

TO: Nakatani Foundation

Nakatani RIES GE 2019 Report

Your Name: Lea Ballenberger

Your University: Heidelberg University

Host Lab in Japan: Kengaku Lab, iCeMS

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

I really liked the experience to live and work in Japan for some time. The time in the lab offered a good possibility to get to know locals and get a better insight and understanding of the culture and the values of Japanese people. Further I got lots of advice from my colleagues about food to try and places to visit. I also really enjoyed working in the lab, as it is very helpful to see different approaches and ways to work, with different equipment and experiments. In general, I am delighted I got the chance to live this experience. Without the Nakatani RIES Fellowship I would not have been able to do such a stay. Now I can look back to great memories, a fascinating country that I got to live in for a short while and lots of great people I met during this time.

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...
 - Going to a public bath on my own. It was a very unique moment to be in the middle of a traditional Japanese place, that was not made for tourists. It was fascinating to dive into the culture and interact with local people.
- Before I left for Japan, I wish I had...
 - Learned more Japanese, to be able to interact more with the locals in their language.
- While I was in Japan, I wish I had...
 - Had more time and money to see and experience more things

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?

In Germany, I study neuroscience, focusing on molecular techniques and electrophysiology. During my stay in Japan, I was working in a lab specialized in neuronal migration during

development. I joined a project on nuclear rotation of granule cells in the cerebellum. To me it was especially interesting to get to know different approaches and ways to work in the lab and get an insight into a new topic. Further I got to see and try some techniques that I hadn't used before. I think in general for research, it is very important to stay openminded and to look at things from a different angle. Working and living in such a different country provides a great opportunity to get inspired for future projects and decisions.

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?

Everybody in the lab was super nice! My supervisor showed me lots of different techniques and we always went to have lunch together. The lab meetings were held in English, so it was easy for me to follow what was going on. I felt very welcome in the lab. Except for some language problems, due to missing Japanese skills on my side, I talked to all people and felt very well treated and as part of the group.

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.

We stayed in a really nice apartment, with our own bathroom and small kitchenette. I usually had breakfast at home and then went to the lab, where everybody started working around 10. For lunch we usually went to different places close to university and ate together with the lab people. In the evening, after the lab, we sometimes went for dinner with the lab people or with the other German Nakatani fellows. On the weekends we usually went to visit different places with the German Nakatani fellows, like all places in Kyoto, Tokyo, Nara, Osaka... In general, I experienced Japanese people as very polite and friendly people. I did not meet a single person who was rude or disrespectful. The only problem might be the language barrier, but if you have a question they will usually still try to help you.

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 really enjoyed having lunch with the people from my lab. During this time, we talked a lot about Japan, about the language, the culture and the history. To me it was really nice, that I could ask all my questions and get them answered by people who are very interested in the country and therefore know a lot about it, or by Japanese people who grew up in Japan and have all the first hand information. My favorite experience was going to a traditional public bath. It was located less than 5 minutes walking from our house. There is nothing similar in Germany, that you could compare it to. Especially, it is a place, where you should follow many

rules, that to Japanese people might seem completely normal, but do not exist in Germany. It already starts with entering and taking off your shoes. Further, there were no people speaking English, so finding my way around, without having anybody showing me what to do, was very interesting. To me, it was a special event and one of my most impressive moments in Japan, as it is not a place prepared for tourist, but a very nice insight into Japanese tradition.