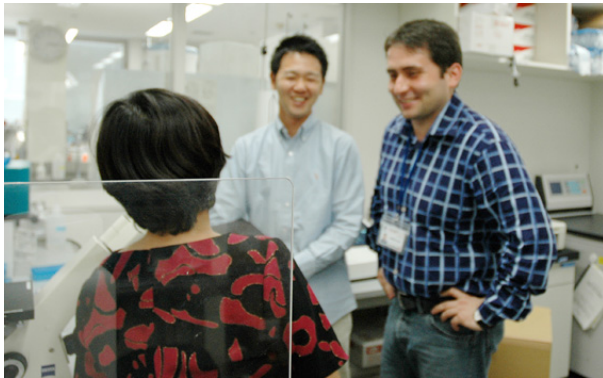


### **A summer of study and fun for young foreign scientists at the CDB**

*October 7, 2004* – The opportunity to work in world-class research facilities in an unfamiliar region of the world has proven to be a strong attractive to the young scientists who have come to the RIKEN Center for Development Biology (CDB; Kobe, Japan) as part of the summer study program sponsored by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS) and the Graduate University for Advanced Studies in association with science agencies in the USA, UK, France, Germany and Canada. The Program provides opportunities for young pre- and post-doctoral researchers from North America and Europe to receive an introduction to Japanese culture and research systems and to pursue their research under the guidance of host researchers at Japanese universities and research institutes. The Program is held every year, spanning eight weeks from late June through late August.



Situated conveniently close to the center of Kobe, a picturesque and dynamic port city near Osaka on Japan's Inland Sea, the CDB has hosted four JSPS summer scholars in the past two years, an unusually high turnout for a new research institute. Applicants choose from 115 publicly funded research institutes, national labs and NPOs when making their requests to be hosted. While some Summer Program fellows came to the Center via personal

connections or a prior relationship with a specific lab, others noted the strength of its reputation as the deciding factor. Cantas Alev, who came to the CDB from the lab where he was working on his doctorate in Germany in 2003 says, "I felt that the newly founded RIKEN CDB was one of the few spots in the world with such a high density of very successful young scientists and researchers in the field of developmental biology, offering rich technical and personal resources and opportunities in an exciting research environment."

Every summer program participants' visit to Japan begins with a one-week orientation in a seaside town in Kanagawa Prefecture, near Tokyo, receiving basic lessons in the Japanese language and in what to expect during their stay. While most cited this experience as valuable, some felt the time could better be spent focusing on more specific needs. "It should be shorter, maybe 3 days instead of 7. We're only in Japan for 2 months - we shouldn't be in orientation for 1/8th of our stay," noted Neal Rao, who returned to the CDB as a JSPS summer student in 2003 after working at the Center as a public information and international affairs coordinator the previous year. "Orientation is important, but vacationing in Hayama really won't "orient" people to their actual situation in Japan (which will probably be in a city instead of a countryside resort town). Orientation should be carried out more in the host institution."



The four researchers who have done their summer stays at the CDB to date have all come to Japan under the auspices of the

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JSPS and the partnering agency in their home country. In addition to roundtrip airfare from the home country to Japan, the JSPS provides allowances for everyday needs and research travel, and makes funds for research-related available to the hosting lab. JSPS fellows are expected to make and pay for their own housing arrangements for their stay, which can be difficult in an urban location such as Kobe, where short-term accommodations can be hard-to-find and high-priced. Several fellows mentioned that this was one of the least positive aspects of their experience in Kobe, highlighting the immediate need for facilities for guest researchers in the Port Island research park.

All were positive, however, about the research environment within the Center. "It's the best site in the world for the kind of research that I enjoy working in, stem cell biology," claims Rao. "In my current lab, much of the equipment is old or has been moved to a new campus. The CDB has the best equipment I have ever seen." All four JSPS fellows answered yes when asked if they would consider returning to Japan to do full-time research, noting the excellence of the facilities and high level of support given to CDB labs as an important factor.

More than one visitor has already made good on that promise. Dr Alev returned to the Laboratory for Stem Cell Translational Research (Team Leader, Takayuki Asahara) this summer to begin a one-year postdoctoral fellowship. The head of another CDB lab, Raj Ladher (Laboratory for Sensory Organogenesis) also first came to Japan as a JSPS fellow at Tokyo Medical and Dental University in 1998. "It really seems to have grown since I participated," he says, "there may be twice as many people in the program now compared to when I came."

Designed to provide scientists from outside the country with a glimpse into life in a Japanese research environment, the Summer Program has proven to be an eye-opening cross-cultural experience for all. Fellows at the CDB noted a range of differences, mainly involving differences in communications styles and working hours. "The days for a normal researcher are very, very, very long in Japan. In Germany Ph D students also stay in the lab very late and work weekends, but I was still surprised at how long a working day can be in Japan."



says Alev, "But thanks to the fact that almost everybody is staying till very late, one is also never alone, which is quite nice." Some fellows at other institutes have experienced a greater sense of isolation while in Japan, however. "I know one person who was forced to speak to the head of their lab through a grad student acting as interpreter," recalls Carole Burns, who worked in the Ladher lab in the summer of 2004, "Fortunately, we don't have that kind of problem here."

Despite the gruelling hours logged in some labs, summer in Japan is not all work and no play. Kobe offers a great blend of entertainment, learning and travel opportunities for the young student or postdoc. Visitors to the Center have taken advantage of their time here to visit other parts of Japan, from Hokkaido to Kyushu, with some staying after the conclusion of the program to do additional sightseeing.

Details about the JSPS Summer Program can be found at <http://www.jsp.go.jp/english/e-summer/index.html> or at the offices of participating research agencies.

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