



Mercury Analysis

NIC International Distributors Meeting & Minamata Disease

23 – 26 April, 2018 | Hakata Excel Hotel Tokyu in Fukuoka, Japan
Reported by Robert C. Tisdale, Ph.D., Senior Vice-President of Rigaku GMG

Nippon Instruments Corporation (NIC) – a division of Rigaku Corporation – held their biennial International Distributors Meeting (IDM) from the 23rd to the 26th of April at the Hakata Excel Hotel Tokyu in Fukuoka, Japan. Founded in 1978, NIC designs and manufactures mercury (Hg) analyzers based on atomic absorption (AA) or atomic fluorescence (AF) spectrometric technologies.



The kickoff on Monday morning began with introductions by Mr. Alvin Chua and Mr. Takashi Yasuda and a preview of the week's schedule. This was followed by a short welcome speech by NIC's President Yoshiaki Yoshioka.



The first day concluded with a gala celebration dinner at the hotel that included an awards ceremony. The gentlemen from AGS Scientific (College Station, Texas) received the highest honor.



Highlighting the second day was the introduction of the newest NIC instrument, the MA-3 *Solo*. Unveiling the new instrument was accompanied by a special ceremony.



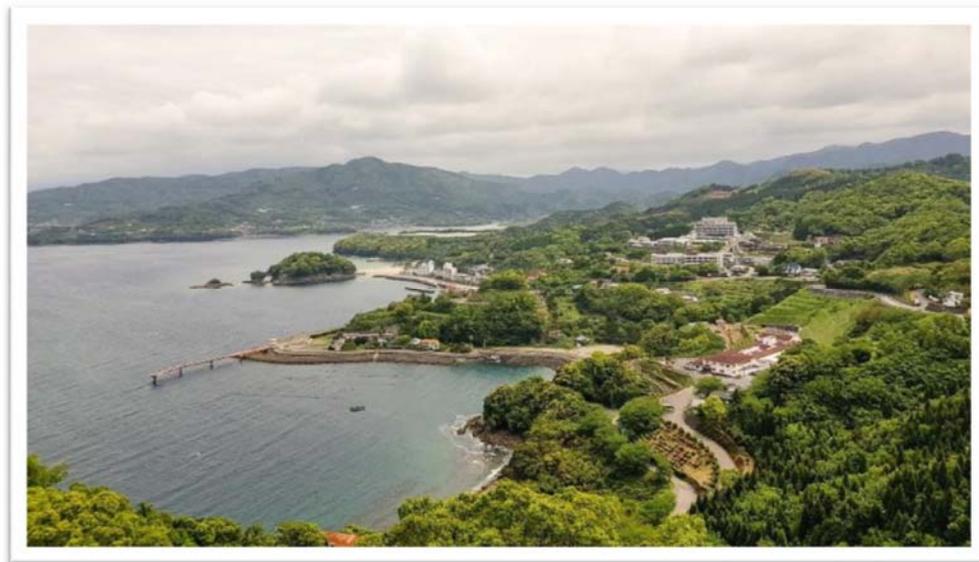
At the end of the second day, everyone participated in a group photograph to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the founding of NIC.



Day three began with a field trip to Minamata, Japan to explore the origins of the modern mercury poisoning disease phenomena. Minamata disease is a neurological syndrome caused by severe mercury poisoning. Symptoms include ataxia, numbness in the hands and feet, general muscle weakness, narrowing of the field of vision, damage to hearing and speech, and ultimately death.



While Minamata Bay is today a beautiful and picturesque seaside, in 1956 it was the scene of an ecological disaster of then unknown origin.



Once in Minamata, the group proceeded to tour the National Institute for Minamata Disease (NIMD). NIMD was established in 1978 with the purpose of conducting comprehensive medical research to improve medical treatment for victims of Minamata Disease while giving balanced consideration to its deep historical background and social importance.

Following a tour of the NIMD laboratories and a video lecture, the group boarded the two buses for an afternoon at the Minamata Disease Municipal Museum.



At the museum, the group had the special and sobering opportunity to hear first-hand how this disease impacted the lives of the people of Minamata. Since 1994, Minamata disease survivors have volunteered their time as Storytellers (Kataribe) to speak about their terrible experiences.



Our storyteller was Ms. Eiko Ueno, who lost both her husband and daughter to the disease. The group is shown standing with her for a group photograph. Everyone was left with a newfound energy to tell this story and to relate the scientific and engineering achievements of NIC in helping to remediate the global tragedy of mercury poisoning.



At the end of the third day, the group proceeded to the Hotel Hakusuikan in Kagoshima. This very traditional Japanese hotel offered beautiful gardens and their famous hot sand baths.



At night, NIC celebrated our last night together with ceremony, a traditional Japanese meal and some fun with a unique fish descaling competition.

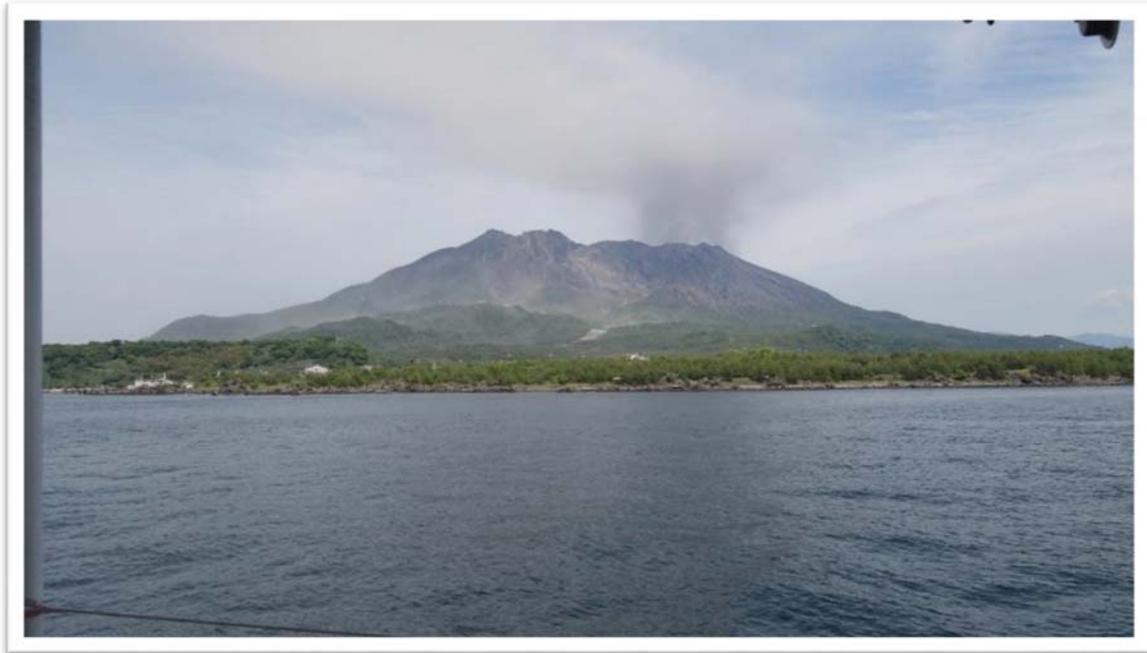


The fourth and final day involved rest and recreation. First stop was a trip to a Sake brewery.



After lunch, the group was off to sea to explore an active volcano that was emitting gritty particles.





In my 40+ years in the scientific endeavor, the NIC IDM was the best learning experience of its type that I have had the privilege to have been a part of. Minamata Disease continues to be a hot topic in the scientific literature. For the latest information:

A proposed global metric to aid mercury pollution policy. Noelle E. Selin. *Science*. 11 May 2018: 607-609. DOI: [10.1126/science.aar8256](https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aar8256).

Robert C. Tisdale, Ph.D.
SVP GMG
Rigaku Corporation