

The Goju-Ryu Karate-Do Ho-Ei Juku Japan Tour 2016



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The 2016 trip to Japan was organised so that the senior instructors of the group could experience the delights of Japan, meet and train with a variety of Masters in various cities and take part in the 25th Annual All Japan Martial Arts Federation demonstration at the famous Butokuden in Kyoto.



The 2016 trip to Japan was a culmination of many years of travel to the country by Sensei Brian Hinchliffe 8th Dan (UK Head of Karate for the All Japan Martial Arts Federation, Seibukan Dojo of Kyoto) and countless hours put into organising the trip during the last year so that the other senior instructors of the group could experience the delights of Japan, meet and train with a variety of Masters and take part in the 25th Annual All Japan Martial Arts Federation demonstration at the famous Butokuden in Kyoto. For the others, Sensei Vance (7th Dan), Sensei Chris (6th Dan) and Sensei Adrian (3rd Dan), it is the trip of a lifetime, the first time to visit Japan and a totally different cultural experience.

Its 08:40 on Thursday 8th September and we wait excitedly for the taxi to whisk us off to Birmingham airport. The adventure has begun and we are bound for Osaka via Amsterdam (and for the first time in my life, a free upgrade, what a nice surprise).

Eventually, on Friday 9th September, we arrive at Kansai International Airport, which was built on a man-made Island, and accessed from the mainland by a bridge over 1km long, an impressive place. After a short altercation with the customs guys due to Sensei Brian bringing a Japanese sword into the country, we make our way to the ticket office and buy tickets for the shinkansen (bullet train) to Nagoya with a return to Kyoto.

In Nagoya we are met by Mr and Mrs Suzuki, who had assisted with making some of our arrangements for our main host, Mr Nakano (7th Dan iaido). Brian had met Nakano Sensei the previous year at the Butokuden and he had invited us to visit him. Mr Nakano arrives in his superb Toyota people carrier and we are taken for lunch on our way to a high quality Japanese sword manufacturer close to Seki City.

For the first time in my life I had seen an order system in a motorway service restaurant that was completely automated via a machine. I'm pleased to say the food was cooked by humans and very nice too.

Seki has a long, established reputation of making blades of high standard for many uses, including the Japanese military during the Second World War. This started 700 years ago in the era of the Samurai but is now better known for its kitchen knives. The region (Gifu Prefecture) is also well known for its method of fishing that uses the Cormorant bird to dive into the water and catch the fish, both fishing skills and blade manufacturing date back centuries.

We arrive at the Nosyudo sword factory and are shown round and given an explanation of how the various swords are made and about their tradition and origin. This matter is clearly still taken very seriously in Japan. We follow that with a trip to the Seki Traditional Sword Smith Museum followed with drinks close by.

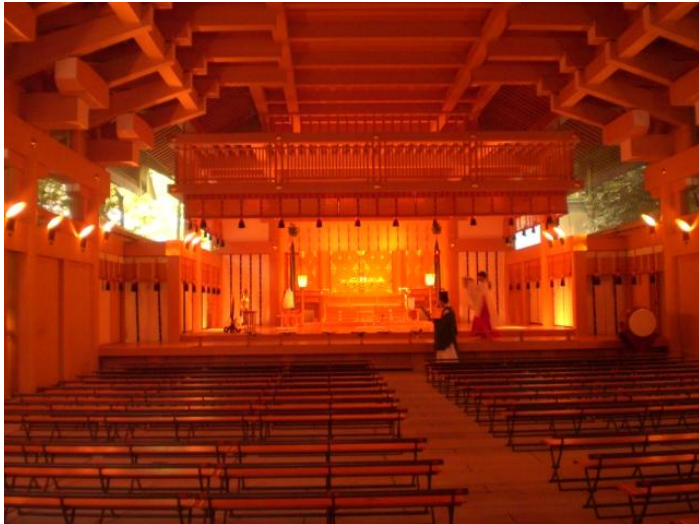
On arrival back in Nagoya, Nakano Sensei had, via his many contacts, arranged some very nice living accommodation for us above a trendy wine bar close to the city centre. Not much time to relax however as we are whisked off for dinner with Nakano Sensei and a few of his friends. A great night was had by all as we were entertained by very gracious hosts for the evening and treated to a spread of traditional Japanese cuisine.



The next day, our first proper day in Japan, we are collected early and go to the Catholic Johokubashi Church where Nakano Sensei holds his swordsmanship classes each week in the dojo. This is the chance to take part in an iaido training session and meet the local martial arts students. With Sensei Brian having been to Japan a lot over the years, he has also learnt very good Japanese language, which is clearly a surprise for the locals, a theme that continued throughout the holiday. We are also given a fantastic demo of Karate to music by the Fugen Ryu Karate Do club coached by Ryo Yashiro Sensei and his group of about twenty Karate-ka; the youngest being just ten years old. Not only are they very good at synchronised team karate but they can put tables and chairs out for lunch in the blink of an eye. After training, we dine there out of Bento boxed food that has been delivered in traditional wooden crates. The children seem surprised that we can use chopsticks, have eaten rice before and know the Japanese word for it. We are off the tourist trail hear no doubt about that.

Lunch was great and what a lovely group of people, if only I'd had a few business cards of my own made up to take with me! Giving cards with your contact details on is a big thing here.

The afternoon is spent going to the Tokugawa Art Museum and also the Atsuta Jingu



(Shrine) in Nagoya, one of the greatest centres for worship in Japan, the location being established over 1900 years ago. It's hard to leave work behind and we debate the timber used to build parts of it and just how old it is? In fact a lot of what you can see is very modern, the centre having been under renovation since 1985, with great emphasis placed on maintaining the ancient, traditional appearance.

The evening must have been a first time experience for everyone as we go to an Italian Restaurant with another group of Nakano Sensei's friends to have a vegetarian meal, surprisingly a few more people turn up who speak English which makes life a little easier for those that don't speak Japanese. Sensei Brian is Vegetarian and Nakano Sensei went to great lengths to accommodate this... Some willing helpers can speak English and help me to understand more of what's going on – thanks Yuko and Naomi.

Next morning, after some much needed rest, it's off to Nagoya Castle, Nagoya Noh Theatre and Hommaru Palace, all national treasures and all a short drive from the city in Nakano Sensei's amazing car. The castle and palace were both destroyed in the air raids of 1945. The castle was re built in concrete by the citizens of Nagoya in the late 1950's. However the re building and restoration of the palace only began in 2009 and is due for completion in 2018. It's being carefully restored using the early Edo period records and is Shoin Zukuri in style, this dating back to the



Samurai period of the mid 1600's. The Castle was the first structure to be built on the site and was completed around 1610. The theatre is modern, being added in the late 1990's.

On total contrast, for the afternoon Nakano Sensei takes us to the Toyota Vehicle Museum in Toyota, being a bit car mad, I'm in my element here and had you been allowed to sit in them I would probably still be there – making car noises. I think this one had to be my favourite.



As a farewell party at the end of our time in Nagoya, the evening is spent having a party with live music in the bar below our digs with yet another group of Nakano Sensei's many friends. We had a great night out and I had even been ambushed into playing the drums (signs of a misspent youth coming back to haunt me). My impression by this time was just how hospitable our Japanese hosts were, I have to say I was a little uncomfortable at the trouble they had been to in order to make us so welcome.

It's Monday 12th September and Nakano Sensei picks us up to take us to the station for the train to Kyoto. We were glad to be moving on to phase two of the trip but at the same time sorry to say our goodbyes. So, Kyoto here we come and back on the Shinkansen.

The taxis in Japan are fascinating and on arrival in Kyoto, I get my first ride in a (new) 1980's style Toyota taxi and make our way to our hotel itsuzi in the Sanjo area. Leaving our bags Brian takes me for an introductory stroll to see the martial arts shop he uses when in Kyoto, where we order a belt and a few other things.



We then head off to the Butokuden for a look round and watch some traditional Japanese archery practice happening.

That evening, after very little rest, we were off to the Tambabashi dojo to meet Kancho Tada and train with his pupils at the Goju Ryu Karate Do Seishikan headquarters. We have a great training session, apart from the bit where I have to perform a kata or two for a number of senior Dan

grades. They're clearly not sure what to make of me so they embark on teaching me a few technical skills. We also work on some Kumite sparring drills with the senior instructors.



Brian arranged for us to return the following Monday, which fell on a Bank Holiday in Japan, to take some photos and make a short film of the two of us training, before you know it we have a few volunteers to come and train with us in an impromptu session. Great!!! When the training session ends, we are typically invited to go for a drink and a meal by one of the oldest Sensei I have ever met,

Oda Sensei aged 80 (not that you would believe it). What great time in a friendly but fashionable bar and no raw fish yet! Then it's the train home for a good night sleep, we have a long few weeks ahead.

Tuesday, and dining at what was to become a regular starting place, in a French style bakery we have breakfast and then head off to Nijo castle; built in 1603 as the home of Tokugawa Ieyasu, the first Shogun of all Japan. It's now a world heritage site and it's easy to see why. It really is a beautiful place, set in the nicest surroundings of the Ninomaru and Seiryu-en gardens, just north of the current city centre.

The afternoon is spent looking in shops and buying some martial arts and language books. We get our kit together and head off to Osaka for a training session and a venture into the unknown at Sensei Izumi's club. Brian was so impressed by what he saw the previous year that he asked Izumi Sensei if we could visit his club.



With letters sent throughout the year, a plan was agreed. We can go there not once but also the following Friday, the senior class. By then we will have Chris and Vance along as well and we might need them. We're met by Noriko, a willing volunteer, and driven at speed in her BMW to the dojo in a school hall and I later realised probably chosen for its size as this class needs a lot of room.

The club members are clearly very athletic and training includes a lot of stretching and yoga too. Brian and myself get the treatment from Izumi who wants to see just how flexible we are (or not). Having been walked on and stretched in various directions we join the class for the last 15 minutes. We are then invited back to the organisation's yoga HQ for refreshments and to have a chat with Sensei and his

Hanshi (senior black belts), with Noriko providing the transport and helping with some translation. It's a late arrival back in Kyoto afterwards but we can relax as it's a day with no training tomorrow.



So our first rest day sees us head for historic Nara, originally known as Heijokyo, which was the capital of Japan until the late 700's. It was also a centre of Buddhist worship and has many historic sites listed as UNESCO World Heritage sites. Apart from its natural surroundings and beauty and the dear

roaming wild in town, the main attraction for me was the Todai-Ji Temple and its vast timber structure, still believed to be the largest timber framed building in the world.

That's quite amazing considering it is only two thirds the size of the original building that was destroyed by fire in 1567. The current structure was built in 1709 and is a scaled down version of the original temple. There are many things to see, we spend a few hours viewing the sites and then had a great lunch in a café in one of the town's tiny streets.



We make our way back to central Kyoto and by chance, we bump into Darren from Australia and a few of his students. People are starting to gather for the 25th annual Martial Arts Festival at the coming weekend. Kyoto station is a magnificent example of modern architecture that really looks the business, as well as housing a department store, various cafes, plenty of technology and providing stunning views across the city too.

We spend the evening in a nice café close to the hotel. It's typically Japanese except the music playing is the Beatles. It gets busy in this part of Kyoto, especially at weekends, so we book a table for Saturday night. We need an early night because tomorrow is going to be a long day, with a four hour Karate training session at the

Butokuden under Kawano Kancho and Uchiyama Hanshi, the Heads of the All Japan Budo Renmei – Seibukan Dojo in Kyoto.



This image shows the main staircase at Kyoto Central Station, which changes every 30 seconds. Here it tells us that there will be a full moon that night...

Breakfast is the usual French café, then we head off for a leisurely walk to the Butokuden, it's a long session with Uchiyama Sensei. Joining us will be a large group from Australia. The

first session is many basics in hot conditions and after the break we get into some Kata. After a while Uchiyama Hanshi asked Sensei Brian if he will take the class for Gekisai Kata and also to help to explain Sanchin form and kata. I am very honoured to be asked by him to assist Brian, certainly the pinnacle of my martial arts career despite having been part of a team that won two silver medals at national level many years ago. I'm sure everyone enjoyed the session and after socialising for 20 minutes we wander back to the hotel via the Saza bar so we can enjoy a well-earned pint of Guinness.

Less pressure on Friday, so it's a leisurely breakfast, then we head off to the Gion District for a casual look around and to visit the Kiyo Mizu Dera Shrine. The bus stop is an unusual experience as we are sprayed with a cool mist whilst waiting - nice. This magnificent timber building complex, balanced on the side of the mountain for



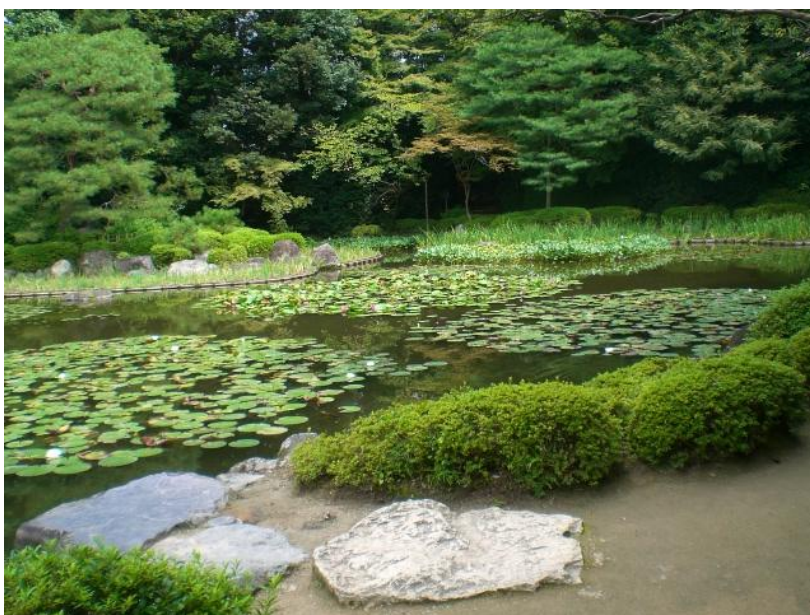
centuries, is well worth a visit, as are the dozens of little shops in side streets leading up to it.

Training again and the evening is spent at Kawano Kancho's main dojo in Kyoto, where Uchiyama Hanshi leads the training. Again we meet Darren's group and also Kim, who is travelling alone. I had to admire how she set about arranging her demo for Sunday by press ganging a couple of volunteers from the Australian team to help her. It's a hot and sweaty session of relentless basics, followed by pair work. After training we go for a drink in another café. At this point I start to realise that Kyoto is not the best place if you just want a quick drink after a two hour session. People don't seem to go into café's just to have a drink!

We head back to the hotel. Chris and Vance are due into Japan around 11:30 that evening, so Brian and I are now entering the next phase of the trip. They arrive and we go out for a walk and a drink at a bar close by but it's actually a quick drink, we're all very tired for different reasons. However we can relax there is no training tomorrow, just orientation for the guys.



Saturday, and the usual breakfast – weird as it is all new to Chris and Vance, but we're already into a routine. Then we head for the Heian Jingu Shrine and gardens where there is a fate on, a band plays American music.



This is the start of a Bank Holiday weekend in Japan. There's time to relax, walk over a few stepping stones and drink some green tea in the grounds of the temple, which is actually next door to the Butokuden. This is handy.

Following a walk round the garden we go there so Chris and Vance can take in the scene. Having

briefly watched the archers again it's time to browse the shops and the famous

Nishiki market. We meet up later for dinner; back to the tempura restaurant, and yes, the Beatles are still playing. but a great spot to eat and take in the locals.

Sunday 18th is our big day as it's the 25th Annual Martial Arts Festival. After an early start in the bakery, we're off to the Butokuden. It's a busy day at the centre with about three hundred martial artists there for our event and about twice that number doing Kendo in the sports hall on the same site and yes the Kyudo archers too. Do they practice every day? I think they must do. The Butokuden is an amazing place built for the martial arts in the late 1800's it is one of Japan's premier martial arts centres.

Chris and Vance and I do some last minute practice and make a few changes but all seems well. There are so many groups performing so many different martial arts and we are last on the running order. It's not a competition but everyone is keen to show their school at its best – so the adrenalin is pumping. We watch the day with interest and enjoyment. Kim's demo goes very well considering – and not surprisingly, Izumi Sensei's club get stuck in and do a bit of everything that they seem to do very well, kata, sparring, breaking baseball bats (nearly). They're not alone as there are so many other good shows as well.



Mr Nakano and his group are here to perform laido and we socialise for a while with them. It is good to Mrs Suzuki come along for support and Nakano Sensei gives a brief speech for the benefit of those not familiar with his school of swordsmanship. Our demo starts with Sensei Brian doing his sword demonstration and then Chris, Vance and I demonstrate Goju Ryu's Suparinpei Kata and pair work. It all goes well and I feel very pleased with the day. That's it, the main pressure is off, so we are going to dinner in town to socialise with the participants of the day's demonstrations.

The evening meal is an informal and friendly affair with a small group made up of the Aussies, us and Izumi Sensei's club, with a VIP or two for good measure – including Samurai Joe Okada, the real Last Samurai.

But the trip is far from over yet, so on Monday we are off to the Tambabashi Dojo once more. Brian has been coming to train there with Kancho Tada since 1989 and it is his first chance to introduce the rest of us to the atmosphere of this purpose-built dojo – it's incredible. We meet up at 2pm and it's a small group but all Dan grades as you might expect. It's very technical and we look at changes in some techniques that have been introduced in recent years and run through the Kata and some basics, then the Chishi come out. These are stone weights used by a lot of Goju-Ryu guys. Hard work but good to have seen them used in Japan. Kancho Tada and a few of his



most senior people have given up their bank holiday to come and train with us and it's a great session. You can't call it simply a karate training session because it's a lot more than that. Brian had arranged for Kim to join us too and I know she was blown away with it.

I'm sure we all have our memories of this day but as far as I'm concerned it's one of the highlights of my time in the martial arts and will remain with me forever, of that I am certain. When we are finally finished, it's back to the digs for a long cool shower and then off to a local noodle bar for our evening meal. Time to think about a few gifts for home.

Tuesday, and it's raining, so armed with umbrellas we take the bus to the Kinkaku-Ji (Golden Pavilion) and Rokuon-Ji Temples. The site is historical and a Buddhist place of worship.



After that we take a twenty minute walk to the Ryoan-Ji Temple with its famous Zen Stone garden. Its unique, being only twenty five metres by ten metres, having fifteen rocks and walled by clay blocks that had been boiled in oil. This contributed to its unusual appearance that changes with age, there are no trees or plants. The centre was apparently re-built following a civil war in the mid 1400's.



We lunch at a local café well off the tourist trail. Luckily, Brian is able to speak quite easily to the locals and we realise that the cost of living in Japan is higher than in the UK. The rain has eased now but is time to make tracks for home as there is more training tonight.

Getting a bus down town to train with Uchiyama Sensei once again and the last time we will see him. The session is once again a gruelling repeat of basics, pair work and some kata – but without the Australians this time as they had departed to Tokyo.



After all the hard work on Tuesday night, Wednesday was an endurance test as we headed off to Arashiyama and its Bamboo Grove. We catch the train to Arashiyama and make our way across the Togestsukyo Bridge to the park, forest trail, bamboo grove and gardens.

There are stunning views of the gardens

from part way up the mountain and this amazing plant that can grow up to one metre a day in the right conditions. We also see the Tenryu-Ji Temple another world

heritage site dating back to the 1300's. Most of the buildings were damaged by fire in the past and those you see now were generally re-built in the Meiji Period.



Thursday was yet another highlight. It's quite a journey to Himeji, being located on the far side of Kobe, but it's well worth the effort. This is a fine example of a traditional old Japanese castle (and one of the last) to remain in its original form and construction was completed around 1600.

Many of Japan's old castles were destroyed by bombing during the Second World War, fortunately this one survived.

Having viewed the castle we're off again to take in downtown Osaka. There's no doubt when you've arrived, that's for sure. This is a very lively place with breath taking neon lights everywhere – definitely cutting-edge. The streets are buzzing with life despite the torrential rain. We eat at a café and



after a walk round it's time to hit the road. Arriving back in Kyoto just before midnight, it's been a long day but one I'm sure we will remember for years to come.

Rested after the time spent on trains yesterday, Friday saw us taking in Fushimi Inari and the mountain Shrine complex.

This comprises about 2km of steps up the mountain side, around ten thousand red coloured shrine gates and stunning views back down to Kyoto and the surrounding forest.

It's located at the foot of Mount Inari.



Back to our hotel to get our kit together and head off to Osaka to train for our second and last time at Izumi Sensei's club, this is also our last training session of the trip. We get the chance to meet this amazing guy, get another neck massage and do some sparring with his senior pupils. Their style is different but it works for them and what they do, they do it well.



So the last full day in Japan has arrived and today saw a visit to the legendary Buddhist mountain retreat of Mount Hiei and the temple complex of Enryaku-Ji. Brian and Vance went to the mountain by bus and spent the day taking in the breathtaking mountain views, the incredible buildings and fascinating wildlife on one of the highest mountains in the region.

The day was brought to an early close by fog that descended on the mountain and actually kept going down lower to the point that the mountain top was above the clouds. Brian was on a mission because he has been there a number of times before and many years ago had hidden some Japanese coins under a large stone near one of the smaller and more derelict temple buildings part-way down the mountain. After some time looking, the stone was found and the coins were, surprisingly, still in place. These were photographed, then picked up and taken away to the UK. With Vance's interest in nature and countryside, a great day was had by both.



That's it, we're off. Sunday morning and my last chance to get a ride in the wonderful retro Toyota taxi down to the station to get the 06:21 train to Kansai International Airport. The journey is a relaxing one and I start to reflect on this incredible journey. Before we know it we are checked in and having a final coffee together before we board for home.

This really was an adventure of a life-time as a first experience of Japan, seeing so many different martial arts, meeting so many really friendly people, performing in a national martial arts festival in the famous Butokuden and properly experiencing not just the incredible tourist sites, but also sampling a little of Japanese life within the community in Nagoya – short though it was. Will there ever be another trip like it...?

Our sincere thanks go to everyone in Japan that helped to make this such a success, and especially to; Nakano Sensei, Kawano Kancho, Uchiyama Hanshi, Tada Kancho, Izumi Sensei, Noriko San, Chika San, Naoko san, Yoko San and Mr & Mrs Suzuki.

