RUTGERS HEALTH
Robert Wood Johnson Medical School

Fukui Travelogue

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First week

My travel experience

My journey requires a bit of backstory. Since I was the first medical student from RWJMS to go to Fukui, there wasn't a pre-planned travel guide for me. A staff member at the multicultural office, Sarah-san, did her best to provide me with directions. I was instructed to fly to

Osaka, but I missed the detail where she specifically told me to fly into Osaka-KIX airport. Instead, I booked a flight to Osaka-ITM, which made the travel guide Sarah-san created unusable

So, my journey ended up being an 18-hour trip: a flight from Newark to Chicago, followed by a flight from Chicago to Tokyo. This was when I hit my second travel hiccup. I was supposed to arrive in Tokyo by 7 p.m. and catch a connecting flight to Osaka, but due to a delay, I didn't land in Osaka until 8:15 p.m.

Before coming to Japan, I had done extensive research on how to navigate the trains and buses, how to communicate with locals, and many other practicalities. During my research, I learned that I would need to carry as much cash as possible. So, before taking the bus to a hotel near the one where I'd be staying overnight before heading to Fukui, I went to find an ATM. At the time, I had two large suitcases with me (which were mostly empty), and I had to drag them around while searching. It took me about 45 minutes to find an ATM, and another 20 minutes to locate the bus stop I needed. That's when I realized that I needed either cash or a special cash card to pay for the bus, so I couldn't buy a ticket from the kiosk. As a result, I missed the last bus at 9 p.m., and I had to walk to my hotel. Fortunately, the hotel offered a shuttle back to the airport.

Meeting Dr. sada

Once I settled into my dorm, I met Dr. Sada, who was responsible for me during the week. Dr. Sada, a professor at the university, worked closely with Dr. Lin to help make the program run smoothly. He was incredibly polite, kind, and went out of his way to ensure I was comfortable. During my first week, he introduced me to what Fukui and Fukui University had to offer. I spent time with two researchers at the university, Dr. Fu and Dr. Chihara, who were working on different projects. I had the chance to learn about their research and participate in various activities. With Dr. Chihara, I got to make an electrophoresis gel, inject samples, and use a UV transilluminator to visualize the bands.

The rest of the week included having lunch and/or dinner with Dr. Sada, other medical students, and staff; visiting Eiheiji Temple; going to a tea shop; learning about how Rutgers became a sister university to Fukui; and being escorted to the Fukui Dinosaur Museum by four medical students.

Second week



my second week consisted of shadowing doctors in the emergency medicine department. I was introduced to several doctors and medical students, including Dr. Hayashi. Communication wasn't as difficult as I had expected. Most of the doctors and students I interacted with knew English, and when they didn't, Google Translate proved to be a very useful tool. When I had to listen to conversations between the doctors and patients, I used an app called UD talk, which acted as a live translator. Although it wasn't always perfect, I could usually get the gist of the conversation, and the doctors were great at filling in any gaps.

Throughout the week, I attended several lectures from an American doctor from Seattle, which covered a variety of topics, as well as a lecture from a doctor from the University of Ottawa. I was also invited to a journal club meeting at a traditional Japanese restaurant, where several residents gave a lecture on anaphylactic shock. The lecture was interactive, creative, and fun. On Friday, I was invited to a farewell party for the doctor from Ottawa at another Japanese restaurant. Once again, I was treated to a dining experience that would be hard to find in the U.S.

Over the weekend, I was guided around a local museum by Dr. Sada, Mr. Henieken, Professor Wakabayashi, and two other medical students I had met during my first week. One of the students, who aspires to work abroad, is part of the Exchange Club—a group of members interested in international work. They were enlisted by Dr. Sada to assist exchange students in any way they could. The exchange students were incredibly helpful in making my stay a wonderful experience. One student even found a bike for me, which I used to get to the hospital.

The museum we visited showcased the history of Fukui and displayed artifacts dating back thousands of years. After that, we went to a museum dedicated to the life of William Griffith, a Rutgers alumnus who had traveled to Fukui Prefecture to teach English and science. His efforts helped establish New Brunswick, Rutgers' home city, as a sister city to Fukui. Following the museum visit, we went to a French restaurant owned by a friend of Dr. Sada.

Third week

I shadowed the same doctors from previous week as well as a FM doctor named Dr. Ito. That same week, from Friday to Saturday, I went to Takahama Town, a seaside town located in Fukui Prefecture. I was escorted by Dr. Ikai, along with a graduate pre-med Rutgers student who had stayed in Japan for a year as a liaison between Rutgers and Fukui University. We had the opportunity to shadow an emergency/orthopedic doctor. He introduced himself and his team by their nicknames, which were mandatory in their hospital, and we were required to come up with our own nicknames as well.

The doctor showed us how the patient consent process worked in his hospital, and we were able to ask him many questions about the medical system in Japan. He explained that practice in Japan tends to be more provider-centered, but that patient-centered care is becoming a growing focus. He took us out for lunch, where we learned more about his motivations for working in a rural area with a declining population.



After we finished shadowing, we were taken to their seaside first-aid station at the beach, as well as a community center where Dr. Ikai conducts research with the elderly in the town. I was deeply inspired by the dedication of the two doctors, who worked in a hospital that wasn't as advanced as Fukui University and was severely understaffed. In fact, the orthopedic doctor we shadowed was the only orthopedic surgeon in the hospital.

After shadowing, Dr. Ikai took us to his home, where we met his wife, three children, and dog. His wife prepared dinner for us, and Dr. Ikai and his youngest daughter played the piano. We also played Uno with the family. Before we left, his wife woke up early to make us breakfast.

Before officially saying goodbye to Dr. Ikai, he and his older daughter took me to Himeji Castle, the largest castle in Japan, located in Hyogo Prefecture. From there, I traveled to Osaka for some shopping and eating before heading back to Fukui.

Fourth week

During the last week, since I had to leave on Thursday from Osaka, I only had two days to shadow doctors. On my final day, before leaving, I was able to visit Kanazawa, a city near Fukui Prefecture. There, I had the opportunity to see some of its historic homes, a castle, and the Kenrokuen Garden.

What I learned from this trip

I learned the value of cultural exchange, the importance of adaptability, and how healthcare systems can vary across countries, all while gaining a deeper appreciation for Japan's rich history and traditions.