

# Travel Report: 10<sup>th</sup> Salk Institute Cell Cycle Meeting

*Zaki Ahmad, School of Biological Sciences*



The Santander Travel Award assisted my travel to the four-day Salk Cell Cycle Meeting held at the world-prestigious Salk Institute for Biological Studies in San Diego on 26-29<sup>th</sup> of June; which gathers the most globally-renowned scientists in the field. Cell cycle is a process by which living cells increase in number, and is a fundamental to organ growth. Errors in the control mechanism of cell cycle is at the heart of all forms of cancer. However, I study the plant cell cycle, and this research area is relevant to improve crop yield still. Using the model organism *Arabidopsis thaliana*, my PhD project aims to understand how changes in the external environment (i.e. light intensity) and internal environment (i.e. sugar availability) affects plant growth through cell cycle control dynamics.

A couple of weeks prior to the conference, I was informed that my abstract had been selected for an oral presentation. I was both excited and nervous to be presenting in front of the audience whose work I have been studying since the undergraduate years. Also, it turned out I was the only plant science presenter and attendee there!

I got lots of positive feedback and some constructive criticism of my research, the latter is more important as it helps to shape the quality of my PhD work and future manuscript submissions. I presented results from my main project and also an observation from a side project which involves following cell cycle in context of circadian and diurnal rhythms. In fact, all the questions and one-to-one discussion afterwards was on this single

observation, which made me realise that this is a hot topic in the field and is likely to have fruitful years ahead. Indeed, last year's Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine was awarded to three circadian scientists.



Because I had been attending alone, I had more chances to meet new people throughout the four days of the conference. During such discussions with respected scientists and peers, besides their science I would also ask for advice/tips. For instance, regarding career choices, I was advised to do a quick-evaluation at the end of the day to see what I enjoyed doing the most i.e. whether it was doing experiments, reading, writing or teaching. From this, one should do more of what s/he likes the most.

The Salk building is not only an impressive piece of architectural marvel, but is also located near the seaside which gives the most scenic views. Overall, It was one of the most productive and fun weeks of my PhD time so far! I gained valuable oral communication skills, learned new cell cycle research, and picked up trending topics in the field. Lastly, I thank again for the funding and my supervisor, Professor Laszlo Bogre, who has always been very supportive; especially in preparing me for the presentation.

