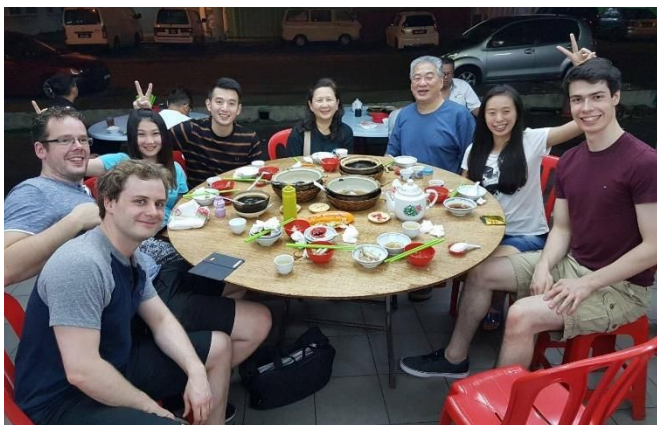
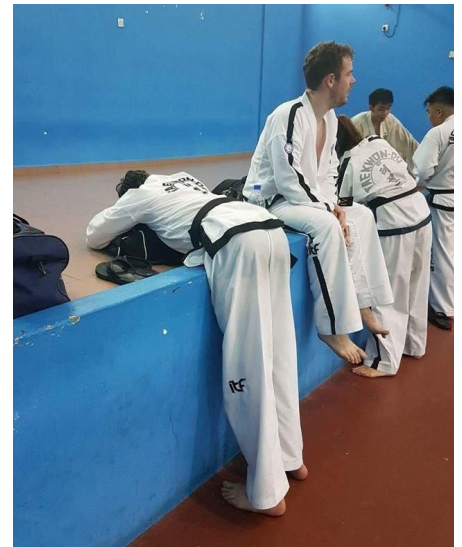


## Malaysia Trip Account 2017

It is said that all good things must come to an end, and this trip was no exception. I had first heard of Master Tan through a couple of seniors at my Taekwon-Do school who had been some years ago and so heading to Malaysia to train under him was something that I'd wanted to do for a long time. It was only now that I had the opportunity for 5 weeks, forming the beginning of a gap year between sixth form and university.

I arrived at the airport after an uncomfortable flight sandwiched between Mr Richard Sperrin and Mr Andrew Fox, both fourth Dans who had made the trip before, and we took a taxi to our hotel. It must be mentioned at this stage that we did in fact stay at a rather good hotel instead of the usual accommodation with Charles or in similarly un-air-conditioned lodgings. Having both already experienced the hardships that come with trying to sleep in the punishing heat, humidity and mosquito swarms, they were determined to find somewhere cooler and less cockroachy. I can't say that I put up too much of a fight...



We went out that evening to meet the Tan family over dinner and although I admit to being a little intimidated and unsure of what to expect, it was immediately evident that they are some of the most lovely people that you are ever likely to meet. Being the most junior at the table, I was quickly taught proper tea-pouring and table-laying etiquette, things that I would put to good use over the following weeks. This was also my first experience of proper Malay food; a type of cuisine that, although simple, is incredibly delicious. For someone who is a huge fan of the simple

pleasures, I enjoyed mealtimes immensely during the trip and would always look forward to lunch and dinner with Master either at rustic sheltered cafés or local restaurants. Although it's hard to pick a favourite, I most enjoyed nyonya food which is a mix between Malaysian and Chinese and is time consuming to produce. On the same level for me was also the Japanese food which we went out for towards the end of the trip after Richard having lost a bet.

After we had finished, we were invited back to the Tans' place for Chinese tea where we met their family of friendly Pit Bulls. Friendly that is if you're there as a guest, in which case they just try to lick you to death. An entirely different story I imagine if you were a stranger breaking in at night! I was lucky enough to be shown around by Master Tan who humbly boasts the most impressive private collection of oriental antiques I have ever seen in my life. Somehow the beautiful ancient doors, woodwork, statues and figurines only enhanced the welcoming and homely atmosphere.





breath-taking views of the capital at sunset and where, I am told, that most of the photos for postcards are taken. Also a high point was going out for crab with Andrew, Master and Mrs Tan, where we learnt to get at all of the edible parts possible using just a spoon swung at speed and our teeth to make short work of the shell!

Then, on Monday, the training began in earnest. The afternoon started with teaching at the local international school in Melawati where all three of us had just a couple of kids each because it was such a small class that day. What was a rather chilled afternoon turned into one of the most tiring days that I had had in a very long time. Other than a few fans on the walls, the training arena wasn't air conditioned and even at 9pm, the Malaysian heat seemed no less intense.

A warm up that would have left me doubled over in England had my lungs burning and I was humbled by barely completing two sets of 30 knuckle press-ups while all the other colour belts and black belts looked on having finished long ago, cheering me after the last push. This first session was mainly dedicated to patterns, where all the hardest parts of



Juche (the third 2<sup>nd</sup> Dan pattern) were performed over and over again without hiatus. The most challenging part for me was trying to hold the jumping reverse turning kicks, which I had never really done before, and so after every landing the outstretched leg religiously followed the pattern of collapsing down with the momentum and being pulled back up to the finishing position.



The Monday and Thursday evenings at the arena were definitely some of the toughest training sessions that I have ever had. One week in we had sparring for the first time, drills making up the first two thirds of the session. Even though my opponent was considerably smaller than me, he moved well and his gloves found my face many more times than I would have liked. On the car

journey back I felt physically and emotionally shattered and although it felt bad at the time, it was definitely a push that I needed to try and improve my footwork and kicks considerably to beyond a level that I felt wasn't embarrassing.

To supplement the sessions at the arena, during the Monday and Wednesday afternoon classes at the Melawati School, Master Tan was often free enough to give us some private tuition. The patterns parts were particularly dedicated to the harder movements in the black belt patterns, with Juche taking a central role. The pattern was meticulously picked apart technique by technique and in the first half hour, all that I had done was the slow side kick to reverse turning kick at the beginning on alternating sides. Richard and Andrew, being 4<sup>th</sup> degrees, just did the slow and fast side kick in Moon-Moo. This was an entirely new approach for me, just focusing on one single movement and trying to perfect it before moving on the next and I found that it was infinitely better than what I had been doing before. At home, I would just go through each pattern a couple of times in a training session and, if I was particularly having trouble with a single movement, perhaps I would do it 3 or 4 times. This was not so here in Malaysia.

The sparring side of things was similar. Master Tan had me moving round, working on my footwork with basic drills and focusing on a small handful of kicks which he judged to be most useful for me considering my height and reach. Also covered with quite some emphasis was what to do when someone ends up punching you in the face, a scenario that seemed to happen quite a lot in the arena but also one that I was far from comfortable with. Suffice to say, at the end of each afternoon in the gym I felt like I had just come out of a swimming pool with the amount of sweat that I had lost! Most of the time although it was very tough, I found the sessions with Master Tan in the training room very enjoyable and I could feel myself slowly improving each week.



It was not all work however! One time on the way to Melawati, we stopped off at one of the most iconic tourist destinations in Kuala Lumpur – the Batu Caves. This comprised of a huge golden Buddhist statue, behind which were an awful lot of stairs leading up to the cave parts. At the bottom was a pile of sand with a sign asking visitors to take a bucket of it up with them to the top to aid in building work. Naturally we took two each, dodging the monkeys and slower tourists as we went! Another notable day out was going to a temple outside of the city. This was most beautiful and I enjoyed the trip very much, even if Master Tan did suggest that I run up the hill to the Monkey God statue! Saturday and Sunday were typically our days off and we made the most of that time on visits to other more local temples and markets.

I also got the opportunity to try some local fruit such as rambutan and jackfruit, both highly delicious with excellent flavour. Speaking of local fruit, something that Master Tan and my two companions were particularly partial to was durian, or 'stinkfruit'. It's a rather large and very spiky fruit with a hard outer shell and once cracked open, has

several sections of really soft, yellow, slug-looking flesh that tastes akin to a mix of banana, onion and mango. It also smells very strong, hence the nickname, and I was amused to find that not only was it banned on public transport, you could also taste it on your breath for hours afterwards. The first time I tried it, I wasn't sure I liked the taste but each time that we went out for it, the more that I found myself enjoying the unique taste, texture and aroma. It's a shame that it was so expensive!

Towards the end of the 5 weeks, Master Tan had been invited to give a seminar in Penang and so Richard and I went along with him and some of his students. On the way, we stopped off a few times such as at a beautiful fishing village and had some amazing seafood. It was lovely to see some of the rest of the country as well, rather than staying in and around Kuala Lumpur the whole time. It was a fantastic event and it was good to be able to practise my sparring against some different



people around my own weight. I did several bouts in a row, either full on sparring or moving and dodging a smaller person's attacks. I felt much happier sparring than I did a few weeks ago that first time in the arena and I can only thank Master Tan's unforgiving training. I also have him to thank for helping me to more than quadruple my push-up capabilities over the short time that I was with him. I can't imagine how much I would have improved had I stayed for a few more months!

It was a unique experience that I would recommend to anybody who wants to improve their Taekwon-Do and if possible to go for at least a few months to get the most out of it. The time flew by and I met some incredible people who I hope that I will stay in touch with!

By Chris Geddie, 3<sup>rd</sup> Dan