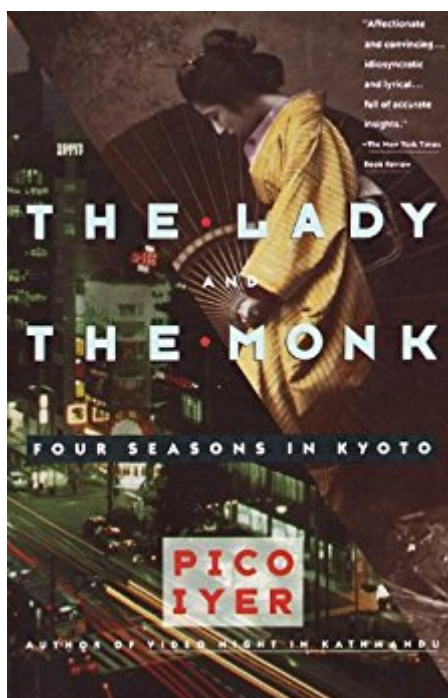


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# The Lady And The Monk: Four Seasons In Kyoto (Vintage Departures)



## Synopsis

When Pico Iyer decided to go to Kyoto and live in a monastery, he did so to learn about Zen Buddhism from the inside, to get to know Kyoto, one of the loveliest old cities in the world, and to find out something about Japanese culture today -- not the world of businessmen and production lines, but the traditional world of changing seasons and the silence of temples, of the images woven through literature, of the lunar Japan that still lives on behind the rising sun of geopolitical power. All this he did. And then he met Sachiko. Vivacious, attractive, thoroughly educated, speaking English enthusiastically if eccentrically, the wife of a Japanese "salaryman" who seldom left the office before 10 P.M., Sachiko was as conversant with tea ceremony and classical Japanese literature as with rock music, Goethe, and Vivaldi. With the lightness of touch that made *Video Night in Kathmandu* so captivating, Pico Iyer fashions from their relationship a marvelously ironic yet heartfelt book that is at once a portrait of cross-cultural infatuation -- and misunderstanding -- and a delightfully fresh way of seeing both the old Japan and the very new. From the Trade Paperback edition.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This beautiful book sold me on both Iyer and Japan. In this thoughtful volume, Iyer details his

perplexing and wonderful experiences as he attempted to understand another culture. The process is not so easy! But I love Iyer's narrative. He set out to Japan to clear his head, to think, to be alone. Then reality hit, and his year turned into something completely different. People who chose to study or live abroad are either quite brave or quite naive. Their experiences can send them to heights of pleasure and back to their own drawing boards. Iyer's frank explanation of both successes and failures in his new culture make this book a special treasure. I was enthralled while reading every page. Although I had already been to Japan when I found this book, now I can't wait to return, not to mimic Iyer's adventure, which would be impossible, but to appreciate even more of his observations and difficulties.

First time reading anything from this Author and I enjoyed it thoroughly as I recently came back from a trip to Japan. And helped me understand much of what I saw and felt.

Any reviewer can find something wrong with a book, if s/he tries hard enough. And many have been quick to do so here. I suppose I could as well (e.g., by picking on Iyer for not going into the implications of the faux-Utopian society Japan has created). But I have absolutely no desire to do so. The book is so beautifully and deftly written, the romance so touching and piquant without falling into bathos, that it would, to me be similar to picking at the lovely haikus interspersed herein, stylistically complementing the lyrical writing. Yes, as one reviewer has pointed out, it is more memoir than what is called "Travel Literature"-though the boundaries between the two have always seemed blurry to me at best. This book will be enjoyed most by lovers of poetry, lyrical poetry - such as that of Yeats and Shelley, than by readers of the "hard-boiled" school of travel writing epitomized in V.S. Naipaul's works. If you believe that poetry is the deepest sort of writing, that one can get to "know" a society or people better through a Romantic relationship with a member of that society than by doing a Sociological study of it, if your dream life is as important to you as waking life, in short, if you have a poetic nature: This is the book for you! "Everyone falls in love with what he cannot begin to understand."--Or, as Pico finds out, thinks he cannot, but through patience and love finds that he can...begin. PS-Pico and Sachiko are still together, according to wikipedia at any event.

I read *Lady and the Monk* before my first trip to Japan in 2008 and liked it enough that I broke my rule of trying to find new homes for non-work books in hopes of keeping my shelves to a dull roar. I just booked another trip and am glad I kept it because I'm going to give it a re-read.

An intimate look at a deep relationship one can have with Japan without zen. This book is really about the author falling in love with a Japanese woman while living in Kyoto as a foreigner. This heightened his appreciation of the country he was in the process of adopting, seemingly unconsciously.

Most travel books follow a conventional path. An intrpedid traveller goes to an exotic locale and begins a journey from Point A to Point B. During the trip, the narrator describes the landscape and the interesting characters he meets along the way. The reader leaves the book feeling that they have a better understanding of some distant locale. Pico Iyer's "The Lady and the Monk" is a very different type of travel book. First and foremost, Iyer goes to Kyoto for a year and never really leaves the city. His book is more of a sedentary tale that revolves around his romantic relationship with a 30 year old, married mother of two. The emotional center of this book is about a Japanese woman's attempt to break out of the strict confines of a society that keeps her from realizing her dreams. This tale of rebellion and rebirth is not told by the woman but by her Anglo/Indian/American lover. His analysis and insights are interesting but they are by there very nature second hand. And yet the one area where Iyer is an expert, his own feelings, he is a bit coy. This is a very unusual travel narrative. It is interesting but not a classic.

Very insightful, without being overly simplistic. The complex relationship of a modern Japan and the traditions of Kyoto. As the title indicates, the focus is on appearances and contradictions in gender roles, the true meaning of Zen and the transformation of Japanese society. Nicely written.

Inconsistent in parts but lovely insightful writing that gives a very intimate picture of his first year in Japan. It thoughtfully engages in the stereotypes, both of the Japanese and Gaijin, without indulging them. Highly evocative.

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