

# FIGHTING FIT

FROM ITS ORIGINS IN EAST ASIAN COMBAT TO THE FLYING MOVES OF NOTABLE FILM STARS, MARTIAL ARTS HAVE HAD MANY INCARNATIONS. IN RECENT YEARS, THE SPORT IS INCREASINGLY THROWING OFF ITS EXCLUSIVE IMAGE AND GAINING WIDESPREAD POPULARITY



**M**artial art refers to the art of warfare (derived from Mars, the Roman god of war) and comes from a 15th-century European term for fighting arts. The original purposes of martial arts were self-defence and training for battle but the birth of martial arts in the East encouraged a move away from these martial war techniques ('bujitsu'), to the use of martial arts as a way to stop conflict and quell violence. The 'way', or path of spiritual development, was considered the most important aspect.

Now all that sounds bit daunting, especially for anyone new to the sport, but today the world of martial arts is changing to encompass all levels and practitioners. While retaining the need for hand-to-hand fight training, martial arts have developed to become competition sports and general fitness pursuits. Some martial arts, such

“ IN LONDON, MARTIAL ARTS ARE ESPECIALLY ACTIVE AND THERE ARE A WIDE VARIETY OF CLUBS OPEN TO BEGINNERS ”



as Judo and Taekwondo, are Olympic sports and there are international competitions for a host of disciplines.

### MIND AND BODY

Training in martial arts has many benefits, both corporal and spiritual, and some disciplines are linked to religious beliefs. In fact, the spread of martial arts from India into the East is mainly attributed to the spread of Buddhism, so initially martial arts and religion went hand in hand. The advantages, therefore, can exceed physical capabilities, resulting in strong self-awareness as well as self-defence. In technical terms, martial arts can be broadly grouped into focusing on striking, grappling or weapons training, but some tend to distinguish between internal and external styles too. Internal styles, such as Tai Chi, utilise internal energy and breathing exercises to promote health in addition to martial techniques. External styles are purely physical, like Thai boxing.

Through systematic practice of martial arts, physical fitness is boosted no end as the whole body is exercised – strength, stamina, flexibility and coordination are all required elements. Judo black belt Kim Dunkley, who has competed for Great Britain, explains that 'if you do a martial



**Left**  
Jet Li as Wong Fei Hung (Martial Arts Master) in *Once Upon a Time in China*, 1991  
**Above**  
Tai Chi  
**Right**  
Kung Fu

art properly you have to maintain a level of fitness. When you reach a certain level, you have to supplement your martial arts training with other forms of working out, such as running, to be able to compete competitively. Martial arts also make you work muscles you might never need to use otherwise!

### POPULAR FOLLOWING

Martial arts today reach a broad audience. From well-known practitioners such as Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan, to the impossible beauty of movement displayed in wuxia films like *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, to the lethal Krav Maga fight scenes in the Bourne films, most of us are familiar with the general look of different disciplines. Dunkley says that 'modern actors like Jet Li make the younger generation more interested, but there is a big difference between mimicking martial arts, which can be

dangerous, and actually learning a martial art, which is extremely beneficial.'

The increased visibility of martial arts has led to more and more people keen to have a go themselves. Some join for the social aspect or to help quit smoking, some want an escape from a difficult background, and many are simply looking for a fun and challenging way to keep fit. There's a class or discipline suitable for every level, from introductory sessions, to more technical classes in a discipline such as Jiu Jitsu or Kung Fu. In London, martial arts are especially active and there are a wide variety of clubs open to beginners.

### STARTING OUT

Finding the right art for you is important and it's best to try out a few different disciplines initially. Make sure the school's philosophy matches your own – is the main focus on winning tournaments, keeping fit, or spiritual growth? You need to look at teaching style, class structure and compatibility with your physical abilities. If you like competition, then select a school that also teaches traditional philosophy. Martial arts is a relatively inexpensive sport and, regularly practised, can bring physical and mental well-being and a huge sense of achievement.

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TO GIVE YOU AN IDEA OF WHAT TO EXPECT, WE'VE TESTED A COUPLE OF MARTIAL ARTS CLASSES FOR YOU. WE SENT BRAVE HOTCOURSES VOLUNTEERS AND MARTIAL ARTS NEWCOMERS ASSISTANT EDITOR JESSICA TOOZE AND SENIOR DESIGNER NEIL BURGESS TO TRY OUT TWO DIFFERENT DISCIPLINES. HERE'S HOW THEY GOT ON...



**Who?** Jessica Tooze  
**What?** Bushin  
**Where?** Queen Mother Sports Centre in Victoria  
**When?** Tuesday 8-9.30pm and Thursday 7.30-9pm

# BUSHIN

'Ask any of my friends and they'd probably describe me as a girly girl; I wear heels, I have long hair, I even have a preference for the colour pink. When I said I was going to try a martial arts class, most people asked if I'd been bullied into it for purposes of this article. In fact, I was quite looking forward to it, especially as I think it's a very good thing, particularly for girls, to learn some basic self-defence.

The discipline I would be learning is Bushin, a unique martial art combining traditional MMA (mixed martial arts) and self-defence. Aiming to develop the mind, body and spirit, the term can be literally translated from Japanese as 'martial spirit'. Well that all sounds very good, I thought, but I was a bit apprehensive as I readied for the class, so I dragged a friend along for moral support.

Thankfully, I needn't have worried as it wasn't intimidating at all – the atmosphere was very relaxed and everyone was friendly and helpful. Aside from another recent recruit, everyone

was dressed in Bushin uniforms with various coloured belts. The shihan (master and instructor), Sensei Cailey Barker, wore black. Beginning with a series of warm-ups, the class quickly moved on to working through some basic punching and kicking with a partner, one wearing gloves, and the other holding pads. We worked through a simple sequence of moves and Cailey and my partner both helped me master the correct balance and coordination to perfect the eye-watering 'groin kick'.

Each class follows a progressive format, and from basic moves we went on to a technical practise of dodges, followed by pad work and sparring. There were a lot of different levels in the room, with some people having practised varying forms of martial arts for years, while others had started with Bushin. Talking to some of the guys after the class, they said that the instinctive human reaction when attacked is to freeze, but even with a few martial arts classes this response changes so you automatically drop into a defensive stance. Everyone



said that they picked it up quickly and with others' help I never felt out of my depth. In fact, I really enjoyed myself. One thing I would say though, is that it is not as easy as it looks, and while you can pick up the basics relatively quickly, there is an almost never-ending array of techniques to master.

Sensei Cailey explained that Bushin is a Japanese-based contemporary style and the focus is on practical moves, practised through sparring. The discipline teaches self-defence using a variety of different martial arts, combining hard (punches, kicks), soft (locks, throws, grappling) and weapon techniques. Some lessons even teach knife and stick fighting so that practitioners are able to defend against any attack. As far as grading goes, there are 10 colour belt grades before black belt. Most students can achieve a black belt in 3-4 years, depending on ability and attendance.

The class made for a great workout, and for someone like me who finds normal aerobics-type classes mind-numbingly dull, it was good to have to concentrate hard so I hardly noticed the physical effort. My aching muscles the next day, however, proved what effective exercise it was. All in all, I would highly recommend Bushin both to beginners and those with some previous martial arts experience. Don't be put off if you're a girl either – if I managed it, you can! Visit: [www.bushin.co.uk](http://www.bushin.co.uk)

# JUDO



**Who?** Neil Burgess  
**What?** Judo  
**Where?** The Budokwai club in Chelsea  
**When?** Tuesday 6.30-7.30pm and Saturday 3.30-4.30pm

'I remember doing Judo for a short time when I was very young – I must have been about 10 years old – so I was interested in seeing how I would get on now. Generally I'm the kind of person that you're more likely to see enjoying a couple of pints rather than pounding the running machines monotonously at the gym, so I was a little nervous going along for my first Judo lesson for many years as I really didn't know what to expect when doing it as an adult. I was relieved that everyone seemed very friendly and welcoming. For Judo, all you need to get started is a Judogi (uniform) so I was soon ready.

The main characteristics of Judo are throws and groundwork (the phase once your opponent is grounded by a throw), with a focus on using an opponent's strength, momentum and balance against them. Unlike many other martial arts, there's no emphasis on punching and kicking; Judo is all about throwing and efficiency. For me one of the major appeals of Judo is that it provides a really good workout, but because there is an emphasis on perfecting technique it also provides some mental stimulation, which keeps it interesting.

At the start of a lesson we greet the Senseis Glen and Jackie by lining up and bowing and then start with the warm up which consists of light jogging around the room followed by a series of exercises including forward and backward rolls, then break falls (practising how to fall safely is as important as practising how to throw)



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down the length of the room. By the end of all this you've really worked up a sweat!

For the next part of the lesson, everyone pairs up and we start to practise our throwing techniques. Firstly you grapple your opponent, one hand on their sleeve and one on the collar, and take turns to practise your throws. When they are first demonstrated by the Sensei the throws may look almost effortless, but once you try them out for yourself, it can take quite a few attempts before you can get the timing, positioning and technique all in sync, with a bit of guidance from the Sensei. It's also a good opportunity to practise your break falls when being thrown. On one of the first times I was thrown I landed partly on my shoulder, which was a mistake I will only make once!

After learning a few throws it's time for some 'randori', which is a form of free-style sparring to practise the throws we have just learnt. This is where I first paired up with one of the black belts who often sit in on the beginners class. Much to my relief I wasn't thrown repeatedly to the ground every two seconds and instead he gave me a lot of very useful advice on things I was doing wrong. After pairing up with a few more people you get a really good idea of how you need to move while doing randori and by this stage, it's becoming a really tough work out.

The next stage of the lesson is called 'ne-waza' which is groundwork, trying to gain a hold down or submission from your opponent from holds, chokes or arm locks. This is the most exhausting part of the training, and the hardest part. Again, when I came up against those with more experience than me, I got a lot of advice and help on what I was doing wrong.

If you want to try a martial art, I would definitely recommend anyone try Judo; it's a fantastic workout, and beats the gym any day.' Visit: [www.budokwai.co.uk](http://www.budokwai.co.uk)