes a rural experience and a rural experience with SekaiCo special. A subpage on what the WHISA is and why SekaiCo wants WHISA holders. This subpage could include details on resources for the application process, and who is eligible for this visa. A subpage on past residents which includes a picture of them, their country of origin, and a personal quote about their experience. A subpage on activities offered at SekaiCo such as Ikebana/ Tea ceremony/ Meditation/ Learning Japanese Dishes/ Learning How to make Wagashi/ Learning Japanese. Another subpage on activities around Aisho (tourist attractions) such as Kongorin-ji, Omi Jofu, Fujii Honke, Marunaka Shoyu, and Toyomitsu Shrine. A Google Maps link to their locations and a brief description should be included. A community board subpage where SekaiCo will post their events, and Aisho residents can post events as well. There should be a subpage showing what the SekaiCo house looks like, including the outside, bedrooms, community space, etc. A subpage on how to get to SekaiCo house by train. Mention that if you are going to stop by SekaiCo, you should contact Riku First. A FAQ subpage could be helpful but might now be necessary. Overall all subpages should have artistic pictures that capture Aishos' countryside feeling while being warm and inviting. A subpage containing links and the most recent post on their Instagram. Some popular share houses/ rural experience websites we recommend looking at are Workaway, Sakurahouse, Sharestay.net, Homestayinjapan.com, Borderless House, and Oakhouse.

6.3 Recommendation 2: How to attract WHISA Holders and Tourists

The tourist season for most places in Japan is not winter, taking advantage of that, running advertisements outside this season would possibly get better engagement with tourists. As for WHISA holders, establishing a good presence online in forums through Facebook and connecting to platforms WHISA holders visit like Workaway, HomestayinJapan, and Oakhouse would help.

6.4 Concluding remarks

Aisho has a self-sustaining economy and does not need tourism to be revitalized. It is also overshadowed and at a disadvantage in the realm of tourism when looking at neighboring towns/cities of Aisho. On the other side, the welcoming people of Aisho and the authentic hands-on activities and traditional history make it a prime target for international tourists who want to spend a year doing cultural exchange.

Bibliography

- Aisho Tourism Navi* | *Welcome to the Aisho Town Tourism Association website*. (n.d.). Retrieved September 25, 2023, from <https://www.aisho-kanko.com/>
- Aisho-cho, Shiga—PHOTOGUIDE.JP*. (n.d.). Retrieved November 28, 2023, from https://photoguide.jp/txt/Aisho-cho,_Shiga
- Ammirato, S., & Felicetti, A. (2013). The Potential of Agritourism in Revitalizing Rural Communities: Some Empirical Results. In *IFIP Advances in Information and Communication Technology* (Vol. 408). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-40543-3_52
- An, W., & Alarcón, S. (2020a). How Can Rural Tourism Be Sustainable? A Systematic Review. *Sustainability*, *12*(18), Article 18. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12187758>
- An, W., & Alarcón, S. (2020b). How Can Rural Tourism Be Sustainable? A Systematic Review. *Sustainability*, *12*(18), Article 18. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12187758>
- Chen, B., Qiu, Z., Usio, N., & Nakamura, K. (2018). Tourism's Impacts on Rural Livelihood in the Sustainability of an Aging Community in Japan. *Sustainability*, *10*(8), Article 8. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su10082896>
- Chen, C.-C., Petrick, J., & Shahvali, M. (2014). Tourism Experiences as a Stress Reliever. *Journal of Travel Research*, *55*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287514546223>
- Data list* | 日本の観光統計データ. (n.d.). Japan Tourism Statistics | 日本の観光統計データ. Retrieved September 11, 2023, from <https://statistics.jnto.go.jp/en/graph/>
- De Simone, E., Canale, R. R., & Di Maio, A. (2019). Do UNESCO World Heritage Sites Influence International Tourist Arrivals? Evidence from Italian Provincial Data. *Social Indicators Research*, *146*(1/2), 345–359.
- Doronina, M. V., Semenkova, S. N., & Taburkin, V. I. (2018). Social and Psychological Aspects

of Environmental Consciousness. *Journal of Environmental Management and Tourism*, 9(3), Article 3. [https://doi.org/10.14505//jemt.9.3\(27\).17](https://doi.org/10.14505//jemt.9.3(27).17)

[Governor of Shiga Pref.] Feb. 17: *Advanced measures for environmental/climate change and public transportation, issues common in Japan (Online press conference)* | 公益財団法人フォーリン・プレスセンター (FPCJ). (2023, February 8). 公益財団法人フォーリン・プレスセンター (FPCJ) | 「日本の今」を、世界のメディアへ。取材と広報を支援する情報発信サイト. <https://fpcj.jp/en/prlisting/20230217shiga/>

Handmade Hemp and Ramie Fabrics Fit for the Summer Heat | August 2021 | Highlighting Japan. (n.d.). Retrieved November 28, 2023, from https://www.gov-online.go.jp/eng/publicity/book/hlj/html/202108/202108_02_en.html

Heins, S. (2004). Rural living in city and countryside: Demand and supply in the Netherlands. *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment*, 19(4), 391–408.

Japan and the Rise of Heritage in Cultural Diplomacy: Where Are We Heading? On JSTOR. (n.d.). Retrieved October 9, 2023, from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/futuante.13.1.0125>

Japan Atlas: Nakasendo. (n.d.). Retrieved October 10, 2023, from <https://web-japan.org/atlas/historical/his26.html>

Japan International tourism revenue, percent of GDP - data, chart. (n.d.). TheGlobalEconomy.Com. Retrieved September 24, 2023, from https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/Japan/international_tourism_revenue_to_GDP/

Jozuka, E. (2023, September 11). *Mount Fuji: How Japan's sacred symbol fell victim to overtourism*. CNN. <https://www.cnn.com/travel/mount-fuji-overtourism-intl-hnk/index.html>

Kaneko, K. (2023, September 17). *Tourists have returned to Mount Fuji. Is that sustainable?* The Japan Times.

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2023/09/17/japan/society/mount-fuji-overtourism/>

Katsumura, M., & Katsumura, M. (2023, September 11). Japan says swarms of tourists defiling sacred Mt Fuji. *Reuters*.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/japan-says-swarms-tourists-defiling-sacred-mt-fuji-2023-09-09/>

Ohe, Y. (2013). Characterizing rural tourism in Japan: Features and challenges. In P. Diaz (Ed.), *WIT Transactions on State of the Art in Science and Engineering* (1st ed., Vol. 1, pp. 63–75). WIT Press. <https://doi.org/10.2495/978-1-84564-806-0/006>

Regional Revitalization of JapanGov. (n.d.). JapanGov. Retrieved October 10, 2023, from

https://www.japan.go.jp/key_policies_of_the_suga_cabinet/regional_revitalization.html

Roman, M., & Bury, K. (2022). The Tourist Attractiveness of Tokyo in the Opinion of Surveyed Tourists. *Tourism and Hospitality*, 3(1), Article 1.

<https://doi.org/10.3390/tourhosp3010014>

Sustainability | Free Full-Text | Tourism as a Key for Regional Revitalization?: A Quantitative Evaluation of Tourism Zone Development in Japan. (n.d.). Retrieved October 5, 2023,

from <https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/13/13/7478>

Tacoli, C. (2017). *Why small towns matter: Urbanisation, rural transformations and food security*. International Institute for Environment and Development.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep02594>

Tanno, K. (2023, September 20). No. Of Mt. Fuji climbers from Shizuoka Pref. Side almost recovers to pre-pandemic level. *Mainichi Daily News*.

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20230920/p2a/00m/0na/014000c>

Taxis in Japan | Japan Transportation | Travel Japan | JNTO. (n.d.). Travel Japan. Retrieved October 1, 2023, from <https://www.japan.travel/en/plan/getting-around/taxis/>

The Emerging Trend of Niche Tourism: Impact Analysis. (n.d.). *IBIMA Publishing*. Retrieved October 5, 2023, from <https://ibimapublishing.com/articles/JMRCS/2021/134710/>

The Working Holiday Programmes in Japan. (n.d.). Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. Retrieved November 17, 2023, from https://www.mofa.go.jp/j_info/visit/w_holiday/index.html

Trains. (2023, January 15). <https://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2019.html>

Transforming Rural Mobility in Japan and the World. (n.d.). World Economic Forum. Retrieved October 9, 2023, from <https://www.weforum.org/whitepapers/transforming-rural-mobility-in-japan-and-the-world/>

Turov, R. S. (2022). Axiology Of Rural Tourism. *European Proceedings of Social and Behavioural Sciences, Land Economy and Rural Studies Essentials*. <https://doi.org/10.15405/epsbs.2022.02.104>

UNESCO - Ojiya-chijimi, Echigo-jofu: Techniques of making ramie fabric in Uonuma region, Niigata Prefecture. (n.d.). Retrieved November 28, 2023, from <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/ojiya-chijimi-echigo-jofu-techniques-of-making-ramie-fabric-in-uonuma-region-niigata-prefecture-00266>

UNWTO Annual Report 2017. (n.d.). Retrieved October 5, 2023, from <https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/epdf/10.18111/9789284419807>

White Paper on Tourism in Japan, 2019 (Summary). (2019). Japan Tourism Agency.

<https://www.mlit.go.jp/kankocho/en/siryoku/content/001312296.pdf>

White paper on Tourism in Japan, 2020. (n.d.). Japanese Tourism Agency. Retrieved November 27, 2023, from <https://www.mlit.go.jp/kankocho/en/siryoku/content/001375676.pdf>

World Heritage Sites in Japan. (2019, July 6). Nippon.Com.

<https://www.nippon.com/en/features/h10035/world-heritage-sites-in-japan.html>

Yang, J., Yang, R., Chen, M.-H., Su, C.-H. (Joan), Zhi, Y., & Xi, J. (2021a). Effects of rural revitalization on rural tourism. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 47, 35–45. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2021.02.008>

Yang, J., Yang, R., Chen, M.-H., Su, C.-H. (Joan), Zhi, Y., & Xi, J. (2021b). Effects of rural revitalization on rural tourism. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 47, 35–45. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2021.02.008>

町の紹介|愛荘町. (n.d.). Retrieved September 25, 2023, from

<https://www.town.aisho.shiga.jp/soshiki/keiei/4/2/743.html>

統計情報|愛荘町. (n.d.). Retrieved September 25, 2023, from

<https://www.town.aisho.shiga.jp/soshiki/keiei/4/toukei/toukeijoho/741.html>

Appendix

Appendix A:

Interview Consent Form

Regional Revitalization of Japan Through Rural Tourism

Interviewers: Bryce Lukens, Joe Jiang, Nicholas Healy, and Dimitry Blazy

Interviewer Contact Email: gr-kyotoiqpproject2@wpi.edu

Project Advisors: Jefferson Sphar – jasphar@wpi.edu, Nirmal, Padini – pnirmal@wpi.edu

The interviewers are students from an American University – Worcester Polytechnic Institute – and are doing a social research project in collaboration with Iwanaga-san from SekaiCo to gain further knowledge on international tourists, working holiday visa holders, and Japanese business owners.

Research findings will be published in the university's internal database as part of a degree requirement at Worcester Polytechnic Institute.

The interviewers are asking for your voluntary participation in an interview that will serve to further develop our research topics listed below.

1. Information on Working Holiday Visa Holders
2. Tourists' Needs for Rural Tourism in Japan
3. Understanding on Aisho Businesses' Opinion on Tourism

The interview is estimated to take 30 minutes. With the possibility of an interview exceeding 30 minutes, the interviewers will notify the interviewee and ask if they would like to continue the interview or stop.

With the interviewee's permission, the interviewers would like to save and share the individual's name, address, and name of business, and a short description of business. With the interviewee's permission, the interviewers would like to record the interview for the purpose of creating a written transcription.

Participation in this interview is entirely voluntary. The interviewee possesses the right to skip questions and to stop the interview as the interviewee sees fit. While the interview is undergoing the interviewee has the right to intervene and ask questions as desired. After the interview, if the interviewee has questions or would like to redact any information from the recording/transcript, please contact the group using the "Interviewer Contact Email" above.

Before signing the consent form: Do you have any questions pertaining to the interview process, purpose of the study, or and general questions regarding the research or interview?

By signing below, the interviewee acknowledges having read the preceding statements and provides their consent for the interview.

Researcher's Name & Signature

Date

Interviewee's Name & Signature

Date

Interviewee's Email:

Interviewee's Phone Number

For more information about this research or about the rights of research participants, or in case of research-related injury, contact:

Interviewer Contact Email: gr-kyotoiqpproject2@wpi.edu

Project Advisors: Jefferson Sphar – jasphar@wpi.edu, Nirmal, Padini – pnirmal@wpi.edu

IRB Chair: Professor Kent Rissmiller – 508-831-5019 – kjr@wpi.edu

Human Protection Administrator: Gabriel Johnson – 508-831-4989 – gjohnson@wpi.edu

Appendix B:

Survey Questions with International Tourists

1. Is this your first time visiting Japan? Y/N
 - a. Yes:
 - i. Where are you visiting?
 - ii. Are you interested in another visit?
 - iii. If so, where do you plan on going?
 - b. No:
 - i. Where in Japan did you visit last time?
 - ii. Where are you visiting?
 - iii. Are you interested in another visit?
 - iv. If so, where do you plan on going?
2. What made you visit Japan?
 - a. Food
 - b. Music
 - c. Anime
 - d. History
 - e. Business
 - f. School
 - g. Other: _____
3. How did you learn about Japan?
 - a. Physical brochure
 - b. Anime
 - c. friends
 - d. Website
 - e. Social Media
 - i. Tik Tok
 - ii. Instagram
 - iii. We-Chat
 - iv. Other: _____

- f. Other _____
4. What is the most accessible way for you to obtain information on tourism?
- a. Physical Brochure
 - b. Website
 - c. Other: _____
5. Where are you visiting from?
- a. China
 - b. Korea
 - c. Taiwan
 - d. United States
 - e. Other: _____
6. What is your age group?
- a. Under 20
 - b. 20-30
 - c. 30-40
 - d. 40-50
 - e. 50-60
 - f. 60+
7. Are you traveling
- a. With family
 - b. Group of friends
 - c. Alone
 - d. For work
8. Rate these activities 1-10
- a. Eating food
 - b. Culinary classes
 - c. Hiking
 - d. Meditation
 - e. Cultural attractions (temples and shrines)
 - f. Geographical attractions (natural hot springs)
 - g. Architecture/ Traditional housing

9. Rate these needs for tourism on a scale of 1-5 heavily disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, heavily agree?
- a. Accommodation (hotels, motels)
 - b. Transportation (buses, trains, cars)
 - c. Food and Beverage
 - d. Guides and Tours
 - e. Attractions
 - f. Shopping (souvenirs, clothes, gifts)
 - g. Security/Safety/Healthcare
 - h. Communication (internet access)
 - i. Entertainment (performances, clubs, bars)
 - j. Language assistance
10. Would you like to meet locals in rural Japan?
11. Would you like to be part of an experienced-based tourism program?
12. What other countries have you visited?

Appendix C:

General Interview Questions for Businesses

1. What is your name?
2. What is the name of your business?
3. What is the purpose of your business?
4. What is your opinion on international tourists visiting Japan?
5. What is your opinion on international tourists visiting Aisho?
6. How prepared do you feel to interact with international tourists?
7. What resources might help you feel more prepared?
8. Have you engaged with tourists in the past (international or national)?
9. Do you/ Have you served Japanese tourists primarily?
 - a. If yes, why?
10. Does your business benefit from international tourism?
11. What days are you open and what times?
12. Describe your ideal tourist? (Country of origin, do they speak Japanese)

Appendix D:

Tentative Schedule Prior to Being in Japan

Landing week Oct 25 - 27: Plan for a sponsor meeting on the 30th.

- Plan will include but not be exclusive to: Logistics around meeting with SekaiCo (Riku) in person on the 30th, explore the possibility of staying in Aisho for an extended stay later in the term and/or after the 30th, conduct research on business of interest in Aisho and particular business SekaiCo wants to be connected with.

Week 1 Oct 30 - Nov 3	Week 2 Nov 6 - 10	Week 3 Nov 13 - 17	Week 4 Nov 20 - 23	Week 5 Nov 27 - Dec 1	Week 6 Dec 4 - 8	Week 7 Dec 11 - 15
Contact Sponsor (go to Aisho on 30th)	Interview local businesses (round 1)	Survey tourists at Kyoto Station	Interview local businesses (round 2)	Experience Aisho attractions ourselves (round 2)	Analyze collected data	Make final presentable (website/brochure)
Contact local Businesses	Interview Aisho residents		Continue Surveying tourists, possibly at other train stations		Report results to sponsor	Make final presentation
Start setting up interviews for later weeks	Tour businesses in Aisho (round 1)					

Appendix E.1:

Schedule For Week 1 of Project

- Monday:
 - Meet with Sponsors and Professors over zoom
 - Prepare for Aisho Visit for tuesday
- Tuesday:
 - Visit Aisho
 - Wander Aisho purposely as tourists
 - Figure out how to get to Aisho via train most efficiently
 - Find the Tourism Association in Aisho
 - Find Aisho Town Hall
 - *Not planned but was performed on spot* Tour of Sake Brewery
- Wednesday:
 - Figure out where to rent bikes (Echigawa)
 - Go to Aisho Had a sit-down with Iwanaga-san in Aisho to gain further clarity on the project scope
- Thursday:
 - Work on methods
 - Write questions for working holiday visa holders
 - Write questions bakery and sake brewery
 - Plan schedule for the following weeks
- Friday:
 - Wellness day

Appendix E.2:

Schedule For Week 2 of Being in Japan

- Monday
 - Meetings with Sphar, Nirmal, and Riku
 - Research groups of visa holders online and reach out (work away platform, Facebook, Reddit)
 - Methods Draft Writing
- Tuesday
 - Kokoka to ask where we can find working holiday visa holders
 - Final Methods Draft Writing
 - Establish a consistent method to contact visited businesses so we can schedule interviews with them (Line/Email Preferred)
 - Email Fukui and Indigo Sponsor asking if they have contacts or leads to find working holiday visa holders
 - Visa Group Posts (Facebook and Reddit)
 - Ask sake brewery to meet friday
 - Plan wednesday trip to Aisho
- Wednesday
 - Go to Aisho
 - Riku Japanese translation for interview questions
 - Look for more businesses to interview
 - Ask Riku for website format/preferences/requests
 - Research different website frameworks
 - Visit businesses from Tuesday plan
- Thursday
 - Organize interviews
 - Give Riku questions so he can fix our google translated Japanese
 - Revise background draft (add about our sponsor and Aisho photos)
- Friday
 - Go to Aisho

- Hopefully interview with businesses visited on Wednesday, bakery and sake brewery

Appendix F:

Interview Questions with Visa Holder Ilvin

1. What is the best resource you found for the working holiday visa? (website)
2. Are there any forums that you find/communicate with other Japanese visa holders on?
 - Reddit?
 - Facebook?
 - Forum?
3. Which country are you originally from?
4. How hard was it to get a visa for Japan? (have them describe the process)
5. Why did you get a working holiday visa for Japan? (are they more interested in the Japanese culture, or just wanted to be able to pay for their vacation expenses)
6. How long have you been in Japan as a working holiday visa holder?
 - How do you plan on being in Japan as a working holiday visa holder?
 - How did you spend in Japan as a working holiday visa holder?
7. Was it hard to find an employer that would employ you?
8. Did you learn Japanese before coming to Japan or did you decide to learn it here?

Appendix G:

Interview Questions for Kuroneko Bakery

Background Questions

- Who started this bakery? Why did they start this?
- Is there a reason the bakery is cat-themed?
- Who are your common customers? (what groups of people)
- How was having a foreigner work at the bakery?
- What did you learn from working with a foreigner?

Tourism

- Do you see tourists International or domestic, if so how often?
- How do you feel about foreign tourism?
 - (Do you welcome them? Or why do you not welcome them?)
- Would you accommodate a foreign language menu (Chinese, Korean, or English)?
- How does foreign tourism affect your business?
- Would you like more tourists?
- Is there anything you would like foreign tourists to know about Kuroneko Bakery?
 - Some fun facts to advertise

Appendix H:

Interview Questions for Fujii Brewery

Background Questions

- Who started this brewery? Why did they start this?
- What does it mean to you to brew Sake?
- Do you sell Sake to stores across Japan? Or only out of your shop here.

Tourism

- When are you open to the public? When are the common tourist seasons for you?
- Do you get a lot of foreign visitors?
- How do you feel about foreign tourism?
 - (Do you welcome them? Or why do you not welcome them?)
 - How does foreign tourism affect your business?
 - Would you accommodate a foreign language menu (Chinese, Korean, or English)?
- Would you like to have more tourists come on tours and to your restaurant?
- Is there anything you would like foreign tourists to know about Fujii Honke?
 - Some fun facts to advertise

Appendix I:**Google Form for Working Holiday Visa Holders**

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1MpqsVdm9hO_cL4iJZELF7yyBRKzzJFFq0fbX0re3ihc/edit

Appendix J:



WPI



Tourist Survey

We Want to Learn About YOUR Tourism Experience in Japan



3 Min Survey — English



WPI



Working Holiday Visa Holders Talk to Us!
워킹홀리데이 비자 소지자들이 문의하세요!

打工度假簽證持有者尋找中



3 Min Survey — EN, KR, TW




Appendix K:

AISHO TOWN

Aisho is different from other locations in Japan, you will almost never see other foreigners around. The local residents are very friendly, especially those at shops and some of the touristy locations. Although they don't speak English google translate is an excellent tool that allows for good conversation. Aisho also has many traditions that have been preserved and are unaffected by modernization. It is the best choice for a rural destination if you are looking to experience hands-on Japanese culture in a quiet place.



- Echigawa Station
- Kongorin-ji
- Echigawa Library and Bin temari Museum
- Aisho-cho Tourism Association
- Omi Jofu
- Fujii Honke Sake Brewery



AISHO TOWN

愛莊町



BIN TEMARI

Bintemari is one of the traditional crafts central to Aisho's culture. Bintemari are hand woven balls with intricate designs that are placed in glass containers after their creation and used as decoration.

There are multiple opportunities per year to create your own bintemari with the local residents at shrines like Toyomitsu. Each different event for creating the bintemari may vary the size for the bintemari created, some events involve creating a keychain size bintemari, while others involve creating one as wide as your palm.



If you don't get the chance to create one, there is a small bintemari museum in the Echigawa Library that includes a video demonstrating how a bintemari is made, as well as plenty of bintemari of varying complex designs. There are also large bintemari sculptures that are also mailboxes, that demonstrate how linked the bintemari are to Aisho's culture.

KONGORIN-JI TEMPLE

Kongorin-ji is a Buddhist temple near the Suzuka mountains. The temple is at the top of several floors worth of stairs, but there are multiple stops on the way to the top, including a small garden, koi pond, and stone buddhas.

We recommend biking from Echigawa Station to the temple, but it is a somewhat taxing 30 minute bike.



FUJII HONKE

Fujii Honke is a family run sake Brewery that will give you a tour of their brewery building and allow you to do sake tasting. The brewery uses spring water from the Suzuka mountain range around Aisho and very tall rice to make their sake.



OMI JOFU

Omi Jofu is a traditional craft which has a branch in Aisho, where they weave hemp and other threads into clothing and other items. They have reservations on their website where you can come in and make crafts using their techniques and machines.