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A Kindle Single

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ODESSA DREAMS: THE DARK HEART OF UKRAINE'S ONLINE MARRIAGE INDUSTRY (KINDLE SINGLE) BY SHAUN WALKER PDF

Is the concept of the “mail-order bride” alive and well, updated for the 21st century?

That’s what journalist Shaun Walker wants to find out when he sets out on a “romance tour” with a group of western men seeking a wife in Ukraine. The men spend a week in the port city of Odessa, hoping to find true love and a Ukrainian bride to bring home.

The country has a huge dating and marriage industry, but it quickly becomes apparent that all is not what it seems. Walker uncovers scams and disappointments, wounded hearts and broken lives as he journeys to the very bottom of Odessa’s sinister marriage industry. There are many twists and turns to the tale that are as shocking as they are unexpected.

Odessa Dreams is by turns hilariously funny, poignantly tragic and deeply disturbing. It is a roller coaster journey that will leave the reader feeling uncomfortable for quite some time.

Shaun Walker is Moscow Correspondent for The Guardian, and previously for The Independent. He studied Russian History at Oxford University and has lived in Moscow for a decade.

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Most helpful customer reviews

28 of 34 people found the following review helpful.

I haven't read it, don't need to, I lived it.

By genericbloke

I got married in Odessa, to an interpreter, and both she, and my now stepson moved to be with me in Europe. She talks daily to her parents via Skype. We had many Christmases this year, Western & Orthodox, a great time was had by all.

It's true what they say, that most of this is a scam, (in ways you cannot imagine) and that everyone gets paid. But the numbers work like this, 90% of men write but never visit. That is the basic business model right there. Many (working) women rely on their interpreters to be at the beck and call of the men that write. Because they're only interested in the 10% of men that visit, and they may or may not have internet access. If you were poorly paid in a bad economy, and somebody offered you money and gifts you'd take it too, right? You'd be dumb not to. Average salary is \$2-300 a month. Food is cheap, clothes and kids stuff are not.

Anastasia are a very serious, (Russian) company, and they actively recruit the women, (ads are all over the city) but the "scams" are perpetrated by the women themselves. Because the fines are so steep for the local agencies that front for Anastasia, especially if they get caught faking chats, (\$5k) that they would be stupid to do it. Without Anastasia they have no clients. I used Anastasia. They were nothing but straight with me.

For the 10% that do travel. yes you pay for an interpreter, but would you go to meet a strange foreign man alone? Think of them as chaperones, or employees, there to do your bidding. A lot of that can be avoided if you only look for women who can speak English, and you're not naive or overly gullible. You can just say "No" if the women ask you to go shopping, they'll lose interest soon enough. Similarly, if a woman is unwilling to sit close to you or hold hands, after a few dates, despite being "involved" then she's also not interested. This is a culture where men are still men, and women know the value of a good man. The women are not stupid, they were brought up amongst men, they know one when they see one, and will make their intentions plain enough. As a woman, if you're not married by the time you're 30 in Ukraine/Russia, you're unlikely to get married, and since all the women look good then competition for a decent man, even to be noticed, is fierce. Beauty when commonplace has no value.

Only 10% of men who visit get married, that makes your chances of success 1% overall. This is a high risk endeavour. It is also not cheap. Most of the men who succeed are men who travel alone to visit one woman, (as I did) Otherwise the women know you're "shopping" and they won't take you seriously. The tours are their own thing, a good way to get there if you're scared, a bad way to meet women. The agencies need women to show up, so those you meet are often just interested in the free night out.

The perception is that all Westerners are rich, if you play up to that you'll be taken at your word, (and may be taken for a fool) but a real man wouldn't behave that way in country. If you talk seriously to a woman, she'll talk seriously back, the women are very intelligent and very direct. They know what's in it for them, and a serious man is worth a lot to a serious woman. Ask to meet her friends and parents.

If you do your homework you will find a dissertation by a US student that claims to look at the process with a feminist eye, she looks at both Ukrainian women and Philippina women interviews many, expecting to find something sordid. What she found was that Ukrainian women were not brainwashed, or stupid, but they had no use for modern Western feminism. Not only that, such marriages have a far better success rate than the average America marriage. The Ukrainian women who are serious about this are very serious.

Do your homework, understand the risks, travel early, travel often. Good Luck.

9 of 10 people found the following review helpful.

What Does a Man Want?

By takingadayoff

This is a kindle single, advertised as 65 pages long. It's spun out from a shorter article that Moscow correspondent Shaun Walker wrote for the Independent (U.K.) newspaper last year.

It's about what used to be known as the mail order bride business. But things have changed. Now Odessa, in the Ukraine, is a center for plastic surgery and is also the source for many of the spam emails you may get inviting you to chat with Ukrainian ladies. Walker zeroes in on one large and apparently successful company there that hosts such chats and organizes tours for men to meet potential brides. He hops aboard a tour and interviews the men and the ladies (or "girls", but never "women") as well as representatives from the company, Anastasia.

The men are a more varied lot than you would imagine, and some are sympathetic, if pathetically unrealistic. Others are quite unpleasant. The women also fall into different categories. Most are there for the money, but there are a few who also seem to genuinely want to find a good husband and father for their potential children. On the face of it, the whole set up is a monumental scam, in which the men run up bills for chatting online, for talking on the phone, and for meeting the women. They have to pay an hourly fee for translators, even when the women speak English. The women string the men along for as much money as possible

before they stop answering their phones or emails.

The men, if they are stupid, are willfully so, since it's painfully obvious what's going on. And yet many of them endorse the service and return for repeat trips. In a way, it's like psychics. Some people believe what the psychics tell them, and don't want to be told that psychics are frauds.

I read this single in one sitting, it was so fascinating, and then went to look at the original article online. You can borrow the book if you're an Amazon Prime member, or if you're set up on booklending dot com, you can borrow it from me. But it's only three bucks, and worth it!

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful.

Everyone interested in a "mail order" bride should read this book.

By Lysander

Great work which any man going to Ukraine in search of a wife should read. I did get a girlfriend and I still see her and we enjoy a full relationship, but we decided against marriage, as she did not want children. I think the book is a little bit unfair, because Anastasia, the introductions agency the subject of the book, has a business model that lends itself to fraudsters, albeit, I am sure that the agency does its best to get rid of them. The problem is that it is extremely difficult to get contact information for the women involved, which means that if a woman is leading a man on, it is extremely hard to determine that other than by going to the expense of going to Ukraine and then seeing if one is stood up. Other agencies do not have that same business model. But realistically, unless you are rich - say \$10 million plus - and look younger than your age, it is a fool's errand to go to Ukraine looking to get a wife who is more than 30 years' younger than you. Moreover, the reason that women go to the sites is economic. That does not mean that a successful marriage is out of the question, but anyone who thinks it is a love match should think again. Arranged marriages often work. These marriages often work, because you need a lot of commitment to pull them off.

Western women fear these women because they are competition. Western men often idealize these women. The reality is that in Ukraine there is almost no social safety net for women who choose badly in the marriage market. Further, there are next to no legal remedies worth having for a woman who chooses badly in the marriage market. The net result is that if you find a woman who wants you and does not want to rip you off, you generally have someone who is careful, dependable and serious, but who is also cautious.

See all 49 customer reviews...

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