

Budo: An Ancient and Diverse Tradition

The original Olympic disciplines contested in Ancient Greece were chosen to demonstrate the skills warriors from the many Greek city states needed to succeed on the battlefield. Since their establishment in 1896, the modern Olympic Games have continued this tradition by expanding the list of events with martial origins, such as fencing and shooting. Tokyo 2020 will feature the debut of the newest Olympic martial art: karate.



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Okinawa Karate Kaikan

Two different karate disciplines will be demonstrated during Tokyo 2020. Kata is a solo event where karatekas will show their mastery of karate forms while kumite is a sparring event where karatekas will face off to score points against their opponents in three-minute bouts.

A Japanese martial art built on British philosophy

For many people around the world, their gateway into Japan and Japanese culture comes through Japanese martial arts, collectively referred to as budō, meaning “Martial Way” or “Way of War”.

This is especially true in the United Kingdom, where 83% of people are familiar with karate and 87% are familiar with judo, another Olympic martial art. The U.K. is home to hundreds of thousands of karatekas and judokas, and at least a third of British tourists to Japan visit because they wish to experience the hard strikes of karate and athletic throws of judo in the country they began.

What few realize, however, is that Japanese martial arts actually have a close connection with Britain. When Jigoro Kano was adapting the traditional martial art of jujutsu to codify what became modern judo in the 19th century, he was actually developing a new approach to teaching that sought to encompass physical, mental, and moral education.

Known as san iku shugi, or “Principle of the Three Educations”, this philosophy was built on the works of Herbert Spencer, an English philosopher whose ideas were highly influential on 19th-century Japanese reformers who sought to modernize their country.

In return, this Japanese martial art with British influences made an indelible mark on British literature by way of Edward William Barton-Wright, who became one of the first Europeans to train in judo while working as an engineer in Japan. In 1898, Barton-Wright sponsored a team of Japanese judokas to come over and demonstrate the sport in the hopes of raising local interest and establishing his own dojo.

Although his plans to open a dojo did not come to fruition, Barton-Wright used his knowledge of judo to develop Bartitsu, the chosen fighting style of none other than Sherlock Holmes, the world-famous consulting detective, who used his skills to defeat his arch-nemesis: Professor Moriarty.

Getting an up-close look at budō

For those seeking to learn more about martial arts and see them demonstrated by practitioners who trace their lineages back to the founders of their chosen styles, Japan offers a plethora of opportunities.

People who wish to learn more about judo are welcome to visit the [Kodokan](#) in Tokyo, the birthplace of the sport and a mecca for judoka from around the world. Visitors are free to sit in spectator seating ringing the main dojo to observe students of all ages and skill levels as they train and to study in the facility’s museum and library.

- How to get there: Visitors can travel by rail to Kasuga Station on the Mita Line or Oedo Line, Korakuen Station on the Namboku Line, or Korakuen Station on the Maunouchi Line and take a short one-to-three-minute walk to the Kodokan International Judo Center.

For karatekas visiting Japan, there is no better place to start their journey than on the island of Okinawa, the birthplace of karate. There, they can visit [Okinawa Karate Kaikan](#), a modern complex located just south of Naha, Okinawa Prefecture, an approximately two hours and half minutes plane journey from Tokyo. The facility is dedicated to preserving the history of karate and teaching its students and visitors the unique culture and philosophy of the art so they may teach it to others when they return home.

To assist in this mission, Okinawa Karate Kaikan features multiple training rooms, an outdoor training area, and a reference room where visitors can study the history of karate and watch videos of masters practicing various techniques.

- How to get there: Visitors can travel by bus, taking either #33 or #46 from Naha Bus Terminal to Tomigusukukōen-mae and walking five-to-ten minutes to Okinawa Karate Kaikan.

Another Japanese martial art with a significant global following is kendo, which developed out of kenjutsu, a form of Japanese swordsmanship that originated among the samurai in feudal Japan.

Practitioners, or kendoka, are immediately identifiable thanks to their distinct armor, bōgu, and their use of shinai, bamboo swords that make a distinctive loud snap upon contact. In competition, the sport is characterized by tense stretches of time as each kendoka carefully reads the body language of their opponent before the two erupt in a flurry of blistering movement to see who will score a strike.



Kendo

People who would like to learn more about this sport can immerse themselves going to the spiritual home of kendo: Miyazaki, Miyazaki Prefecture on the island of Kyushu, approximately two hours away from Tokyo by air. Some of the best-regarded bōgu manufacturers are based in Miyazaki, with kendoka from around the world flocking to the city to purchase equipment and to hone their skills at one of the dozens of schools and training camps that operate year-round.

Iaido is another sword-based martial art. Unlike kendo, in which two opponents face off in combat, iaido is a largely solo art that primarily focuses on smoothly drawing a sword to respond to a sudden attack before being placed back in its sheath. Much emphasis is placed on discipline and control as practitioners, known as iaidoka, focus on the minutiae of each move and step they take. Additionally, iaidoka wield metal swords with students aiming to hone their skills to earn the right to progress from training blades to real katanas with razor-sharp cutting edges.

Iaido's origins can be traced back through the centuries to [Iai Shrine](#) in Murayama, Yamagata Prefecture. Visitors who come to the shrine can experience iaido for themselves by watching demonstrations held at the shrine. The shrine also hosts workshops for those who wish to gain hands-on experience. These are taught by senseis who teach students the skills and techniques passed down to them through generations of master swordsmen.

- How to get there: Visitors should travel by rail to JR Murayama Station, approximately three hours and half minutes away from Tokyo by bullet train, and take a ten-minute taxi ride to Iai Shrine.



Iaido Experience

An enriching pursuit

Much like the events held at the ancient Olympic Games, the many disciplines encompassed by budō come together to form the skills needed by a warrior heading into battle. In their modern forms, these martial arts offer an opportunity to engage in physical activity and also to practice discipline and deepen one's knowledge of philosophy. For those interested in delving into the rich and long histories of these martial arts, many will be surprised to find that they do not have to dig very deep to hit upon rich veins of knowledge that yield some surprising connections that stretch across continents and cultures.

