

Life as a doctor at the world's best ski resort

Fancy spending your weekends cruising down some fresh powder and your weekdays reducing shoulders and strapping up knees? This is what I have just spent the past 5 months doing through the incredible Sports Medicine and General Practice training programme at Niseko International Clinic.

Niseko, situated in northern Japan, is famed for its fresh powder. This makes it a world class destination for snow sports. During the busy winter months, Niseko transforms as seasonal workers and tourists descend on the area for their chance to ride on the slopes by day and enjoy the culinary delights of Japan by night. Niseko International Clinic is a private medical facility which provides medical care to the tourists and residents alike during this busy time. With x-ray facilities, ultrasound and on sight blood testing, the clinic is well equipped to deal with dislocations, fractures, and ligament injuries, as well as more typical general practice presentations.

For the past 2 years the clinic has taken on international doctors for a sports medicine and general practice training program, and I was lucky enough to bag one these roles for the 2024/2025 season. Now they are recruiting for the 2025/2026 season, and it could be your turn to head off to Japan for the winter.

Who is this for:

Any qualified doctor with at least 3 years of practice behind them. I came out here with my wife and son and we have had an incredible experience as a family. Other doctors have come out on their own. A background in general practice, emergency medicine, or orthopaedics would suit the position best. I graduated 5 years ago and have spent most of my time since then in the emergency department.

What to expect:

I work 5 days a week from 8:30 to 17:30 (although more commonly finishing at 18:00) and get two consecutive days off a week. Particularly in December and January the clinic is very busy and you will be working hard. There is a 'fever clinic' which you will spend a morning or afternoon in most days. Here you will see mostly coughs and colds. This year there has been a lot influenza as well as some gastroenteritis. The rest of the time you will be in the main clinic seeing mostly trauma from snowsports injuries. The team itself is a mix of Japanese and international staff and they are all very friendly. Many of the staff will also be seasonal workers like yourself, and will be going through the same process of settling in to a new place. The position is not salaried, but flights and accommodation are covered and you are supplied with a stipend which is enough money to live and enjoy life here. The medical director, Dr Moroi, is very supportive and takes the training aspect of your time here seriously. I have improved my ultrasound

skills, my reduction skills, and my plastering skills whilst at the clinic. You also work closely with physiotherapists which is a great way to expand your knowledgebase.

Downtime:

Putting shoulders back in and reducing distal radial fractures is definitely satisfying, but it is the snow that draws people here. I came here as a total novice on the slopes, but spend most weekends skiing. One thing to be aware of is that lessons here are incredibly expensive so I used youtube to learn. If you are experienced then there is the incredible world of backcountry skiing to explore here. If you can pull yourself away from the powder there are various other activities to engage in. There are various snow festivals in nearby towns (think building sized snow sculptures) and I have also tried ice fishing on a nearby frozen lake. Many of my evenings have been spent in onsens (Japanese hot springs) and delving into the incredible culinary world of Japan.

Challenges of living here:

Despite everything seeming quite close by here, public transport is terrible and you really need a car to live here. Given how well set up the clinic is, it is also easy to forget how remote you are in Niseko. This sometimes means that you need to rationalise your medical decision making to adapt to the limitations of the local health service and this can be quite daunting.

My experience at Niseko International Clinic has been incredible both in and out of work and when I go back to Scotland the emergency department there will definitely be getting a better and more well rounded doctor back.