



# Adventures *and* Misadventures

It's the annual travel season again! Many doctors take the chance to hang up their stethoscopes and head out for overseas adventures - seeking the sun and seas, the snow and the mountains, or maybe just some peace and quiet. But sometimes, these adventures can turn into "misadventures", as two of our travellers recount. Another traveller shares her positive encounter with a GP during her long "vacation" (Lucky you!) in France.

## Text by Dr Chong Yeh Woei

I started skiing in Japan ten years ago when I travelled with Prime Travel and experienced the joys of skiing through powder snow in Hokkaido. I would always go to Rusutsu Resort, though most people are more familiar with the Niseko situated twenty miles away. I kept returning with my family to Rusutsu because of an excellent ski instructor - Maasa San - who had learnt to ski only as an adult.


In 2014, we arrived at Rusutsu on 18 December and had our first lesson with Maasa the following morning. We were going down the green beginner slopes to familiarise ourselves before moving on to the more advanced slopes over the next few days.

I was on the green slope for my third run when we had to stop halfway. As we were about to move off, I fell without warning due to the uneven snow. As I fell, my ski pole strap, which had wrapped itself around my left thumb, yanked at it, causing what one would call "gamekeeper's" thumb injury. However, I did not realise the gravity of the injury. Since it was only the first day of my skiing activities, I decided to carry

on and after some time, the cold had numbed the pain. When the pain did not go away, I took some Etoricoxib and soldiered on for five more days.

When I came back to Singapore, I noticed the laxity of the thumb when I gripped the thumb with my right hand and could feel the "give" at the base of the thumb. I quickly saw Tan Soo Heong, the hand surgeon, who asked me to get an MRI scan of the thumb. The diagnosis was a complete rupture of the ulnar collateral ligament. The only remedy was to do a tendon repair using my redundant palmaris longus tendon, as the original tendon had retracted after some time.

I had a very successful surgery in January 2015. The few post-surgery weeks included painful physiotherapy of the repaired thumb and wearing a splint daily. When I went back to Rusutsu the next year, I was quite nervous about getting back to the slopes. Fortunately I did not have any injuries in the 2015 season and even had a blast going down the "black slopes".



Dr Chong is in his fifth decade and trying to decide what is important going ahead for the last leg. Is it leaving a legacy, drinking good Pinot noir, reading the good stuff, keeping an active lifestyle, or just enjoying the good company of his friends? He would like your honest opinion!







**Text by Dr Tan Yia Swam, Editor**

My husband is on his Health Manpower Development Plan (HMDP) stint in Nantes, France, and I am here with him and the three boys as a stay-at-home mum. Upon turning two months old, our youngest boy needed his check-up and a set of vaccinations. We managed to find an English-speaking GP near our residence and made an appointment to see her.

The clinic was situated on the third floor of a charming old building, where the doctor shares a clinic space with two other doctors. The receptionist keyed in our details into a computer, but the doctor herself kept handwritten notes. Even the list of patients for the day was handwritten: the time and name, with 15 minutes allocated per patient. The waiting room was sparsely furnished, with maybe 12 wooden chairs against the walls, and some local magazines and health pamphlets. There were only two other patients waiting with us. It was a short 15-minute wait; the

doctor came out personally to call us by name and walk us into her consultation room. Basic medical history was taken and a physical examination was conducted in the usual manner. She took the baby's height and weight herself (the ruler was an ancient-looking wooden one). She took extra care to confirm that we understood the French vaccination schedule, which was very similar to the one in Singapore; and she took the time to read through the health booklet carefully.

The prescription was written by hand and we were sent off to buy the medications – turns out that there was a pharmacy just on the ground floor. It was another 15-minute wait before we were called in again. When we were done, she collected the payment of 30 euros in cash, made out a receipt and walked us to the exit.

In all, it was a smooth visit to a very competent and professional doctor who proves that one doesn't need the latest fancy gadgets to be a good doctor!



Dr Tan Yia Swam is now adjusting to life as a stay-at-home mum – managing a household with three rambunctious boys poses new challenges! Part of her wishes she can stay like this forever, yet part of her can't wait to get back to work!

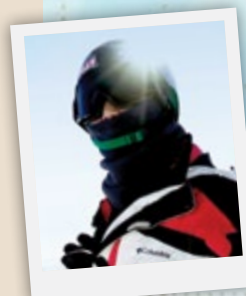


**Text by Dr Wong Tien Hua**

Two years ago, my wife fractured her ankle when she fell off a ski lift at Whistler Mountain, Vancouver, Canada. Before you think that she had plunged 50 metres from the ski lift into the rocky ravine below, it was not nearly as dramatic. In fact, it was at the disembarking point where she had reacted a few seconds too late when jumping off to catch the ramp as it approached, and instead slid off the chair and fell about a metre. Unfortunately her skis jammed into the snow and her body weight twisted her ankle at a hard angle, fracturing the lateral malleolus.

We visited Whistler Healthcare Centre later in the day and a young doctor attended to her in

the emergency department. He had scruffy hair and a chiselled face with a scar on his eyebrow. Physically, he was huge and built like a rock, with muscles bulging through the scrubs, and carried the necessary scars that came along with his lifestyle – we found out that he would go on call one day and hit the mountain the next, snowboarding down one of the triple black diamond slopes. As he looked at my wife's X-ray, he reassured her that he had sustained the same fracture before. And without further ado, he proceeded to show us the previous fractures he had suffered on his arms, ribs and legs! ♦



Dr Wong thinks that skiing is a great way to get outdoors in the winter. It involves the whole family, both young and old, and it is able to combine physical activity, beautiful scenery and local cuisine all in one. It is no wonder that our doctors often bump into each other at some of the more popular ski resorts.

