

KIMORI DOJO VISIT JAPAN Oct'11

A contingent of Aikido enthusiasts from around the world organised by Sensei Simon Puffett will become live in students (uchideshi) at Kimori Dojo Nagoya Japan under the tutelage of Dojo Cho Toshiharu Sawada Shihan 7th Dan.

'This is a fantastic opportunity to experience the essence of Japanese culture and hospitality while learning Aikido in the atmosphere of being live in students' – *S.Puffett*

Those people attending are...Douglas Gilmore 5th Dan – NZ / Simon Puffett 5th Dan – NZ / Justin Marchant 4th Dan – Hong Kong / Roland Stetler 3rd Dan – Australia / Barry Symmonds 3rd Dan – United Kingdom / Carlos Gambetta 2nd Dan – Argentina

Day 0 Friday - Packed & Ready to Fly...

Having looked forward to this trip for the past 12mths, I am so geared up I think I could actually fly there myself. The bags are packed and all without my wife or mums input! What a mission though, I'm seriously considering naming my backpack the "Tardis" Caterbury Macpac's are truly the best!

They say the prepared mind never loses its way, shame I lost my check list...made another one though, camera ✓ laptop ✓ wigets ✓ dogi's ✓ gloves ✓ socks & undies ✓✓ and Nurofen ✓. Mmmmm Nurofen for all of those niggly injuries you can receive when on the mat like bumps, bruises, twists, sprains and hangovers. Standing here looking at the door with my bags in hand and I've got that feeling... oh yeah PASSPORT might pay to take that along too.



Nagoya Castle

Finally Friday has come around, the last half day of remunerated slavery before catching a taxi to the airport. I'll have a 3hr stop-over in Singapore...surely they don't need the entire 3hrs!? Note to self, have a chat with the captain upon take-off promoting the merits of a straight-line saves time.

I'm so excited to be catching up with Sawada Shihan and the Kimori Dojo family, not forgetting great mate Aaron McConnell. Aaron has lived in Nagoya for over 5yrs and has always been awesome help and a friend when there's been visitor's to Kimori Dojo. Then there are the misfits! I meant to say the buddies from NZ and abroad that have succumb to the past 12 months of constant pressure and internet bombardment coercing them to share in this excellent experience.

Day 1 Saturday - There's something on the wing!...(Twilight Zone)

The flight was fantastic! Stepping out onto the disembarkation platform I made a quick resolution to stop watching programs like air crash investigations. Between an over active imagination and my wife Irene talking about the medical issues caused by DVT (Deep Vain Thrombosis) when flying long distance at my age...at my age!? What a cheek! Although I'm finding of late the charm and boyish excitement of flying is being increasingly replaced by trepidation, similar to traversing a greasy tightrope above a family of famished crocodiles. I guess it's an age thing...Doh!

On a lighter note you do have to laugh at the advances in technology and travel. I can remember the era when you would clamber onto a flight where they would allow people to smoke cigarettes while seated above thousands of gallons of aviation fuel. The seats themselves felt more like undersized barber chairs and to soothe the nerves of the non-smokers the in-flight service would supply copious amounts of silly juice from the roving drinks trolleys.



Nowadays thankfully there is no smoking on aircraft, who would have thought the combination of alcohol a naked flame and aviation fuel could be hazardous. Depending on the carrier and distance you usually get a personal video monitor, a USB port for your ipod or laptop and one beverage of your choice per meal. Don't dare ask for another heavens forbid as you'll get a scornful look and the threat of calling for the air marshal.

Not surprisingly the one thing that hasn't changed over the decades of flying people to holiday destinations must be that packet of cheese you can never open! We all get it it's an aviation industry joke on the punters. Don't go driving the point home and adding insult to injury by taking away the metal cutlery that could barely help. Followed up by replacing it with the all new black ops light-weight hypoallergenic utility device called the spork. I'm bent over backwards astonished that there hasn't been more in-flight issues due to this hilarious to some, cheese packet treat.

The flight was fantastic...I think I travel well compared to many.

Upon landing I was very thankful to see Sawada Shihan and Aaron at the airport, I also noticed the temperature and it was hot and humid. An hour later and Barry Simmonds from the United Kingdom arrived sporting a world class mullet. We later surmised that the true explanation behind his delay through customs plus the added discomfort of having someone search through his nick nacks was purely due to the hair-do. Barry has been a great friend since we met in Wales at a Aikido Seminar...while I was in the UK I had visited Barry several times down in Newton Abbot near Torquay in the South West of England. Barry had always expressed his interest in visiting Japan and the opportunity had finally come. Aaron kindly drove us back to Kimori Dojo while Sawada Shihan and myself caught up on the last 2 years of gossip. On our arrival to the dojo we met Roland Stettler an ex student of Takase Shihan that currently holds the rank of sandan and resides in the Gold Coast of Australia.

Before we knew it we were heading back out to the airport to pick up Carlos Gambetta a nidan arriving from Argentina at 4:30pm then followed by Douglas Gilmore 5th dan at 8:50pm in the evening. It was pointless to return back to Kimori Dojo so Aaron and I decided to wait for Doug's arrival four hours later. This was to be Barry, Carlos and Doug's first visit to Japan. Upon Carlos's arrival it was plain to see he was very tired so after a bite to eat and a short walk around we put Carlos to bed in the car while we waited for Douglas to arrive. When Douglas walked out of customs he had the biggest smile on his face I have seen on any one person for a while...it did however make me wonder had he met up with the customs people too? But no he was just amped to be in Japan!

Day 2 Sunday - First days training at Kimori Dojo.

The new day had begun and we were all up raring to go! Our Gi's were on Hakama's tied up and we were all sweating profusely before even setting foot in the Dojo. Kobayashi Sensei's beginner's class started off smoothly although the faces on the Gaijin were all beginning to take on a glow synonymous with falling asleep under the baking sun. Thankfully there were a couple of breaks during the class due to the 33 degree temperature and 110% humidity so it felt but we were never able to gulp down enough water to quench the feeling of our brains cells reaching boiling point. However what a great afternoon of training though!

Day 3 Monday - Weapons Seminar & Welcoming Party.

The Monday was a public holiday so prior to our arrival a weapon's seminar was organised for the visitors, Kimori Dojo members and external Dojo's. We were all raring to go however unfortunately Roland had hurt his back prior to arriving and had put the finishing touches to that lower lumbar area once and for good the day before. Poor Roland had been relegated to watching and being the official camera man. I must say Roland has done a mighty fine job behind the camera. Later that day and after the seminar a welcome to Kimori Dojo party was organised by Sawada Shihan. The evening was absolutely fantastic Sawada Sensei's wife Kimiko Sawada had fully catered for 35 guests. There was singing from the Kimori Dojo ladies performance group and a solo piano concerto from Mrs Sawada's niece. Oh and yes our heads did hurt the next day but we put that down to the humidity and dehydration of the weather and training.

Day 4 Tuesday - Typhoon Strikes

Tuesday was a very wet and woolly day to say the least with a typhoon hitting Nagoya causing major flooding and road closures but who came here to go sightseeing I ask!? With the weather at the door the day was full with 6 hours of training 2 with Sawada Shihan privately, 2 hours of us going over what we had been shown followed by the scheduled evening classes with everyone.



Day 6 Thursday - Training, training, training!!

The updates are getting to be minimal as we are training throughout each day averaging 5-6 hours of training per day. Sawada Sensei informed everyone that I was to take the second class of the evening after Aaron McConnell Sensei. The first class was brilliant! Having not seen Aaron for two years I noticed his technique had vastly changed and become more powerful and relaxed. Next was me! During the class I could hear a knocking noise which I later realised was my knees.

Day 7 -10 Friday, Saturday & Sunday – Meeting with Waka Sensei & Attending All Nagoya Koshukai

The daily routine was well underway. Carlos, Barry and Doug were bunking together in the same room while we left Roland in a room to himself more for comfort and not wanting to disturb him. I jumped into the smallest room which had enough room for a single bed, a suit case and a laptop. Each day started with an early rise followed by Barry kindly enticing me out of my cupboard with a hot coffee. Twice a week we attended the 0630hrs Iaido and Aikido class with Sawada Sensei. It would be fair to say we were all blurry eyed and half asleep from the previous nights antics and not conducive to a safe environment swinging liato's around a crowded room. Nonetheless we all survived with big smiles and all our fingers and toes still attached.

Saturday evening we were privileged to be taken out by Sawada Sensei & Fuji Sensei. Originally we were given an invitation to join a group of 20-25 people to meet Waka Sensei for a quiet evening of finger food and drinks. On our arrival we was surprised to be informed that it would now only be Waka Sensei, Sawada Sensei and Fuji Sensei with only us foreigners attending. The evening with Waka Sensei was very relaxed and full of laughter including several bar games involving Sawada Sensei's magic coin tricks.

Sunday morning we all got up early to place mats down in a massive sports arena for the 2nd Annual All Nagoya Koshukai with Doshu. Over 400 people attended ranging from beginners to the very experienced. All in all there were about 10 Daikokujin (foreigners) in total for the two one hour lessons taken by Doshu. Waka Sensei was also on the mat during Doshu's lessons which provided the wonderful opportunity to train with him several times. In essence the timing for our visit to visit Kimori Dojo was very fortuitous to say the least and allowed us to experience training with so many different people from a vast range of dojo's throughout Nagoya.

After the seminar we attend a banquet whereby speeches were given by several dignitaries commemorating the occasion. After the speeches the toasting and more serious Ikkyo Undo was allowed to begin. While everyone mingled and business cards (Meishi) were being given out the laughter accompanied by big smiles and pats on the back continued well into the evening.

On the way back to Kimori Dojo we decided to stop into a small Yakitori restaurant just around the corner from the Dojo. It was horrible! The drinking started again then the gorging on more Japanese delicacies. Eventually we all got home and slept very well, thankfully we weren't too seedy the next morning.

Day 11 Monday – Finally some sightseeing!!

Due to the Typhoon rolling in earlier in the week we weren't able to go sightseeing in Nagoya. Now that it's past we are off to Nagoya castle and the Atsuta Shrine. Both of these places are beautiful and great for photography.

Day 16 Tuesday – Departure Day 2nd Sunday Nov'11

Between Tuesday to 2nd Sunday of November we continued to practice on average 4 ½ to 5 ½ per day. On the Thursday we were invited to Sawada Sensei's home for lunch so naturally we stocked up on red wine and cold tea so not to go empty handed. Once again the meals prepared by Mrs Sawada were nothing short of absolutely delicious! We ate and we ate and the platters kept on coming to the point we all had to politely thank Mr Sawada and politely explain we couldn't eat anymore. Wow what a feast!!

Upon getting back to the dojo we felt that we needed to take a little nanna nap prior to changing and going out on the town with Aaron Sensei and friend Hashimoto San. To say that Hashimoto San is hilarious is an understatement. Somewhat of a stand-up comedian although not professionally he did however have us in constant fits of laughter. Our local hangout in Nagoya for the fortnight became an establishment called the 'Hub' well know for its gaijin clientele and of late the visiting drunkards constantly singing happy birthday to Carlos Gambetta every time we were there.

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As our departure dates for all grew ever closer it was interesting to listen to the words of everyone, more especially from three of the group who were 'long time wishers & first time visitors to Japan'. In all honesty it was like listening to my own thoughts from when I too was a first time visitor to Japan back in 1990. They were all like kids having run out of the theatre after watching their first Bruce Lee movie, except the ages of these kids were 38, 42, 43, 46, 54 and 68. Yup 68 years of age who happened to be our own Douglas Gilmore Sensei from Hamilton! You really can't take your hat off to the man enough due to his commitment and effort to be at Kimori Dojo. Douglas knew full well this was no sight seeing trip. In all honesty I had my concerns whether we all could physically cope with the amount of training that I knew was to come, however cope we all certainly did and then some.

The only injury incurred was Roland's back which was unfortunate as it had happened prior to travelling to Japan. Thankfully Roland did begin to train with us in the daily private weapon lessons with Sawada Sensei which were a lot lighter and not requiring too much ukemi.

I guess it would be fair to say and without exaggeration that we all had a great time and we all came away with something very special. Not just something technical but more so a greater appreciation for those who teach us and for those who we teach and more importantly for those people we practice with.

We would like to thank Toshiharu Sawada Shihan and Kimiko Sawada for their most warm heartfelt hospitality that we all experienced during our visit. Not forgetting the Kimori members that accompanied us on our trips around Nagoya and allowed us to share in their love for Aikido and their Dojo. We cannot thank you all enough in words other than to say... **SEE YA NEXT YEAR!!**



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