

# SEAN KELLY

“Voyages: Visual Journeys by six photographers,” *The New York Times Magazine*, September 26, 2015.

**The New York Times Magazine**

## VOYAGES



A self-portrait of Alec Soth in his room at the Park Hyatt Tokyo.

“I love the movie ‘Lost in Translation,’ so I decided I would stay in the Park Hyatt Tokyo, where the film was made, and not leave for five nights. Instead, I would bring the city to me, finding people online — through Craigslist and other sites. I brought in singers, a sushi chef, teachers and others. I probably learned as much as if I had gone out and visited temples and wandered the streets. Normally, I have a wariness of photographing in other cultures, but I felt as though I could get away with it here, because I’m not even pretending to enter the city. I was totally lost in translation, presented with this fabulous surface of things that I don’t entirely understand.”



Sari, a D.J., dancer and singer. “She walked through the hotel dressed like this, and it created a bit of a sensation. There’s a scene in ‘Lost in Translation’ where Scarlett Johansson wears a pink wig, so I wanted someone to wear a pink wig I bought. But Sari had this blue wig and a bob that somehow achieved the same quality.”



Alec Soth in a robe and slippers provided by the Park Hyatt Tokyo. “They had the big, plush white bathrobe, which is way too over the top and kind of cumbersome, but this was super comfortable.”



Soth at a tea ceremony with Shuntaro Kondo. “I was kind of expecting this old, grizzled tea master, but it was a younger I.T. guy. He has a mobile setup, so he can travel around and do tea ceremonies. I think he does it mostly for natives. He’s especially interested in getting younger people to understand the value of the tea ceremony.”



Insect sushi prepared by Uchiyama Shoichi, a private chef and ecologist. “I wanted to have Domino’s pizza delivered to me, but it turns out the hotel wouldn’t allow pizza delivery. This guy came up and prepared the sushi in the room. That took a long time — a good hour just to lay out all the things and wrap it. Each one is different. I ate three of them; I couldn’t handle any more.”



Singers from the Ganguro Cafe, part of the Ganguro fashion revival. “I asked them to sing, but they ended up dancing. I liked the idea of bringing in entertainment, though they caused a problem by being flamboyant in a hotel that’s not flamboyant. They seemed bored. They were just on their phones all the time.”



Masa-san, a language teacher. “We talked a lot about how you’re never supposed to make eye contact. It’s challenging when eye contact is something you’re supposed to do if you’re a confident person in the West.”



Soth holding a pocket mirror. “I was given this room, but then I had the question of whether I wanted to switch rooms to be on the other side of the building, which faces much more of the city and has the view seen in ‘Lost in Translation.’ I ended up choosing to stay on this side because it felt even more removed from the city.”



A business card from Yasuda-san, a “consultant for foreigners” Soth found on Craigslist. “The most memorable part of our meeting was the exchanging of business cards. I was kind of dreading it, because it’s such a formal thing. Only later did someone tell me that when someone hands you a business card, you’re supposed to look at it for a long time and study it, instead of just putting it down. I love the line on his card: ‘Welcome to Japan! Is your life in Japan alright?’ ”



Shin-san, who describes himself as a “love doctor.” “I assumed he was going to be like his name and give lots of advice on love and such, but instead he was really focused on fashion and making yourself attractive to people. He said you have to find a celebrity role model to come up with your style. I asked him, ‘What would you tell a schlub like me?’ He looked at my shoes, saw sneakers and suggested David Beckham, which is not really useful for me.”



“I would get room service at night for dinner, and the card would come with that, but I only got it twice for some reason. I don’t know why I find it so lyrical, but I do. I guess it’s connected to being in the clouds and also thinking about the time-zone difference, because it was as if I was never in Japan — as if I were somewhere else — but here’s the weather for Japan tomorrow.”



Genki Takasaki. “Someone searched Japanese websites for me, since I didn’t know how to search for different rental things, and said he had found a rental nerd. But the whole thing was a misunderstanding, because he doesn’t self-identify as a nerd at all. So they were kind of insulting questions that I asked him. He’s a ‘NEET,’ which stands for ‘Not in Education, Employment or Training,’ which is this class of people who are unemployed and sort of content to be unemployed.”



Asami Tonai, an assistant to the private chef. “She was just in heaven with these bugs. She was so enthusiastic. Later, this bug landed on the window outside. (We were really high up, not an area where there are many bugs — I hadn’t seen a bug my whole time there.) And she went over to the window and was kind of petting the glass and talking affectionately to this bug. But she talked about how she wanted to eat it. I thought it was weird after she was simulating petting it.”



A view from Soth's hotel room. "Japan wasn't the worst jet lag I've had, in part because I wasn't concerned about it. I was in a bedroom the entire time, so it didn't really matter."