



## martial arts smarts

The Brazilian art of capoeira is alive and well in Townsville.

Stepping through the doors of Townsville's Capoeira Brasil studio in Fleming Street, the scene appears fairly tame – a wooden dance floor, peripheral chairs and an assortment of photographs on the wall. It's only a cluster of exotic instruments and a stack of mats that suggest, in just a few hours, this room will come to life...

So what is capoeira? "Well it's pronounced 'capo-weara'," says instructor Matthew Eales, admitting that he was up till late engrossed in some of capoeira's high-energy manoeuvres. Matthew reveals he first discovered his passion for capoeira when watching martial-arts film *Only The Strong*. "My friend casually said he used to do that style of martial arts. I said 'Whaaaat?' and started begging 'Show me that move!' until he gave in."

Also known as 'instructor Uakari', Matthew explains the origin of capoeira is rooted in the slavery days of 1500s Brazil. Unable to capture enough Brazilian natives for slavery, the Portuguese brought in boatloads of West Africans. The resulting melting pot of cultures, and ongoing oppression, led to the creation of a fighting style called capoeira. When slavery was abolished in the late 1800s, many of the ex-captives were forced to live on the streets, using capoeira to survive. This led to capoeira

being outlawed and it wasn't until the 1950s that two masters succeeded in having it recognised as an art form. Capoeira is now one of Brazil's national sports.

Watching Matthew leap, cartwheel and flip around the studio, without so much as a breath of hesitation, it's clear the spirit of the sport has survived. And nearly every night in Aitkenvale, people are joining instructor Uakari in the name of fitness, flexibility and new friends.

"You don't feel like you're working out – it's a game," Matthew explains. "You can release your tension and stress in a positive atmosphere while becoming fitter and stronger." But isn't there a lot of falling over involved? "We've all been there. We've all fallen down and that's the capoeira way," says Matthew. "If you don't fall you're not learning." But, in saying that, capoeira isn't all about attempting tricky manoeuvres. It's about getting fit and having fun, combining dance-like movements, spectacular acrobatics, martial arts and music. Matthew says most first-timers start out shy and hesitant, but then settle into the relaxed and friendly environment.

See the sport in action at the studio, 17 Fleming Street Aitkenvale, during the Capoeira Festival 18-23 August. Or visit [capoeiraschool.com.au](http://capoeiraschool.com.au) to find out about the regular classes.