

ABSTRACT

The Roles of Japanese Working Holiday Makers in Queensland's Tourism Industry: A Case Study of a Tourist Facility in the Cairns Region

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In the 1980s, Cairns and the Gold Coast became international tourist destinations as a result of massive foreign investment from Japan. Although previous research has elucidated this process with a focus on the activities of Japanese investors, it has overlooked the significance of Japanese workers who provide services to Japanese tourists. Attempting to correct this gap, this study examines the working and living situations of Japanese working holiday makers (WHMs) who work at a tourist facility near Cairns. In doing so, it attempts to shed light on their importance to, and conceptualize their roles in, Queensland's tourism industry.

The author conducted fieldwork in Australia for this purpose. This included an interview survey of Japanese WHMs and participant observation of a tourist facility situated on the fringe of an area of tropical rainforest in the Cairns region which employs a number of Japanese WHMs. The data collected by means of this fieldwork produced the following findings: 1) Most Japanese WHMs worked at the facility for only a short period of time; they usually worked for about 1-4 months before moving on. 2) The Japanese WHMs were the main workers in the Japanese division of the facility. Without these workers, the facility would not be able to deal with visiting Japanese tourists. 3) The working and living conditions of the Japanese WHMs were relatively poor. Their duties were unskilled service-related jobs, their wages were low, and their dormitory was poorly equipped. 4) The Japanese WHMs did not protest to their employer about their conditions, but were attempting to improve their quality of life by means of a variety of cooperative efforts, such as creating original games, inventing new recipes, and obtaining informal compensation from their bosses. 5) The Japanese WHMs also tried to give a positive meaning to their experiences at the facility. They attempted to give meaning to their experiences by appropriating ideas and images which they regarded as useful and plausible.

In total, these findings led to the conclusion that Japanese WHMs constitute a large pool of cheap, unskilled, temporary, flexible and obedient workers for Queensland's tourism industry. Employers are able to take advantage of their availability to lower labor costs, to deal with fluctuations in labor demand, and to recruit workers to provide services for Japanese tourists.