

# My journey in Japan

Division of Removable  
Prosthodontics

Simonne Estacio Salazar



I was born and raised in a tropical country, the Philippines. It is composed of 7,107 islands surrounded by a vast body of water. The Philippines is tagged as calamity ridden country where typhoons come and go, and earthquake usually occurs. Though behind all these, are richness in natural resources; stretches of fine beaches, lush forestation; deep rooted family ties and a passion for their faith. The people while known to the world for their music and fun loving ways with happy smiles despite adversities are called Filipinos. I am strengthened in character by difficulties in life and yearning for higher education to be shared with my countrymen.



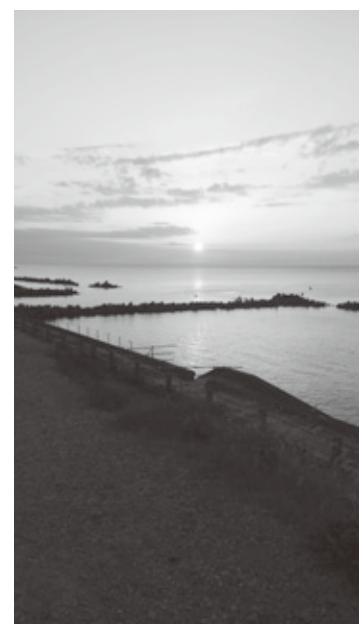
Picture of one the beach in the Philippines called Boracay Island

## My life in Niigata

I first set foot in Niigata, Japan on the

25<sup>th</sup> of September 2014. The air was chilly and I was tired from my trip, when I suddenly saw the warmest smiles there could ever be of Dr. Kobayashi and his wife that night. It was their wonderful smiles that vanished my worries and gave way for my happiness and security. Cold breeze blew and a picturesque view of Niigata city with its glaring lights greeted me as we headed to my apartment. A shivering cold and loneliness enveloped me as I entered my room, it was the first time I was away from my family. It suddenly dawned on me that I was to start a new life, alone but armed with the strength in chasing my dream to full realization- and for this, I will forever be grateful to the Japanese Government Monbukagakusho: MEXT Scholarship Program.

I was overjoyed by the warm welcome of everyone in my department, Division of Removable Prosthodontics, Niigata University. On my first day, they prepared a welcome party filled with sumptuous food and drinks



Beautiful Sunset in Niigata-shi

and good stories to share, I felt like family. They were kind, accommodating, and very helpful, I was mesmerized! In the days to come, Niigata University has opened me to a one of a kind learning experience where great minds share ideas and knowledge. An institution that will help me learn new techniques and advancements in the field of Dentistry.

It was in Niigata University that I found my home away from home. Every person that I have encountered has been gracious, gentle and kind. I found my Place, my Peace and my Comfort in the institution. Warm smiles, cheerful greetings and kind hearts from my professors, teachers and friends helped me thru in starting my life again.

I have heard that Japan celebrate many festivities the whole year round. Each festival has a character of its own. The Shin-dai-sei Festival of Niigata University last

October 2014 was my first. The program ran all throughout the day with different activities to do and presentations to watch. It was vibrant, fun and colorful to see and experience. Everyone who joined was in their festive mood ready to join the fun be it dancing or singing. We even got to try eating a variety of authentic Japanese food that were cooked by the students. It was indeed a wonderful day for us.

I joined the Discover Niigata tour in No-

vember, an experience I will never forget. The tour depicts the rich history and culture of Niigata, a “must” for everyone to see visiting the city. The first destination was the Niitsu Railway Museum. The exhibits, displays and illustrations were vast and interesting. Collections of vintage uniforms, telephones, pocket watches etc. of previous employees were amazing. The illustrations of train structures, the mechanism of transportation in the olden times and how it evolved until today leaves me

in awe. Everything has its own stories to tell. “The Falling Leaves” is a song my grandmother loved to play over and over again. It was in Niigata Botanical Garden where I had my first experience of “the falling leaves” . It was Autumn a colorful and beautiful scenery that one cannot fathom. As the warm sunshine touches my face and the magical beauty of the garden greeted me, I remembered my

grandmother. The beauty and color of Japan is a site to behold – hence I feel blessed and honored to see all of these. Next stop was the Niitsu Art Museum, an edifice housing different masterpieces and artworks of known people, It gave us a glimpse of the rich art history of Japan considered as one of the best in the world. Last point was the Aeon Mall, I enjoyed browsing through shops and indulging myself with the delightful sweets and foods on display. Every presentation is a work of



**Colorful and scenic view at the Botanical Garden**

art. I must admit that I was so thrilled with the food presentation that I could not afford to eat so that I cannot destroy the work of art. It was a nice place to end a very interesting tour.

My enthusiasm was on high when I joined my second tour, the Autumn Niigata City Tour. With the previous tours that I had, I was totally mesmerized and enthralled! The tour was hands on and perfect in satisfying my five senses. We headed for the rice factory, we were allowed to choose the flavor and cook our own rice cracker and to top it all- eat it too! The aroma and richness of flavor of the rice cracker satisfied my sense of smell and taste immensely. It was an experience of a lifetime! Niigata City Aquarium was next on our list. It was an extraordinary experience to see the different animals that inhabits Japan Sea. Interesting colors in different shapes and sizes were present that could make you love the place even more. We were very fortunate to be given the opportunity to see the dolphin show, we saw them do tricks and play. The cheers, laugh and applause of everyone present even made the experience more enjoyable. The last stop of the trip is a very memorable one; it was in Yahiko Shrine, where we got in touch of nature. I was very grateful to have felt and touch the beauty of the surroundings, see the culture and experience

the tradition.

In my months of stay, I have seen remarkable places, joined festivals, toured a rice cake factory- a many firsts in my life. I am totally impressed, ecstatic and enthralled. Many thanks to the Niigata University and its International office for organizing trips that most International students will have the opportunity to learn, enjoy and appreciate. I am lucky enough to have joined a festival two autumn trips that were organized and I am happy to say

that it was a very wonderful experience for me.

The places I have been to, taught me a lot of what really Niigata is. To truly know the place and its people, one must immerse himself to the cultures and traditions of the place that will open your eyes to what real beauty and kindness is. And by far, I have loved this city as much as I love my own. I am very thankful for this

very wonderful opportunity that is given to me.

As Lucile once quoted "If you never chase your dream, you will never catch them." I am very honored and thankful to the Japanese Government Monbukagakusho: MEXT Scholarship Program, and to our Chief Professor Dr. Takahiro Ono, to our Associate Professor Dr. Hiroshi Kobayashi everyone in my department for guiding me and giving me the chance to chase my dream.



**Beautiful sunset at the seaside of Niigata**