



# Wakayama Workation Project

## Background and Reasons for Deciding to Undertake the Project

Within Wakayama Prefecture, the Kihoku region has been successful in enticing large factories to its flat and reclaimed land areas, whereas the Kinan region has had difficulty securing the wide areas of flat land necessary for attracting factories because of the close distance between the region's coastal and mountainous areas. For this reason, Wakayama Prefecture, in collaboration with local municipalities, has been pouring effort into enticing ICT businesses to the Kinan region since FY2001.

Although these efforts to bring ICT businesses to the Kinan region have been steadily bearing fruit, unsurprisingly many businesses have said that “there are high hurdles to overcome, such as relocating employees and employing local staff”. Accordingly, in 2017 Wakayama Prefecture began implementing “Workations”—a concept that was gaining recognition in other countries at that time—as an “entry point to attracting businesses” by providing people with a vision of what working in Wakayama Prefecture would be like while giving them a sense of Wakayama's appeal.

## Project Aims

Wakayama Prefecture is the first government body in Japan to promote workations, and has been doing so since FY2017. With population decline continuing unchecked in regional areas due to declining birth rates and population aging, there are limits to regions simply stealing each other's populations through relocation and settlement, and so creating a

related population comprising people who maintain connections with a region even though they are based outside it is an urgent issue. Human resources and companies that are interested in acting as partners—not guests—of a region in its revitalisation, while turning attention to the particular resources of each region, are important pieces in regional revitalisation. While leading the country in these efforts, Wakayama Prefecture has been implementing and publicising workations that go beyond the simple “Telework + Tourism” type of workation seen overseas to create a prototype for a sustainable Japanese workation model that matches businesses' and the regions' purposes, and is still continuing its workation initiatives today with the aim of realising a society in which the “workation” working-style, or lifestyle, is ubiquitous.



Development training camp-type workation

## Project Outline

### (1) Wakayama Workation Networks

Private business operators in Wakayama Prefecture willing to cooperate with accepting

workationers are recruited and registered as “Wakayama Workation Networks”; PR is carried out through centralised dissemination of information via a dedicated website.

(2) Workation experience meetings (FY2017)

The acceptance of workationers got off to a shaky start in FY2017, but first of all initiatives were carried out to conduct workation experience meetings and obtain feedback about workations from the employees of IT companies in the Tokyo metropolitan area.

(3) Parent/child Workations (FY2018, FY2019)

Parent/child workation events were planned and conducted in order to “entice entire families to come to Wakayama”.

(4) Collective Impact Leadership Training (FY2019)

Using the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications “Project to create and expand related-populations” grants, human resources training was conducted for companies utilising workations.

(5) Wakayama Online Workation (FY2020)

Although human movement, especially between prefectures, has been restricted due to the spread of the COVID-19 virus, awareness of the term “workation” suddenly spread all at once. Taking this opportunity, “Wakayama Online Workation” events introducing the appeal of Wakayama workations in terms of both business and tourism were held in the form of webinars.

(6) Establishment of the Workation Jichitai Kyogikai (known as the Workation Alliance Japan (WAJ))

Workation pioneering local government bodies in Wakayama and Nagano Prefectures invited local government bodies nationwide to establish a workation alliance in November 2019. The activities of this alliance have further spread and established the concept of workations, and at the same time, Wakayama Prefecture’s proactive leadership of the alliance’s activities has widely publicised and

advertised Wakayama’s suitability as a workation destination. As of the end of November 2021, 202 local government bodies (1 circuit, 22 prefectures, and 179 municipalities) are members of the alliance.



Inspecting local sites where there are issues

### Project Features and Innovation

(1) Good access from the Tokyo metropolitan area and Kyoto-Osaka-Kobe. It is possible to fly from Haneda Airport to Nanki-Shirahama Airport in approx. 70 minutes, and Nanki can be reached from Kyoto-Osaka-Kobe by limited express train in approx. 2 and a half hours.

(2) The communications infrastructure is improving. The region boasts the second-highest number of Wi-Fi spots per capita in Japan,\* and a top-class nationwide network environment is provided.

\*TownWiFi Inc. survey results (April 2018)

(3) World-renowned tourism resources. The region is blessed with a rich abundance of tourism resources beginning with the Kumano Kodo Trail and Koyasan temple site, two of the UNESCO World Heritage designated “Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range”. Wakayama is also drawing substantial attention from outside Japan, with the international travel guide *Lonely Planet* ranking the “Kii Peninsula” 5th in its “Best in Travel 2018 Top 10 Regions Award” and “Wakayama” being selected as No. 1 in sustainability for the guide’s “Best in Travel 2021 Readers’ Choice Award”.

## Results of the Project

In Wakayama Prefecture, vigorous efforts are being made to attract ICT businesses to the region, and ICT companies are currently gathering in mainly Tanabe City and Shirahama Town. Wakayama Prefecture's workation project is creating the potential for open innovation by providing opportunities for exchange between these ICT businesses that have come to the region and businesses that are implementing workations. Moreover, smart city demonstration experiments are being born through collaborations between companies that have come to Wakayama on workations and the region, and there are more and more cases in which local residents and tourists can also feel the benefits of innovation created as a result of workations.



Local company operators pitching their businesses

## Issues and Responses

Initially, the goal of the workation project was to entice companies to Wakayama, with their employees relocating and settling here; however, having various companies implement workations and conducting discussions with participating employees of these companies brought a different value to light—"Creation of related-population". Even if they are not considering relocating to Wakayama Prefecture, related-population members will become fans of Wakayama and interact with local residents on their frequent visits to the region and disseminate information externally. They are

therefore precious human resources who not only generate simple economic effects but also bring vitality to the region. Accordingly, by providing an environment that enables them to carry out their work as usual while on workation, we are endeavouring to lower the hurdles for them to come to Wakayama Prefecture, thereby generating human flow into the prefecture.

## Future Developments (Anticipated Results, Outlook for the Project, Issues, etc.)

The Japanese Government has been preparing various measures for correcting the over-concentration of population and industry in the Tokyo Metropolitan area. In particular, "creating jobs in regional areas" is regarded as a first step towards creating a flow of people to regional areas, and with the spread of teleworking due to the COVID-19 pandemic and other factors, working environments freed from locational restrictions—not only offices—are gradually spreading, and we are approaching a major paradigm shift that will enable people to come and go from regional areas while working. At this turning point, workations are expected to become major tools for generating human flow to regional areas.

## Reference URLs

<https://wave.pref.wakayama.lg.jp/020400/workation/index.html>

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## Key Terms