

tales from tokyo



CHELSEA HAYWOOD, FORMER MODEL AND AUTHOR OF THE BOOK *90-DAY GEISHA*, TELLS **NADIA CORRENTI** ABOUT HER ADVENTURES AS A TOKYO HOSTESS.

AT THE tender age of 20, Canadian Chelsea Haywood and her Australian husband Matt boarded a plane to Japan. Her mission? To work as a hostess in a Tokyo club and write a book about her exploits as a companion, confidante and friend to some of Japan's most powerful and wealthy men.

Why are international hostess clubs so popular in Japan?

In Japan, you have a public face and a private face, and they're completely separate. If you all work in the office during the day, then you can all go to a hostess club in the night-time, act like absolute monkeys, and show up at 9am and no one will say a word because they've disassociated. Japan is so disciplined and quite uptight in a lot of ways. The fact of the matter is, they're coming there for human connection.

You were regarded as a status symbol by the Japanese men. What was that like?

I enjoyed the friendships, but it is strange when you're paraded around as a foreign novelty and taken shopping, mostly so strangers can see them with you in public. But after a while I turned down invitations because I didn't want to go to Gucci or Prada and get new shoes anymore. I'd already gone through that experience to see what it was about, and I wasn't interested in personal gain.

What do men look for in a foreign hostess? The men are all so different and what they're looking for is very different. I went to

a Japanese hostess club once and the dynamic there was much different. The male role was to almost insult and put down the hostess. But at international hostess clubs, it's really surprising and entertaining for Japanese men to come in and speak to an Australian woman who gives back as good as she gets.

What are their expectations? Some of them just befriend you and other ones want you to come back and start a business with them and quit hostessing. Some delusions certainly develop, but still, in that situation I don't think that there's any expectation from there. But you never commit to anything, you never say anything. It's all about the chase.

What was your lifestyle like? I was exhausted a lot of the time. You don't really see the sun – it's a very dark existence. You're in the underworld and there's Yakuza (mafia) in the streets; you're playing this princess role in a hostess club – it's surreal.

You suspected one of your customers was a serial killer.

Do you still think that? There's a high probability that he could have been. Even now in Japanese media, there's no photos of him. They don't release any information – it's all very secretive.

There's talk of a movie. Who would you pick to play yourself? Natalie Portman. She can still pull off being 20 or 21.

Is that the desirable age for a hostess? Yes. You're like spoiled spongecake after you're 25!

90-Day Geisha is available in bookstores now.



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