

Training in Malaysia - by Armaan Rahman

At the end of 2008, having confirmed my place at university for September 2009, I decided to go abroad for 6 months. For the previous 2 years, having not being able to find an ITF school in Leeds, I had been training in a TAGB school, but was told that I may be demoted to Black tag if I wanted to grade across to their association. After speaking to Mr. Lear, I decided to go to Malaysia and train with Master Tan.

Training

The training was intense, with Monday to Thursday making up the bulk of the weeks training, Friday to just teach and relax, before the early Saturday morning start. Sunday was a much needed day of rest. Here's a breakdown of a typical week, the change in our training schedule coming into place in June and July, when the international schools had broken up for their summer holiday.

January-May

Monday – International school and Evening class
Tuesday – International schools
Wednesday – International school and running at the park
Thursday – International schools, And Evening class
Friday – International school
Saturday – Chinese schools

June and July

Monday – Evening class
Tuesday or Wednesday – Running, followed by training at the park
Thursday – Evening class
Friday – Running, followed by training at the park
Saturday – Chinese schools



Evening class

This was the main class of the week, training lasting for 2 hours, starting at 8.30pm. We warmed up and stretched before the class started, and also went through some of our patterns, either on our own, or in groups. After this, Master Tan started the class. We always started off with basics, starting from walking stance middle punch, to then moving to kicks and kicking combinations (for sparring). After this, we would then run through all, if not most of our patterns, working up from Saju Jirugi and Saju Makgi. We would then often do pad work, or go straight to sparring. Sparring would usually start with drills – movement, checking kick, downwards kick etc. We would then move to free sparring, but only with one technique e.g. one side could only do downwards kick, while the other could only do back kick. This was a very good way of learning how to trap your opponent, although more often than not, I was the one getting trapped – I would like to think that I did get better at it during my time training. Finally, the lesson finished with a few rounds of free sparring, the part of the lesson that everyone looks forward to.



The park

During term time of the international schools, the park was where we ran just once a week, but once the school holidays began, this was the place of our training other than the evening class. At the beginning, I started with a fairly poor 3-4 laps, which went to 5 after a few weeks, which was apparently the minimum. I built up from there, and was running 8 laps, and then 10 in the last few weeks. In my last lesson at the park, I ran 15 and a half laps, but was unable to complete 16 (which Hannah did on the same day). Turns out that the jump from 10 to 16 laps was too much for my legs, which seized up, but at least I know that I pushed myself until I could literally run no more. After collapsing in a heap, and stretching my legs for a while, I decided to call it a day at 15 and a half – also taking into consideration that we had to train on the basketball courts afterwards.

International schools

There was the two elementary schools and one middle/high school. On Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, we would help Master Tan with teaching these. In the first two months of my trip, Lyonel took the warm up, followed by the class being split up into groups, according to grade, and each group going through patterns etc. with either Master Tan, Lyonel, myself, Hannah or Callum. After a while, I took the warm up, and also became a white belt specialist.

Chinese schools

This was the difficult early start. After being accustomed to getting up at 11 am on most other days, we left at 8am on Saturday mornings. There were two classes: the first one we would sometimes train at, and on other occasions, we would teach some of the juniors. We trained in second class,

taught by Lyonel. Class finished at around 1230pm and then we'd go for lunch with Master.



Training- Day 1 and Chinese New Year

I arrived in Kuala Lumpur at 9.30pm on a Friday. After being met by Master Tan, Mrs Tan and Callum at the airport, we went out for a bite to eat on our way to the house. After arriving at the house, I met Charles – a kind Malay man, who let me out my room for the next 6 months. After this, it being around 1am, I thought I would get a good night's sleep – turns out that I wasn't. The Saturday morning was training at the Chinese schools, so it was a 7am start.

In the morning, having met Lyonel, my training began. I suppose in hindsight, it was one of the "easier" classes of the week and a good way to settle in. I got through the first class and most of the second. The heat was getting to me though, and in the end, I was told to sit out. Anyway, after my first training sessions, I was pretty tired and had the afternoon to relax. In the evening, the Chinese New Year celebrations began. We were taken to Master Tan's sister's house, and enjoyed my first steamboat, along with a few other Chinese dishes. We then played a game equivalent to wink murder with cards, each of us being dealt a card, the person with the 7 of diamonds being the "murderer." We also received the red packets, although I can't remember their name. Having capped off an enjoyable first day, I finally got that good nights sleep that I needed.

Food

Food is definitely one of the several things I miss from Malaysia. There is so much of a variety of food that I was spoilt for choice. Here are a few of my favourite places:

The Canteen – every Tuesday and Thursday Master Tan would drive us 25 minutes around the city to Kepong to get here. It served the best teh tarik when the boss made it, and we waited for him to get there to order it. There's nothing like freshly cooked chicken, especially when they waited for Master Tan's arrival before cooking.

Banana Leaf – all the food here was served on a banana leaf. The curry was really nice, served with rice and vegetables. The chicken was better than the canteen. Sitting outside in the sun also made for a good atmosphere.

Kayu – This is where we watched Liverpool beat Man U 4-1, sorry to bring it up again sir (and 2-0 loss to Barca in Champions League). It was famous for its roti tisu – a sweet. The murtabak (meat filled circular pastrie) and fried chicken were also amazing.

Here are some of the foods:

Durian – I hated durian. Known as the king of fruits, I tried it only once, and pretty much refused to try it again. A definite must try in Malaysia – just don't agree to eat the whole fruit.

Mangostein – this is a purple fruit with white flesh, known as the queen of fruits. It's really nice and another must try.

Kaya Bread – kaya is basically a type of jam. Put on toast or steamed bread with butter, I could taste it now – I wish!





Batu caves



Lyonel?



Mosque

Trips

Waterfall- 1st trip

We left early in the morning, in our 4 car convoy; Master Tan, Ms Cheang, Mr Lim and Jacquie. Unfortunately, Hannah was not on our first trip because she had to go back home. We spent the day climbing up the river over various rocks and through rapids. After this, we had a picnic. After this, despite my desperate attempts, I was subject to the initiation – getting thrown into the river – although it took 3 attempts and 7 people for it to be successful. It was a very hot and sunny day, with the cold river proving to be a perfect escape from the Malaysian sun.

Towards the end of the day, we decided to go to the waterfall, which was further into the jungle. 45 minutes in, we came to a dead end, and because night was falling, we called it a day and headed back to KL.

Waterfall – 2nd trip

Our second trip to the waterfall didn't start too well – lets just say Hannah brought over some of the British weather (rain). After getting to the fringe of the jungle, we waited for a while for the rain to stop. This time we headed straight up to the waterfall. With one extra car, we set off on the windy and slippery track. It didn't start off too well for us in Ms Cheang's car. After going through some deep puddles etc, we came to an abrupt stop. Being behind all the other cars, we were left for a while, before Mr Lim came back in his pick up. It turned out that some water had got into the battery part of the engine, so after drying it out, we were on our way again.

Our progress after this was pretty good, albeit the only non off road SUV crossing a rather dodgy bridge, while the other 4x4's crossed through the river. After our mistake on the first trip, we took the correct route, winding up at a steep 50 foot hill. The only car to make it was Master Tans, but after going up, he knew we couldn't have gone any further even if we made it, so we returned to where we stopped the first time.

It seemed that the weather was kind to us though, because although it rained when we got there, and even as we left, there was no rain for while we were there and we enjoyed the rest of the day.



Thailand- Hat Yai

The first of our trips to Thailand was to Hat Yai. This was a two night trip, but the journey was very long. We left on Friday morning, at around 2am, just a few hours after finishing the Thursday evening class.

We reached the border at around 8am. There must have been around 250 people at the border, with lots of people going away for the bank holiday weekend. It took us around an hour to get through, and then we were on our way to Hat Yai. After arriving, we checked into the hotel and went straight out to eat. We spent the rest of the afternoon wandering around town and catching up on sleep.

In the evening, we were invited to Ba's house – one of masters students, studying at university in KL, who's family lived near(ish) to Hat Yai. After a 20 minute car journey, we arrived at her dads farm, and after being welcomed by her family, sat down for dinner. After this, I was shown their local mosque – although a small mosque, it was impressively modern.

We then headed for the seafront, with some of Ba's family, before heading back to the hotel.

After getting back to the hotel, myself, Li Zhou, Hannah and Callum decided to go out into Hat Yai, to visit the night market. This was the first time we had mango rice – sticky rice with coconut milk and freshly sliced mango. We must've had it at least four times in our two day trip.

The next day, after breakfast, we had a few hours to shop and relax before meeting up with everyone. At around 4pm, we met Master and made our way to a Chinese temple. The same day was Mrs Tans birthday, so after eating, we met in the hotel lobby to wish her a happy birthday and give her a birthday cake.

After this, we headed out to a local bar for some live music. Towards the end of the evening, I managed to miss a sitter of a shot in pool against Master and Lyonel, sinking the black and then the white, hence losing – although I didn't make the bet of becoming a Man U fan if I lost.

After lunch on Sunday, we headed back to KL. The journey after the border was really long, and the drivers must've been very tired. I thank Ms Cheang and Jacquie for driving – arriving back in KL at 4am on Monday, most of us could sleep, but they both had to go to work at 6am.

Thailand- Betong

The second of our trips to Thailand was to the border town of Betong. This was a one night trip, although the journey was still 5 hours or so. The border control was completely opposite to Hat Yai – it was very quiet; only around 20 people and it took us around 20 minutes to pass through. Upon arrival into Betong, we could tell that it wasn't a tourist town and very quiet. The recurring theme of our trips was that the hotel was amazing, and this was the case again here.

In the afternoon, we headed to see the communist camps. We walked through the 1km tunnel that they lived in. We learnt about how they lived by information on walls etc throughout and also that some had fled from Malaysia. We also saw their uniforms, weapons and learnt some of the history (no I don't remember much) of communism in Thailand. In the evening we ate nearby the camps, enjoying some seafood and chicken dishes. On the way back to the hotel, we stopped by a hot spring – well most of us did. Ms Cheang's car didn't stop, and because of the lack of phones/ walkie talkies, her car missed out. The spring was really nice, although at the start it did just seem as though I was getting 2nd degree burns, my feet were slightly cured from the months of hard work.



Evening class in PJ



Medals for Vision

East coast

On the last weekend of June, Master Tan decided to take us to the East coast of Malaysia. This time there would only be two cars going – Masters and Ms Cheang's. We also set off at a reasonable time of around 11 am on a Friday morning. We would be spending one night at Kenyir Lake and two at the Awana hotel a few hours further down the east coast.

We arrived at Kenyir Lake at around 5pm, and after some drinks, settled into our rooms – albeit for just one night. We then headed for the pool, before it got too dark. I later realised that the 'kids' waterslide had that name for a reason – after flying off it and almost breaking my leg – don't worry the water broke my fall, or would have done if it was more than a foot deep.. After this, we went to the hotel restaurant for a buffet dinner. After a few good hours of eating and chatting, we left the restaurant at around 11.

The next morning, after getting some photos of the scenery and some TKD, we headed for the Awana hotel, Kuala Terengganu. With Master Tan pointing out each mosque, which was around every 1km or so (us travelling through the Muslim states), the first stop along the way was a boat yard. Here, we saw the middle stages in the build of a 3 million ringitt (around £600,000) boat for the Malaysian government, which was 6 months into construction. It was handcrafted from scratch, using the highest quality of wood available, and would take their two-man team around 18 months to finish. It was amazing to see the craftsmanship that went into every square inch of it, and it was therefore not surprising to see the log of orders they had –from several people around the world.

At around 5pm, we arrived at the Awana hotel, quickly checked in and then headed straight out to eat. After returning, myself, my sister, Hannah and Luke decided to play some pool, giant chess outside and then wandered to the beach – which was quite spooky at night.

The next day, after breakfast, the four of us and Ms Cheang headed for the beach. We decided to go banana boating – the only problem being that we needed a fifth person – we tried to convince Ms Cheang and although she put the lifejacket on, she refused to go. Instead she would take pictures from the beach of what would unfold – it was hilarious!

After spending the whole afternoon on the beach, we then got ready and met Master to go out to eat. We met up with an TKD instructor in Kuala Terengganu – who then took us to the beach to see turtles. Each turtle was around 1 metre long – we saw them come onto the beach, lay their eggs (and bury them for protection) and then go back into the water – all of which would take around 2-3 hours. Night after night, they would patrol a few kilometres of shore and take the eggs to a sanctuary to hatch – otherwise people would poach the eggs – which were considered a delicacy. We also got the chance to release around 200 baby turtles into the sea. This was one of the highlights of my trip to Malaysia.

Singapore

Towards the end of June, I decided to go and see Singapore – my visa was running out and was told that it was very different to KL. I booked some tickets on Aeroline for me and my sister – who had come out for the last month of my trip to train. We left at 8am, and the trip would take five hours.

Even as the coach entered the city, you could see the difference from KL – a much cleaner city, not a single piece of litter on the streets. This is the

first instance of Singapore being a “fine” city – there is an on the spot fine for littering.

Our hotel was on Orchard Street, most famous for its numerous shopping complexes. The hotel was amazing, but having not got very much money to spend, Singapore’s designer shops weren’t exactly in budget. However, we did get to see some of the city. We travelled to the Islamic area, seeing numerous mosques – including the famous Sultan mosque. The places to eat were fairly similar to KL.

This was just an overnight trip and before we left, there was just enough time to buy some gifts for relatives back home.



Competition Time

On the 11th and 12th April, there was a competition at Brem Hall, Kepong. One clear difference from competitions in England was that in Malaysia, the competition was held in the middle of a shopping centre.

I was entered into both patterns and sparring, and both events as a 3-man team – with Li Zhou and Kuo Qiat. First up was individual pattern. Instead of the custom one v one, each person performed their pattern on their own in front of the panel of judges. After receiving a score out of 10, the medals were decided – unfortunately I did not get a medal in this event. In individual sparring, it was much the same story because I went out in the first round, but both events gave me experience of competitions abroad and also gave me an indication of what I had to work on for the rest of my training in Malaysia.

Towards the end of day 2 came the team events. First up team pattern. We performed Ge-Baek, and despite only 2 lessons practice, got the gold. In sparring, we were given a bye in the first round, but lost in the semi-finals, in the 2nd match of sudden death – still coming away with bronze, but disappointed that we didn’t get to the final. Having got these two medals in the team events, we got the overall trophy for the Open black belt male category.

Vision KL also came away with the overall trophy for the competition, winning 23 gold’s, after entering 26 competitors.

Thanks

I have a lot of people to thank for such an amazing trip, so here goes. I thank Mrs Tan for organising all the hotels for our numerous trips, and even the hotel when my sister and I were going to Singapore. I also thank “the driver”, Ms Cheang for the countless hours she spent driving us on the trips, and going out of her way to take us to and from training.

I also thank Lyonel Tan; who made time to help me with my patterns and sparring drills, while also coaching me at competitions – not forgetting picking my defence apart during the evening class – which did actually go a lot of the way to improve my sparring during my trip. I wish Lyonel and Michelle, having been selected to represent Malaysia, good luck in St. Petersburg.

I also thank Hannah and Callum, the experience wouldn’t have been the same without you. Hope you both have a great time at university.

And finally, I thank Vision Malaysia. From the first day I landed until the day I left, I felt like a member of the Vision family. From the training to the trips away, I have some great memories – my best wishes to you all.

Special Thanks

The person I am most grateful to is Master Tan. I have learnt so much from you during my trip. I thank you for the training, the opportunities to teach and the trips away. Your life is Taekwon-Do and from you I have learnt how much Taekwon-do can help you in life. I wish you, your family and your students every success. I enjoyed every moment of my time in Malaysia, best wishes,

Armaan





Never bet with Master Tan



Push ups for losing a bet?



Blue mats 1, Armaan 0