

JSPS Short Term Postdoctoral Fellowship – Angela Tam

Host Institution: Department of Internal Medicine, Division of Rheumatology, School of Medicine, Keio University, Tokyo

Host Researcher: Professor Masataka Kuwana

My fellowship project involved investigating the role of immune cells in the progression of fibrosis in systemic sclerosis (SSc), an autoimmune disease which I studied during my PhD in London. The fellowship combined techniques such as cell culture, molecular biology and histology which I had used during my PhD with the skills and research interests of my host lab in autoimmunity and SSc. Our work was aided by access to in-house facilities within the host lab and the Research Park. It has been an eye-opener working in a different lab to that from my PhD, especially in a different country, with regards to working environment and culture, as well as lifestyle.

The fellowship was my first ever visit to Japan and being in Tokyo provided a good base for exploring Japan. The year-long stay allowed me to experience the different festivals and celebrations of each season, including the cherry blossom viewing in the spring, fireworks displays across the Tokyo skyline in the summer, and the red maple leaves in the autumn. Some of the activities I most enjoyed included climbing Mount Fuji, visiting the temples in Kyoto and Nara, wearing a kimono, cycling around the volcanic island of Oshima, enjoying the hot springs of the Izu peninsula, and visiting a bustling shrine on New Year's Day.

Through the JSPS Science Dialogue programme I also volunteered to give a lecture to students at Utsunomiya Girls' High School, Tochigi. It was a great learning opportunity for me to visit a Japanese school and it was very rewarding to interact with local students and to inspire them to study science and to study abroad.

Although we spoke in English in the lab and it was possible to survive with English and body language for day-to-day necessities, it became a lot easier and more enjoyable with the improvement of my Japanese. Armed with only 10-hours of basic Japanese before arriving in Japan I was keen to learn more of the language and joined the Japanese Club at Keio University and a Japanese class in the local area. The classes helped with integration into the community, making new friends, and I enjoyed practising my Japanese with my colleagues. The Japanese Club also organised various cultural events such as visiting a large Japanese dolls display, watching a traditional Japanese kabuki theatre show, and watching a sumo wrestling tournament. I strongly recommend applying for a JSPS fellowship for an invaluable opportunity to share research and cultural experiences with our Japanese colleagues.



Teachers and students from my Japanese class



With other foreign students and alumni of Keio University, after a Kabuki performance at the National Theatre, Tokyo