

Tukido: Operation Monsoon 2

Tukido students were offered the opportunity to take part in a trip to Malaysia in 2002 and again very recently in 2004. These trips, known as Operation Monsoon have developed from the underpinning philosophy of Master Teh, the founder and Grand Master of Tukido. These trips included Tukido training as guests of the Malaysian Tukido students and the opportunity to learn about the environment, cultures and lifestyles that constitute Malaysia. This article focuses on Operation Monsoon 2, which took place in August 2004.

The physical side of Operation Monsoon 2 is clearly evident in the travel and training involved throughout the trip. This article offers some comment on the physical elements, and relates such to the deeper elements involved which may be considered to be beyond the physical and touching on the emotional, psychological and even philosophical.

The relationship of trip to the underpinning philosophy of Tukido lies in the processes involved and the experiences of the individuals and the group concerned. In his book “Clouds” Master Teh explains a great deal of his philosophy, which we see in action within the travel experience referred to as Operation Monsoon 2. One of the fundamental principles is that people should be inspired to try new experiences and go outwith what they might regard as their personal comfort zone.

“Fundamental exercises do not make up martial arts or any other sports, although obviously we all need them. ... An advanced stage is reached through jumping over the fence of fundamental exercises. ... I would rather push a star to be born.”

(Clouds p191)



(Andrew Newall (3rd Dan) performs side kick)

From this the individual may gain a greater understanding of themselves and others. By trying something which is initially considered to be outwith their range the individual gains greater insight regarding what is possible for them and may proceed to develop a different perception of how best to approach life generally. Examples of this abound in Operation Monsoon 2 and these are as varied as the range of individuals and locations involved. When we consider that for some members of our group this was their first experience of air travel, some had a fear of heights, some were non-swimmers, some rather staid in their eating habits, some had never been outwith an English-speaking environment and some were not comfortable with animals, insects or marine life, we may begin to see that challenges were involved for many members of the group at various stages in the trip.

By dealing with their fears in a positive way the members of our group who had concerns regarding foreign travel and environments, jungle areas, or open water and the creatures therein gained an opportunity to see elements of the world they would not otherwise have experienced and on reflection will realise that they are stronger individuals than they may have initially given themselves credit for. From this their self-esteem will benefit and they will think more positively of themselves, which directly relates to what Master Teh refers to in Clouds as the “hidden self” and his belief that “What you think of yourself is more important than what others think of you.” (Clouds p257)

“It is important for us all to do something out of the ordinary to provide a fresh break for us, to recharge our energy. ... Other experiences will make us realise how little we know; we will be more humble and prepared to learn more.” (Clouds p257)

Tukido has at its roots the fundamental values of loyalty and trust, which is embodied in the principle of keeping your word. Those who travelled with Master Teh as part of Operation Monsoon 2 faced many situations where they may have felt exposed and vulnerable due to the surrounding environment and their personal perceptions and fears in the situation.



(Master Teh deals with a poisonous snake)

By trusting Master Teh all concerned were enabled to experience situations which were outwith their normal range and which in all truth could have been very dangerous had people reacted in an inappropriate way. By trusting that all concerned would keep their word and follow the guidance given, Master Teh could guide a group of very different individuals through a range of environments with the knowledge that their trust in him would allow his knowledge and understanding of the situations concerned to enable all in the group to share the experiences safely and to emerge from the experience with a changed perspective on themselves, others and the world around them.

“Those who have the vision to fulfil a dream know that it cannot be done alone. Each individual self has its limitations. Loyalty is the force which can overcome this, allowing all individual selves to achieve their individual goals.” (Clouds p235)

The range of locations experienced during the 12 day period was breathtaking. Each location had much to offer in isolation but when combined the experience was even more intense. Our journey began by travelling to London, where the instructors and students from the range of Tukido Clubs involved (Scotland, Ireland and even Greece) were scheduled to meet up. From there we travelled to Malaysia.

Our first stop was Kuala Lumpur (KL), home of the famous Petronas Towers which are highlighted as the tallest buildings in the world. Immediately on arrival in KL we were faced with the climate change from that of the UK, followed by the abundance of colour evident in the buildings, shops and dress of the local people. Although some of our group had visited KL two years previous, the fascination of this vibrant city was as keen as ever.



(The Petronas Towers by moonlight)

We had the opportunity to train with the KL Tukido Club and to join their instructors and students after training for a trip round the China Town, followed by freshly cooked food in the atmospheric location known as “Opium Lane”.

The challenges faced in KL included communicating with local people and managing to achieve the desired outcome. This included negotiating fares with taxi drivers, requesting food for lunch in local restaurants and bartering with stall owners in China Town. There was also the challenge of performing well in Tukido training while alongside local students. This for many in our group was an entirely new and initially daunting experience, which in hindsight is considered to have been entirely stimulating and enjoyable.



(Cooking food in Opium Lane)

From KL we travelled to Taman Negara, the Malaysian National Park. This involved a lengthy bus journey followed by a three hour up-river trip in a long, low, wooden boat. The boat trip was a true experience in its own right. Our position in the boat was such that we were in arms reach of the water and we had a panoramic view of the riverbanks on either side.



(Travelling by boat to Taman Negara)

On arrival at Taman Negara we were immediately faced with a very different environment than that which we had enjoyed in KL. We were very quickly made aware that we were in a real jungle location, despite the apparent civilisation of the rows of chalets. This was brought home to us when we ventured outwith the camp area and walked along one of the tracks to the river. Several members of our group discovered that leeches were looking to feed that night. Over the course of the following two days we experienced a range of jungle walks, from official tracks, through treetop walkways, to rough jungle areas outwith the usual pathways. As might be expected, we encountered a range of animal, bird and insect species on our jungle walks. In Taman Negara there were many challenges relating to the natural environment and the indigenous wildlife. A number of individuals in our group were rather apprehensive about walking into the jungle areas, with some being especially fearful of the prospect to the level of considering staying back at our accommodation rather than accompanying the group on the walk.

One example of overcoming such fear may be seen in the Treetop Canopy Walk through the jungle. This was doubly difficult for some of our group as they had a fear of the jungle environment and also a fear of heights.



From Taman Negara we travelled, via KL, to Redang Island in the South China Sea. This again involved a considerable bus journey and a two hour boat trip. The boat trip on this occasion was quite different to that which we experienced on our journey to Taman Negara, as this boat was a modern hydrofoil and the trip was across open sea rather than along a river. On arrival at Redang we were immediately impressed by the natural beauty of the location and we were yet again faced with a very different environment to that from which we had come. Here we had a more overtly tourist setting, but one which has so far remained relatively unspoilt.

(Descending from the Treetop Canopy Walk)

Easily the most awe inspiring experience of Redang was the quality of the underwater world experienced by simply donning a mask and looking under the sea a few yards from shore. The rock and coral formations were spectacular in shape and colour and there were many species and sizes of fish in evidence. In Redang Island the most striking challenge for many was the prospect of swimming in relatively deep open water. Some had a fear of marine life which added to their apprehension of swimming where they considered “slimy creatures” might get close to them, some feared being in deep water as they considered they were not strong swimmers, some did not like putting their face under water and some did not trust themselves to use a mask and snorkel. We gradually increased the numbers who took part in swimming, with stronger swimmers subtly watching out for weaker swimmers, until we managed to get the entire group in the sea. Over a relatively short period we had all, including non-swimmers complete with buoyancy aids swimming in water which was for most relatively deep, wearing masks and snorkels and gazing in amazement at the array of colour and abundance of marine life in the coral covered sea-bed. Interestingly even those who feared the “slimy creatures” were enthralled by the colour, variety and graceful nature of the fish life they encountered.

From Redang we travelled, again via KL, to Master Teh’s home town of Taiping, meaning “Everlasting Peace”. On arriving in Taiping we were once again faced with an entirely different environment to that from which we had come. Taiping has an enchanting tranquillity which is most keenly felt around the area known as the Lake Gardens. The town is surrounded by jungle and mountains which are frequently cloaked in a haze towards their upper slopes. Our group experienced walking through areas screened by bamboo and looking over wooden bridges into still waters inhabited by colourful fish. We also experienced the local markets where people found us of particular interest as Taiping seldom has such large groups of western tourists.



(Our group by the Lake Gardens in Taiping)

In Taiping the challenges ranged from jungle walking to swimming in a jungle pool and being very public figures of local interest. While we had walked in the jungle area of Taman Negara and had been swimming in the sea at Redang, there was something different about swimming in the Burmese Pool and having to keep tee shirts on to protect ourselves from surface feeding insects.



(Master Teh performs jumping front kick)



(Master Teh performs flying side kick)

It was also challenging to perform Tukido techniques in full public view within the Lake Gardens, to a level which produced high quality photographic images suitable for publication.

The final challenge in Taiping was to perform well in an inter-club competition with the local Tukido clubs who gathered in Taiping for the event.

At the end of the trip all involved were asked to comment on what they liked best and in what way improvements might be made to Operation Monsoon. The instructors and students from local Malaysian clubs very much appreciated having the opportunity to gain instruction from Master Teh personally and to experience training with people from other Tukido clubs. Their comment regarding improvement was simply that they would like a little more time to be directed towards free-sparring as they normally only spar with each other but during Operation Monsoon they get the chance to spar with international students and they would like to make the most of the opportunity for sparring.



(Our group with Malaysian Instructors and students in Taiping)

Within our group of travellers there was difficulty in identifying singular experiences as “liked best” due to the nature of the trip and the vast number of experiences which were fully appreciated by all. When pressed to be selective it became clear that there were specific highlights on which all agreed.

All concerned very much appreciated the opportunity to train under Master Teh and alongside the Malaysian students. The feeling of training in the country and the town where the founder of Tukido personally trained was considered a highlight in its own right. The opportunity to spar with Malaysian students and to experience alternative styles of sparring against a wider range of opponents than would normally be possible

was much appreciated by all. The opportunity to observe and learn from Malaysian Instructors was also appreciated. We all considered it a particular privilege to meet with Senior Instructors Ng Chai Huat (4th Dan) and Koay Chin Heng (4th Dan). Their presence made our training sessions additionally enjoyable both in KL and in Taiping. We were offered a very warm welcome by Ng Chai Huat and his students in KL where they arranged transport for our group on numerous occasions. The level of hospitality shown to us by the Malaysian Instructors and their students made our trip particularly enjoyable.

Being able to observe the range of architecture, from the Petronas Towers to the National Mosque, and experiencing the vibrant city centre with its range of shopping facility and vibrant night-life was particularly enjoyed in Kuala Lumpur. Experiencing the range of “creepy crawlies” in the jungle, being able to see wild boar at first hand, spotting the very elusive “mouse deer” and watching Master Teh rescue a German family from a highly poisonous snake were considered high value in Taman Negara.

The experience of swimming in the South China Sea and being able to experience the underwater world first-hand was the main aspect highlighted, although watching coconuts being harvested and enjoying the unspoilt sun-baked beach was also high value in Redang. Taiping, although off the main tourist routes, was felt by all in the group to offer a very special experience. Knowing this was the home town of Master Teh and that he had spent many hours training in the Lake Gardens where we were performing Tukido techniques was the main highlight of Taiping from our Tukido perspective. We were also given very privileged night-time access to Taiping Zoo, for which we thank both Mr Ang Lee Kaw, Town Councillor of Taiping and Dr Kevin, Director of Taiping Zoo. Our group thoroughly enjoyed the experience of seeing the wide range of animals catered for. We especially appreciated seeing the crocodiles and big cats being fed and personally getting to feed the hippos. Such was the enjoyment of the experiences gained in Operation Monsoon 2 that a number of individuals would prefer that the trip be extended to three weeks in duration.

It is true to say that all concerned had experiences in this trip which were new to them and in many ways represented a challenge to them which they each had to overcome. All concerned have grown by virtue of this trip and their perspectives have been altered in ways they might never have credited previously. This is the underlying benefit which Master Teh has designed in to Operation Monsoon and in which he has demonstrated his belief by selflessly ensuring that all concerned were offered all the support and care necessary to enable them to gain from the experience.

To have the opportunity of being guided through such a range of truly unique experiences while engaging in Tukido training in the environment within which the Grand Master himself developed his thoughts and skills is a privilege indeed. This we consider is a privilege which very few in the Martial Arts world are given and for which we are very grateful to Master Teh.

In addition we had many opportunities for socialising, which gave a great deal of pleasure to all concerned. This ranged from the Scots and Malaysians teasing the Irish and mimicking their accents, to the Irish teasing the Scots about their historical relationship with the English. There were amusing differences in perception such as some of our Malaysian hosts finding it difficult to understand our various accents and even expressing the view that to them we all looked very similar in facial appearance. There were also several nostalgic references made to the previous Operation Monsoon and shared amusement regarding events which had taken place at that time, ranging from karaoke performances to late night revelling.

In addition to a superb holiday experience, all concerned have been left with a greater understanding of themselves, other cultures and the natural world. It has also further cemented the respect felt by all for Master Teh both as a person and as Grand Master in Tukido. Once again we have been offered an insight into the level of integrity involved in the philosophical underpinnings of Tukido and the wider relevance of such for our lives generally.