

## Japan: a new exciting journey

Division of Periodontology Tran Thi Thuy Diep

Greetings from Niigata! My name is Tran Thi Thuy Diep, you can call me Diep. I am from Vietnam, a beautiful country in South-east Asia, just a 5-hour flight from Tokyo. I had the opportunity to participate in Niigata University's student exchange program in March 2018, and I returned again in October 2022 to pursue my graduate studies - officially living in a foreign country for the first time.

The first time I came to Japan as an exchange student, everything was new and exciting. Every dish I tried was delicious and tempting, every place I visited was beautiful. But when I returned as a gradu-

ate student, I felt something different - the feeling that I had truly settled here and had become a part of Niigata City. I found myself worrying about what my life over the next four years would be like - whether I would miss my hometown, whether I could excel in my work, and whether I could adapt to this new life and this new city.

I was so worried because, honestly, I had very little experience with scientific research before. The PhD program itself felt like an endless ocean. Every day, I delved deeper into a world of complex research, academic papers, trials, and failures. I often found myself doubting my abilities:



Spring - Niigata 4/2023



Summer: Fujisan 8/2023

What if I am not smart enough? What if my research is not good enough? Fortunately, I have always had the support of my professor and supervisor. They have taught me to think critically, ask deeper questions, and strive for excellence - but they have also emphasized that failure is part of the process. It is okay to make mistakes, as long as you learn from them and keep pushing forward. I am deeply thankful for everything I have learned so far.

I have also been lucky to have the opportunity to present posters and oral presentations at many places, both in Japan and abroad. As a small Vietnamese girl who had never left Asia, I never imagined that one day I would have the chance to set foot in the United States and present my research project there. Without the guidance and careful mentorship from my professor, my supervisor and labmates, I wouldn't have been able to achieve this.

In addition to studying and conducting

research, I feel very fortunate to have the time to explore new places, through opportunities to attend scientific conferences and also by traveling on my own. As a country with a rich history and tradition, each prefecture in Japan has its own unique cultural characteristics, from mascots and famous foods to special souvenirs that represent the area. Everywhere I have traveled, I have had the chance to enjoy beautiful natural landscapes and learn a lot about Japan's culture and history. One other form of travel that I find particularly interesting, and is also one of my hobbies, is hiking. As a hiking lover, Japan has been a wonderful place for me to explore and enjoy the mountain views. The mountains here are spectacular, and every hike brings a sense of peace and adventure. The most remarkable experience was the opportunity to climb Mount Fuji to its summit. It was truly unforgettable. The climb was difficult, my legs ached, and I questioned whether I could



Autumn: Kamikochi 10/2024



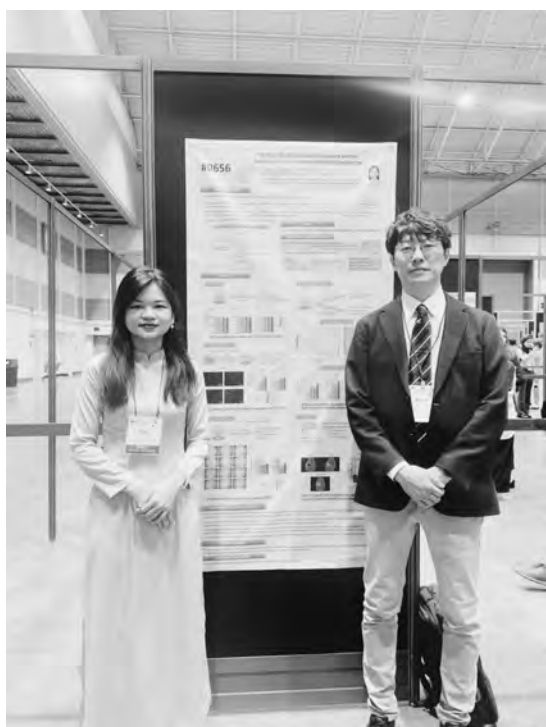
Winter - Niigata 1/2023

make it to the top. But when I reached the summit, I was greeted by a breathtaking sunrise view that left me speechless.

I believe that the weather in Niigata is always a big challenge for international students from tropical countries like Vietnam, where it is hot year-round. The weather in Niigata is also often windy, with little sunshine. The first winter was particularly difficult, as the temperature dropped sig-

nificantly, and the snow fell heavily. If it were not for the support and warmth of my friends, I think I would have felt very sad and exhausted. However, I have learned to appreciate the beauty of all four seasons here. Although winter is cold, the falling snow is still beautiful and romantic. I can also go skiing and enjoy soaking in an onsen. A few months later, spring arrives with beautiful cherry blossoms everywhere. When the flowers bloom, my friends and I go to Hakusan Park every day to have lunch and enjoy the flowers. Summer comes as the time to swim, hike, and enjoy the beautiful sunshine after rainy days. And then comes autumn, when I can admire the gradual transformation of the leaves, with green, yellow, and red hues intertwined.

Living in Niigata has been more than just academic growth—it has been a transformative experience. It is a reminder that life, like nature, has its seasons of challenges and beauty, and with each season, I am becoming a stronger, more confident version of myself. Japan has not only shaped me into a better researcher but also into a better version.



Poster presentation at IADR,  
New Orleans, USA 3/2024