

Reading and speaking

Why on earth would anyone do that?

- 1 Read the advert from the Japanese travel agency *Cerca Travel*. What is a 'solo wedding'? Why does the advert say you might want such a wedding?


CERCA TRAVEL offers
SOLO WEDDINGS ~ in KYOTO, JAPAN



Luxurious weddings in kimono or dress + location photo shoot

You are single, and you don't know if you will get married and have a wedding ceremony in the near future. However, you would like to have some pictures of yourself now in a wedding gown, or in a gorgeous bridal kimono, while you are young and beautiful.

Experience the feeling of being a princess for a day in the beautiful city of Kyoto!

- 2 Look at the photos and the title of the article. Explain the phrase 'everything but the groom!'
- 3  10.10 The American photographer, Naomi Harris, has decided to experience a solo wedding. Read and listen to the introduction. Why can't she be 'stood up at the altar'? Why do you think she wants a solo wedding?
It could be for her work. She might want to wear a beautiful dress.
- 4 Read *A growing trend*. Answer the questions.
- 1 What did Naomi 'sort of' forget to do? Why?
 - 2 How do you know that she was surprised when her boyfriend broke up with her?
 - 3 Why did living in New York *not* help her marriage prospects?
 - 4 What other reason does she give for not being married?
 - 5 Could her reasons for not marrying be just excuses? How do you know?



My solo wedding –

'I lie awake in my hotel room in Kyoto, nearly 6,000 miles from home, my stomach in knots. My mind is racing with thoughts of my wedding tomorrow. I take a deep breath and tell myself I don't have anything to worry about. I can't be stood up at the altar because the person I'm marrying is myself.'

A growing trend

The solo wedding is a growing trend in Japan. Like many of the women who use the service, I am a *spinster. I'm 42, and while all my friends are married or in long-term relationships, I sort of forgot to do it myself. In my late 20s, I thought I was dating the man I would marry, but he broke up with me abruptly. It was nearly 13 years before I had another relationship.

I used to think I was single because I lived in New York City during my 20s and 30s, where single women outnumber single men. Or because I travel so much for my work as a photographer. But I have many friends in New York in the same industry as me who have managed to meet, date, and marry. I've watched them get married, but I never thought I'd have a wedding of my own. Now here I am in Kyoto, awaiting my big day.

Getting ready for the Big Day

Yukiko Inoue has been running **Cerca Travel** for ten years. She is a 48-year-old divorcee. Two years ago, her colleague, 37-year-old **Natsumi Akai**, expressed interest in having her photos taken professionally in a wedding dress and the idea of the solo wedding was born. Since then, 130 Japanese women have paid ¥380,000 (£2,500) for a two-day package, including a dress-fitting, hair, makeup and a photo shoot – in short, everything except the actual ceremony.

I am met by Natsumi at the Ayumi Bridal dress shop. Natsumi is tall, slim, and beautiful. She tells me for her, the solo wedding was all about the dress.

'For Japanese women, the wedding dress is a symbol of being beautiful,' Natsumi explains. I, on the other hand, have never fantasized about wearing a wedding dress, and feel slightly nervous as Natsumi leads me into a private fitting room lined with puffy white gowns. But trying one on, I am shocked. I look in the mirror and I can't help catching my breath. I barely recognize the radiant, elegant woman I see. Natsumi smiles. 'You're a princess!'

In the end, I try on eight dresses. I end up choosing the first one I tried.