After a year in Japan, Steve Hawks, along with his wife Jaylyn, returned to Moab just in time for the Christmas and New Year’s holidays. Hawks was on assignment for Utah State University as a visiting professor at the University of Tsukuba, just 40 miles northeast of Tokyo.

“It was an amazing experience with a variety of opportunities to engage with public health students and faculty at my host university in Japan,” Professor Hawks said. “Given my public health background, it was especially interesting to observe the evolution of the COVID pandemic, and public health response, within the context of a foreign public health system.”

Hawks is a full-time faculty member in USU’s College of Education and Human Services in the Kinesiology and Health Science department. He helped develop the college’s Master of Public Health program, a program which is available at several USU campuses, including USU Moab. Hawks is on the MPH steering committee and is actively engaged in the community health efforts in Moab.

While working with colleagues at the University of Tsukuba, Hawks worked with his academic host to develop stronger ties between USU and the University of Tsukuba in the area of public health—and to explore future opportunities for student/faculty exchanges, joint study abroad opportunities and joint research activities.

“I had the opportunity to sit in on classes, deliver guest lectures, join in ‘journal club’ discussions involving student research projects and attend a variety of faculty meetings,” he said. “All of these activities provided a great window into university life in Japan, and I look forward to building on our progress going forward.”

Teaching and research activities at the University of Tsukuba dealt primarily with body image and eating disorder issues that are being studied as part of an internationally coordinated effort. While in Japan, Hawks was able to present at a public health ‘International Webinar Series.’ He also consulted as a faculty advisor for a Ph.D. student doing research on body image and self-esteem issues among Japanese college students.

“One of the best outcomes of working with people of different backgrounds and experiences is that outcomes can be richer and more innovative,” said Lianna Etchberger, USU Moab associate vice president. “Professor Hawks’ visit strengthened relationships for growing global engagement projects that will benefit USU students and the health of their communities. Community and global engagement experiences for students help create engaged citizens, which is an important goal for USU.”

Hawks’ experiences in Japan led him to publish a book chapter dealing with the challenges of promoting global engagement among university students, even in the midst of a global pandemic. The chapter appears in the book “Resilient Pedagogy,” published by USU in 2021 as part of the Empower Teaching Open Access Book Series and deals with “transformational pedagogies for promoting global engagement in times of crisis.”

In addition to university activities, the Hawks were able to enroll in Japanese language classes, visit several cultural and historical sites, tour local Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples and become accomplished connoisseurs of fine Japanese food.

“I took my love of sushi to new heights,” Hawks reported.

Going forward, Hawks looks forward to maintaining strong ties with the University of Tsukuba, including ongoing student and faculty exchange opportunities that will benefit both institutions.

“As I return full-time to the USU Moab campus, I am especially excited about the upcoming ribbon cutting for the new USU Moab education building on April 1,” Hawks said. “In the new facility, USU Moab’s ability to make great contributions to our community will only continue to grow—and I couldn’t be more excited to be part of the process!”

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    }
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  } //

  $('#content > .row.justify-content-end').remove();
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