

Welcome to Kaifukan Dojo
Iaido Class
Kailua Recreation Center



Introduction

Kaifukan Dojo was established in April 2001 by 7th-dan Kunio Maeda Sensei, who moved to Hawaii from Japan in the summer of 1999, and is a member dojo of the Hawaii Kendo Federation. Kaifukan started off only as a kendo dojo, but upon requests from many students, Maeda Sensei, who has practiced iaido for 35 years and holds a 4th dan in iaido, started iaido class in Oct. 2003.

What is iaido?

Iaido (ee-eye'-doh) is a martial art that teaches certain aspects of Japanese swordsmanship. Iaido emphasizes drawing a *katana* (the Japanese long sword), making a series of attacks or cuts intended to kill one or more enemies, and then returning the katana to its *saya* (scabbard).

Philosophy

Iaido is an art, or perhaps training method, using a real (or almost real) sword in solo practice. *Katas* (practice exercises) start and end with sheathed sword, and hence involve the drawing and sheathing of the sword. Iaido is most often translated as the way of harmonious living, the art of adapting to circumstance, or the way of being here and now. The name consists of *iru* (being), *ai* (harmony), and *do* (path or way).

In iaido, the practitioner battles non-material opponents with techniques that today are completely obsolete and devoid of practical application, and do not even offer the satisfaction of affirming superiority over other practitioners through competition. As a true *Budo* (martial way), iaido is a battle with the self, a cutting away of all redundancies. Through precise movements of kata, the practitioner seeks to mobilize his or her entire being, to unite the intention, action, and sword, every detail being a matter of life and death. Through this unification of sense, will, and action, the sword becomes a tool for spiritual and personal development.

What equipment will I need?

The uniform top is called a *gi*. It is a heavy, quilted-cotton shirt with three-quarter-length sleeves. Although many kendoists use their heavy, quilted-cotton gi, ordinary iaido gi is a much lighter and thinner cotton shirt. The bottom is called a *hakama*. It is a pleated, divided skirt (somewhat similar to modern culottes) generally made of cotton or cotton-polyester blend. The gi and hakama may be blue or white.

The hakama and gi are robust versions of the formal samurai clothing of the 18th and 19th centuries.

They are worn during sword practice to emphasize the formality of training. Iaido training is meant to be more than just physical practice, and the choice of clothes emphasizes this. Additionally, the clothes add grace and dignity to an already graceful and dignified art. From a practical standpoint, the hakama is cool and comfortable, allows easy movement, and disguises the feet from the opponent.



The primary weapon used in iaido is the *iaito*. Beginners should consult with Maeda-Sensei before purchasing equipment. Iaido is not very well known, and there are martial arts stores selling totally unsuitable equipment to uninformed beginners. Most replica swords sold in martial arts stores are fine to hang on the wall as something that vaguely resembles a Japanese sword from a few feet away. It will fall apart within six months when used for training (besides being heavy, unsafe, poorly balanced, and not being available in different lengths). A *shinken* (sharp Japanese sword) is generally not recommended for beginners.

Iaito are made from a zinc-aluminum alloy. This alloy is selected because of its durability. It is flexible, yet rigid enough to duplicate the handling characteristics of a *shinken* quite closely; even the weight and balance are nearly the same as those of a *shinken*. The well-made iaito is designed to perform years of service. Less expensive iaito are priced in the \$180-\$300 range, and are perfectly acceptable for use, especially by iaido beginners. A more expensive iaito allows you to customize many of the basic components of the iaito, including *tsuba* (guard), *tsuka* (handle) length and wrapping style, and *menuki* (ornaments), as well as *saya* (scabbard), *sageo* (sword cord), *nakago* (grip length), *habaki* (anchors *tsuka* to *tsuba*), and even the *hamon* (temper line) appearance. However, none of these custom modifications change the basic way that the iaito is used by the iaido practitioner.



The *obi* (belt) is a four-inch-wide, 13-foot-long fabric belt worn over the *gi* and under the *hakama*. The *obi* is used to hold the *saya* and *iaito* securely on your left hip. The iaido *obi* is different than the *obi* used in judo or karate. As many iaido *katas* are performed from a kneeling position, kneepads are strongly recommended. No outward sign of rank is worn. Training is normally done barefoot.

Iaido Etiquette

All martial arts have rules of etiquette to some degree or other, but none more so than iaido. This is because, in addition to traditions that would apply to judo or karate, for example, one must also consider the near-sacred status accorded the sword, as well as practical safety concerns in dealing with such a weapon. So in the iaido *dojo* (practice room), it may at first seem that there is a bewildering array of rules – how to hand a sword to another; how to receive a sword; how to place a sword by the wall when not training; that one must never step over another's sword; as well as the method of bowing to the sword before and after practice. Added to these is proper cleaning of the sword, as well as inspection to ensure the sword is safe for training. These are but a few. The list may seem daunting, but after a short period of training, it does make sense, and becomes an integral part of practice.

Training

A typical training session in Kaifukan Dojo is an hour in duration. After formally bowing to *shinza* (the high place), to Sensei, and the sword, a brief warm-up takes place. This is followed by practice of the basic elements of iaido – *nukitsuke* (the draw), *kiritsuke* (the strike), *chiburi* (removing blood), and *noto* (resheathing), and then training in the various *kata* is carried out. These are normally the Zen Nihon Kendo Renmei (ZKNR) Seitei Gata – the standard set used for initial training and gradings. More advanced students may practise *koryu* (traditional forms). Frequently, a lesson may focus on a single *kata*, or a particular technical point, or etiquette. Kaifukan Dojo practices the Muso Jikiden Eishin Ryu (MJER) school of iaido.

Okay, how much will all this cost me?

As with most sporting equipment, for iaido equipment you will generally get what you pay for. Here is a list of iaido equipment that you will need to own, with costs shown based on August 2004 price lists:

Gi	\$50 - \$90
Hakama	\$45 - \$210
Set of gi & hakama	\$140 - \$240
iaido obi	\$30-\$75
Kneepads	\$10
iaito	\$180-\$500 or more
Carrying bag	\$20 - \$50

Other costs include: **TUITION:** \$10/month or less. **KAIFUKAN Registration Fee:** \$30 for lifetime membership as long as student status is maintained. **HAWAII KENDO FEDERATION Registration Fee:** \$5/year.

For more details, please refer to the application form.

Kaifukan Dojo iaido practice sessions are held on Saturdays from 1:00 - 2:00 PM at the Kailua Rec Center.

Is iaido dangerous?

iaido has a lower rate of injury than other martial arts. Iaidoka rarely incur injuries worse than a bruise, although there are exceptions, of course.

The common injuries in iaido are associated with the feet and ankles. It is possible to hurt the Achilles tendon and the plantar fascia muscle (the tensioning muscle on the bottom of the foot). Both injuries can be prevented with a proper stretching program.

Iaidoka can trip over the hakama, which can cause the usual variety of injuries from falling on a hard surface. Some Iaidoka can incur chronic wrist injuries, such as carpal-tunnel syndrome, from overuse. These can be further aggravated if the student also does some other wrist-aggravating activity, such as heavy typing or playing the piano.

The following safety statistics are provided as general information: 99% of Iaidoka report sore knees at some point or other; 95% have hit themselves in the back of the head with their tsuba; 85% have stubbed a toe on the way from the change room to the dojo; 63.7% have hooked their big toe in the hem of their hakama and taken a great cartwheeling fall; 9% of those have done this during *shinsa* (promotion exam).

Does an iaito blow hurt?

As there is absolutely no contact in iaido, there is also zero pain from iaito blows!

How does the ranking work in iaido?

As with other martial arts, iaido rankings exist, although progress through the ranks is slower than in some other martial arts. There is no distinction made between men and women testing for rank, which currently takes place only in Japan. As women did not study iaido in significant numbers until the 1970's, most of the senior teachers are men. However, women are becoming increasingly visible as students and teachers.

How do I get started??

Maeda-Sensei will not accept anyone who wants to try out iaido without having any idea about it and/or what he or she is going to be involved in. He requires all potential students to sit through and watch a complete iaido practice session before applying to become a Kaifukan student. The minimum age for an iaido student is arbitrary, and the decision is at the sole discretion of Maeda-Sensei.

Iaido is a lot of fun, but it is very strenuous both physically and spiritually and, therefore, children need constant moral support from their parents. For this reason, Maeda-Sensei strongly recommends that children under 14 should join with their parent/guardian. There is no maximum age, but practitioners should be in reasonably good health with no mobility problems. If there are any health questions, please consult with your family doctor before applying.

Kaifukan students are expected to attend all practice sessions, and to notify Maeda-Sensei via phone or e-mail before a session if it must be missed. Students who are not serious about iaido study and practice may be placed on probation, or asked to leave.

Contact Information:

Please contact Maeda-Sensei at [**kaifukan@hawaii.rr.com**](mailto:kaifukan@hawaii.rr.com) with any specific questions.

