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## Hiring challenges plague Japan's tourism reopening

By Julian Ryall (<https://www.ttgasia.com/author/julianryall/>) / Posted on 22 September, 2022 19:02

The mood among Japanese tourism operators is improving as Japan readies for further removal of travel restrictions, but many players are finding it challenging to ramp up operations to meet the boom in enquiries and the eventual return of business.

"We are extremely busy. We are getting a lot of enquiries and bookings," said Naomi Mano, president and CEO of high-end inbound travel firm Luxurique.



*Hotels in Niseko are rushing to scale up their manpower for the coming winter sports season*

"I'm interviewing and hiring new staff every day," Mano added.

That surge in business is only expected to intensify, as the majority of bookings now are just from Asia. Mano expects people from North America and Europe to start making reservations after they have witnessed a few months of unrestricted travel.

Avi Lugasi, owner and managing director of Kyoto-based Windows to Japan tour company, said he has yet to restart advertising as there is "so much pent-up demand for Japan that we cannot keep up with the calls".

He told *TTG Asia*: "We are seeing a lot of people from abroad making enquiries and reservations for the New Year period, and there is a lot of interest in skiing and winter sports."

Lugasi is struggling to cope with only half the staff strength compared to what he had pre-pandemic. He is eager to hire, but acknowledged that the process will take time – new hires must be trained and allowed to "find their feet" in the company.

The hunger for additional staff is shared by many other companies in the travel sector, fuelling the fight for talents.

"I was speaking to an official of another travel company only a couple of days ago, and they are trying to hire 50 new people with immediate effect," he said.

The pace of business is also picking up in the winter playground of Hokkaido's Niseko, which has struggled in the last two years without the thousands of visitors who normally flock to its world-famous powder snow.

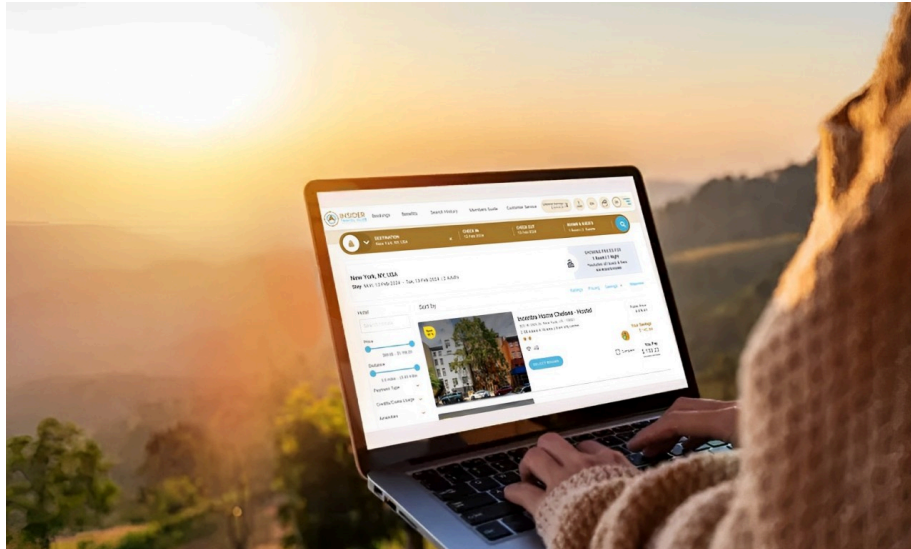
Ross Findlay, managing director of Niseko Adventure Centre, said the upcoming winter sports season is booming and it has been reported anecdotally that hotel rooms are running out.

However, there are hurdles to overcome. Staffing for hotels and other businesses in Hokkaido's ski resorts is arguably the biggest challenge, with properties that have been operating with 20 staff suddenly needing to ramp that up by a factor of 10, he shared.

There is also a shortage of foreign ski instructors to meet the needs of the inbound market, which is complicated by the need to obtain work visas at short notice to permit their entry to Japan.

For now, the hectic pace is eluding Yuuki Bando, the owner of the Bang-Do travel guiding and translation business in Tokushima City on Shikoku Island. She said travel firms she works with are not yet reporting the surge in enquiries and interest, probably because the prefecture is relatively off the beaten path.

“The feeling is that it will take longer for the international tourists to come back to this part of Japan, but we also need to use this time to get staff back into travel companies, hotels and visitor attractions and to train them so they are ready,” she said.



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