

WORLD OYAMA KARATE
St. Petersburg, Russia Trip Report
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Our trip to St. Petersburg, Russia was incredible. I had never been to Russia and I was excited about this opportunity to go for the first time. My first impression of Russia was that everything felt BIG. The buildings were large, the food portions were large, and the roads were wide and large too. The city always seemed busy with people walking everywhere all the time. St. Petersburg is a big city with cultural history from the past still present and visible today. Even the Dojo and gymnasium we trained in had high ceilings that echoed loudly every time we said “Osu!”.

Shihan Karius, Branch Chief in Russia, and his leaders, Sensei Vitold Karius, Sensei Kirill, and Senpai Ruslam were all incredibly generous and welcoming to us. I saw that Shihan Karius has cultivated a strong spirit of Oyama Karate in St. Petersburg. I felt that Shihan Karius is an example of how to live a lifestyle as a KarateKa. He walked very fast everywhere we went, and he moves with a sense of purpose when he goes from place to place. He didn't talk a lot and never appeared to be tired or overwhelmed. He just made sure we felt a part of the Oyama Karate family and that we had a positive experience. I was moved by that. During one of our lunches, I learned that Shihan Karius chose to study Karate in secret when the martial arts were outlawed during the Soviet Union. Apparently in those days, studying martial arts was considered a crime and you could be arrested if you were caught training and teaching others! That told me Karate is in his blood because he was willing to risk his freedom. I think that's one of the reasons he is so revered and respected within his community. He was promoted to 6th Degree Black Belt and I felt proud to be affiliated with him through Oyama Karate.

My biggest take away from this trip is that World Oyama Karate is a foundation for connecting people around the world – no matter our race, religion, political views or ethnic, cultural backgrounds. I now believe this is because of our World Oyama Karate philosophy, which is to “Just Sweat”, take chances in life, and ultimately challenge ourselves. After my experience in Russia, I better understand that we, as human beings, can all relate to the desire of digging deep inside to find out the truth of what we are really made of. We all want to know that answer about ourselves. That common desire to overcome a challenge, a fear, a worry or anxiety, connects us to the next person because we can see and feel their struggle, their effort, their sweat. I saw this happen with the 1st Kyu (Brown Belt) students who were taking their Shodan test. Those Brown Belts were pushed hard and they stuck through it! After their test was finished, I felt proud and happy for them and wanted to congratulate them. But in that moment, we didn't have to try speaking English or Russian to express our feelings to one another. I didn't need to say much to show that I understood. In Oyama Karate, we can just lock eyes, give a nod of acknowledgment, say “Osu!” and continue pushing to the next level. That's powerful.

I came back home to the United States feeling like a new fire has been lit within me. I was inspired to dig more deeply and think how I can improve my Karate. On the plane flight home, I thought to myself “..Maybe I can make more time in the pockets of my day to train outside the Dojo, or maybe I can work harder to become a better communicator and teach more clearly in Atlanta so our Dojo can grow, or maybe I can sharpen my weaker techniques to set a higher standard of example, get in better shape physically, lose some weight, and increase my stamina more....” These were some thoughts that came up for me because of the experience of training with our St. Petersburg Branch. It's awoken a new spirit in my Karate and I'm very grateful for that.

Our Russia Branch trains hard and took a great sense of pride in showing their skills and their city to us. They were tough and humble at the same time. Naturally, this made me think of what I would do to host them and give them a positive experience if they ever came to visit and train with us in the United States. I think that was the point of this trip. To imagine how we can treat each other in the best way possible through our practice of World Oyama Karate.

At the end of our trip, we had a great celebration party together and reaffirmed our connection as fellow members of World Oyama Karate! Truthfully, I am a part of the younger generation that uses social media and technology often. It's hard for me to imagine a time without Facebook, YouTube, Instagram etc. But, SAIKO SHIHAN's messages through Oyama Karate have impacted how I view technology. Real human connection is time spent being present with one another and building relationships that have deep roots and will last a long time. Technology can never provide that. I think we can

spread this message to more people through our training in Karate. Thank you to all the Shihans, Senseis, Senpais and fellow members who allowed me to attend this trip and share in this great experience. Spasibo, and OSU!

