Challenges and Opportunities of Japanese micro entrepreneurship in

Wellness tourism:

The Case of Oita prefecture

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Medical tourism has been promoted under the National inbound tourist promotion policy from around 2010 in Japan. This would result in diversification and internationalization of medical and wellness tourism in Japan.

Japan is popular as a hot spring destination worldwide. Hot spring therapy has been considered traditionally for health improvement and for prevention of disease rather than treatment as it is the case in western medicine. Hot springs have been a major resource for health and wellness tourism in such destinations. Inbound tourists from China aim to receive medical treatment rather than checkup. However, they visit Japan in the form of medical tourism (Hanyu, 2011), and hot springs can be a part of such treatment. This research argues that collaboration between service providers in medical and wellness tourism, especially hot spring sectors can increase demand for health tourism in Japanese hot spring destinations.
This research focuses on health tourism in Oita prefecture. The prefecture is known also as “Hot spring prefecture” and the title was registered as a trademark in 2013. Beppu city, one of the biggest cities in Oita, has the large amount of hot springs in Japan. At this stage, the research focus on present situation of wellness tourism in Oita and reveal past attempt of collaboration between service providers in medical and wellness service providers and possibility of collaboration. There are a few thousands of hot springs in Beppu city operated by traditional and micro level entrepreneurship that are interviewed for data collection.

This research concludes that high potential exists for initiatives to develop health tourism in micro entrepreneurship level in hot spring destinations in Japan. However, understanding the differences between western medicine and hot spring therapy by the industry is the key formation of health tourism entrepreneurship. Basic requirements of health tourism development in Japan include provision of information about health tourism resources in different languages and maintenance of existing facilities are required.