

If you've got the yen, Tokyo has the place

Recent visitor to Japan BERWYN LEWIS spent an afternoon in one of Tokyo's more than 300 'love hotels' — in the name of investigative journalism, of course.

JAPAN'S "love hotels" provide for the fantasies of those who are deprived of space and privacy, by the hour or overnight. They also provide high-class, comfortable and somewhat erotically-inspired accommodation for those seeking a good night's sleep.

As a journalist, I could hardly say "no" when the chance to investigate one of these hotels presented itself.

My first problem was that I was alone. Love hotels cater for couples, triples or any combination thereof so long as there is more than one person.

I approached the problem Pollyanna-style and mentioned my interest to a small gathering of friendly Japanese business people in a jokey, baited fashion, somewhat akin to dropping a fishing line off the end of a jetty. They laughed in a restrained manner and I laughed too but I noticed a slight blush gathering on the cheeks of one of the younger gentlemen. From that moment he was a moving target and partner in crime.

Contriving an excuse for us to be alone was a simple matter and naturally the subject of love hotels cropped up in our broken-English conversation. To my surprise he was more than willing to accompany me and he just happened to have the business card of one in his wallet.

There was one condition. His identity must not be revealed, otherwise his job and his career would be nothing less than kamikaze material. I also had one condition. That he understood our rendezvous was on a strictly professional basis. We will only talk, I said, far too many times.

Did this shy and polite young man really know what I wanted? Did a demon lover lurk beneath his impeccably cut suit and immaculately groomed hair? Oh well, I said to myself, as he made a call from a nearby pink public telephone using a 10 yen piece which I had given him in order to establish the politically correct tone, opportunity only knocks once and right now it was giving directions to The Windsor Hotel in the Kamata district of Tokyo.

It was about 4 pm on a hot, wet Wednesday, not exactly the most romantic hour for trysts at a love hotel.

I examined the precision of some plastic display food, sushi, with abject determination hoping he was going to be decorous and honourable in the best Samurai tradition.

He completed the call, inscrutably. It was a fate accompli. We set off down a series of gradually diminishing alley ways. Within seconds I had lost my sense of direction; rapid escape was now impossible.

We turned into what appeared to be a wide, open roller-door. We were walking into a car parking station! Through the gloom and gleam of automobiles I perceived a tiny shuttered window at the far end. I hung back, for his sake. He had told me they usually don't welcome *gaijin* (foreigners) because they create too many problems, mostly related to communication breakdowns — despite the fact that the language of love is supposed to be universal.

A few words in Japanese and some electronically operated doors at our right slid open. We stepped into a chintzy lobby. I almost walked into a suit of armour. A panel lit up on the wall behind me displaying photographs of about 30 different Japanese and Western bedrooms with varying prices. It was just like choosing a McDonald's, with or without onions. There were about 10 rooms to each of the hotel's five floors and at that hour it was about half full.

"You choose."

"No, you."

It was his territory. He chose a room that looked like something out of an Australian Housing Commission home. At this point I was not about to be cheated by some cultural quirk.

"No, this one," I said, pointing to a Shakespearean-inspired boudoir replete with velvet curtains draped over a four-poster bed. It was only 4,500 yen (\$A27) for two hours and just 1,200 yen (\$A7) for each hour after that.

A panel of information in Japanese revealed that if we had waited another



15 minutes, till 5 o'clock, we could have stayed all night for 4,500 yen. I also learned that we could have taken advantage of a discount offer, a reduction of 1,200 yen from 10 am to 5 pm on weekdays. I was relieved we hadn't been budget-conscious. With the grace of the gods the whole experience might be behind me in just 120 minutes when, if the worst came to the worst, we would be thrown out, back into the carpark.

THE face behind the shuttered window, of which only the mouth was visible, was informed of our choice, room number 501. A key slid towards us and

we stepped into a velvet and brass-trimmed lift which whisked us to the fifth floor. We unlocked our door, removed our shoes and slid into Japanese slippers and entered our chamber of love where no love would be made.

We turned on the TV set and sat down on the love seat. A porno movie graced the screen. The two naked bodies, in the process of engaging each other, were of indeterminate sex due to the imposition, by Japanese law, of a white flare which censors the genitals.

I-picked up a book. It was a catalogue of pornographic pictures. I glanced to the right. A vending machine

for condoms and a pay-as-you-use bar. I invited him to choose a drink. He chose something called "Sport", so I did too which made him laugh.

"This is only for men," he said. It was too late — I'd torn the tab off and was nervously gulping.

I went to the window and pulled back the curtains. It was a two-way mirror looking into the bathroom. Perhaps a bath would be in order? No, that would mean removing one's clothes and could be misinterpreted! Instead I played with the light controls, they were dimmer switches.

I investigated the huge bathroom. Rubber mats stacked at one end could

THERE are more than 300 love hotels in Tokyo and an estimated 10,000 throughout Japan, mostly located in the big cities. However, there is no official listing. They're mostly found around the main bar, disco and coffee shop areas, including Shinjuku, Ueno, Idabashi and Shibuya.

Love hotels are a postwar phenomenon, mostly privately owned by individual business people.

First, there was the Ryokan (Japanese inn) which catered for the illicit, discreet or purely lustful. After the war, the needs of Japan's lovers exceeded the resources, leading to the establishment of the love hotel industry, which flung open its doors and cash registers to a lucrative new market.

When they are visible from the

street, they can be identified by their eccentric facades — chateaux (there is a big castle on the road to Hakone or the Queen Elizabeth Hotel on the Tokyo-Nagoya expressway which specialises in groups: two or more couples to a room), ships and Gothic fairytale architecture with concealed entrances into which one disappears within a minimum amount of time.

They are not controlled by the Japanese Yakuza (organised crime or criminal element) and they are safe, reliable, scrupulously clean and efficiently conducted, not to mention discreet to the point of being impersonal.

For those without amorous intention, they are a great deal quieter, equipped with more creature comforts and more space and service per yen than the conventional hotel.

be unrolled for rolling around on. An inspiring range of gadgets and flexing objects as well as taps absorbed my attention. Hoses, sprays, massage and suction plugs, jets, shower outlets at all levels, vibrators beyond my wildest dreams as well as shampoos, soaps, bath bubbles, oils, creams and sprays for all manner of intentions lined the bath tub. There were also tea and coffee making facilities and a automatic device which turned off bath taps in case one forgot.

I returned to contemplate the bed. It was soft and there were mirrors on three sides, one above, two on either side. Two crisply folded yukatas were perched on the pillows. My companion informed me that other rooms offered turning double beds, sometimes two double beds to a room.

"This is for swapping," he informed me.

Swapping, it seemed, had entered the vocabulary of Japlish (Japanese English) with nothing less than a vengeance.

Yet more rooms, ranging from 7,000 (\$A42) to 20,000 yen (\$A120), he told me, offered instant replay videos of action projected onto the ceiling, equipment for S and M and B and D, rocking-horse riding (with vibrating saddles), up to three TV sets (how on earth would they find time to watch it all?), see-saws, vibrating beds and something which he described as a

"stage show" which came complete with audio sets. A "super car", a "super horse" and a "pink swinging chair" were also available for specialist interests.

I stared at the paintings on the wall. They were classic, romantic English prints of landscapes inhabited by reclining nudes.

My companion was flicking through the pages of a beautifully bound tome entitled *Endless Love*, graphic photographs of novelties available from the front desk, garters, underwear with strategically placed holes and phalluses for all seasons. But my friend was struggling with a translation problem.

"I do not know the word for this in English," he said. He pointed to a range of dildos with bare, capped, dragon and temple shrine tips.

I turned to the window. A real one. Outside in the soft rain a man with a loud speaker was making an election speech in the square below.

"Tokyo City is electing a new Governor on July 7," my friend informed me.

The room was getting very hot. I turned on the air-conditioning and another porno movie began. A pretty young girl, fully clothed and holding an umbrella, introduced herself and began to stroll through a park, feeding deer.

The love hotels, I realised with relief, had not overlooked the appeal of the human element, even on TV.