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I had the great pleasure of being a Rutgers-USAID Research and Innovation Fellow during the summer of 2015. For four months I lived in Jatinangor, Indonesia on the island of West Java and worked at the Universitas Padjadjaran in the Department of Pharmacy. My research focused on the pharmacological properties of Indonesian plants. With the help of my lab partner, Milyadi, I investigated the antitumor, antibacterial, and antioxidant properties of these plants using various techniques, including the MTT and disk diffusion assays. These were procedures I had not previously been familiar with and doing this fellowship gave me the opportunity to significantly enhance my laboratory skill set. Additionally, I was able to learn a great deal about plant-based therapies and the vast resources available in Indonesia, one of the world's most biodiverse countries. On one occasion I was even able to shadow an herbalist during her patient visits! Later this year I am hoping to publish my findings.

What I learned during this fellowship extended far beyond the lab. This was my first time in Indonesia (and Asia for that matter) and I had no idea what to expect. Each island in Indonesia has a unique culture and customs and I was fortunate enough to learn about not only the culture of West Java but also that of Bali. My stay in Indonesia overlapped with the Islamic holidays of Ramadan and Idul Fitri and the Hindu holiday of Galungan and, as a result, I was able to learn a great deal about these religions and their values. During weekends and the Idul Fitri break I was lucky enough to do some traveling around Bandung, Jakarta (the capital), Bali, and the Gili Islands. Activities I did include visiting a tea plantation and factory, white water rafting, hiking, and snorkeling. I was also able to learn some Bahasa!

Overall I don't think I could have had a more positive fellowship experience. I was able to explore a new culture, partake in research that genuinely interests me, learn a new language and customs, and make many friends. I had many opportunities during my fellowship that I would have never had otherwise and am extremely grateful for having been a part of the program. I cannot recommend the USAID RIFP fellowship enough for anyone who is considering applying.