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Sakura in Saku

Sunday, 29th of April, Ulrich, Andrea - an Italian friend from Hefei - and me left for a one week trip to Japan. Our destination was the seminar with Endo Seishiro Sensei in Saku, one and a



half hour from Tokyo by Shinkansen. The seminar began on Tuesday, so we had some time for hiking and sightseeing. After the first night in Komoro - a starting point for some mountain hiking and winter sports we went by bus up to Takamine Hotel, a ski resort at 2000m above sea. From there we began our way upwards to catch a view at Asama yama, an active volcano. Unfortunately there was still a lot of snow on the steep hiking trail and after one hour we turned back for safety. Imagine one of us would have twisted his ankle and thus just could watch the seminar we came for...



Back at the Takamine Hotel we stopped for a bath at the onsen, a bathhouse with water from a hot spring. Down in Komoro, we enjoyed the Sakura strolling beneath the cherry trees in full blossom inside the ruins of the old castle. There we also excitedly watched a Kyodo school practicing their martial arts. Quite impressive!



The next morning we took the local train to Saku, registered at the dojo and went to the Saku Budo Hall for practice. The following days had the same schedule: breakfast, a short walk near the dojo, 3 ½ hours practice, visit to the onsen to relax our bodies, dinner and then some chat and drinks with other Aikido friends until it

was time for a night's rest on the mats in the dojo.



On Wednesday we followed an invitation of Saku City mayor for a reception of all foreign Aikidoka to the City Hall and Endo Sensei also gave a short speech.



Friday students of different dojos and the guests from abroad presented the art of Aikido in an impressive embukai to a bigger audience.

Because the event started later this day, we took the chance to visit a local Shinto shrine. After the embukai we practiced just one hour. Due to the huge number of guests there was little space left for ukemi!



In the seminar, Endo Sensei didn't focus on any techniques. As one of very few beginners I just got a first impression of what Endo Sensei teaches and I had plenty opportunities to practice with experienced partners.

What I understood were some principles: (1) Being aware of what you're doing; (2) Being relaxed, especially in the shoulders, i.e. with our arms not using the strength of our muscles, only the power of our body; (3) Contact, since most techniques only work with contact; (4) Timing – the importance of using the right moment; (5) Movement – keep the flow of moving and feel what may come next!



We mainly started from standard entrance like shomen uchi, katate dori, etc. leading to jiyu waza, any technique that appeared suitable in the moment.



Friday evening it was party time! After a Japanese dinner every nation was invited to perform on stage. Representing Germany Jörg from Cologne, Ulrich and I from Shanghai performed a German children song as a canon which the audience and ourselves enjoyed very much.

After we bid farewell at the end of the seminar we went to Tokyo for the last night of our trip. We were off for a Korean style restaurant with some excellent beef meat and then enjoyed the images of night life at Shinjuku.



Sunday morning in Hombu Dojo I registered in the Aikikai federation and participated in the beginners' class with Irie Sensei focusing on basic techniques like ikkyo, irimi nage and shiho nage.

After having bought some souvenirs we took off from Narita Airport for Shanghai. Summarizing what I found most impressive besides Aikido was the politeness and helpfulness of the Japanese people. I hope to have a chance to go there again...

Henrik Koehler