

From Mountains to Oceans

Arivazhagan Rajendran

Journey to the land of the rising sun

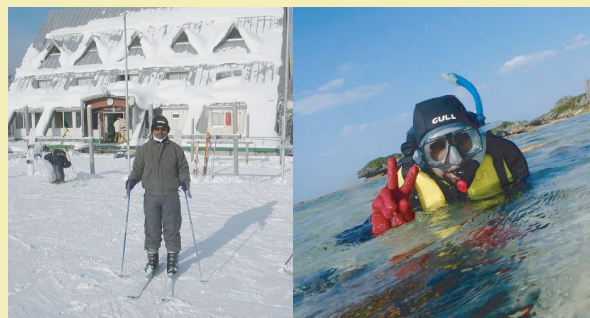
From where to start and how to start? A common question that arises whenever we have to decide our career path. However, I had no such question in my mind. I had no doubt where I should start my research career. Japan — the land of the rising sun was always my first choice for my research endeavors. One way I was attracted by its technology and innovations, on the other hand its culture — *as rich as mountains and as deep as oceans*. After I received my master's degree from The University of Madras, I came to Japan to pursue a doctoral degree. This was nearly one and a half decades ago, since then I am in love with this country. As soon as I arrived in Japan, I found that everything here was new to me, the climate, work culture, language, food, lifestyle, and so on. It was a bit tough for me in the beginning, while at the same time it was so fun to take it up as a challenge.

Academic career

After working under the guidance of Prof. Norio Teramae at Tohoku University, I graduated in 2008. Then, moved to FIBER, Konan University and worked as a postdoctoral researcher with Prof. Naoki Sugimoto. During my second postdoctoral research, I had a chance to work with Prof. Hiroshi Sugiyama at iCeMS and Department of Chemistry, Kyoto University. Then, my academic career started as an Assistant Professor when I moved to the research group of Prof. Makoto Komiyama at TARA, University of Tsukuba. Since early 2015, I have been working as a Junior Associate Professor at IAE, Kyoto University and working in collaboration with Prof. Takashi Morii. My current research focuses are the chemistry of nucleic acids and DNA nanotechnology. In particular, I work on DNA origami, the art of folding DNAs into nanoscale shapes, a similar method to the art of Japanese paper folding. In addition, I am teaching four courses on basic physical chemistry and sustainable energy.

Hobbies and interests

One of my favorite hobbies is sightseeing, and I have visited so many beautiful places in Japan starting from Sapporo to Okinawa. Visiting new places at right season refreshes and recharges my mind and gives me enormous power that I could use for carrying out hard research experiments. Other notable hobby is hiking where I have been to the mountains in Yamagata (Yamagata Zao,



Left: Ski at Omoshiroyama, Yamagata. Right: Snorkelling at Okinawa.

Yamadara), and in Kyoto (Fushimi Inari, Daimonji-yama, Kurama). Trying new hobbies such as skiing, snorkelling and scuba diving are fun too. Being a chemist, I not only cook chemicals and biomolecules, I do cook delicious foods whenever I get free time. I cook Indian dishes and even learnt to cook some Japanese delicacies like “Yasai Itame”, “Mabo Nasu”, “Maki Sushi”, “Kakiage (Tempura)”, and so on. I enjoy the Japanese foods *from the tall mountains (mountain vegetables fry/sansai tempura) to the deep sea (seaweed/nori and sea grapes/umibudo)*. I really enjoy the diverse culture, foods, and places of Japan.

Messages to the readers

“*Learning from environment has more impact than the class room learning*”. I have learnt a lot from my supervisors: the more you work, the more you get (from Prof. Teramae), independent thinking to carry out research works (from Prof. Sugimoto), sincerity and hard work (from Prof. Sugiyama), dynamic and active at all the time (from Prof. Komiyama), and accuracy and thorough investigation of research problems (from Prof. Morii). Also, I have learnt Japanese just by communicating with people and not from class room. The second message is “*target the heart of the research problems and their solutions at first*”. It is good to systematically perform the research works. However, often it will consume lot of time and make you confused whether your approach is right or wrong. I usually start to find the key problem and its solution, make sure that the approach works, establish a method, and expand to rest of my work. Finally, when research tires you, remember the words of Robert Frost: “*The woods are lovely, dark and deep, But I have promises to keep, And miles to go before I sleep, And miles to go before I sleep*”.



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