

NIKKEI WEEKLY

Issued: March 5, 2007

[This Issue's Top](#)
[Back Issues](#)
[Subscription](#)

Brit brings aliens to Yuzawa slopes

Ex-investment banker capitalizes on opportunity by catering to foreigners

To 33-year-old British citizen Neil Riley, the town of Yuzawa in Niigata Prefecture - just a 90-minute bullet train ride from Tokyo - is a treasure trove. He left his job at the Tokyo branch of a foreign investment-banking firm and founded his own company, Japan Worldwide KK, so that he could share his experiences there with other foreigners.

Some of the foreigners living in Japan are fluent Japanese speakers who have no trouble getting around, but there are quite a few who do not speak the language and are limited in what they can do by themselves. Riley's firm targets those businesspeople who earn a high salary but do not seem to know what to do on a day off, a situation Riley himself experienced.

Riley's first exposure to Japan took place in 1991 as a student at Newcastle University majoring in Japanese and East Asian politics. In his sophomore year, he came to Japan to study at Fukuoka University. After completing his studies at Newcastle, he returned to Fukuoka and taught English to overseas-bound employees at Matsushita Electric Industrial Co.'s Kyushu branch. Riley returned to England and found work in London at what used to be the Bank of Tokyo-Mitsubishi, and then at Deutsche Bank. He eventually transferred to the Tokyo branch of Deutsche Bank. Riley's first contact with the town of Yuzawa was in the winter of 2003 when a friend took him snowboarding there. He was impressed by the fact that a place like this existed right outside of Tokyo.

Riley enjoyed his visits to Yuzawa so much that his experiences became the catalyst that led him to start his own business. The ride from Tokyo to Echigo-yuzawa station is a mere 90 minutes. When every businessman he passed in Tokyo's business district began to look like a potential client, it was not hard to sever his ties with the financial world and forge out on his own.

In November 2004, Riley left Deutsche Bank and in April 2005 launched Japan Worldwide. While information on Japanese ski slopes is readily available in English on the Internet and elsewhere, Japan Worldwide attracts would-be skiers because it is a registered travel agency and can offer its own domestic package tours.

Riley's firm is also tuned into the needs of the foreign tourist. One of the packages Japan Worldwide offers is a six-day ski trip with a Sunday arrival and a Saturday checkout. Most Japanese travel agencies do not offer this type of tour. It is a schedule Japan Worldwide developed with American and European workers' longer vacation schedule in mind. By extending the tour and avoiding the weekend, the price for lodging ends up being less than half of the usual weekend rate.

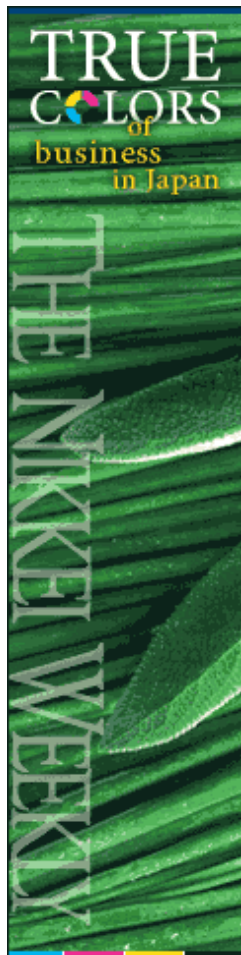
Last season, Japan Worldwide handled 1,000 ski visitors. This season, it has already handled 2,500. Its goal is to handle 5,000 before the snow thaws this year and to have 7,500 visitors next season.

Currently 52% of Japan Worldwide's customers are from Tokyo, but the company hopes to begin attracting people from overseas, especially other Asian countries, Australia and New Zealand.

In terms of competition, Niseko in Hokkaido also offers tours for foreign visitors. But Yuzawa is just 90 minutes from Niigata Airport, which has regular flights to and from Vladivostok and Khabarovsk in Russia as well as Seoul and Shanghai.



Neil Riley, founder of Japan Worldwide meets skiers from abroad at Naeba ski resort in Yuzawa, Niigata Prefecture.



Nikkei's top news delivered fresh each Monday in a vibrant tabloid format.

THE NIKKEI WEEKLY

In August 2006, Riley was honored with an award from Niigata Prefecture for his work promoting regional tourism. Though the company is still young, the award reflects the prefecture's acknowledgment of Riley's work and serves as an encouragement to continue bringing foreign tourists to the region.

Through the eyes of a foreigner like Riley, the area outside of the ski slopes is also full of potential for tourism. Japanese sake, such as Hakkaisan, is well known among Western visitors. "Something like a winery tour by regional sake manufacturers could draw a lot of visitors," Riley said.



News Quotes



Advanced

[HOME](#) [NIKKEI NEWS](#) [COMPANY WATCH](#) [MARKETS JAPAN](#) [PERSONAL NIKKEI](#) [SEARCH](#) [HELP](#) [CONTACT](#)

Copyright Nikkei Inc. All rights reserved. | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Cookie Policy](#) | [RSS Feeds](#) | [About NIKKEI](#)