

## My Uchideshi Experience Estefanía Ayala



I'm Estefanía, from La Plata city, in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Uchideshi at Kobayashi Dojo from March to May 2026.

I started Aikido three years and a few months ago, at age 50. I've always liked martial arts, but I didn't have a complete idea of what aikido consisted of, anyway I always wanted to do a Japanese martial art. It was my dad who spoke to me since I was young about the depth and seriousness of Japanese culture.

But above all, I started because I found a place nearby with convenient hours and because you have to exercise to be healthy, but I hate the gym. I just loved it and knew I was going to keep practicing as much as I could.

I listened to Celeste sensei's anecdotes about when she was an uchideshi 30 years ago, and I found it fascinating! Then she told us we could apply to do the same, and she mentioned Barbara Sensei's insistence and support in making us seriously consider it, although I honestly didn't think it would be so real and so soon.

And so it was, a few months later, here I was at 53 (an old lady by western standards), embarking on this adventure.



The hardest part was the lead-up, getting everything ready for my two-month absence from home and work. What I feared most was whether my body could handle the number of classes ahead, and although at first I thought I wouldn't be able to get up after the next fall, my eagerness to learn was stronger, and I did. Each time it became more challenging, and the support of my classmates made everything easier.



Without a doubt, each class was the happiest moment for me. Being able to practice with so many different classmates, many so experienced, and seeing firsthand the precision of Hiroaki Sensei's technique and all the other senseis was a privilege I enjoyed immensely. Just being near Soshihan, his joy and enthusiasm in his

classes, and even when he was participating, was incomparable. He truly breathes Aikido, and that's contagious.



The classes with the children were a learning and enjoyment experience on another level.

Everything flowed very easily; even the weather was lovely, and I was lucky enough to see a huge number of cherry blossoms.

Between classes, I was able to explore the city quite a bit and managed to get back without getting lost. All the food was fabulous, from the ramen to the sushi to the fried chicken and crab croquettes.

Regarding cleanliness and the rules to follow, I can only say thank you for the patience of Hiroaki sensei in Tokorozawa and Kasahara sensei in Kodaira, because by the time I started to improve, it was already time to go back home...

The most incredible thing was that even though I didn't speak any Japanese, I felt like I understood. I never felt like an outsider; instead, I felt a very comfortable sense of belonging, which was fostered by my classmates, senpais, and senseis.

All of this makes me feel incredibly lucky, and all I can say is thank you! What I thought would be a one-off experience has now turned into something I think I might even return to Japan...

Thank you, goodbye, and I hope to see you soon.

