

An APEC Fellowship Adventure: From Malaysia to Tasmania

written by Hazrul | 29/05/2024

Embarking on the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)-Australia Women in Research Fellowship was like a catalyst for me, where I delved into a world of endless scientific possibilities. Initiated by the [Australian Government](#) and administered by the [Australian APEC Study Centre](#), this prestigious annual program aimed to empower 20 women researchers from nine developing economies, including Malaysia, to foster collaboration and innovation in STEM. All this is thanks to the opportunity to research in Australia while having family at your side!

My journey as one of the seven Malaysian recipients and research fellow at the [University of Tasmania](#) Australia in 2022 was exhilarating, offering an opportunity into the transformative power of this APEC initiative. My time on the beautiful island of Tasmania was a whirlwind of excitement and discovery. The program was structured, yet its flexible design enabled me to delve into cutting-edge research in [Separation Science](#), particularly in the electrophoretic analysis of pesticides in [agriculture](#) and [food safety](#). From exploring innovative methodologies to collaborating with experts, every moment during the three-month fellowship was filled with opportunities to push research boundaries and make meaningful contributions to the field. As I immersed myself in academia management, from teaching and learning to research direction, I gained valuable insights that broadened my perspective and polished my skills in and out of the laboratory.



Dr Aemi Syazwani, with family and friends, in the University of Tasmania during the three-month fellowship program.

My fellowship experience was not just about professional growth. It was also a journey of personal fulfilment and academic exploration. Bringing my family along, including my daughter, who soaked up the vibrant [STEM culture](#) in Tasmania, added an extra layer of joy to

our STEM adventure. I had the opportunity to create STEM activities with my daughter's kindergarten ([Sandy Bay Infant School](#)). It was an enriching experience, as I introduced a group of 5-year-old children to the wonders of science through simple experiments like 'Colour Rain', 'Paper Chromatography', and 'Milk Rainbow'. From witnessing the mesmerising blend of colour in the 'Colour Rain' experiment to observing the separation pigments in paper chromatography and the vibrant patterns formed in the 'milk rainbow', each STEM activity sparked curiosity and excitement in the young minds. This was my way of conveying and showcasing STEM in general and my Separation Science project specifically, in the simplest words, to these brilliant young minds. This journey ignited my daughter's interest in science as she excitedly shared the experiments and concepts she learned, mirroring my work at the university.



The STEM activities that mesmerised young minds!

Of course, no journey is without its challenges. There were times of uncertainty, from navigating the logistics of moving to Australia to arranging accommodations. Finding affordable short-term accommodation in Tasmania, Australia, was challenging since most accommodations were expensive and required a contract, bond payment and credit rating. Due to this, my family and I opted for accommodation 45 minutes' drive from the University of Tasmania. However, with the unwavering support of the fellowship program and my host institution, I overcame the obstacles and embraced the opportunities that lay ahead. And as I look back on my experiences, I am grateful for the lessons learned and the friendships forged along the way.

As I continue my journey in STEM, I am more determined than ever to empower women and inspire future generations to pursue their dreams. Programs like the APEC-Australia Women in Research Fellowship are vital in levelling the playing field and creating a more inclusive research landscape. The exposure to a diverse environment enriched our family's perspectives, fostering a deeper appreciation for science and education. This fellowship has been a shared adventure, bringing us closer and inspiring my children's lifelong passion for learning. If I could change one thing, it would be to encourage more women and children to pursue STEM fields without hesitation. I want them to believe in themselves and know their contributions are invaluable. Creating an environment of equal opportunity is crucial.

I hope that the next intake of fellows from Malaysia will have an equally transformative experience. I wish for them to grab every opportunity, embrace collaboration and use this initiative to significantly contribute to STEM. Together, we can empower more women in research.

Dr Aemi Syazwani is a senior lecturer in analytical chemistry based at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Johor Bahru. Readers can connect with her through [LinkedIn](#). Follow the link ahead for more details about the [APEC-Australia Women in Research Fellowship](#).