

# *10 Tips for Studying a Martial Art in an Asian Country*

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(Sidebar to accompany “Studying T’ai Chi in South Korea”)

1. Learn as much of the language as you can. If possible, study before you go. Focus on the terminology of your art and learn to count—you will win respect if you can take your turn calling out the repetitions during warm-ups.
2. Don’t let the language barrier discourage you. There are advantages to learning a martial art purely by observing and doing.
3. Be polite and deferential. Don’t hog the teacher’s attention. Work to reverse the Ugly American image that undoubtedly precedes you.
4. Learn and adhere to customs of address. Don’t offend adults by using their first names instead of their titles (often combined with the family name).
5. Asian societies are essentially hierarchical, even if their governments are democratic. Don’t argue with your teacher or point out inconsistencies in the instruction. Just store it all away.
6. Be ready to witness corporal punishment of young students.
7. Be ready to train at least five days a week in unheated, unair-conditioned dojangs. Figure on stretching more than once a day, every day.
8. If you’re a teacher, take advantage of the chance to be entirely a student again. Shed your ego. Be open.
9. Know that it will take time for the teacher and your fellow students to get used to your presence. But it will happen.
10. Use your sense of humor. Keep it light and have fun.