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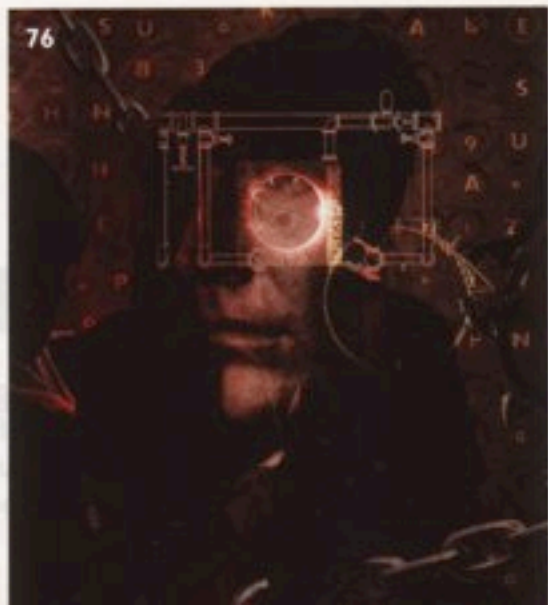
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We care about your safety. It is our policy that your seat belt remain fastened at all times, even when the sign is not on.

Inflight telephone instructions appear on page 139.



Journey Of The Heart

Getting swept off your feet in Japan is as much about logistics as love.

Japan may not be the first country you think of for romance, but if you pack an open mind — and love in your heart — anything can happen. I went with no expectations. I came home with a wedding kimono, rings, and a husband as my souvenirs. How did that happen?

After six months of dating on both U.S. coasts, Victor and I decided to meet in Japan for a vacation. We headed straight to The Three Sisters Inn in old Kyoto, about 250 miles from Tokyo. Renowned for hospitality toward ambassadors and lovebirds alike, the charming sanctuary is run by three Yamada sisters, who were all born in the inn.

Perhaps our first clue to the unfolding enchantment should have been the antique red wedding kimono that served as decoration in the sitting

area of our rooms. But as we walked out the door to explore the town, we heard temple gongs, not wedding bells. We visited Shinto shrines, Buddhist cemeteries, and sacred forests. We strolled along the famous Path of Philosophy, where many before us had contemplated the universe. It was a day of complete meandering — serendipity and serenity were our sirens. And Kyoto was casting its spell.

The next day, a cold rain turned the guidebooks' "must-see" scenes into impressionist paintings. A Japanese cabdriver wearing the traditional white gloves taxied us to the Ryoanji Temple rock garden.

BY LISA SONNE

JOURNEY OF THE HEART

We entered a walled area and sat, under cover, on steps that looked out on an eternity of combed sand gravel with fifteen rock islands. The rain and soft Japanese voices pattered around us as we sat quietly in this quintessential Zen garden. We emptied ourselves of worries, thoughts, noise. Then, Victor took my hand, walked me to a nearby forest, and told me he wanted to spend the rest of his life with me.

During the rest of our time in Kyoto, Victor was a "male-man," delivering proposals to me at

postcard-beautiful sights. By the time we reached our next pre-arranged stop, the lovely Hotel Park in the university town of Gifu, Victor wanted us to return to the United States not as an engaged couple, but as husband and wife. It seemed romantic and impossible. It was Friday. We were leaving Japan on Tuesday morning. We were half a globe away from birth certificates and justices of the peace. Victor got on the phone to the American embassy, but the embassy's recorded message required that he push numbers. We had a

The Basics: Kyoto, Japan

Getting Around: Japan's trains are comfortable and efficient. The Japan National Tourist Organization [212-757-5640] in New York can provide information on schedules, prices, and ticket offices. Having a train pass saved us money and time in getting around, and allowed for changing plans.

The cabs in Kyoto, Nagoya, and Gifu are all models of civility. You may need someone at your hotel to write down your destination in Japanese. Do not assume everyone speaks English. And do not try to get out of the cab before the driver opens the door for you!

Where To Stay: The suites at The Three Sisters Inn [011-81-75-761-6336; fax: 011-81-75-761-6338] in Kyoto have sitting areas and private gardens. Our communal breakfasts introduced us to fascinating people from Europe and the States. Gifu's Hotel Park [011-81-58-265-5211] is a modern hotel that looks out over the Nagara River. The high-rise's roof affords great views of the mountains and city, which can be savored while soaking in outdoor baths. A "homestay" offers the opportunity to stay with a Japanese family and get a more personal view of the country — rural or suburban, depending on your interests. Three organizations that arrange homestays: World Learning [800-858-0292], People to People [011-81-58-234-6253], and Friendship Force [011-81-58-240-9029]. You should find out about your family in advance, and bring American gifts for them. You are ambassadors for each other's cultures.

Where To Propose: In Kyoto: Ryoanji Temple rock garden [011-81-75-463-2216] — After you have been filled by the rich austerity of the rock garden, you can explore the lush gardens and forests that surround it. Golden Pavilion [011-81-75-461-0013] — Kinkakuji is a gold palace reaching to the sky and reflected in the "Mirror Pond." The Silver Pavilion [011-81-75-771-5725], or Ginkakuji, backs into a forest with pretty gardens, and is near one end of the Path of Philosophy, along a canal where bridges and benches beckon for proposals. The Heian Shrine [011-81-75-761-0221], near The Three Sisters Inn, offers a wonderful introduction to Shintoism. In Gifu: In front of the largest lacquered-paper Buddha, and around the corner from it, where there are thousands of origami cranes (a symbol of happiness). You can contact the Gifu City Municipal Office [011-81-58-265-4141] for more information. The Mitahora Kobo Temple and Tea House [011-81-58-237-3812, fax: 011-81-58-237-7480] are enchanting and peaceful. — **LS.**

JOURNEY OF THE HEART

rotary-dial phone. Victor had another idea.

I poured our tea service while Victor poured out our fairy-tale dilemma to American Express. He was politely interrupted. "Excuse me, sir. I am sorry to ask this, but are you a card-holding member?" After saying yes and giving his mother's maiden name, Victor was put on hold. Minutes later, the American Express fellow told us exactly what we would need to do: Go to the

VICTOR

WANTED US TO RETURN TO THE UNITED STATES NOT AS AN ENGAGED COUPLE, BUT AS HUSBAND AND WIFE. IT SEEMED ROMANTIC AND IMPOSSIBLE. IT WAS FRIDAY. WE WERE LEAVING JAPAN ON TUESDAY MORNING.

American consulate in Osaka to get our certificate of marriageability, then take it to a Japanese ward office with two witnesses to register our marriage. No ministers or blood tests or wedding ceremonies required — and, we were assured, the marriage would be legal in the United States.

It might even be possible for us "maybe" to get all the paperwork done on Monday. If we accomplished this, we planned to go back to "our" rock garden and exchange rings privately in Japanese

attire. We would save the traditional celebrations for our families back home.

With offices closed until Monday, we proceeded to enjoy Japan — to soak in outdoor baths in mountain pools, take part in a real tea ceremony on the Mitahora Kobo Temple grounds, and watch the National Living Treasure papermaker and his wife create paper. We spent Friday evening on a homestay farm with three generations of a Japanese family whose ancestors, dating back to the sixth century, are entombed in caves in the nearby forest.

On Saturday, American friends in Gifu helped us find a red kimono with cedars and cranes for me, and traditional Japanese pants and a jacket for Victor. We also took time to visit the world's largest Buddha made of lacquered paper. It gently smiled down on us, and the enormous ears (2.1 meters) seemed to hear our hearts. I turned to Victor and proposed to *him* — our circle complete.

Next, we took the train to Nagoya and headed for the used-and antique-jewelry district. Within an hour we had beautiful engagement and wedding rings picked out.

That evening, Victor placed the engagement ring on my finger. Then, a friend in Nagoya gave me a white wedding kimono that she had bought and saved for years, not knowing why.

When it seemed that destiny could surprise us no more, the phone rang. Our Gifu friends, who were arranging a Sunday engagement party, had news. The priest at the Mitahora Kobo Temple wanted to give us a wedding ceremony — the first for foreigners in the 1,200-year history of the temple. An inexorable roman-

tic momentum was moving us all and gathering force and magic.

The next morning, three women dressed me for hours in my kimonos, showing me how to place the fan and hold my outer garment. By the time I stepped out of the car at the temple grounds, I felt like an exotic princess meeting my prince. Dozens of elderly Japanese applauded me, bowed, and came to touch the bride for

actually married — yet.

Monday was the day for love and logistics. Japan's great train system ricocheted us from bustling Osaka and the American consulate office to the ward office in Kyoto. Two of the sisters from the inn, Sandy and Terry, helped us find the ward office, served as witnesses, and translated.

The Japanese ward officer wanted to close early for the Emperor's Birthday, but sister Sandy's perseverance saved us from leaving the

How To Get Married In A Foreign Country

We were lucky. Usually, getting married in a foreign country requires traveling the Internet or the phone book *before* traveling to the country. Birth certificates, blood tests, divorce decrees, even residency may be required to avoid bureaucratic knots and tie marital ones. For specific information, you can visit www.travel.state.gov on the Web, or call Overseas Citizen Services [202-647-5225] at the U.S. State Department.

Since every country has its own laws, the U.S. State Department suggests that you check in advance with the individual country's embassy and/or tourist office. Most countries have embassies in Washington, D.C., and many have consulates in large cities. Since each U.S. state has its own marriage laws, you should also check with your attorney general about the legality of a foreign marriage. — **L.S.**

good luck (at five feet eleven inches, with blond hair, I was a hard sight to miss).

Victor and I ascended more than 100 steep stairs as the choruses of monks chanting in the distance mingled with the sounds of a waterfall. Inside the temple, designed with intricate gold and simple wood, the Buddhist priest blessed our union with prayers, ointments, incense, bells, and an exchange of bracelets. Old and new friends then contributed to this rite of passage with biblical readings, prayers, and poems.

Following the ceremony, a beautiful meal of food grown in the mountains was served in a 500-year-old tearoom that seemed to float on the pond. We felt like the movie should fade out and the fairy tale should end with a happily ever after ... but, we still weren't

country as two single people. With barely a breath to spare, we were officially married before closing time. At twilight, we reached the rock garden, and a guard let us in after hours to privately celebrate our good fortune.

We returned to the inn glowing. The sisters all smiled as we entered our new room. On the table was their creative Americanization of a Japanese wedding cake — an apple pie with the inscription: Happy Marriage!

We departed Japan the next morning to begin our new life together. We had arrived as two never-been-married people. We left joined in our journey in ways the heart knew, but the mind could not imagine. **W**

LISA SONNE is an award-winning writer and filmmaker and a happy newlywed.