New Days, New Ways: Changing Rites of Passage

Vision Quests for Everyone

A For centuries, Native Americans have gone through vision quests in hopes of gaining guidance and direction. Several companies and organizations are now offering a similar experience for non-Indians. For a fee, anyone who is looking for a new direction in life can go to certain wilderness areas in Canada or the United States and go through such a ritual. The details may vary from one organization to another, but in most cases, experts in psychology or Native American culture help to prepare the person in advance. This preparation usually lasts for several days and includes meditation, natural vegetarian food, lessons in the meaning of a vision quest and perhaps dream groups, in which the seeker of the vision discusses his or her dreams with psychological analysts. As on a traditional vision quest, people on this new-age quest spend one to four days alone in the wilderness. However, a difference is that they might choose to sleep in a tent and to bring drinking water. Some Native Americans are angry that non-Indians are doing this. They see it as a fad and say that the quest is meaningless to a person outside the culture, tradition, and religion.

Main idea:

Anyone can now experience a Native American vision quest, for a fee.

Summary:

Although some Native Americans do not approve, several companies and organizations are offering non-Indians the opportunity (for a fee) to experience a vision quest that is similar to the traditional one.

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A New Emirati Wedding



B In the United Arab Emirates, on the Arabian Peninsula, the traditional wedding seems to be changing, at least for some people. A typical Emirati wedding is extremely lavish – elegant, expensive, and huge. There might be 1,000 guests at the three-day celebration for the bride and groom. The groom has to pay these bills, and after such a wedding, the couple begins their marriage in terrible debt. Each wedding seems to be bigger than the one before it. Several years ago, the government decided that things were getting out of hand – out of control – so they started a Marriage Fund. This is money for young Emirati men who agree to marry Emirati women, not foreigners. Many of these men agree to have a group celebration. At one such group celebration, at which the UAE president was the guest of honor, there were several of the components of a traditional wedding: a lavish feast of exquisite food and entertainment by Bedouin dancers waving their swords. The difference? There were 650 grooms. It was, one person pointed out, "a symbol of a new spirit of economy."

Main idea:

Summary:

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Getting Married – Japanese Style?



C In Japan, too, weddings are different these days. A popular wedding is a *seiyaku*, which means "sincere vow or promise." Although less than one percent of all Japanese are Christian, 80 percent choose this Western-style Christian wedding. It certainly looks like a Western wedding; the bride wears a white gown, for example, and the groom wears a tuxedo. It also closely follows all the steps in a Christian wedding: there is the processional (in which the bride walks down the center aisle of the church to join the groom at the front), hymns (religious songs), readings of Christian scriptures (holy books), the exchange of vows, and of course the wedding kiss. In fact, some people say that this new Japanese-Christian wedding is more traditional than most Christian weddings in the West, except for the fact that the couple is usually careful to choose a "lucky day" for the ceremony. So why do so many Japanese choose this style of wedding when the Japanese culture already has rich, beautiful marriage traditions? One answer may be that this is a trend, and the Japanese are somewhat famous for following new trends. Another reason may be that traditional Japanese weddings are even more expensive than those in the Western style.

Main idea:

Summary:

Weddings Anywhere, Any Way



D While most Japanese weddings these days are in a traditional Western style, many couples in Western countries are looking for a non-Western wedding experience that expresses something of their personal interests. It is now possible to get married in a helicopter, on a ski slope, in the ocean (with dolphins, in Florida), in a hot-air balloon, or in a drive-through in Las Vegas (in which the couple stays in their car for the ceremony). For couples who want both to travel and have a traditional wedding (just not perhaps their tradition), it is possible to have a Hindu wedding in Goa, India. The groom wears an Indian kurta (loose shirt without collar), and the bride wears a red sari (dress with cloth wrapped around body) and traditional Indian jewelry, with her hands decorated in henna. They walk around a pyre seven times and repeat their seven promises of love. The ceremony is conducted by a Hindu priest, either at a temple or on a beach.

Main idea:

Summary:

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