

New Workstyle Blooming in a Nature-rich Town

As people's lifestyles change due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the town of Shirahama—a famous tourist destination in Wakayama Prefecture—is attracting attention for its innovative approach to work-style reform



The panoramic view of the ocean as seen from NEC Solution Innovators' Shirahama Center. The open-plan space encourages greater communication within the workplace.

Shirahama, a town situated in the western Japanese prefecture of Wakayama, has long prospered as a resort destination owing to its warm climate, beautiful coast, hot springs, and picturesque scenery. Thanks to its convenient location—only an hour's flight from Tokyo—more and more companies have recently set up satellite offices in the town, revamping their traditional working styles by letting employees work while enjoying the amenities of the resort area. Earlier in 2020, as the pandemic made teleworking a reality for many workers and provided them with opportunities to work outside the office, Shirahama came to

stand in the spotlight as a suitable destination for both travel and work, especially for “workcation,” the combination of work and vacation. IT firms from Tokyo had already begun moving their offices and sending their employees to Shirahama's IT Business Office, the complex maintained by the town, in as early as 2014. One of the companies new to the town was NEC Solution Innovators, Ltd., which opened a satellite office there in 2016. From its office featuring a panoramic ocean view, the employees, who used to work in urban settings, now provide system support services remotely for corporate clients nationwide. After

work or on their days off, they can easily visit hot springs, exercise in a natural environment, and participate in traditional events and other local activities in ways that would be impossible if they were based in a big metropolitan area. Not only does their new lifestyle afford them quality free time, then, but it motivates them to work better and harder as well.

Another of the companies that relocated to Shirahama is QualitySoft Corporation, which specializes in developing cloud services and software. The firm moved its Tokyo headquarters there in 2016, having bought a corporate training facility and then converting it into “Innovation Springs,” a complex that comprises an office building, co-working space, a seminar room, accommodation for workcations, and common areas. QualitySoft regularly hosts a variety of activities including programming classes for children, various networking events, and startup camps for participants from across Japan. Through those events, it aims to encourage a wider range of people to be interested in IT careers, while spurring innovation that addresses local issues.

The company's president, URA Kiyoharu, has high expectations for the town as an important base, saying, “A setting with abundant

natural surroundings leads to inspiration, and interaction between diverse people leads to innovation. Amid the changes to our way of work because of COVID-19, the growing number of talented people coming here ought to make Shirahama even more interesting.”

The increasing number of companies and their employees relocating to Shirahama also brings benefits to the local community by boosting its tourism industry. Formerly, the lack of visitors in the off season created problems for the town, but the expanded number of IT company offices has resulted in more business trips being taken there, as well as more visitors on weekdays and in winter—normally quiet times.

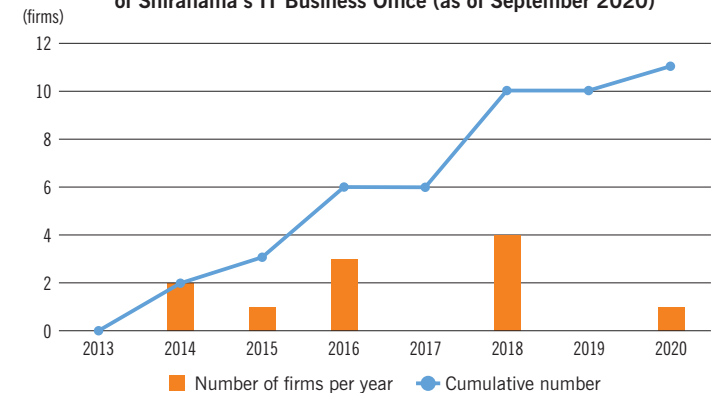
The inflow of companies is now leading to new possibilities for the town's existing industries. For example, NEC Solution Innovators, mentioned above, has been collaborating with local entities to collect tourism-related statistics and apply them to the development of apps and new services. According to SAKAGUCHI Shingo, who heads the company's Shirahama Center, “Our involvement with community members has helped us leverage our knowledge to consider how we can enrich Shirahama.”

Companies' efforts in the town are thus rewarding employees with a better work-life balance while stimulating the local economy: a win-win situation. Even after the pandemic ends, there will still undoubtedly be more people—not just companies—moving location to explore a new working lifestyle. Shirahama, a resort town attracting an increasingly diverse range of people, is emitting bright rays of hope for a silver lining during these difficult times. ✿



The town of Shirahama has picturesque scenery, a beach, hot springs, and an airport all in close proximity to each other. Adventure World, which combines a zoo, aquarium, and theme park into a single complex, is another popular tourist spot.

Trends in the number of firms setting up workplaces in the related facilities of Shirahama's IT Business Office (as of September 2020)



QualitySoft's office is surrounded by a grove of trees. Most of the interior areas, designed for a comfortable work environment, were built with locally-produced lumber.