



# Organizing Wellness Tours for Visitors to Japan by Making Use of the Career as a Researcher

Wanping presenting tours that TokudAw organizes for visitors to Japan at the company's booth

Photo: Wanping Aw

Wanping Aw from the Republic of Singapore is a Project Assistant Professor at the Institute for Advanced Biosciences, Keio University, and also runs a travel and consulting company. She uses her knowledge as a researcher to plan wellness tours<sup>1</sup> for visitors from outside Japan.

## Murakami Kayo

While studying abroad in Australia, Wanping became fascinated with Japanese culture by watching anime and TV dramas. After participating in a three-week exchange program in Japan, she fell in love with life here and enrolled in graduate school at the Tokyo Medical and Dental University in 2008. She then continued her research at RIKEN, the National Research and Development Institute, and is currently a Project Assistant Professor at the Institute for Advanced Biosciences, Keio University. She specializes in the field of nutrition.

"I am now doing research that analyzes, on a genetic level, how proteins and vitamins in foods with functional claims<sup>2</sup> affect the body. I became interested in nutrition as a child. My mother often bought me foods that were considered healthy, but she could not explain how they affected my body. That was when I decided that I wanted to become a university professor who

would scientifically pursue evidence for the effects of functional food."

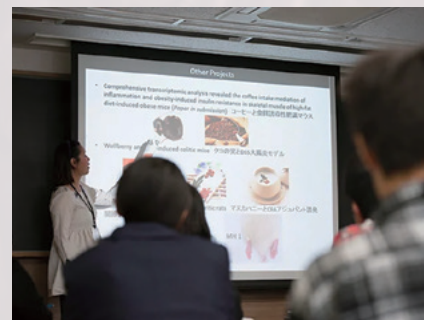
As she continued her research, Wanping was inspired by the example of many of her colleagues who were establishing their own companies, and decided to start a business in the travel and consulting industry. Her mother ran a dormitory for international students, and from an early age Wanping interacted with people from many different countries, so the travel business was one of the areas she wanted to pursue. She became a Certified Domestic Travel Services Manager and obtained other relevant certifications in preparation for starting her business. In September 2020, she co-founded TokudAw Inc. with a Japanese partner who has experience in the travel industry.

"TokudAw seeks to facilitate mutual understanding among individuals and corporations of different nationalities, thereby fostering harmonious relationships that transcend cultural differences. Through our

business initiatives, we aim to build enduring connections that span generations, contributing to a collaborative and inclusive global environment."

However, the first year coincided with a period when inbound tourism dropped sharply due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the company had almost no sales. "We had no customers during that period, but I think it was a good thing," says Wanping, "because we were able to use that time to think carefully about how to develop the business and prepare for it."

Now that demand for inbound



Presenting her own research in a lecture

Photo: Wanping Aw





Wanping Aw

Photo: Wanping Aw



Spa treatment (image)

Photo: Fast&Slow / PIXTA

tourism has picked up, TokudAw offers tours for international visitors to experience traditional Japanese culture, such as making goheimochi<sup>3</sup> and wearing kimono, as well as tours for wheelchair users. She also uses her medical expertise to plan wellness tours that include a full medical examination and spa treatment.<sup>4</sup>

“The level of wellness tours in Japan is high, and they are very much in demand among foreign visitors who want to enjoy the nutritionally balanced Japanese cuisine and hot spring treatment. The strength of our company lies in the ability to propose travel plans that are best suited for each individual customer, and to provide medical evidence as to why they are good for their health. It takes many years for a researcher to publish the results of their research, but in the travel business I can immediately make proposals to my customers that make use of the knowledge I have. I believe that my two jobs, as a researcher and as a travel agent, create a virtuous circle.”

In addition, Wanping also provides

consulting services for companies outside Japan who are planning to expand their business in Japan and educational consulting services for students wishing to study in Japan.

For Wanping, who left her home country at the age of 17 and has lived in Japan for more than 15 years, Japan is “a place where one can be free and try new things without any restrictions.”

“Whether I succeed or fail, it is all

my responsibility. That is why I find it interesting. I am a competitive person and I do not want to lose to my past self. I want to provide even better services than I do now, so I am constantly making improvements based on customer feedback. My motto is to continue to introduce the profound charm of Japan to our international customers and to provide them with wonderful experiences.”



Wanping (center) at a kimono wearing experience-type event that she held at the invitation of a hotel in Otsu City, Shiga Prefecture

Photo: Wanping Aw

1. According to the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), wellness tourism and medical tourism are two branches of health tourism. Wellness tourism can be further divided into activity-type tourism, which includes exercise and relaxation to restore, promote, and maintain good health, and recreation-type tourism, which includes experiences of nature, hot springs, and cuisine to soothe the body and mind. Medical tourism, on the other hand, is a type of tourism activity that involves the use of evidence-based medical services.
2. Some foods contain ingredients that are useful for maintaining good health (functional ingredients), and foods with high levels of such ingredients are called functional food.
3. A local delicacy of Nagano, Toyama, Gifu and Aichi. Cooked rice is mashed and then hardened into a flat oval or ball, skewered, coated with a sauce made of miso, soy sauce, walnuts, etc., and grilled over a fire. The shape of the skewers and rice cakes varies from region to region.
4. Soaking in a hot spring or medicinal herb bath to treat illness or restore health.