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Institute for the Study of the Earth's Interior
Okayama University
Host Researcher: Katsura Kobayashi

Arriving at Kansai airport was only the first stage of my journey in Japan. The Institute for the Study of the Earth's Interior (ISEI) although part of Okayama University, is actually located in Misasa, a small town in a different prefecture (Tottori) on the opposite side of Honshu. I needn't have worried about the journey though. Despite speaking no Japanese, my numerous confused requests for help in locating myself were always very kindly received. The coach journey out of Osaka started slowly winding its way out of the large city, but soon entered the more mountainous centre of the island. At one point, we entered a long tunnel in fair weather and scattered clouds, but emerged to snow drifts and sleet.

The experience of settling down to life in Misasa was in many ways like that initial shock of going through a tunnel and entering a different world. Misasa is a small town in a not very populous (by Japanese standards) prefecture. The cultural differences between Japan and the UK are compounded by going from an urban environment to a rural one. However, the quality of life, with hot springs, clean air, fantastic fresh seafood and beautiful views is a refreshing change and a perfect environment for scientific contemplation.

As already mentioned, Misasa is the unlikely home of ISEI, which possesses some of the most modern and comprehensive geochemical analytical facilities in the world. I was here to use two instruments in particular (the Cameca 1270f being the one in the photo), which are able to accurately measure the elemental and isotopic composition of minute amounts of rock material. The aim of the project was to analyse the tens of micron sized pockets of melt that

get trapped inside crystals as they grow from magmas. The geochemical information contained in these melt inclusions is able to tell us about the processes leading up to the eruption of lavas.

I found research life in Japan rewarding, with the abundance of analytical facilities creating exciting possibilities for projects. With my colleagues at ISEI I have had many new ideas for taking this project forward and pursuing new avenues of enquiry. I hope to be able to continue collaborating with my new friends and colleagues in future.

Me in an ISEI lab