



Expat Kiwi Living & Training in Hong Kong

My name is Shane Bentley born in Auckland New Zealand November 4th 1964. I have been living and working abroad for the last 16 years. Now based in Hong Kong coming up 12 years working here as an Airline Captain with Cathay Pacific Airways.

Recently my very good friend Simon Puffett Sensei from Aikido Shinryukan NZ studying under Takase Shihan at Hombu Dojo Auckland asked me to write an article on my Aikido practice as an expatriate training away from home.

This is the first time I have ever tried writing something about my own Martial Arts training as it has been a very personal road / adventure for some 33 years of study of which I love very much.

I will try my best to share some of my Aikido training with you starting with a brief introduction to this path's beginning.

I have a Karate background beginning at the tender age of 11 years old in 1975. It was a small Karate Dojo located in the Raumati Paraparaumu Community Center just north of Wellington - New Zealand. I continued to practice Karate in Auckland under Martin Lindgreen Sensei whom has become a long time very good friend.

My training took a turning point in the mid 80s towards a very hard style and non-commercial traditional martial art system known as Sir Gee Dorr School of Martial Arts now based in Pattaya Thailand. I began training from 1984 under Sifu (Sensei) Robert McInnes 8th Dan whom I respect and honour very much as my teacher and also a long time friend of which I still practice regularly here in Hong Kong and through trips to Thailand from Hong Kong being quite convenient now.



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My interest in Aikido started in the Year 2001 through a colleague of mine from work. I became a member of the Hong Kong Aikido Association in the year 2001 under the late *Kenneth Cottier Shihan 7th Dan* whom I am honoured to have known and had the privilege to have been graded by to Shodan level in June 2007 just before his passing away.

A truly wonderful man and a great loss to the art of Aikido and to all who knew him.



AIKIDO SHINRYUKAN

OFFICIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE AIKIKAI WORLD HEADQUARTERS, TOKYO JAPAN

Training Away from home (New Zealand) has provided some interesting, hidden but welcoming challenges and considerations for me. Here are but a few that I have had to adapt to:

1. Language barrier (which has been overcome due to having learnt basic Cantonese understanding).
2. The physical size difference between myself a Westerner, and an Asian physique. This has required me to adapt using deeper more solid stance work for effective Ukemi. A shorter person has a lower C of G (Center of Gravity) there for seems to require less effort to maintain their overall Balance, Center and Posture. This observation has taught me to keep my own Center a lot lower so that my balance is not broken so easily. The down side to all of this is that a deeper stance requires more energy.
3. People feeling a little intimidated by looking up at a foreigner and having to throw a larger and unfamiliar frame, however most senior grades like to test their techniques effectiveness on my size. (90kg - 1.83 meters). I enjoy being Uke as it provides great training value for my own self improvement.
4. Generally Asian people are very supple and more flexible than a Westerner, so I have trained hard to maintain flexibility to adapt and fit into this wonderful training environment here in Hong Kong.

I have met so many wonderful people through my martial arts training over the years, and the best way I can describe this is that we all have one common interest which brings us together. It doesn't matter about profession, skin colour, age or gender. Martial Arts tends to bond people through friendship for a lifetime. Amazing!!

Nobuo Takase Shihan and Simon Puffett Sensei have always made me feel welcome at Hombu Dojo Auckland on many an occasion - thank you both. Through their teachings and friendship I have been able to learn various techniques on and off the mat during practice or during general discussions. It is surprising what can be picked up during a social event involving a little NZ Church Road Red Wine and a few funny war stories which always goes down a treat after training.

Let me now introduce Nagai Hitoshi Sensei from Aikido Doyu-kai Hong Kong my Aikido teacher and good friend. I have been lucky enough to practice with and take Ukemi for Nagai Sensei on a number of occasions now.

Sensei's technique in my opinion has True Spirit aligned with excellent timing and balance that allows Uke to blend with Tori from what ever angle Uke is being thrown from. A humbling yet satisfying feeling connecting with the mat through Sensei's technique. Thank-you Sensei.



Nagai Hitoshi Sensei demonstrating
Shiho nage from Katate-Tori



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I have been working hard on developing my home Dojo here in Hong Kong for some time now. A dream that has finally come true to life on Monday 15th September 2008. Nagai Hitoshi Sensei kindly offered to open this holy place of hard training with a traditional opening ceremony for which myself and a number members were all privileged to be apart of. A very exciting and even a little emotional for me at times throughout this first training session as so much work and preparation went into this special day. Thank-you Nagai Sensei and all who participated making this day a success. Words can not explain how proud I am of this Dojo.



Spacious Roof top dojo at Shane's home in Hong Kong.

Practicing Aikido in Hong Kong can be quite restrictive because of the lacking practice venues and space available. This is due to the overall physical small size of Hong Kong verses its population. Most venues are pre-booked a few months in advance by other activity clubs. So a lot of planning is required if you need extra practice outside of normal practice times to prepare for a grading or just to consolidate technique without formality. It has been possible in the past with an approximate 60% successful strike rate to book a venue and to train. This new Dojo makes practicing here in Hong Kong less stressful and more enjoyable knowing that nobody is waiting outside the front door only to begin their activity on the hour when your time is up.

However the concept of a successful venue booking to practice Aikido makes it that much sweeter to train, and you really do appreciate the time as it doesn't come easily. Another consideration when training here in Hong Kong is your mode of transportation. Most of us don't own a car here as it's quite inconvenient to own and to park it. A car is quite a costly outlay overall and is not a must to have like in New Zealand. The public transportation network here runs like a Rolex Watch with ease. Overall, the public transportation system here is a lot more cost effective and efficient to get to training or just getting around in general. I travel 1 hour to the Dojo and an hour to return home to practice at the Hong Kong Aikido Association and Aikido Doyu-kai Hong Kong. It takes a while but it has always been worth the travel time.



Shane taking ukemi during Irimi Nage with Nagai Sensei

Hong Kong is very central in its Global location. Because of this our Dojo's have many visitors passing through either on business, or just transiting. It's not uncommon to see new faces in the Dojo. The added advantage to this location is the close proximity to Japan. This in turn allows regular visits from various Japanese Shihan's. It enables them to take classes adding a little variety and spice to our already wonderful training environment. I feel very privileged to be able to experience such a variety of instruction from many of the visiting Sensei's passing through. A disadvantage to all of this is of course, complacency. Regular visits and training can sweep away that special occasion, so I am mindful of this and try to appreciate each visit. After all, You only live once.

Aikido Shinryukan New Zealand

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Nagai Hitoshi Sensei has made me feel welcome in his Dojo to which I am truly grateful. I have known Sensei for a while now, but have only recently begun training seriously with him in his Dojo after his invite to me not so long ago. However short termed this friendship maybe so far, it will be a long one from this day on. I enjoy taking Ukemi from Sensei as I am learning so much as he has so much to offer. I see his students lapping up his teachings and enjoying their training which provides motivation for me to train harder. Sensei teaches 1 night a week for the Hong Kong Aikido Association and then teaches his own students of Aikido Doyu-kai Hong Kong during the rest of the week. I'm not concerned with the politics of martial arts as every martial art style has its own to deal with. I'm only interested in practicing the Aikido I love and training hard. My Aikido knowledge is very limited due to my inexperience in this art, however I'm learning from quality people, whether they are instructors or students. I can learn from anyone. One day I hope to pass on the knowledge gained from past teachings. This being said let me leave you with some photos and a closing passage at the end of this article.



Shane Bentley is also an assisting instructor at the Aikido Doyu-kai Dojo Hong Kong.

Overall all it has been a wonderful satisfying adventure living, working and practicing Aikido here in Hong Kong. I must acknowledge my wife Donna from Hong Kong. I give her full credit for allowing me the freedom and putting up with my untiring interest in martial arts to practice regularly. Although her interest doesn't lie with any martial art, she enjoys watching me training with our children Allan 7 years and Leila 5 years old.

In summary, it's been a pleasure writing this article and I hope you have enjoyed reading it.

These are a few rules I follow throughout my study.

1. Respect your Family
2. Respect your Sensei or Sifu,
3. Respect your Art, School and Dojo,
4. Respect your fellow students,
5. Respect all other martial arts,
6. Respect all other people of different races.

Train Hard with Spirit. Best Wishes; Shane Bentley "OSU"!

by Shane Bentley 28/08/2008

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