

SPring-8 Experience

Bayerisches Geoinstitut, Bayreuth, Germany

Joy Reid

It is the middle of the night when I arrive in Kansai Airport but the sun is shining brightly. Still on European time and lacking a night's sleep I make my way to SPring-8. The train seems to be the fastest and smoothest way of getting there, with an express *Haruka* Train to Shin-Osaka and then a Shinkansen train to Aioi. This journey takes you through the highly populated Osaka Bay area. It seems that most flat stretches of land in between the hills and the ocean are almost completely encrusted with human habitation. At night the sea of lights viewed from the hills above Kobe make a fantastic spectacle. An alternative route to SPring-8 is to take the high-speed boat, which whisks you from Kansai to Kobe Port, and then to take the train from Sannomiya station, in Kobe, to Aioi (change in Himeji). This is slightly cheaper but takes longer and is a challenge for the non-Japanese speaker. From Aioi, one takes a bus to SPring-8 in which I usually, involuntarily, fall asleep and find myself, one hour later, in a remote area with very few signs of life in the wooded hills apart from the grey outline of SPring-8 itself. Quite a contrast to the Osaka Bay area!

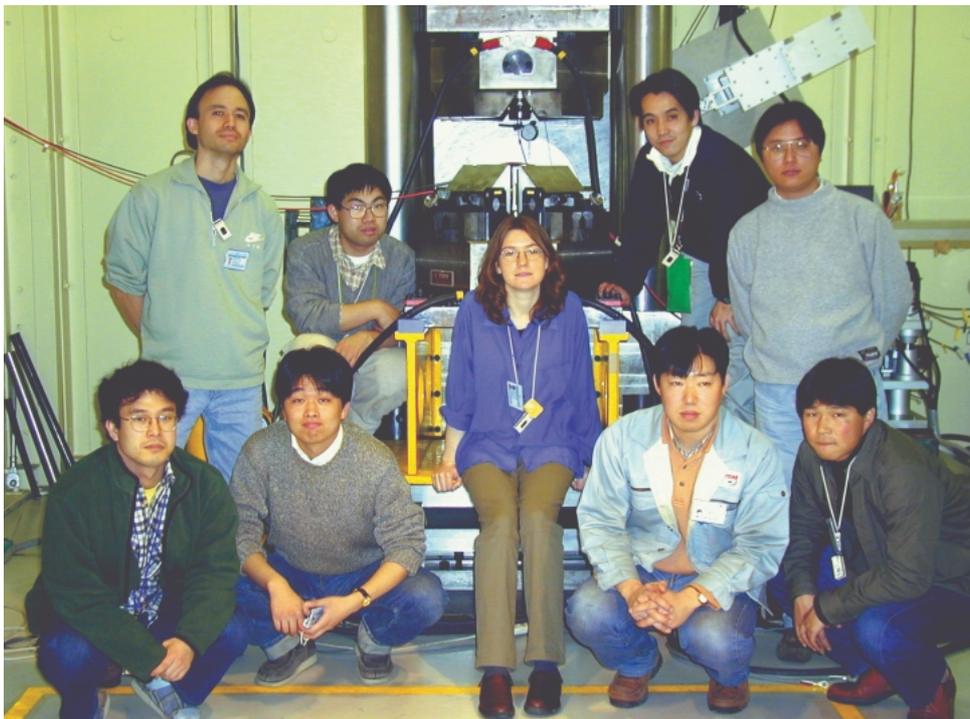
The SPring-8 guesthouse is always welcoming with a reception that stays open 24 hours, a warm lobby and lounge where one can telephone home, make use of the online computers, buy beer from the vending machines and read newspapers. There is also television and although it is in Japanese it can still be very entertaining. The guesthouse rooms are sparkling clean and fresh. Admittedly, at first I was a little surprised by the heated toilet seat, the intelligent bath and the room heater, the controls of which are totally in Japanese! However, once one has settled in, the guesthouse provides a very private and quiet sanctuary in which you can completely relax.

Life at SPring-8 revolves, of course, around experiments and everything else has to fit into this schedule, including eating and sleeping. The cafeteria food seems really good at first, but becomes rather repetitive, and so it is a rare treat to have enough time to go out to eat. The closest restaurant, "The Volcano", sits on a neighboring hill and serves Italian-style food and should one have a craving for dairy and wheat products it's the place to go. Other restaurants in the area really require a car to reach them. My colleagues surprised me one evening with a trip to a traditional Japanese restaurant (Uoyoshi). The place at which we arrived looked like a normal house and I wondered what we were doing there. On entering, ladies dressed in kimonos came running up to greet us. We took off our shoes and put on slippers only to take them off again as we were ushered into our room. Other members of our group were already sitting around a low-lying table. Despite the fact that one is supposed to sit kneeling on the floor most people seemed to shift to a cross-legged position after a while and I am sure that I shifted around far more than anyone else! The humor and hospitality of my colleagues and my fondness for Japanese food and wine made this evening very special.

Another trip on a dark, rainy afternoon took us into Himeji city to look at the famous castle, which was beautifully lit up against the evening sky. Compared to Osaka castle, the one in Himeji is older and more authentic. There is a bus that goes to Himeji from SPring-8 and the journey takes about one hour. It is one of the places where you can exchange money, although there is also a bank in Aioi that will serve this purpose. If one wants to use standard western cash cards with *Maestro*, *Cirrus*, or *Plus*, it is very advisable to withdraw money at the cash machines in Kansai Airport. It is very

difficult to find cash machines that accept these cards in Japan. Certainly there are none in the vicinity of SPring-8.

On the whole, my experiences at SPring-8 have been very positive. As a new, third generation, synchrotron source, SPring-8 is much like any other in the World although there are aspects that made it different. One was the impression that very few foreign scientists work there and the other was the apparent lack of female scientists. However, any misgivings that I had with respect to how I would be received as a non-Japanese, female scientist were unfounded! The Japanese sense of humour combined with gentle politeness allows one to feel comfortable very quickly and I have enjoyed working at SPring-8.



High Pressure viscometry group: (From top left) Brent Poe*, Akio Suzuki**, Hidenori Tersaki***, Hiroshi Kaneko (HIC), (from bottom left) Taku Okada***, Makoto Maeda**, Joy Reid*, Kenichi Funakoshi (JASRI), Jin Satoh** (key: * Bayerisches Geoinstitut, ** Tohoku University, Sendai, *** Tsukuba University).