



10th dan Okinawan Karate Master Hanshi Tetsuhiro Hokama (left) with Northern Ireland-based 7th dan Sensei dan Redmond at the tomb of Okinawan Karate Master Matsumura 'Bushu' Sokon, the founder of Shorin-Ryu.



On the final day of training at the Hokama Dojo, Sensei dan Redmond (third from left), chief instructor of the Chojun Karate Association (CKA) in Northern Ireland, presents Okinawan Karate Master Hanshi Tetsuhiro Hokama with a specially engraved plaque.

IRISH GROUP VISIT THE BIRTHPLACE OF KARATE-DO

HEADED UP BY SENSEI Dan Redmond, chief instructor of the Chujō Karate Association (CKA) in Northern Ireland, a group of seven club members left Dublin Airport recently for their much anticipated Karate tour to Okinawa, the home of Karate-do. The tour members included Karen Agnew, Liza Scullion, Laura Burns, Connor Doherty, Keith Millar, Steven Surgeoner and Jordan Millar. Two members of the Karate Union of Northern Ireland (KUNI), father and son Michael McConville and David McConville, also joined the group on their journey to the Fas East.

Tour leader Redmond had made two previous visits to the island home of Karate-do and he was looking forward to once again meeting up with the Okinawan Karate Master Hanshi Tetsuhiro Hokama from the Okinawan village area of Nishihara.

'Regular and intense'

"Planning and training preparation for the Okinawa tour had been regular and intense for the four months prior to the trip, so it was wonderful to finally be in the airport beginning our long, arduous journey", Redmond said. The first flight was from Dublin to London Heathrow and from there to Tokyo Haneda Airport, Japan. It was upon arrival in Tokyo that the group discovered that all of the connecting flights to Okinawa were cancelled because of Typhoon Chan Hom which was raging in the Ryukyu Islands.

The jet lagged group were treated very well by Japan Airlines who secured hotel accommodation and told them to return next morning to see if flights would be departing for Okinawa. "Next morning thankfully we were checked in and allowed to board the flight", Redmond explained. "However, we were forewarned that it may be necessary to return to Tokyo if the severe weather prevented landing at Naha Airport in Okinawa".

On approaching Okinawa the turbulence increased. "Our pilot made two aborted attempts to touch down on the runway but eventually he was forced to turn the plane around and return to Tokyo. The experience was distressing for the passengers and screams of fear were heard above the noise of the turbulence", Redmond added.

Japan Airlines again found hotel accommodation for the group who were advised yet again to return the next morning. "Next morning, once again, we were airborne, and although some turbulence did cause concern, it was nothing like the previous experience and thankfully our group finally landed in Okinawa", Redmond said.

After checking into the Smile Hotel in Naha City, Redmond made contact with 10th dan Goju-Ryu Hanshi Tetsuhiro Hokama who arrived at the hotel the following morning.

'A memorable day'

"Thanks to hanshi we had a memorable day touring the sites of Okinawa, mostly the monuments and shrines dedicated to legendary Karate masters who had formed styles that are practised all over the world today", Redmond said.

"Hanshi Hokama was an excellent tour guide and was most knowledgeable of the sites we visited. He was also very humorous and entertaining, always being the joker. It turned out to be a fantastic, entertaining day that was much appreciated by us all



During their stay in Naha City, Okinawa, Master Hanshi Tetsuhiro Hokama (second from left) brought the visiting Irish group to a monument dedicated to the famous Okinawan Karate master Chojun Miyagi, the founder of Goju-Ryu.

even though we were very tired", Redmond added. "Some people believe that Mr. Miyagi in the movie 'The Karate Kid' was a fictional character but, in fact, there was a real Mr. Miyagi in Okinawa — Chojun Miyagi (1888-1953), the famous Okinawan martial artist who founded the Goju-Ryu of Karate style by blending Okinawa and Chinese influences.

'Very traditional dojo'

Accompanied by Hanshi Hokama we got the chance to visit a monument dedicated to Chojun Miyagi", Redmond said. The group also got the opportunity to visit some other gravesides and monuments dedicated to famous Karate masters, including Matsumura 'Bushu' Sokon, Anko Itosu, Matsumora Kosaku and Morio Higaonna.

"We took a trip to the famous Shurijo Castle which was destroyed during World War II but was rebuilt in an exact replica as the plans of the original castle had been stored in a safe location", Redmond added. The Fukusyuen Garden, the Tamaudun National Heritage Centre and the Peace Park were other interesting sights the group visited.

After sightseeing, Redmond and the group went to visit the Budokan which is the Okinawan Martial Arts main hall. "Arrangements were then made for some training at the Hokama dojo and each evening that week was spent training and sweating in a very traditional dojo environment", Redmond said.

Here, under the stewardship of Hanshi Hokama the Irish students practised Goju-Ryu and experienced first hand the effective principles of the old Okinawan Karate style. As well as training the dojo, each morning the group met in a local park near their hotel at 7 a.m. to practice kata. Sessions were taken 7th dan Redmond, Steven Surgeoner, a 4th dan, and Michael McConville, a 3rd dan. "Because it was the rainy season we usually got soaked during training by the sudden rain showers. Although we were wet, everyone agreed that it was a most enjoyable experience", Surgeoner commented.

While the final week of the group's Eastern tour was spent in Tokyo, Japan, before they departed Okinawa, Redmond presented an engraved plaque to Hanshi Hokama to mark the Irish visit and to thank him for making everyone so welcome and access to training opportunities.

Impressive museum

Based in Tokyo's Princess Royal Garden Hotel the group decided that their final few days would be spent relaxing and sightseeing. "First on our 'must see' was the 'Crossroads of Asia' and the Sky Tree, a broadcasting, restaurant and observation tower in Sumida", Redmond said. They visitors also took in the Meiji Shrine, the Imperial Palace and Gardens, the graves of the 47 Ronin and the Tokyo Budokan Martial Arts Training Centre and its impressive museum.

At this point the group decided to separate and visit places that specifically interested each individual. "Without doubt it was a really memorable visit to Okinawa and Tokyo which so enjoyable and educational", Redmond added. "Plans are already underway for another visit to the 'Land of the Rising Sun' at a future date to be decided".



Shuri Castle in Naha City, Okinawa where the book, the 'Bubishi', was kept when it arrived in Okinawa from China.