

Dr. MORITA Maho

#### My research

Organisms in Nature harbor various biologically active substances, which are known as natural products. Symbiotic microbes interact with the animal hosts, often by producing natural products that play key roles in protecting the host animals chemically. My research specifically focuses on a biosynthetic pathway of the bioactive alkaloids isolated from marine animal “ascidian”. The goal is to understand which microbe biosynthesizes this class natural products and to harness the biosynthetic logic using multidisciplinary approaches.

#### Advice on preparing to go abroad

It is assumed that most researchers going to the US under this Fellowship apply for a J-1 visa. To receive a J visa, the person is required to submit an application and take an interview at the Embassy. This should go smoothly; however, it often takes time to get form DS-2019 from your host institution. Therefore, the hosting faculty member should be asked to prepare the form early on. It's a good idea to ask the members and staffs of your host laboratory to give you information about the area before you leave Japan. In my case, they gave me information about apartment availability in a safe neighborhood before departing Japan. Upon arrival in the US, I stayed at a hotel for a few days while I opened a bank account and signed a rental contract. When entering into an apartment contract in country it's often necessary to make a down payment in cash or by check. Therefore, you should think about the kind of money that you will need to bring with you before departing. In my case, I brought a bank check from Japan.

#### Advice on problems that may arise when living abroad

You may need various kinds of assistance from people in your surroundings, particularly after just arriving in the country. In that case, it is important to let people know precisely what you want to do and what kind of help you will need in doing it. At least in the case of my surroundings, I was uncertain as to who would act in my behalf when I encountered a problem. I found it necessary to ask questions and state my opinion in such cases, otherwise the situation I felt would not change. If you do not understand something said in English, you should ask the person to repeat it. If you don't understand something related to the research, you should ask your host researcher or lab mates to explain it to you. If a situation exists in which you are not

given an opportunity to share in research reporting, you should inquire as to why not. In this manner, you should, I believe, be able to prevent problems before they occur. As changes in one's environment can cause an unexpected decline in a person's physical condition, it would be advisable to check out the hospital to which your insurance is applicable and get a flu vaccination right away.

What is it like living abroad?

As public order and safety is good and public transportation adequate where I reside in America, living here feels about the same as in Japan. That said, last year an international student was shot to death late at night in the university's parking lot. So, I have to be very careful about my safety. In Utah where I live the price of an apartment is cheaper than on America's east or west coast. (A studio apartment is priced at about ¥10,000 per month.) I am living with my husband without having to do room sharing. One thing that may differ from Japan is that many researchers, including my PI, bring their partners and children to their lab, bespeaking the socializing enjoyed among the families. Within a day's reach from the university there are national parks and ski resorts, so many members of the lab enjoy hiking and outdoor sports on their days off.

What is good about your receiving a Postdoctoral Fellowship for Research Abroad?

In my case, it is being able to challenge a field of research that is different from what I had been studying in Japan. Having been accepted for this fellowship, I am able to undertake a research theme that is highly novel (but also quite risky). For this opportunity, I am very thankful. At the lab, an opportunity to adjust one's assigned research theme is provided once a year. Due to holding this fellowship, I am able to choose whatever theme I prefer and carry out my research freely.