

KENSHINKAI MEMBERS IN JAPAN (SEPTEMBER 2009)

Richard Lewis and Tom Winn travelled to Japan in September 2009 in order to train Yoshinkan Aikido and watch Yoshinkan Aikido demonstrations with Takeno Sensei, Ando Sensei and Chida Sensei. Tom Winn stayed at Ando Sensei's dojo, whilst Richard Lewis also travelled to Yamanashi to train with Takeno Sensei. Tom Winn kindly submitted an article on his experiences in Japan (see below). Thank you Richard (front row second from left) and Tom (front row second from right) for sharing your experiences with us.



On the 14th of September I began my stay at Ryu dojo. I would be sleeping in the dojo and taking part in the training sessions at Ryu and around other places around Urayasu in Tokyo.

My typical day would include getting up at 4.45am every morning to open up the dojo for Ando sensei and then tidying up the area where I slept. At 6am the first training session of the day started. These sessions lasted for an hour and were taken by Ando sensei or one of the other morning instructors.

At 7.20am I would join Ando sensei and his wife Stephanie for breakfast. The first morning I was given chopsticks to use, but these proved to be a little difficult for me so they were substituted for the good ol' knife and fork, which was slightly embarrassing. I found breakfast to be an interesting experience, not only to have a traditional Japanese breakfast but to be able to have it with one of the highest ranking Yoshinkan Aikido instructors. After breakfast I would help with the washing up before heading back down to the dojo to await the arrival of the uchi-deshi to help out with some of the morning cleaning duties.

The next training session started at different times depending on the day. On Tuesdays and Thursdays the sessions took place at Ryu dojo and started at 10am and lasted for an hour. On Wednesdays and Fridays the sessions took place at the Budokan just round the corner and started at 9.30am and lasted for an hour and a half. These days were the days the Tokebetsu course took place.

After these sessions the uchi-deshi and I would have lunch with Ando sensei. In my family I am known as the fastest eater, ironically out in Japan I was the slowest; it would appear that chopsticks are far quicker compared to the westerner's knife and fork. Again after lunch I would help out with the washing up before heading back down to the dojo to relax before the next session.

At 2pm the next hour session known as the Kenshu class took place at the Ryu dojo. These sessions were often weapons based covering things like the 31 jo kata, kumi jo and some bokken work. After these sessions I had about four hours before the evening class. During this time I would go out in Urayasu for something to eat and exploration.

The evening session started at 7.30pm and lasted for an hour with half an hour of free time in which we were able to practice what we had been shown during the session or to practice something else. At the end of this session I would retire up to the area I slept to set up my bed for the evening. The uchi-deshi would leave around 10pm. After a whole day of training I found it very easy to drop off to sleep, despite the biting from the bugs.

After a week of training closely with Ando sensei and his uchi-deshi I feel my aikido has improved dramatically. It's been a great experience not only to train everyday but also to be able to have a personal insight into the Japanese culture. One of the best parts was riding a bike with Ando sensei down to the train station on the way to Hombu. I had a smile like the Cheshire cat all the way. I would recommend to anyone who wants to improve their aikido to think about going out to Japan and learning from any of the top instructors out there. Not only will you gain important insights into the world of aikido, but you will also meet some very friendly and welcoming people, you will get to experience first-hand another culture that very different to our own.

Tom Winn

Kenshinkai Yoshinkan Aikido UK

September 2009