

Luke in Malaysia



“Come on Lukey, you’re too slow” was hollered across the hall just before the round finished. At the end of a 3 hour training session, after sparring two 3rd degrees at the same time and only using left leg downward kick I could no longer resist the urge to lie down on the floor and hope that a hole would open and take me away. What was I doing putting myself through this?

Well I’ll tell you. Ever since Mr Philip Lear returned from Malaysia in 1996 and took over the Crowborough TKD School I had heard the stories about

training in Malaysia under Master Tan Eng Kiat and had set my heart on doing the same. Then in 2007 I got the opportunity to go on a short, 2 week holiday there with other Vision TKD members. Sad that I had never realised my dream of training in Malaysia I snapped up the chance to go on holiday there and as you can see from the report last year, it was one hell of an experience. I instantly decided that I had to go back, on my own and only to train. So the time came when I had saved enough and had persuaded work to give me 2 months unpaid leave. It was now or never. It had to be done.

Training week in, week out has always been the best part of TKD for me. I’m not too motivated by competition or gradings, I just love the training. So I wanted to train for as long as I could and decided to coincide my trip with the 3rd ITF World Cup in Italy. This way, I could hopefully see what improvements I had made.

Arrival and 1st days training

The 13 hour flight seemed to go quickly and I felt so pleased when I walked through KL international airport as I saw some familiar sights from last year. Ms Cheang (5th degree and Master Tan’s most loyal student) picked me up from the airport and it was so good to see her again. She drove me to the house that I would be staying in, in Petaling Jaya, a satellite city of Kuala Lumpur (KL).



I met Charles, the landlord and settled into my home for the next 6 weeks. I couldn’t ask for a nicer landlord; Charles helped me with a new phone and also gave me a touch n’ go card for the train as well as giving me some free t-shirts and offering to drive me to the shops. Due to Charles’s work schedule and my training we didn’t see each other much but he was always available to help and a genuine, nice guy.

After a good nights sleep and steamboat for dinner the night before, Master Tan picked me up to go to go training. I was lucky that the first lesson was in an air conditioned gym, I was not so lucky in having to do more chin ups than I conceived I would or could ever do. Following what I thought was a killer session I had time for a quick rest before the main class in PJ.

I was wrong about the killer lesson earlier, that was nothing compared to what was about to begin. The stifling heat made it impossible to breathe at first but it was good not having to warm up and being able to go straight in to stretching.

We had arrived for class an hour early, just to make sure we got a lot of training in. This was to become a running theme; always arrive early and train yourself. I couldn't tell you what we did in the class as all I was focussed on was not passing out and not giving up. I thought I was fairly fit...I was dead wrong, in fact I felt almost dead full stop. I now had a vague idea of what I had to be able to do...and what I would be struggling with for 6 weeks. Yet the feeling was amazing.



After the class we all went for noodles and man did I eat a lot of noodles. As long as you are not watching your weight, there isn't much that could top Hokkien Mee and Cantonese fried noodles after 3 hours of hell.



Competition

On my first weekend I was entered into a GTF competition in Selangor. For some reason I didn't sleep the night before at all so spent the morning trying to sleep on the bags at the back of the hall. I wasn't too nervous about the competition as I had no expectations and the hall had air con. This changed pretty quickly. The air con failed at lunch and the hall became unbearable

(well at least to me). Then as I was warming up I saw Master Tan watching from the balcony...suddenly there was pressure. The patterns went well and I won gold, although after watching the video I was not pleased with my own performance. Then the sparring started and I could really feel the heat. In earlier rounds I had been told off for too much punching as the GTF seemed to only like punches when they were in a combination with kicks.

The final came and I was feeling really tired. I knew that the Master wanted me to kick more but things were getting tough and I felt like I had to resort to a bit of gold old European punching tactics. I had my opponent on the edge of the ring and Mr Lear's reverse punching drills came to mind. I had decided that as soon as the other guy's foot twitched he would be getting a very solid punch to the solar plexus. It went better than expected, he moved and I punched but as he twitched he dropped his body a bit lower and got my fist in his face, instantly dropping him to the floor. It was greeted with lots of boo's, ahhhh's and some cheers (from the Vision students). The ref gave me a bit of a telling off and a minus point but it was worth it. I apologised to my opponent but must admit a sense of pride as well. In the end I won the final and so came away with two gold's – more than I expected.

The competition also had an exhibition match with Lyonel Tan (Master Tan's son) and a GTF competitor who challenged Lyonel. It was great to watch Lyonel in patterns and sparring and made me realise some things that I needed to learn to do. The Vision team came away with a great many medals and had good day out.



Food!

I had realised it on my previous trip to Malaysia but I was rapidly reminded how important food is to Malaysian's. Within my first week I had eaten steamboat, roti canio, kaya toast, black noodles, Chinese pasta noodle soup, braised duck, various curry dishes, rice porridge, some crazy coconut milk-ice shaving desert thing, nasai lemak, Thai curry, chicken rice, fish head and the dreaded Durian...it was amazing (well, apart from the Durian). The food is always so fresh, especially the seafood, which I wouldn't normally eat that much of back home but in Malaysia you would be mad not to. All this is in the first week...5 more weeks and a LOT more food to come. I had to think about which weight category I would be competing in because there was no way that I was missing out on this food!!!

Hardcore training

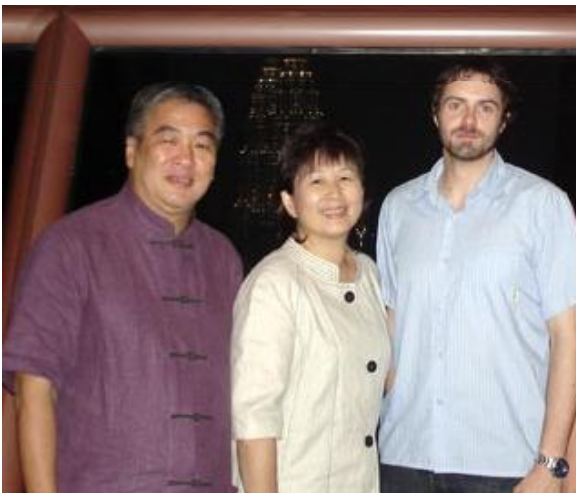
The 2nd week was when the serious training began as the competition was out of the way and the schools had started back after Monday, which was a national holiday so we had a picnic in the rainforest (you don't get to do that everyday!).



After lunch (remember, food first!) I went to an International School (ISKL) and helped Lyonel teach the kids. It was quite a strange experience as back home I tend to only teach adults so teaching kids who have never done any TKD before was definitely a challenge. After the class we went to a different campus and whilst Master Tan taught a class Lyonel and I began our chin up session. Because it was Ramadan the traffic would be really bad when we were due to leave so we stayed and trained to avoid it. 4 hours of TKD with Master Tan was really tough. I did even more chin ups and sit ups than last week and spent ages practising movements from Juche (you

know the ones) and the 3rd degree patterns. The only thing keeping me going was knowing that there wasn't a class later and that we would be going for duck afterwards (Mr Dunn's favourite!!!) ;-)

The following day involved a private class with Master Tan in a hall where apparently Oxygen is banned. As my legs were struggling from fatigue any kicks were difficult and it got worse, after the session I was given a 30 minute rest before going running at Taman Aman park (which I got lost trying to find but the less said about that the better). I did 5 laps and was told that each week I would increase by 1 so that I would complete 10 laps before leaving. At this stage 10 seems impossible as 5 was the furthest that I had ever run. After running we went through a few patterns until Master Tan told me to sit down (I think he noticed that my legs didn't work anymore). The pain wasn't over though; we went for Durian in the evening. I don't mind a bit of Durian but it seems that I don't get away with having just a bit; I have to eat a lot. As it turned out this was my only Durian experience as the argument that I was never going to lose weight eating it was valid. I should mention here that Master Tan said I needed to lose 5kg before I leave...uh oh, better cut back on the noodles...and curry...and kaya...oh dear...



Master's birthday

On Friday's I would usually have a day off from training and only teach one private student, Ariq. This Friday was special though, as we were going out to dinner for Master Tan's birthday. After teaching Ariq we were kindly invited to have showers and get changed at his parent's apartment. These people had never met me before so it was a very kind and friendly gesture. From there we rushed to down town KL to arrive at the KL Tower. We had two big tables booked at the revolving restaurant as so many of the Master's current and old students wanted to attend. The views were spectacular as we could see all over KL and it looks pretty amazing all lit up at night – especially the Petronas Towers. After a great all-you-can-eat buffet and some very amusing song requests (thanks everyone!) the waiters brought out a special cake for the event; it was a giant Vision badge cake and it looked and tasted great! I think that Master Tan really enjoyed the evening as he had so many friends and students with him enjoying the party. It was an honour for me to be invited and even more so to be seated on Master Tan's table. It was great to see how much a family Vision really is in Malaysia and I was really made to feel part of it.



Eventually we left the restaurant and had to get some sleep as we had another early start the next day.

Despite being in a rush to leave on time we had to leave time for food so we could all meet for dim sum in the morning. After some great food (again) we left on our road trip across Malaysia to the east coast. Before arriving at the Awana resort we stopped off at Hai Ping for some food (you can see a pattern emerging I'm sure). Once we all checked into the lovely hotel we all did our own thing. Many people caught up on some sleep but I went down to the pool to swim and generally muck about with Lyonel and Annebel for a few hours. Eventually the rest joined us and the water sports games began. For dinner we went to the best stuffed crabs in Malaysia – for those of you who came on the trip last year, you know how good it was. For everyone else, you haven't lived! After eating we went to a local

TKD school run by Mr Wei, a friend of Master Tan's. We watched the training session and then went for coffee.

The next day we had a mammoth game of beach football, which was great fun and was then followed by some rather unfair penalty shoot outs. I was unaware that I was against a former semi-pro goalkeeper! Needless to say I had a lot of exercises to do for losing. To make things better I went in the sea and in the Jacuzzi – it's a hard life I know. Unfortunately this was only a short break and we had to return back to KL.

Haircut and more food

Having been in Malaysia for over 2 weeks I was still struggling to get use to training in the heat so it was time for a trip to the Indian barbers. It has been a long time coming so I was quite nervous about having all my hair shaved off but it was definitely the right move. And I think it got Master Tan off my back a little as well.

After training we went for noodles and I resisted eating a lot, only having one pau but my efforts were going to be futile. I thought that the focus on food would lessen the longer that I was in Malaysia but it didn't. The next day we went out for Lyonel's birthday and had curry for lunch, Fatty Crabs for dinner (Skinner, it was excellent!) and then cake. In the same week I also had pork noodles, fish head, fish noodle soup, Vietnamese noodles and several curries. I daren't weigh myself at this point.

Teaching

As I have mentioned teaching kids is not something that I do a lot of back in the UK but it was becoming a big part of my time in Malaysia. I taught I two different international schools (ISKL on Tuesday's, Thursday's and Friday's and Mont' Kiara on Monday's and Wednesday's), two Chinese schools on Saturdays and one private student on Friday's.



At first I found it very difficult teaching kids as young as 6, especially if it was their first lesson. However, overtime it got easier and it was good to see how Lyonel and Leona (Master Tan's daughter) taught.



The Chinese schools presented different problems as many of the students didn't speak much English and I don't speak any Chinese. When it was nearing the time for me to leave I could see progress in the students that I had taught and that gave me a sense of satisfaction that I hadn't really got from teaching before.

Another great thing about Malaysia is the amount of English football that it shows. There are way more premiership games on TV and Master Tan and I would often go to Kayu (coffee shop) to watch the games until the early hours of the morning. One time stands out in particular when Master Tan's team played my team so we both went wearing out football shirts.

Master made sure that I got some boos and insults directed towards me as we entered the place. It was a great atmosphere and I think that Master Tan enjoyed watching me jump up and down more than watching the game (I tend to get a bit animated when watching football). When my team won I was trying so hard to contain myself, I was desperately trying not to show how happy I was as I knew that I would suffer in training later in the week.

As it turned out I went to Lyonel's University class on Sunday so was safe...or so I thought. After the warm up Master Tan turned up unexpectedly and I was put through hell. We were doing drills on the kick shield and the two younger 3rd degrees that held the shield for me couldn't really hold it with enough resistance. Master Tan showed them how to hold it and asked me to kick it, I couldn't believe that he didn't move an inch, instead it was me that went backwards. After this came probably the most significant moment of my training in Malaysia, Master Tan held the target for me for several drills. Afterwards Lyonel said to me that it was a great honour for me because sir almost never holds the pads for students. It was such a good feeling, well it was afterwards, at the time I felt like dying, he was working me so hard!

Then I had to spar all the black belts, each one got a rest apart from me, who had to go continuously. I was only allowed to use my left leg downward kick, which as you can guess is not my favourite technique or leg. The last round was to spar the two 3rd degrees at the

same time, this time I could use downward kick and punch...there were a lot more punches than downward kicks!!! They could use anything. After being heckled for three hours about being too slow the round ended and I hugged the floor for a few minutes. That session was torture but totally worth Liverpool beating MU 2-1!



Halfway

Later that week I realised that I had been in Malaysia 3 weeks, which meant I had 3 weeks left...I was halfway. I felt quite sad once I had thought about it as I felt like there was still so much improving to do and so little time. After going to a café to use their internet service to update the Vision website (I needed a faster internet connection for uploading lots of photos) I went and practised my patterns on my own in the garden. Realising that there was hardly any time left and it was going so quickly I had to double my efforts to get the improvements that I needed.

It was a strange week as I had bad times (realising it was 3 weeks, not being able to walk after running, dealing with the most difficult student in the world and being told that I am too slow and look tired, again) and good times (a trip to TG Sepat for seafood, football result, A&W'ss root beer floats, catching up with friends back home on Facebook and doing more chin ups than is surely good for you).

Genting and 9 laps

One Saturday Master Tan took me on a trip to Genting Highlands. It was a long trip and the highlands were, well, very high. It was the first time that I felt cold air since being in Malaysia and it was very refreshing. We ate dinner in the VIP area of the casino and watched Liverpool win on TV. Then we hit the tables, I quickly lost all my money...oh well, it's still cheaper than playing back home. Then we wandered around the rest of the casino, it was not for me, back to the VIP please! I was slightly worried when security wouldn't let me back in but it was quickly resolved. Then I watched two more premiership games before we left at 4am.

Later that week we met Jaquie Lian who had just returned from Uzbekistan, where she had been representing Malaysia at the Veteran World Championships. Jaquie got a silver in 1st degree patterns and bronze in sparring. It was great to see another Veteran medal for Master Tan's students.

In the evening I went to the park, 9 laps!!! It was a killer but I felt so good afterwards. Not being able to walk for a few hours after was a small price to pay as I knew that I was going to achieve the 10 laps before I left.

Abdur Rahman and 10 laps

There is one student that Master Tan teaches that I will remember for a long time to come.



Abdur Rahman trains at the Mont Kiara School and also has a private class with Master Tan on Wednesday's after the main lesson. It would be during this time that I would also be training and this was most definitely not my favourite session. I would arrange the blue crash mats into a sort of sparring ring sized area and then start an hour of pain. I would practise every jumping technique from the patterns then followed by several jump back kick drills. After about 5 minutes the mats had sapped all strength but I had to keep going. What made matters worse was that Rahman would look totally fresh and eager to get on with his training. When we were given a water break Rahman would take a quick sip and run back, standing with his arms behind his back, claiming "I'm ready to go sir". I think Master Tan found it highly

amusing that a 3rd degree black belt was dying on his feet while a green belt child was ready to rock and roll. This kid was making me look bad! On a separate session we had to race to the end of the hall and back doing downward kicks, I couldn't believe it when he kept up with me...and didn't look like he had broken a sweat. Master Tan wouldn't let me forget and made sure that everyone else knew at dinner time.

There was a national holiday coming up, Hari Raya, which meant we were all going on a trip to Thailand. Because of this my running day had to change...time for the big 10. It was tough but I managed it and even got in a couple of sidekicks and some chin ups along the way. I can tell that it took all my energy because the notes in my diary simply read "ran 10 laps..." in the most awful handwriting that slid off the page as I fell asleep writing it.

Thailand

It was Hari Raya so time to go to Thailand. It was a 6 hour car journey to Hat Yai so we left at 1am. After a lot of snoozing in the car we arrived in Thailand and crossed the border without hassle. We checked into the hotel and then people did their own thing. I wandered around the shops with Ms Cheang and Tiff and they persuaded me to try a desert – made from birds saliva (I know what you're thinking but really, it was good). Then we all went for dinner at a great seafood restaurant. Later on Master Tan, Lyonel and I wandered the streets of Hat Yai, had some reflexology and then drank coffee at a stall. I had the biggest prawn that I have ever seen; it was bigger than most lobsters!



The next day we left early for Krabi. On the way we stopped at a brilliant restaurant (what else?!) and had some great Thai food. Several hours later we arrived in Krabi and checked into a luxury hotel.

Krabi was amazing, especially the beach. We went swimming in the sea (only found out about the hundreds of jellyfish afterwards – thanks Lyonel) had a Thai massage, ate fruit and just generally sat around by the beach. It was glorious and very relaxing. Then we took the obligatory TKD photos and there were some interesting ideas.

The next day I went for a 4km run on the beach, which was far better than the alternative that Master was pushing for! Then

after the hotel breakfast I spent the whole day throwing up.

We stopped at a couple of amazing hotels (seriously, they were unbelievable) and then continued the drive back to Hat Yai. The road trip was unpleasant as we had to keep stopping to let me jump out and be sick. Once we had checked in the others all went out for dinner and I just sat in bed (although I did manage to call room service and get some ice cream). No idea what was wrong as I had the same food as everyone else but I was feeling much better the next day.



Leaving

Over the next couple of days I went to the usual classes and had photos taken with the students because it was the last time that I would teach them. It was really good to see on my last class all the kids finally get the hang of the things that I had been teaching them and very heart warming when some of them said that they didn't want me to go. I didn't want to go either! Then I had my last lesson in PJ. It was really great to go out for dinner afterwards where a lot of the students came to say good bye to me.

On the last evening Michelle and CK took us all out to dinner in their home town, Klang. It was great to finally eat one of Mr Lear's favourite dishes bah-ku-te. Sir, you would have

loved it! Then we I went round Master Tan's house and we just talked and looked at loads of photos. It was a real honour.

After 1 hours sleep I left for the airport with Master Tan, Ms Cheang and Leona. I was so glad that they came to see me off but I was so sad that I didn't have much to say. I had loved every minute of my trip (well apart from the vomiting) and had been made to feel very much a part of the family and now I was leaving it all behind. I sat on the plane next to an English couple and when they started complaining about their holiday I just went and sat somewhere else as I couldn't identify with anything negative they said. I simply can't understand how anyone could not have had a good time in Malaysia and urge anyone to go right now, for as long as possible. I will definitely be going back someday!



Thoughts after Italy

The competition didn't go as well as I had hoped, in fact it went so badly that I'm not going to discuss it. However, it showed me that what I had thought was 6 weeks of training followed by a competition was in fact just the start of my new dedication to training. Not only am I changing the way that I train at the gym but how often, how much I run and getting to class early every session. It's

about putting everything into every action, about every move in patterns being special, about never giving up and about getting on with it now because one day I'll be too old.

Favourite Quotes from Master Tan

Luke, you're lousy, not that lousy but still lousy.

Lukey, you're just above average for a 3rd degree, you're ok.

Death before dishonour.

Too slow Lukey!

Such a Hollyday ;-)

