

TO: Nakatani Foundation

Nakatani RIES 2024 Final Report

Your Name: Sinani Kperogi

Your university: University of Tokyo

Host Lab in Japan: Kim Lab

Meaning of Nakatani RIES Fellowship: How would you describe the meaning/impact of the Nakatani RIES Fellowship

Giving students an opportunity to travel abroad while doing research is an amazing privilege. I think as an undergraduate, you should study abroad at least once because it really does open your eyes to what the world really has to offer. This experience was truly unforgettable!

Complete the following sentences with the intended audience for these responses being potential applicants to the Nakatani RIES Fellowship.

- My favorite experience in Japan was...
 - Travelling to different parts of Japan. My favorite place was Kyoto because of the nature and beautiful scenery. I also really enjoyed going to the konbini at 2 am for some ice cream
- Before I left for Japan, I wish I had...
 - Visited more places and stayed longer in the Kansai area (Kyoto and Osaka). The people are much friendlier there than in Tokyo. I also wish I had drunk more matcha.
- While I was in Japan, I wish I had...
 - Known about the overnight bus to places like Osaka and Sendai sooner. The shinkansen can get really expensive and the overnight bus is a great way to save money and travel long distances. I also wish I had eaten more types of Japanese food.

Research Internship Overview: Provide a description of your research project and experience during your research internship. How did your project relate to your current or future academic interests? What was the experience of working in an international research setting like? What will you take away from your research experience this summer and what impact do you think this has had or will have on your future academic career or research interests?

My research project was mostly focused on the fabrication of microwells to trap single cells efficiently. The straighter the side wall of the wells, the better it did at trapping the cells when a flow was introduced. My project helped me gain wet lab experience, which I know will be useful for when I plan to conduct my own research in the future. I had an overall great experience at my lab; however, I wish I did get a more social lab than the one I had. I heard about the experiences people in the Kyoto and Osaka area had and I was a little jealous of how lively their labs were. Although my mentor's English wasn't that proficient, I did have a fun time learning Japanese lab terms and teaching him lab terms in English. As well as random English words from time to time.

Lab Environment Overview: Provide an overview of what the personal environment of the lab was like. Describe the personality and working style of your research group? What was it like working with your research mentor/s and the overall group dynamic in the lab?

The overall environment of my lab was quite introverted. People were nice and welcomed me, but I didn't do much outside of the lab setting with the people in my lab. The most I did was go out to lunch a couple of times with the other international PhD students. I did run into some challenges with the language barrier while interacting with my mentor, but luckily, he was very enthusiastic about learning and overcoming the language barrier, so it wasn't much of an issue as the summer progressed.

Daily Life in Japan: Provide an overview of what your daily life was like in Japan. This could include the people you interacted with outside the lab on a day-to-day basis, food, your housing/living experience, your travels around Japan and the challenges you faced and the rewarding experiences you encountered over the course of the summer.

A typical day consisted of me going to lab around 10 am (there was no strict time I had to be there) and taking the Den-en-toshi line to Shibuya, then transferring to the Inokashira line straight to the Komaba campus. Sometimes I would stop by 7-eleven to get a coffee or something for breakfast or I would go to a local bakery to buy their croissants or other pastries. After I was done with lab, I would take the same trains to go back to my apartment and maybe stop by FamilyMart for a treat. I did most of my travelling on the weekends except for the last week when I went to South Korea for 5 days. I did face some challenges while living in Tokyo, like getting lost in Shibuya station the first time I had to navigate it myself. Since my Japanese skills aren't the best, I had a hard time asking for help with directions. Also, I faced the harsh reality of being a black person in Japan a couple of times. I would always get stared at on the train or just walking on the street. Especially by little kids. People can also be quite pushy and impatient on the Tokyo trains and when getting off, Japanese people have (in my opinion) no sense of direction when walking anywhere. It can be really frustrating to think you can walk on one side just to have people bump into you anyway. I had to learn to be comfortable with no personal space on the trains too. Particularly if I was going back to my apartment at 5:00pm or going to lab at 9:30am. I am really proud of how much my Japanese skills have improved, especially with reading and understanding Japanese.

Experiences with Japanese Culture: Provide an overview of your most meaningful experiences with Japanese culture. This could be program activities or interactions you had with your lab or within your daily life in Japan that you think best exemplify aspects of Japanese culture or values. What did the experience/s teach you about Japan? What did they teach you about yourself?

I think the most meaningful experiences I had in Japan were with the JP fellows. I loved being able to ask them questions about the differences between Western culture and Japanese culture. I also loved getting their insight on how Japanese people perceive tourists, but particularly American tourists. I also really enjoyed and appreciated the planned events by the Nakatani foundation. The first two weeks and the last week were the most interesting and unforgettable experiences I had in Japan.