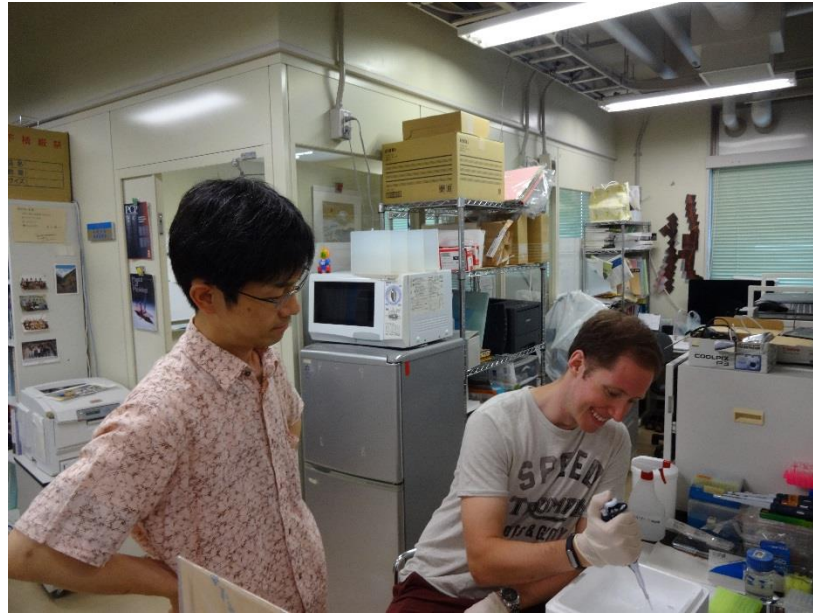


The JSPS Summer Program 2015 can hardly be summed up in a few short sentences, but if I can do it in one, it was an experience of a lifetime. The program begins strong, by introducing you to over 100 enthusiastic researchers from across the globe, with a few things in common, an excellence in their research fields and a curiosity about Japanese culture. Intensive, and enjoyable, language classes are followed up by cultural experiences like the tea ceremony, and origami folding. Following orientation week we are moved to our respective host institutions; mine, the lab of Professor Hidehiro Fukaki, Graduate School of Science at Kobe University, proved to be a campus nestled on the mountains, offering stunning views of Kobe and Osaka. Kobe University has many campuses, 3 of which are on Rokko mountain. This offers a quiet seclusion from the bustle of city life, though it does mean there are fewer amenities. The campus itself does have 2 cafeterias and 2 convenience stores however, so I never went without. The following two months proved fruitful both scientifically and culturally, as I my research went smoothly, and I also had many opportunities to travel and experience the real Japan. First, working in Japan. My research revolves around investigating, mapping, and enhancing overall root architecture in the model plant species *Arabidopsis thaliana* with an aim to translating that knowledge to crop species (ie. rice, oilseed rape, maize, wheat etc...). The research I performed at Kobe University consisted of utilising new equipment, techniques, and strategies to observe key genes involved during the early stages of lateral (branching) root development. Working in Kobe was generally no different than working at the University of Nottingham, in England, in that as scientists we generally work individually, however, when a protocol or chemical was needed my colleagues here were very helpful and spoke English quite well (though not all JSPS fellows were as lucky!). Working hours in Japan tend to start later and finish later, and the pace of work was much slower than what I was expecting (and used to), potentially owing to more reading, reflection, and planning of experiments. That said, my research experience proved rewarding and I obtained exciting and unexpected results which will lead to further interesting investigations. Importantly, I kept all my weekends lab-free and travelled: Japan is a well-connected country that is easy to get around, with a rich cultural history that needs to be explored! With cheap flights, and relatively cheap shinkansen tickets I managed to see many different

castles, shrines, and temples. The people of Japan, while perhaps timid at first, are extremely friendly and always willing to lend a hand to a lost traveller. Living, eating, and socialising in Japan has all been very easy once you found your stride. Just remember *sumimasen* and *arigatou gozaimasu* and you'll do well! I can't thank the JSPS enough for this experience and will highly recommend it to all my future colleagues!



With Supervisor, Professor Hidehiro Fukaki



Obon Fireworks, Kobe