

The Goju-Ryu Karate-Do Ho-Ei Juku Japan Tour 2019

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Just as with previous events, a lot of planning had clearly gone into the 2019 Ho Ei Juku Japan trip. Although Sensei Hinchliffe has spent a lot of time in Japan, the main purpose for most of the group was to experience Japan firsthand, meet and train with the highest and most experienced Karate masters in Kyoto and primarily take part in the 28th Annual All Japan Martial Arts Federation demonstration at the historic martial arts building, the Butokuden, in Kyoto.

The 2019 trip was made possible thanks to Sensei Brian Hinchliffe, 8th Dan Goju Ryu Karate and 6th Dan Muso Jikiden Eishin Ryu Iaido, Chief Instructor of the Ho Ei Juku martial arts organisation and Chairman of United Kingdom branch of the All Japan Martial Arts Federation. His many years spent in Japan and many hours of planning and organising this year's trip permitted some of the Ho Ei Juku senior Karate and Iai Jutsu students from England and Czech to visit Japan for the first time.

The Ho Ei Juku group travelling to Japan in 2019 consisted of Sensei Brian Hinchliffe, Vaughan Smith (3rd Dan Goju Ryu Karate), Marek Knapp (3rd Dan Goju Ryu Karate and 3rd Dan Muso Jikiden Eishin Ryu Iaido), Karel Zíbar (2nd Dan Goju Ryu Karate and 2nd Dan Muso Jikiden Eishin Ryu Iaido) and Atilla Emin (2nd Dan Goju Ryu Karate). In addition, Diana Sochrová was our camera operator for the trip.



The Czech part of the group met Sensei's Brian in Dubai on the way to Kansai International Airport and the start of the adventure in Japan. A nearly 2 hour ride on a limousine bus took us from Osaka to Kyoto, which was the first opportunity for the members that had never been to Japan to see something of this amazing country. After a quick check-in at the hotel, near the famous Pontocho district, the first four members of the group went for a short walk around the Sanjo market district.

On Sunday the 8th the first trip on foot was to the famous Butokuden building, where the next Sunday the annual demonstration would take place. Sensei Brian selected the way through the Okazaki park and Heian Jingu temple. We took a few pictures near the big Jingu Torii gate and followed to the Heian shrine. After a quick visit to the temple we continued just around the corner to the Butokuden. The building was fortunately open and we had the very first opportunity to see the iconic martial arts building first hand. We had a look around the adjacent buildings, where a Kyudo event was in progress. We also visited a Sumo dojo in the vicinity. And we could not miss visiting

the Tozando shop headquarters near the Butokuden. A pleasant walk around the Kamo river brought us back to the Sanjo district.

After that, we took a train to the Manpuku-ji temple, where in the 1990s Sensei Brian spent a lot of time and trained there too. A short taxi ride brought us to the Seishikan dojo, Brian Sensei's former honbu dojo. We took a few pictures at the entrance still carrying the Goju Ryu Karate Dojo signs. And then we finally arrived to the Fushimi Inari temple complex. The orange colour was all around and we took a walk through a part of the more than 2 kilometres long pathway, hemmed by thousands of orange gates. Visiting a traditional tea house enroute, a sample of properly prepared green Matcha Tea was another interesting experience. At 6 pm we met with the rest of the Ho Ei Juku group (Atilla and Vaughan), arriving on Sunday, and went for an evening walk through the Teramachi market street.



Monday started with a walk to a Budo shop near the Kyoto Imperial palace, where we bought (or ordered) gis, obis and weapons. After that we got on a train and headed towards the Arashiyama district in the western part of Kyoto. Arashiyama is known for its famous Togetsu-kyo bridge over the Katsura river and a bamboo grove on the mountainside.



Because not all of us had seen the Butokuden, we started Tuesday the 10th by visiting the famous place again. However the main goal for Tuesday was a visit to Osaka and evening training at Sensei Izumi's

Dojo. After arriving at Temmabashi Station near Osaka castle, we were picked up by Noriko, an old friend of Brian Sensei from Tokyo. She drove us to the parking lot at Tamatsukuri Suji, from where we visited Osaka castle on foot. After spending about 3 hours there we went back to Noriko's car, then made a quick stop at the former site of Naniwa-no-miya Palace were then brought to Mr. Izumi's Dojo in Yao City, a suburb of Osaka.

Izumi Sensei and his karate students practice Kenwa Mabuni's Shito Ryu Karate Style. And because he is a qualified yoga instructor, all his students practice stretching exercises during their training sessions. Their flexibility was amazing!





The kids' group showed us some of their routine, the senior students preformed 3 of Shito Ryu katas and some weapon sets. We showed them part of the Butokuden set and finally some of us went to a sparring session with the senior students. Their style was different to the Goju Ryu principles we are taught by Brian Sensei, but it was very interesting to stand up against a different style of Karate. But every session has to end and this one was not an exeption. After returning to Kyoto by night train, we had a pleasant dinner at a traditional Japanese restaurant.

Wednesday started with a bus ride to Kyoto Station. We went through the giant hall and ended at the top of the building, from where we could admire a wonderful view across all of Kyoto. At about half past eleven we took a train to the ancient city of Nara. After arriving we fed some Sika deer in

the park and went to see the biggest Buddha statue in Japan in Todai-ji Temple. A beautiful garden full of deer lead us to the giant Nandaimon gate and eventually to the Todai-ji Temple. To see the majestic Buddha statue and big wooden temple building was an exeptional experience for all of us.



Later we went higher to the Nigatsu-do temple, a peaceful and quite place practically without any tourists. The old paintings on the wooden temple buildings and ubiquitous deer made up a special atmosphere. Then a quick walk towards the Nogamijinja Ishiko Shrine to visit some sword and knife shops before they closed and then back to Kyoto by train.

On Thursday we stayed in Kyoto. We went to see the opening of the Takashimaya Kyoto Store and then on foot through the Geisha Gion district to the iconic Kijomizu - Dera temple. After spending a few hours in the vicinity of the temple we moved to the Kyoto Station again to see it in the night. If you are ever in Kyoto, do make sure you take the escalators to the top of the station building...

On our schedule for Friday was the Nijo castle, a complex built in 1603 as the home of Tokugawa Ieyasu. The inside of the castle with its squeaky floor and the beautiful Ninomaru and Seiryu-en gardens were really breathtaking places. Then a quick walk through the Kyoto Imperial palace garden and we visited the Budo Shop from Monday to collect the ordered goods.

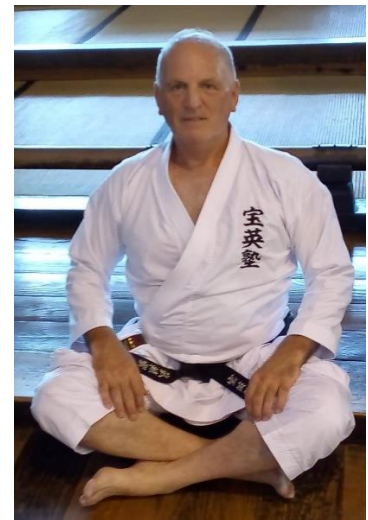


In the evening we visited Sensei Kawano's Dojo, Kawano Kancho is the president of the All Japan Martial Arts Federation and head of the Seibukan Dojo of Kyoto. This group practices Goju Ryu Karate so we were curious how this session would go. We were welcomed by Sensei Uchiyama and after a quick warm-up the training started. Compared to Mr. Izumi's session this one was more Okinawan. Going through the basic techniques with a lot of effort and hard work was typical for this Dojo. Again we performed part of our set for Butokuden event, as did Mr. Kawano's students.

Saturday morning was the first chance we had to try the wooden floor at the Butokuden for real. Karate training in the authentic old building under the supervision of Mr. Uchiyama and Mr. Kawano was an impressive experience. After replenishing fluids and a quick shower we went to visit the famous Golden Pavilion Kinkaku Ji (Rokuon-Ji temple). The beautiful landscape around the building and the temple at the small lake shore itself were amazing in the rays of the afternoon sun. Next on the schedule was the Ryoan-Ji temple with its well known Stone Garden. A pleasant walk through the garden and around a lake and we went back to the hotel.



Sunday was the Big Day in our itinerary for the trip. The 28th Annual AJMAF Taikai demonstration started in the morning and according to the official booklet, 16 groups and individuals from 8 countries were to perform in the legendary Butokuden and show the spectators what they had learned throughout the years. 8 Karate, Iaido, Aikido a Kobudo groups performed before the lunch break and as the Ho Ei Juku group was number 12 in the list, we started to warm up slowly after lunch as the afternoon program continued.



We got ready and at about 2:30 pm we stood for the go. After the entry Sensei Brian performed Hamahiga no Tonfa kata, followed by Tenryu No Kon Bo kata by Vaughan. Marek and Karel followed with Tachi Uchi no Kurai Tanimura Ha of Muso Jikiden Eishin Ryu. Brian and Vaughan then showed Hamahiga no Sai Kata. And then came time for the Karate part. Vaughan, Marek, Karel and Atilla went through the Gakisai Dai Ichi kata, followed by the Bunkai in pairs. Still in 4 we continued with Shisochin kata and Bunkai of 5 selected techniques. For the last part Sensei Brian joined us and we all went

through the Sepai kata together. And that was it. The 15 minutes of 2019 Ho Ei Juku group Butokuden performance had passed so quickly.



In the evening we took part on an official dinner for the Annual event attendees. All members of the group were sitting at the table with Mr. Takagi, the 34th generation

Abbot of Butsuda-Ji temple. Sensei Brian, the only one of us able to speak Japanese, talked for a while with Mr. Takagi and we were all invited to visit his temple near Kyoto Imperial Palace on Tuesday. We also had the fun and lively opportunity to spend more time with Samurai Joe Okada, the Last Samurai...

On Monday Mt. Hiei and Enryaku Ji temple were on our list. We went without Atilla at that time, who was already on his way to Osaka to continue his own Japan trip. A bus ride to the mountains east of Kyoto took about 45 minutes. During the ride we had a wonderful view over the Biwa lake. After nearly 3 hours walking around the large temple grounds and Mount Hiei, we returned to Kyoto. We took a short walk through the Okazaki park area again and visited Honnoji temple.



On Tuesday morning, Vaughan left for Osaka airport to return to the UK. The rest of the group was picked up by Mr. Takagi and driven to the Butsuda-Ji temple. This temple was founded about 1.050 years ago by emperors Suzakami and Murakami. We have been shown places that even believers do not usually enter. After a lunch we had alltogether we were brought back to Sanjo area, where we went for a last walk along the Kamo river before taking the limousine bus to Kansai International Airport.

Sensei Brian stayed in Japan to have at least a little time on his own agenda after the others had left. He went by shinkansen from Kyoto to Hiroshima and revisited some famous sites that he had not seen for many years, including Miyajima island, Itsukushima shrine and also the Mori museum in Yamaguchi prefecture, before returning to Osaka and then England.

This trip really was the adventure of a lifetime as a very first experience of Japan. Seeing many authentic and different martial arts, meeting many friendly people, performing in a national martial art festival in the legendary Butokuden and experiencing much more than just the incredible tourist sites, but also sampling a little Japanese lifestyle. Our time in Japan passed so quickly! Our sincere thanks go to everyone in Japan that helped to make this such an experience. We would especially like to thank Kawano Kancho, Uchiyama Hanshi, Izumi Sensei, Noriko San and Mr. Takagi, not to mention of course Sensei Brian and the UK branch of the All Japan Martial Arts Federation, as without their years of contact and communication with Japan, none of this would have been possible.

