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1. Who are some online suppliers of bogu?

In North America,

Aoi Budogu

Bogubag (Koei) --- as of 11/6/07, they are temporarily not accepting orders

Bogu-zen

E-bogu

Eguchi

E-Mudo

Mugendo Budogu

2. Which supplier should I use?

You should ideally use the same supplier that your sensei or other dojo members recommend. Having a good relationship with a supplier you can trust goes a long way towards making people comfortable with their equipment choices.

3. What are the dogi sizes? How do I measure for hakama and keikogi size?

Hakama and keikogi usually go by height. Your supplier should have chart indicating which height corresponds to size.

Hakama come in sizes from 16 to 30, where a 27 fits someone about 6 ft tall. This can vary depending on supplier, so check the chart if you switch suppliers. Each size difference is about 4 cm in length. My experience is that if your height is on the boundary of the published ranges, go down rather than up. If you have an unusually long or short inseam, you may need to go up or down a size. However, it is wisest to ask your supplier if you are unsure.

Keikogi marketed outside of Japan typically come in sizes 0-5, where a 5 fits someone about 6 feet tall. If you are bigger than that, sometimes they are available in larger sizes. Some companies will offer custom sizes for a reasonable surcharge (typically around 20%). Higher quality keikogi come in sizes S, M, L, XL, and sometimes XXL, where XXL is usually the same as a size 5. Sometimes those sizes are written in Japanese characters. Sometimes, there are half-sizes. Sometimes there are long sizes. To find your size, check the chart. Go up one size if you are much heavier than average. You may have to hem the arms or the tails, but it will fit better around the chest.

4. What are bogu sizes? How do I measure for bogu?

Bogu usually are not sold in sizes, but rather you provide the measurements and the supplier picks the right sized pieces for you. Most machine-stitched sets and even some hand-stitched sets come in stock sizes. There are typically 4 or 5 different kote and men

sizes, and 3 different dou sizes although of course it varies from one manufacturer to the next. Semi-custom sets involve adjusting the internal padding to a stock-sized men to fit you better, with everything else coming from stock sizes. Full custom sets are made to order in your size and available in the higher-end machine-stitched and hand-stitched sets.

Most good supplier websites will show you how to measure, and most every supplier needs the same measurements. For men, you will need the hatimaki and hokkaburi measurements, which are, respectively, the circumference around your forehead and the the circumference from the bottom of your chin to the top (center) of your head. For dou, you need the measurement across the opening of your dou, which is waist width (not circumference) plus a little more. Most people add a couple of fingers width, but some prefer bigger. Some suppliers automatically include this additional space when you provide the measurement. For kote, you need the circumference around the biggest part of your palm, not including the thumb, plus the length from wrist to fingertip. You will also need to supply height, waist, and weight. Some suppliers may request a tracing of your hand.

5. How do I pay for this stuff?

This varies from supplier to supplier. Many companies accept credit cards. You can also do a wire transfer of funds, or send a money order. Be aware that wire transfer fees are typically in the order of \$30-\$40, so for small orders, they don't make sense.

6. How does it ship? Where does it come from? How long does it take?

If you are ordering shinai or bokken, you will be required to use some sort of courier service such as DHL, UPS, or FedEx, as normal mail may not accept long packages. If you are just ordering bogu, you can also ship normal mail. The cheapest shipping option when ordering from Japan or Korea is surface mail, also known as "sea-mail."

Some suppliers maintain an in-house stock and ship direct to you. Some maintain no stock, and act as a broker between you and the manufacturer in Japan or Korea, in which case, the shipment is direct to you from the manufacturer. Some do a combination, only maintaining stock for cheaper, more popular items like shinai.

Of course, if you are buying from a supplier in your own country, it will arrive in the same time as anything else you might order. If it is coming from overseas and you use one of the courier services, it should take less than a week to arrive unless it is held up in customs. If it is sent by sea-mail, it will take at least one month and sometimes two.

These timeframes are all from when the product is shipped. It can take some time to fill your order. If you order custom or semi-custom, it can take 3 months or more for your bogu to be manufactured. Even ordering stock sizes, it is typical to take a month to fill the order. If you are ordering from Japan during their busy season in April when they are supplying school equipment, expect additional delays.

7. I'm confused by all the terms. What do I need to know?

Men -- the helmet

Dou -- the chest protector

Tare -- the waist protector

Kote -- the gauntlets

Mengane -- the metal mask part of the helmet

Mune -- the top part of the dou made of leather or equivalent (usually with some embroidery)

Doh-dai -- the hard shell part of the dou, made of bamboo or synthetic material

Take -- an individual bamboo stave in the dou-dai or in a shinai

Futon -- the padding over the head, wrists and waists, consisting of felt bound by cotton and sewn together

Himo -- the strings used to attach bogu, also the straps used to tie hakama

Machine-stitched -- when the futon is sewn by machine, resulting in long rows of stitches

Hand-stitched -- when the futon is sewn by hand, resulting in little square stitches

Tezashi -- hand-stitched

Shoazome -- natural indigo dye

Hakama -- the divided, pleated skirt worn as part of the kendo uniform

Tetron -- an artificial material used to make hakama

Keikogi -- the heavy cotton jacket worn as part of the uniform

Kendogi -- same as keikogi

Uwagi -- generic for top of any uniform (kendo, judo, karate, etc.)

Shinai -- split bamboo sword used by kendo players

8. What should I budget for a beginner bogu set? I found something cheaper, why should I spend so much?

The low-end for decent quality bogu is around \$400, and you probably shouldn't spend any more than \$1000 (for a beginner bogu set).

In the end, you get what you pay for. It's difficult to compare apples to apples when shopping mail order, or even if you see the goods in person. Quality shows up in the use and over the long haul, which is why having a supplier you can trust is important. In the end, bogu is protective equipment for your own physical safety, so really think about whether or not you want to skimp on protective gear.

9. Should I get a very expensive set of bogu as a beginner, because more money means more protective?

Not necessarily. Some more expensive bogu protect better, some are lighter and thinner for competition. So long as you buy an adequate set, you will be fine and in a few years you will have a better idea of what you want in the high-end. I hope you will be practicing for a few years and upgrade, but if you are in the majority and are not, at least you will not have spent a lot of money. However, if you have the money and really want it, go for it.

10. What does the "mm" measurement mean? What's a "bu"?

In machine-stitched bogu, the distance between the rows of stitches is given in millimeters. In hand-stitched bogu, the stitch width is given in "bu", an old Japanese measurement equivalent to about 3mm.

11. What width should I get for a first set?

You should get a machine-stitched set of between 3mm and 5mm. Be suspicious of low stitch widths in inexpensive gear. The quality low-end sets are usually 5mm.

12. What palm material should I get on my kote?

If possible, choose clarino or deerskin palms. It's not the end of the world if you end up with cowhide, but you'll be happier with either of the other two. If you can avoid cowhide palms, do so.

13. Should I get a fancy color on my dou? How about a kamon?

You can, of course, select any color available, but Memphis Kendo Club *strongly advises* against any color other than black. Unless you are Japanese, it is not recommended that you not get a kamon.

Be content with selecting whatever embroidery pattern you desire for the mune.

14. What sort of hakama and keikogi should I get?

Most beginners are happy with a tetron hakama and a single-layer cotton keikogi. The vast majority of people choose blue for both pieces, but black tetron hakama is widely accepted and will be fine. You shouldn't need to spend more than about \$100, although there are options for higher-end hakama and keikogi that can easily surpass that.

15. How much does bogu cost?

As stated before, the low-end for decent quality bogu is around \$400. The high-end can be very high, and it's not so hard to custom design for yourself a \$20,000 fantasy bogu from the catalogs. However, the point of diminishing returns for functionality starts at around \$3000. Many people spend between \$1000 and \$2000 for a very good set, but you don't need to spend that much -- especially if it is your first bogu.

16. What am I paying for as it gets more expensive?

A lot of what you pay for is hard to see. Overall quality of materials improves up the line, as well as craftsmanship. Here are a few things that vary:

- stitch width (see question 17)

- type/quality of felt used inside the futon
- type/quality of padding used inside the kote
- quality of cotton used to bind the futon
- quality of indigo dye used on the cotton and leather
- variable thickness padding in the men and kote futon vs. same thickness
- varying stitch width for machine-stitch bogu, tighter where needed
- style of stitching if hand-stitched (nagazashi is best, other styles are shortcuts)
- shape of needles if hand-stitched (round is better, triangular damages fabric)
- trim/reinforcement material: clarino, cowhide, deerskin in various grades
- type of mengane (duraluminum, titanium, IBB)
- type/quality of lacquer used to finish the men and dou (artificial or traditional)
- type of dou (plastic, fiber, bamboo)
- number of take (staves) in the dou if bamboo
- finish on the dou: even in plain black, there are different qualities
- type/quality of leather for mune (top of dou), cheap one is artificial
- stock sizing vs. custom sizing

17. What difference does the stitch width make anyway?

For machine-stitched bogu, stitch width has become shorthand for the quality of a set of bogu and many people only look at this number, but that's over-simplifying things. Within the same product line from the same manufacturer, a lower stitch width indicates a better set. However, as the quality of materials is also going up, it's hard to say how much the stitch width adds to the cost. All other things being equal, a tighter stitch width means the padding will be stiffer and stronger. However, some manufacturers believe that a wider stitch width is better, allowing the padding to absorb shock better and be more comfortable. In that case, quality of materials and constructions makes the difference.

For hand-stitched bogu, again stitch width means the padding will be stiffer and stronger. However, usually the quality of materials will be the same within the same product line and same manufacturer, and the stitch width drives the price. Smaller stitches makes a much bigger difference in price for hand-stitched bogu compared to machine-stitched bogu.

18. What width should I get?

Machine-stitch widths greater than 5mm are usually not recommend for adults. Most people would be best off with a 3mm or 4mm width. The \$400 low-end is usually a 5mm width. The exception would be Chiba Bogu's "Mine" bogu, which uses a 6mm width but is both expensive and a good choice for adults. Some bogu manufacturers offer 2mm or 2.5mm stitching, but this is entering into diminishing returns and many feel make the bogu too hard and stiff, and cause the padding to be so pressed such that it is flimsy and not very protective. Mostly, the 2mm sets are marketed to people who believe that tighter is always better.

Most people opt for 1.2 or 1.5bu when buying hand-stitched sets. But if you are buying

tezashi bogu, you shouldn't be needing to read this FAQ.

19. This 3mm bogu is cheaper than that one. Why should I pay more?

You can't compare sets just by stitch width alone. A 5mm set from one manufacturer can be better than a 3mm set from another. If the price looks too good to be true, it probably is. You get what you pay for!

20. Why are hand-stitched sets better than machine-stitched sets?

They aren't necessarily. Cheaply made hand-stitched sets are poor choices. However, a good one breaks in more quickly and protects better than a machine-stitched set. This is due to the way the material is stitched.

21. This hand-stitched set is cheaper than that machine-stitched set. What gives?

Cheap hand-stitched sets have recently become available. In order to make the price attractive, corners are cut. This way, people can have the pretige of hand-stitching without the price. However, the sets don't hold up and protect like they should due to cheap materials and construction shortcuts. Buying a cheap hand-stitched set is a waste of money -- you are better off to put the money into a good machine-stitched set in that case.

22. Should I get a titanium mengane? Are they lighter? What's IBB?

Actually, titanium mengane are about 100 grams heavier than duraluminum ones, but they are much stronger, so for hard practice where collision is possible, titanium is better. Recreational users are better off with the lighter and cheaper duraluminum. Overall, though, there normally isn't a lot of face-to-face collision in kendo.

IBB stands for "Ideal Best Balance", a specific brand of titanium mengane that is weighted towards the back. It is heavier than the normal titanium mengane, but feels better due to the balance.

23. What's the difference between clarino, cowhide, and deerskin?

They are different materials used for the kote and for trim pieces. In a beginner's set, the trim material is not so important but you should pay attention to the palms of the kote.

The most common palm material in CHEAP kote is cowhide. Cowhide palms tend to get progressively stiffer with use (they loosen up after you sweat into them a bit, or wet them down), which eventually causes them to tear. The only advantage to cowhide is cost. Expect to repalm or replace kote with cowhide palms after about 2 years of recreational use.

Tanned deerskin is superior to cowhide in that it tends to remain pliable after repeated soakings in sweat. A good set of deerskin kote can last 5 years or more of recreational use.

Clarino is artificial leather. Like cowhide, it gets stiff with sweat but it can be washed and becomes pliable again. Some people report they like their clarino palms very much, while others think they are a waste of time and money. The concept of clarino is to offer something relatively close to deerskin at cowhide prices.

24. What are kera? What are namako?

Kera are the puffy stitched tubes running crosswise at the joint between the wrist and hand in kote. Namako is another name for the same thing. Kote can be either single kera or double kera. Double kera are supposed to be more flexible and offer better protection. Mostly, they just look nicer.

25. What should I look for in a tare? What do the number of bars mean?

A cheap tare serves as well as an expensive one. Tare serve a function, but if you are going to cut corners, a tare is where to do it. They are expensive because there is so much futon. The number of bars is purely decorative. Some manufacturers make tare with a lot of bars to indicate a high-quality bogu.

26. What's a "fiber dou"?

A fiber dou is one that's made of a kind of compressed paper fiber, commonly mistaken for fiberglass. In fact, some suppliers will advertise their fiber dou as "fiberglass". Fiber dou is the normal construction for inexpensive adult dou. Cheap kids' dou are plastic (true plastic) and not suitable for adults, but the fiber dou works fine, especially if you get the "bamboo look" variety, which add some stiffness.

27. Should I get a bamboo dou? What's the difference between 43, 50, 60, etc. take?

Bamboo dou offer more protection than fiber dou, but frankly, not enough to warrant the extra price. You are better off putting your money into men and kote. Sooner or later in your kendo career, you will want one, though, simply because everyone likes having a nice bamboo dou.

Like stitch width, the number of take (bamboo staves), goes up with price. More take allow the manufacturer to get a nicer bend to the dou. If you are bigger around the middle, more take are required -- some manufacturers offer 64 take dou for those with exceptional hara.

28. Can I get a fancy dou color?

This is a subject of great debate among kendo players. Conventional wisdom is that, "the nail that sticks up gets hammered down," so beginners are best advised to get a black dou and blend in with the crowd. Many people in the West think this is nonsense and say to go ahead and get whatever color suits your fancy. However, just because you think it's

nonsense doesn't change the thinking of the traditionalists (**like, the guys who sit on rank testing panels**). If you pick a color other than black, you **will** get noticed and some sensei will care and others won't.

That said, women players around the world are just as likely to have red dou as black, so either color -- for women -- is perfectly fine.

Memphis Kendo Club does not have any policy on color dou. If you want it, get it --- just be advised of the previous advice. Every kendo player should have a black dou - PERIOD - if for no other reason than to wear for rank testings. If you want a color dou, you should talk to one of the club instructors for advice. Many people wear color dou, but most really good players who do so have traditional colors (brown, red, gold) in muted tints (no bright electric blue or green with prints of cranes or dragonflies or leaves, etc.).

29. What about a kamon? Can I use a coat of arms instead?

A kamon is a Japanese family crest, often worn as decoration on the dou. You can wear one if your family is Japanese or if your sensei has granted permission to wear his. Anyone else is just being pretentious. Anything other than a kamon is just silly.

30. Do I have to buy a complete matching set of bogu?

Not at all.

Some suppliers offer only complete sets, but many of the better ones allow you to mix and match from different sets. If you are on a budget, this is a fine way to build a functional set. Choose the best kote and men you can afford, and then buy a tare and dou with whatever is left over. You can always upgrade later.

Another approach if you are using club bogu is to buy your own stuff piece-by-piece, swapping out the club gear as you go. Many people buy a pair of kote first.

31. What is tetron? Should I buy a cotton hakama? What does 7000, 10000, etc. mean?

Tetron is a polyester blend commonly used to make hakama. Cotton hakama are more comfortable and look nicer than tetron hakama, but tetron are very easy to care for. Tetron requires no ironing and so long as you hang it up at home, you needn't even fold it all that carefully. Tetron can be machine washed without losing pleats. Cotton hakama must be carefully folded, hand-washed (or machine delicate) and ironed. They are a pain to take care of. Most beginners buy tetron to start and after a while buy cotton.

#7000, #8000, #10000, etc. indicate the thread density of the hakama, similar to thread count in sheets. The higher the number means a heavier weight.

**32. What are singleweight/single-layer and doubleweight/double-layer keikogi?
What is shoaizome?**

Singleweight (or single-layer) keikogi has, logically, one layer of fabric. Doubleweight (or double-layer) has an exterior and interior layer. Usually the interior layer is dyed different and doesn't fub off so much. A doubleweight keikogi protects better and looks nicer, but is correspondingly heavier and hotter.

Shoaizome is the traditional indigo dye used in keikogi and hakama. It is usually applied in great quantities and rubs off on your skin, turning you blue. You can help set the dye by washing it in cold water with a few handfuls of table salt or a few cupfuls of vinegar. Some people feel this doesn't help much, but you'll at least feel like you're doing something to avoid looking like a smurf after practice.

33. Why shouldn't i just get an artificially died keikogi?

Artificially dyed keikogi are available from most suppliers. The natural indigo dye looks nicer and wears well like a good pair of jeans. The artificial dyes look, ... well... artificial. However, if you prefer to avoid smurfdom, artificial dye may be for you.

**34. What's the difference between a keikogi and a judo, karate or iaido uwagi?
Can't I use the one I already have?**

Kendo keikogi are longer than judo or karate uwagi and have a vent in the back rather than the sides. If you use judo or karate uwagi, your bare legs will show through the sides of your hakama. A karate uwagi is too light and won't protect. A judo uwagi is cut much fuller and with a heavier collar and is not very comfortable under hakama. The sleeves on a keikogi are 3/4 length so that they do not interfere with the kote. An iaido uwagi is the right cut, but the material is quite light and will not protect as well as a keikogi.

35. What colors are available for uniforms?

The hakama may be blue, black or white. The keikogi may be blue, white, shiro musashi (white with pattern) or kon musashi (blue with pattern). The only combination not used is a blue or kon musashi keikogi with a white hakama.

However, you should check with your dojo. All white is generally for children or women, although men occasionally will wear all white during hot months. Alternatively, it is not completely uncommon to see a combination of a white keikogi with blue hakama. Shiro or kon musashi (white/blue with pattern) is almost exclusively worn by children. Some dojo require that beginners wear white keikogi and only yudansha may wear blue. Some require that all wear the same color. The vast majority of people pick all blue.

36. My dogi has arrived! How do I know it fits?

Your keikogi should not bind you in the shoulders and the sleeves should be no shorter than 3/4 length. If they are longer, they can be hemmed so long as the rest of the keikogi fits ok. Check that you can bind the ties. If it is long enough, but too loose, you can live with it or go one size down in the "long" version, if available. If too tight, you can go up a size or consider moving the ties if you have enough coverage.

Try on the hakama with the koshiita (hard trapezoidal panel) in the small of your back. The hemline of the hakama should be about ankle height when worn at the proper height -- you can adjust the hakama up or down a little at the waist. The front himo should be long enough to tie properly (i.e., bring to the back, wrap to the front, then back again and tie in the back). Similarly, the back himo should be long enough to bring forward and tie in the front. The keikogi should be long enough that no leg is exposed through the sides of the hakama. If too short, exchange for another size. If too long, exchange or consider hemming, especially for a growing child. Cotton hakama typically shrink about 2cm after washing so keep that in mind -- they should fit a little long out of the package.

37. My bogu has arrived! How do I know it fits?

Try on your men by putting your chin in the cup and then rotating the men onto your head. Your forehead should be against the forehead pad while your chin is in the cup. The fit should be loose enough that you can talk, but still snug. Very snug is good so long as your jaw is not forced together -- it will stretch with use. The men-buton should cover the hole top of your head. Two of the bars of the mengane have a slightly wider spacing. This is called the monami. When your men is on, you should be looking out between those two bars.

Try on your tare. The himo should be long enough to tie properly, i.e., bring around the back and then forward again to tie. Put your dou on over your tare and tie it while sitting in seiza so that the bottom of the dou lines up with the joint between the belt of the tare and the flaps. Stand up and make sure the dou moves freely over the tare -- if you lift it up and drop it, does it settle down over the tare or get caught on the belt? Check the gap between the sides of the dou and the tare -- it should not be more than a couple of fingers on either side.

Try on your kote. Don't fiddle with the laces at this point, but rather get your sensei to show you how to adjust them correctly. Check that the joint between the barrel of the kote and the hand part is at your wrist. Your fingers should not be squished together. If you grasp a shinai with the kote on, the tips of your fingers should not be pushing at the ends of the kote. If you force your hand open and the fingers hit ends, but they don't when holding the shinai, that's a good fit. A little snug is ok. They will stretch, but not too snug. They will feel stiff and awkward at first.

If any of your bogu is too small, exchange it for the next size up. For dou, if you already have the largest size, your best solution is probably to stretch it -- ask your sensei to show

you how. Another option is a custom-sized dou which are only available in bamboo and are expensive. It is easy to add material to the tare-himo if you are too big for stock sizes.

If your bogu is too big, ask yourself if going down a size is likely to make it too small. Men typically come in 2 cm sizes (hokkaburi measurement). Adding a pad either at the chin or at the top is a common solution to an in-between size problem. Kote or dou that are slightly too large are usually not a problem.