Chapter 1

Educational Tourism in Regional Areas: Case Studies in a Japanese University

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ABSTRACT

In Japan, the number of international tourists is increasing, but they are concentrated in a few limited areas. Regional areas have tried to welcome international tourists for regional revitalization, but in vain, due to the lack of dedicated human resources. Some Japanese universities or colleges have launched educational programs where students communicate with residents and identify the problems and values specific to regional areas. This chapter introduces two case studies of programs that required university students from urban areas to visit regional areas as domestic tourists. Students reported on the value of the areas to others, including regional residents and international tourists, and developed as coordinators. Coordinators do not have to be the residents in the area. Rather, dual-site residents may lead regional tourism, bridging urban and regional areas, and involving international tourists. They could not only lead international tourism in regional areas but also solve the depopulation problem across Japan.

INTRODUCTION

International tourism is one of the growing industries of the 21st century. Now, an increasing number of international tourists can visit anywhere in the world. Although sometimes hindered by unpredictable events such as an economic crisis, disasters (earthquakes, typhoons, heat waves), infectious diseases (SARS, influenza, Ebola hemorrhagic fever), terrorism (Al-Qaeda, ISIS, religious fundamentalism), or others, the number of international tourists has been increasing. In the post-industrial age, developed countries shifted their principal industries from manufacturing to the service sector. Japan, one of the most developed countries, now focuses on international tourism as a growing industry. Figure 1 shows the number of international tourists who visited Japan from 2003 to 2018. As the figure shows, the number has swiftly increased over the years. The visitors mainly derive from Asian countries; the top

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three in 2018 were China (8.4 million), South Korea (7.5 million) and Taiwan (4.8 million), the most developed Asian countries. The Tokyo Olympics in 2020 and Osaka Expo 2025 should further increase the number of international tourists.

Figure 2 shows the total number of nights international tourists spent at each of 47 prefectures from the year 2013 to 2018. International tourists are concentrated in a few areas, such as the urban areas of Tokyo and Osaka, the old capital Kyoto, or Hokkaido and Okinawa for the natural beauty. Other prefectures rarely welcome international tourists. Figure 3 shows the geographical aggregation of international tourists, in terms of the total number of nights international tourists spent in Japan in 2018. Except for Hokkaido and Okinawa, the northern and southern islands, most international tourists visited areas between Tokyo and Osaka. The “golden route” attracts an influx of international tourists; they arrive at Narita International Airport (NRT), go through the Tokaido line, and depart from Kansai International Airport (KIX), or vice versa (Leeja 2017; Kaneko 2019). Now JNTO (Japan National Tourism Orga-