

naturejobs

CAREER GUIDE

ASIA-PACIFIC

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As long ago as 1803, Napoleon Bonaparte apparently pointed to China on a map and warned: “Here lies a sleeping giant. Let him sleep, for when he wakes up, he will shock the world.”

These days, as the world has seen, the giant is well and truly awake, not least when it comes to science. China has almost doubled the proportion of its GDP spent on R&D over the last decade, and in 2013 overtook the combined R&D spending of the 28 nations of the European Union. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development predicts it will leapfrog the US by 2020.

For anyone considering their career in science, China's rise is reason enough to think about a move to Asia, but it is not the only one. A little to the east, South Korea is second only to Israel in the proportion of its GDP it spends on R&D, and Japan is not far behind. Singapore has built up its research and innovation capacities rapidly since the turn of the century by luring foreign talent with offers of large salaries. Australia and New Zealand are playing to their strengths by focusing limited resources on the fields in which they excel.

Researchers in the other parts of the world that have traditionally dominated the scientific playing field are facing tough times as competition for jobs and grants increases, and R&D budgets shrink or flatline. The UK, for example, spent 1.6% of GDP on R&D in 2013 – less than it did a decade earlier. US share of global R&D spending fell from 34% to 30% in the decade to 2011.

Hardly surprising then that many ambitious scientists are embracing opportunities in the Asia-Pacific region. Of course, taking a job far from home is a big leap, so in this Naturejobs Career Guide we present first-hand accounts of what it's like to work in this region along with tips from employers and key facts and figures.

Most people who take up overseas opportunities have positive, career and life-changing experiences. For a minority it doesn't work out because of unexpected challenges. Those of us who have put this guide together hope it increases the likelihood that readers considering taking the plunge will be glad they did.

Nic Fleming
Guest Editor

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