



### **Andreas Almquist**

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Nationality: Swedish

Dojo: Iyasaka Aikidoklubb

Mr. Almquist stayed in Tokorozawa dojo as an uchideshi for two months. Starting with 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary events, his uchideshi experience seemed to give him a lot of opportunity to learn about many things, including his own self. From September to November; he stayed in Japan at the best time of a year: the autumn.

## Meeting Japan with No Expectations Andreas Almquist

I'm writing this sitting on the beach on Koh Lanta island, Thailand a couple of days after leaving Japan and my uchideshi period. I am still trying to figure out what really happened during my time as uchideshi. Trying to get an overview; I have to admit it is quite difficult. So many things happened, so it is kind of difficult to sort in all the impressions.

I went to Japan with no expectations. Or more correct, just one – the expectation that it would be different and that I would not have a clue on what it would be like, so I should have no expectations. I set out my mind to just go there, live in the moment and just see what happens. And I can tell you that being an uchideshi has been an experience for life. I have had a lot of fun, seen fantastic places, met many new friends and of course, trained a lot of Aikido. Because that is what you will do as uchideshi, practice, practice and practice until your body is aching everywhere and then you practice some more. You will be really tired.

For me, in addition to all the excellent Aikido training, the uchideshi experience gave me chance to learn more about myself and other people. Of course you train a lot and practice techniques, refine them and learn some new. And the quantity training that you get here really improves your Aikido, no discussion about that. But, at least I think, the real deal is to master your own mind when you are really tired and have to share quite little space and no privacy with several other persons, people that you have never met before, which are from other countries and cultures than yourself and that see things differently than you do. When you are really tired and have had little sleep than this becomes your real challenge.

During my stay we there were many uchideshis from staying in the dojo. Due to Kobayashi Dojo 40th anniversary many people had come to participate in the celebrations and choosed to stay a couple of weeks after the event. The good part by being many is that all cleaning and other uchideshi duties goes fast and the life becomes easier for everyone. If everyone helps out and takes care of the rest of the group the best situation. If someone doesn't, it will leads to irritation and bad atmosphere. Trust me, I know.





Personally I found the uchideshi life quite relaxing actually. There is a lot of hard work with all early mornings, cleaning and training that makes your body ache everywhere. But the life is very predictable. You know your schedule and what needs to be done. Every day is almost the same. The only thing you have to keep track of is when you have to get up in the morning. At 4:50am to go to Kodaira dojo and clean or if you

can sleep until 7:30. And your biggest decision that day might be if you should stay in the dojo and sleep or if you should go to the Onsen for a wonderful bath and massage. You will need both so some day you have to skip sleeping. For me, the uchideshi time has been for my soul the same thing as Onsen is for your body. Very relaxing and not at all boring as it might sound. Trust me on that to.

During my time in Japan I have meet the most wonderful people and many new friends for life. First of all Kobayashi Sensei who always has a big smile and close to laughter. He really can enlighten your day by just be present. And then Hiroaki Sensei, his lovely wife Miyoko-san and daughter Kaho-cyan. Hiroaki has, like his father, close to laughter and has really impressive Aikido. I have learned a lot from him. Miyoko-san makes the most wonderful breakfasts. Without her the uchideshi life should not have been so great as it has been. Kaho-cyan always have a big smile and can enlighten ones mood when she peeps in to the dojo to say Ohayogozaimasu (good morning) before going to school. Then all the other instructors at Kobayashi dojo, Kasahara sensei, Koyanage sensei, etc., who always are eager to help us uchideshis and also let us know when we can improve (especially in cleaning, thank you, Kasahara sensei). And then of course all the wonderful members of Aikido Kobayashi Dojo which helps to take care of you and make sure you feel at home.

If I should give an advice to the reader it would be to keep in mind why you wanted to be an uchideshi. What the reason was that you enrolled. Then, try to help everyone as much as possible without sacrificing your self and your goal. You also need rest and some time alone. Make sure you get it. One thing that also can be good to have in mind if you share your uchideshi time with others is that everyone comes here for a different reason and most certainly have different goals with their stay than you have.

I am not going to say anything about the Japanese culture, food, way to party, etc. That I leave to you to experience for your own.

Finally, I have had a really great time and will certainly go back again.

