

History of Karate

Karate is a fighting system which uses the hands and feet to deliver blows, kicks and strikes with great power.

The art of Shotokan has been practised for many years. The name Karate means empty hand, a phrase which tries to express the idea that karate needs neither external weapons nor thoughts of violence. The name Karate-Do means the way of Karate and is a method of teaching which develops the mind as well as the body.

Modern Karate has its origins in Okinawa, an island in the East China Sea 500 miles south of Japan. In 1477, following a period of political turbulence, the king of Okinawa, Sho Shin, banned the carrying of weapons by anyone on the island. As a result of this ban the islanders developed a secret system of unarmed combat known as Okinawan-Te, the word Te meaning hands.

Over the following years, Okinawan-Te developed into three distinct styles around the three main towns of Shuri, Naha and Tomari. Although they are quite close together, the karate styles they produced were quite different. All modern karate styles have as their origins, one or a combination of these three styles.

Although the practice of Karate was at first forbidden, it was later taught openly and was even introduced into schools. Okinawa's Japanese overlords were impressed by Karate and asked the Okinawans to arrange a number of demonstrations. They did this using a school teacher named Gichin Funakoshi.

Master Funakoshi had studied under two different Karate Instructors (Master Azato and Master Itosu) and was a dedicated and talented Karateka. Gichin Funakoshi successfully promoted karate on the Japanese mainland and eventually established a permanent training centre he named The Shotokan from which Shotokan Karate derives its name.



The Original Shotokan Dojo

During the years following Master Funakoshi's demonstration in 1915, other Okinawan Masters travelled to Japan and in doing so, introduced to the world an effective system of unarmed hand to hand combat.

Although karate, like many other things has had to change over the years, its fundamental principles have stood the test of time. Today, students of the art will practice many of the techniques that would have been taught many years ago.