

# Samurai Warriors

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# Table of Contents

- Report
- Pictures
- Summary
- Bibliography

# Report

Ancient noble warriors. That is what the Samurai were. In Japan, the Samurai first became popular in AD 1200s as fighters for the Daimyo, or lords. They were very low on the social class, but everyone was afraid of them. Their leader, the Shogun, was the second highest, just behind the emperor. Don't be fooled by their low ranking. The Samurai could kill someone if he or she acted dishonorable towards them.

Trained since they were seven, the Samurai were deadly. Keep in mind that one could not become a Samurai if they were a foreigner, a farmer, a merchant, and entertainer, or left-handed. Also, after General Toyotomi Hideyoshi took control in 1590, one could only be a Samurai if his or her father or mother was one. Both men and women could be Samurai, but men were traditionally the only ones in battles while women defended their home. Not only were they trained how to fight, but they also were very commonly taught reading, history, poetry, and handwriting. They were some of the main writers of the traditional Japanese poetry called Haikus. There was also a popular Japanese phrase that went, "The pen and the sword in accord." This means that one must know when it is right to choose the pen, or writing, or sword, also known as fight. Some other things that they were taught were good manners, obedience, respect, and self-discipline. Of course, they were also taught about battle. Samurais were taught to die for their fellow comrades. There were also some traditional board games, much like some of today's, that taught them how to outwit his or her opponent. When they were not doing any of that, the Samurai would practice fighting with each other. They used wooden swords during this time because they didn't want to seriously injure each other, but it would still hurt. Many teachers taught his or her students about other famous Samurai, and the students would listen closely. At about fourteen years of age, young Samurai take part in a graduation called genbuku. During this, they are now allowed to tie their hair up in the traditional Samurai front-knot style. Now, they could finally fight in a battle.

When Samurai battled, they fought for their Daimyo. Samurai would fight each other so that their Daimyo could have more land. Each Samurai (there could be hundreds of thousands) had a special role. Some of those roles include archers, gunmen, and foot-soldiers. One of the most important roles was the banner-carrier. They would carry a banner on their back with their Daimyo's symbol on it. While this was a great honor to be chosen for, it made you a quick and easy target. To survive, they needed much armor. All Samurais wore armor to battle. The lower you were ranked, the less armor that you got. The lower ranks got armor made of thin metal, but the higher ranks were made of chain mail, rawhide, and rigid iron plates. Their armor could weight as much as 40 pounds. The helmet alone was 32 pieces. On top of the helmet they wore a mask that had to look frightening. Another important part was the cloth overcoat. It went over the armor on their backs and bore their family badge. It was so hard to take on and off that most Samurai had someone help them take their armor on and off. The armor made it very difficult to walk and run. It is hard to believe that they were able to jump on and off of horses. It makes sense then that they tried to get shorter horses so that they could jump on and off of them easier. Their horses also had to be fast, strong, obedient, and able to jump high. That great of a horse would be very

expensive, so many could not afford to buy one. Having a horse would mean that you would need to get food for it along with your own. Samurai would be gone for anywhere from weeks to years at a time, and they could not carry all of that food with them. For a while, they would get rations of rice and (only sometimes) dried tuna. They would make this in their helmets because the pots would just be another thing to add to their heavy load. When the rations run out, the Samurai would have to hunt any wild animals they could find. While on the road, their armor would commonly become infested by lice. After the long time they spend away, the Samurai will come home to their Daimyo and get paid. To do that, the warriors would present their enemies head. After getting paid, they would return home to their wives. While their husbands were away, it was the woman's job to defend the household and children if they had any. They would then spend the rest of the time together until the Samurai was called away to fight again.

One of the most important things to a Samurai was there weaponry. Anything that they could use to kill their enemies, they did. Their most famous weapon was the katana. It was a long sword that was extremely flexible. These swords were very expensive, so most could not afford them. Some other ways that Samurai could come into possession of such a blade are inheriting them from their fathers, capturing them from dead enemies, or receive them for acts of bravery. They were crafted by the top metalsmiths. The metalsmiths would fold iron over and over again in special ways that made it strong yet flexible. The katana could take months to create. When finished, there will be two layers of iron that are different colors. There would be a curved line that separates them. There is an old Japanese saying that goes, "A Samurai always sleeps with his sword by his side." This shows us just how precious the katana was to a Samurai warrior. Even when home, Samurai would carry their katana with them. The other sword that Samurai would always carry with them is a small one. It is called tanto. It is never used unless a Samurai is forced to do Seppuku. That will be covered later. Any other weapons that they have would be more specific to what they fight as. For example, an archer would have a bow and a swordsman may have other swords. There are many different weapons that a Samurai would have access to during battle.

Possibly more important to the Samurai than their weapons were their beliefs. The main belief of the Samurai was called Bushido. It translates loosely to "way of the warrior". Bushido teaches one to respect honor above all else. They serve their Daimyo until the end. If they ever disrespect or disobey their Daimyo, the Samurai must commit Seppuku. Seppuku is the act of taking one's life. This is done as slicing open the stomach for the men and the throat for the women. Both slices go from right to left. Some warriors will have one of their friends stand behind them. Once the Samurai made the first cut, their friend would slice off their head to prevent them from being in pain for too long. They followed the religions/philosophies of Shintoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism. Shintoism is the belief in Kami. There are hundreds of Kami that they worship. It is still practiced today. Kami exist in natural places such as mountains and lakes. Their shrines are marked by torii. Buddhism is another polytheistic religion they follow. The goal of Buddhism is to reach Nirvana by ending

suffering. To do that, followers must give up wanting. Confucianism is a philosophy based on the ancient teaching of Confucius. It is all about acting correctly around others. You must respect all other, especially your elders. These values were highly valued throughout all Samurai.

While they lasted for hundreds of years, the Samurai eventually did have a downfall. In 1858, Japan was opened to the western way of life. Because of this, resistance began to build up against the shogunate. The Meiji Restoration began in 1868, which removed Samurai. In 1871, feudalism was abolished, and, five years later, it was illegal to carry a sword unless you were part of the national armed forces. There were several Samurai rebellions in the 1870s, but the Japanese army was successful in stopping them. Now being a Samurai is illegal, though some still have katanas and armor in their homes.

Today, Samurai influence can be seen throughout the world. Shinto is now the state religion of Japan with Bushido as its ruling code. In WWII, katanas were used in battle and made suicide attacks because of death before dishonor. Now, people practice karate and other martial arts that are much like what the Samurai were taught. Their influence will never go away.

# Pictures



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This is what it was believed Samurai armor looked like.



This is what a katana looks like.





Here you can see the Samurai hair style.

# Summary

The Samurai were the ancient warriors of Japan. They were trained since they were little in the codes and battle of the warriors. When they finally graduate, not only can the Samurai fight, but they can also wear their hair in the traditional style. Only certain people could become a Samurai, and it was very few people in Japan. The Samurai were very low on the social structure pyramids. The main thing that the Samurai did was fight, but they also patrolled the streets. They would fight for their Daimyo. Normally, that would be a fight for more land. To get paid, they would bring home their opponents' heads. Some would ride in on horses, but there were many of problems with that. Some other jobs for the Samurai was archer and swordsman. Their weapons were anything that they could find, but the katana was their most precious. They were highly expensive and took a long time to create. Their other common knife was used to commit suicide. That ritual was used as part of the Samurai code of honor called Bushido. Their religions were Buddhism and Shintoism. They also followed the teachings of Confucius. Even though they were powerful for a while, the Samurai started their fall in 1858. In 1871, they were completely abolished. Some relics still remain from those times. There are now many of things in today's world that come from Samurai influence.

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