

The research experience

I was awarded a 1-year short term fellowship (August 2015-2016) to study ash dispersal from the Sakurajima volcano in Japan using a numerical weather prediction model (WRF) in Kyoto University. This has been an incredible experience for me. Having the freedom to choose how I pursue the research project enabled me experiment with tools that I previously have little experience with (in my case satellite and radar data), as well as new models. It's not an overstatement to say that the personal growth I was able to achieve in this one year is easily comparable to my PhD in its entirety.

The people

This positive experience was also helped by the support I received from other researchers in the university. People both in and out of the university were very helpful and I never felt isolated or unwelcome. In Japan I also had a chance to attend a number of national and international conferences and greatly expand my research network.

Tips and suggestions

- Embrace the freedom that you're given to explore new methodologies, areas of study etc.
- Try to integrate and help other researchers (usually it's your help with English and their help with Japanese!).
- Try to go to as many conferences and explore possibilities for collaborations (other labs etc).
- JSPS has a school outreach programme called "science dialogue". I was able to participate in it and overall it was a very rewarding experience.
- Most people in the university speak English...
- ...However it's always good to know at least basic Japanese (including the basic syllabaries).
- The stipend from JSPS is more (much more) than enough to cover your stay, so don't worry about money.
- Japan is a very nice country so do some travelling when you have time!
- Try to adapt to the way of life and culture (try new things, food etc).
- Read up on everyday Japanese culture before you come, it can make a huge difference in your stay.

Confession

I must admit that I speak Japanese and have a Japanese wife so my overall experience might be slightly atypical. However most of the experiences that I had are shared by other fellows as well. Knowing Japanese definitely helps when interacting with others as Japanese are generally shy and might be apprehensive to speak in English. You just need to try your best and they will open up!

Finally

Once again, I would like to help JSPS London for giving me this opportunity. It has been an invaluable experience for me and has definitely had an impact in both my personal development and my future career.