

Kato Fumiko has used her experience in the travel sector to create a new and successful business.



**K**ato Fumiko founded WAmazing Inc. in 2016. The company provides online travel booking services for tourists visiting Japan. Kato's goal is to help visitors discover the beauty of the country's lesser known regions and encourage them to visit places other than the popular sites that everyone else visits. So, she developed an app service with the idea of matching more secluded regions with repeat foreign tourists who want to see arcadian Japan, rather than famous spots. Through the app, WAmazing provides a SIM card that allows free internet access for 15 days during the visitors' stay, and provides them with information on sightseeing in various localities across Japan, with the aim of revitalizing

the city, Kato has also been able to participate in the Acceleration Program in Tokyo for Women launched in 2017 by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government to support female entrepreneurs. The program has so far seen significant results, with 200 participants, making it one of the largest programs in Japan dedicated to women. About 60 businesses have advanced efforts to develop a presence in overseas markets. She says that the program was extremely beneficial, as it provided a comprehensive, well-balanced curriculum on the knowledge required for managing a startup. In addition, it was a valuable experience for her to share her struggles with other entrepreneurs of the same gender, she notes.

## Opening New Doors

Kato Fumiko's WAmazing helps travelers explore hidden Japan.

by Kirsty Bouwers

the tourism industry. As of the end of January 2022, approximately 310,000 inbound travelers were using the service. The application also includes a tax-free e-commerce service enabling the user to shop free of tax online at any time and pick up the purchases at the airport, which saves time and makes sightseeing possible without that extra baggage.

In response to the extraordinary situation of the last few years, the company launched a new service. WAmazing now also works with local municipalities and provides consultancy services such as marketing research and inbound strategy development, in order to help attract more visitors to rural areas and also to help with the shortage of manpower, which has become an issue in the tourism industry.

When it came to picking a place to establish her business, Kato points out that Tokyo has the three essential elements for business growth: human resources, capital, and information. Thanks to her presence in

WAmazing's existing online travel business is gradually growing due to the recovery of the inbound market, and the new business, digital technology promotion for local tourism in collaboration with local governments and tourism businesses, is also growing steadily. WAmazing's human resources practices are also essential to its success, Kato says. The company actively hires people from diverse backgrounds, including women with childcare or long-term care responsibilities, personnel living in rural areas, and foreign nationals. They now have 162 employees living in 23 different prefectures, and they have adopted a remote-first policy.

Kato's background in establishing online travel agencies and community projects, and her strong desire to contribute to regional revitalization by inbound travel, are the driving forces behind the launch and expansion of her new business. With Tokyo as the gateway, she is opening new doors to charming, off-the-beaten-track destinations.