

The Realities of Finding Love Abroad

"The One" Might Just Reside in Another Country

by lola akinmade

Had I shut down my Match.com International profile a few seconds earlier, I probably would be writing a different story. A message lurking in my inbox began a three-year intercontinental relationship with a Swede with whom I recently exchanged "I dos." What drove me to consider love abroad? "Some black women choose to date internationally because it delivers an exciting range of relationship opportunities they would not likely have domestically," says Rosalind Cummings-Yeates, who has penned expert feature articles on finding love for Match.com and AOL. "For the well-traveled black woman, the chance to meet men from different countries creates an endless stream of relationship potential."

That made sense. As I chatted with more black women who'd found love abroad, one thing we seemed to have in common was that we were avid travelers; adventurous and open to new dating experiences. Finding love abroad is a significant time investment, and online dating opens up the world to women searching beyond their backyards. Once a connection is made, hundreds of dollars can be burnt flying across continents in attempts to sustain your budding relationship.

While the prospect of an international relationship may seem exciting, the reality is that it exposes a whole new set of challenges. Sure, the old adage says absence makes the heart grow fonder, but in the case of finding love abroad, the adage out of sight, out of mind ends up being more appropriate in many cases as the strain of distance takes its toll on new love. International relationships in their infancy readily fall victim to this. And once you and your love decide to take things further, issues such as securing res-

ident permits, learning the local language and finding jobs begin to surface.

Whitney Love met her boyfriend, Roar, online in 2006 while living and working in Germany as an English teacher. The couple currently resides in Stavanger, Norway. "I have heard too many stories of women who ended up down and out because something happened to their husband, and they couldn't speak the language or didn't have a local support network. I didn't want that to be me!" says Whitney, who is fluent in Norwegian and has secured a job in Stavanger.

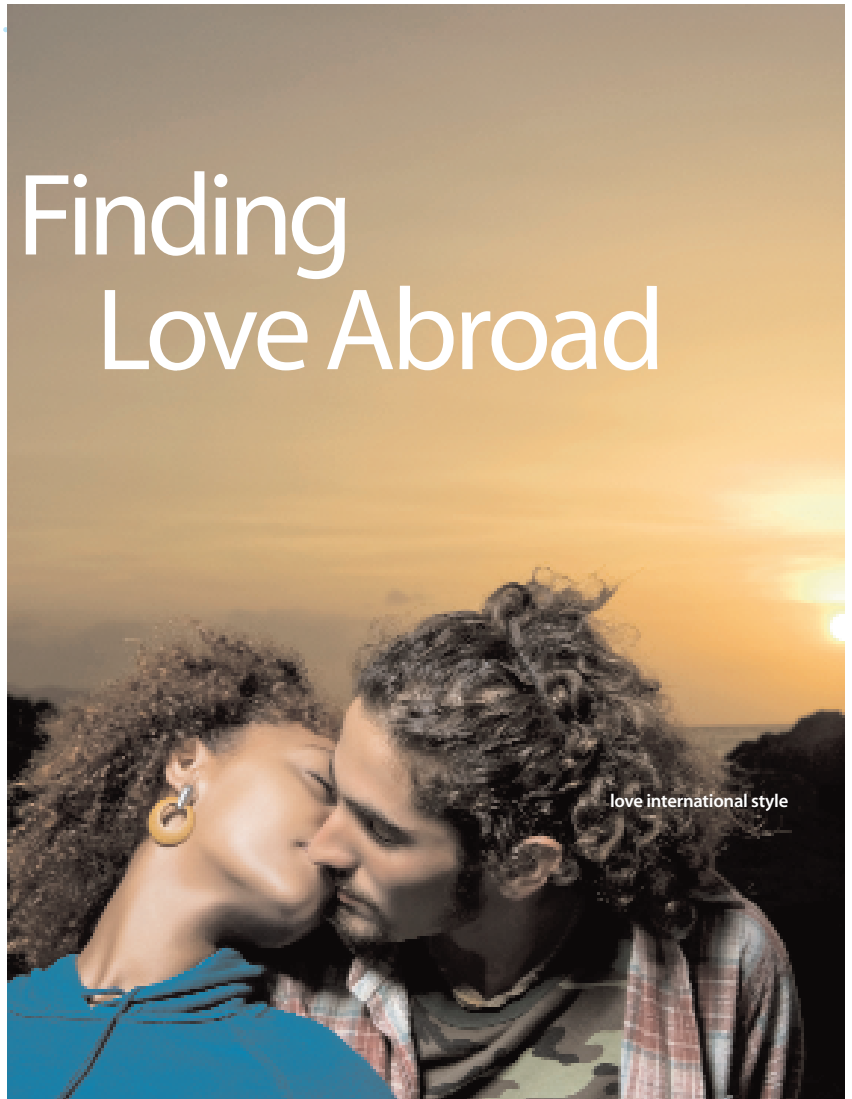
For many black expatriates, the immigration process could take months, even years, with a mandatory period of physical separation required while necessary visas and permits are being processed. Sometimes, permits are denied and this can devastate a relationship.

Living oceans away from family can

be equally emotional. Erica Smith-Escasut, originally from Baton Rouge, Louisiana, but now living in Toulouse with her French husband of nine years, can relate. Being able to share experiences in real time with family and friends is difficult. "Knowing that I can't just hop in the car and drive over to see my mother makes the distance challenging," she says. "The Internet has made it easy to stay in contact, but nothing will ever replace being able to give someone a hug."

Finding a community of black female expatriates can temporarily fill those gaps of loneliness, and that is what Adrienne George, founder of the Black Women in Europe (BWIE) blog, aims to achieve. BWIE is a social networking site that celebrates "women of the African Diaspora living in Europe." She also found love abroad, meeting her Swedish partner, Jonas, in Brussels four years ago.

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