

Lost In Translation (2003)

TOMATOMETER

All Critics

95

Average Rating: 8.4/10 Reviews
Counted: 222 Fresh: 211 | Rotten: 11

Top Critics

98

Average Rating: 8.5/10 Critic Reviews:
45 Fresh: 44 | Rotten: 1

Effectively balancing humor and subtle pathos, Sofia Coppola crafts a moving, melancholy story that serves as a showcase for both Bill Murray and Scarlett Johansson.

AUDIENCE

83

liked it Average Rating: 3.6/5 User
Ratings: 329,993

Movie Info

After making a striking directorial debut with her screen adaptation of *The Virgin Suicides*, Sofia Coppola offers a story of love and friendship blooming under unlikely circumstances in this comedy drama. Bob Harris (Bill Murray) is a well-known American actor whose career has gone into a tailspin; needing work, he takes a very large fee to appear in a commercial for Japanese whiskey to be shot in Tokyo. Feeling no small degree of culture shock in Japan, Bob spends most of his non-working hours at his hotel, where he meets Charlotte (Scarlett Johansson) at the bar. Twentysomething Charlotte is married to John (Giovanni Ribisi), a successful photographer who is in Tokyo on an assignment, leaving her to while away her time while he works. Beyond their shared bemusement and confusion with

the sights and sounds of contemporary Tokyo, Bob and Charlotte share a similar dissatisfaction with their lives; the spark has gone out of Bob's marriage, and he's become disillusioned with his career. Meanwhile, Charlotte is puzzled with how much John has changed in their two years of marriage, while she's been unable to launch a creative career of her own. Bob and Charlotte become fast friends, and as they explore Tokyo, they begin to wonder if their sudden friendship might be growing into something more. ~ Mark Deming, Rovi

R, 1 hr. 45 min.

Drama, Comedy

Directed By: [Sofia Coppola](#)

Written By: [Sofia Coppola](#)

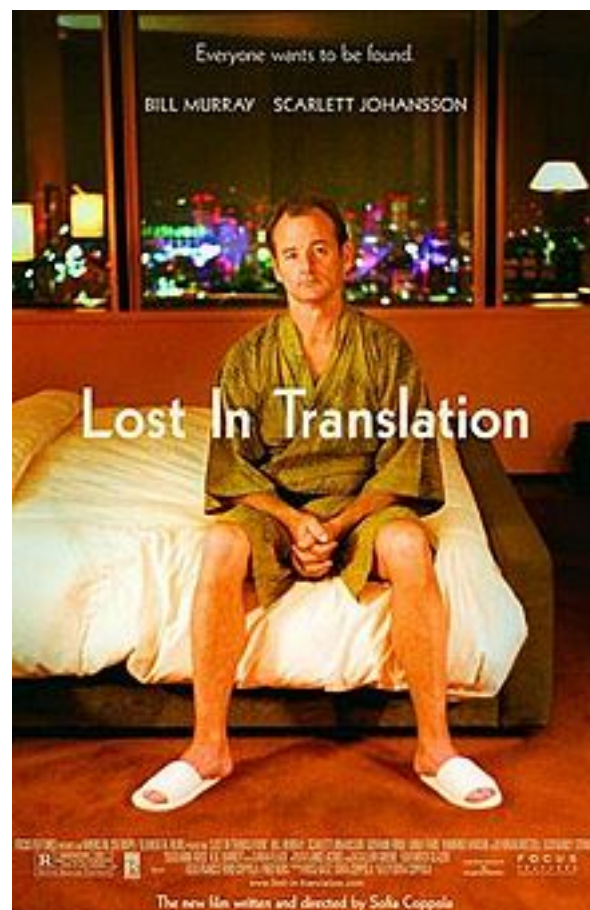
In Theaters: Sep 26, 2003 Limited

On DVD: Feb 3, 2004

US Box Office:\$44.6M

Focus Features - [Official Site](#)

[\[www.rottentomatoes.com\]](http://www.rottentomatoes.com)



Theatrical release poster

(Wikipedia)

Lost in Translation (film)

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Lost in Translation is a 2003 American comedy-drama film written and directed by Sofia Coppola. It was her second feature film after *The Virgin Suicides* (1999). It stars Bill Murray, Scarlett Johansson, Giovanni Ribisi, Anna Faris, and Fumihiko Hayashi. The film revolves around an aging actor named Bob Harris (Murray) and a recent college graduate named Charlotte (Johansson) who develop a rapport after a chance meeting in a Tokyo hotel. The movie explores themes of loneliness, insomnia, existential ennui, and culture shock against the backdrop of a modern Japanese city.

Lost in Translation was a major critical success and was nominated for four Academy Awards, including Best Picture, Best Actor for Bill Murray, and Best Director for Sofia Coppola; Coppola won for Best Original Screenplay. Scarlett Johansson won a BAFTA award for Best Actress in a Leading Role. The film was also a commercial success, grossing almost \$120 million from a budget of only \$4 million.

Plot

Bob Harris (Murray), an aging American movie star, arrives in Tokyo to film an advertisement for Suntory whisky, for which he will receive \$2 million. Charlotte (Johansson), a young college graduate, is left behind in her hotel room by her husband, John (Ribisi), a celebrity photographer on assignment in Tokyo. Charlotte is unsure of her future with John as she believes he takes more interest in his celebrity models, most notably a young and popular American actress named Kelly (Faris), than he does in her. At the same time, Bob's own 25-year marriage is tired and lacking in romance as he goes through a midlife crisis.

One night, after a long photo shoot, Bob retreats to the hotel bar. Charlotte, sitting at a table with John and friends, notices Bob and has a waiter bring him a cup of sake from her table. Later, Bob and Charlotte have brief encounters each night at the hotel bar, until Charlotte invites Bob to meet up with some local friends of hers. Bob accepts and arrives later at her hotel room dressed in clothes that appear to be designed for a younger generation. The two begin a friendship and bond through their adventures in Tokyo together while experiencing the differences

between Japanese and American culture, and between their own generations.

On the penultimate night of his stay, Bob attracts the attention of the resident vocalist. The next morning, Bob awakens to find the woman in his room, having apparently slept with her. Charlotte arrives at his room to go out for breakfast only to find the woman in his room, leading to conflict and tension over a subsequent lunch. Later that night, during a fire alarm at the hotel, Bob and Charlotte reconcile and express how they will miss each other as they make one more trip back to the hotel bar.

On the following morning, Bob is set for his departure back to the United States. He tells Charlotte goodbye at the hotel lobby shortly before checking out and sadly watches her retreat back to an elevator. While riding in a taxi to the airport, Bob sees Charlotte on a crowded street and gets out and goes to her. Bob embraces Charlotte and whispers something (substantially inaudible to the audience) in the tearful Charlotte's ear. The two share a kiss, say goodbye and Bob departs.

Cast

- Bill Murray as Bob Harris
- Scarlett Johansson as Charlotte
- Giovanni Ribisi as John
- Anna Faris as Kelly
- Fumihiko Hayashi as Charlie Brown
- Akiko Takeshita as Ms. Kawasaki
- François Du Bois as the Pianist
- Takashi Fujii as TV host
- Hiromix as herself

Analysis

Over the course of the film, several things get "lost in translation". Bob, a Japanese director (Yutaka Tadokoro), and an interpreter (Takeshita) are on a set, filming a commercial for Suntory whisky (specifically, 17-year old Hibiki). In several exchanges, the director gives lengthy, impassioned directives in Japanese. These are invariably followed by brief, incomplete translations from the interpreter.

Director [in Japanese, to the interpreter]: The translation is very important, O.K.? The translation.

Interpreter [in Japanese, to the director]: Yes, of course. I understand.

Director [in Japanese, to Bob]: Mr. Bob. You are sitting quietly in your study. And then there is a bottle of Suntory whisky on top of the table. You understand, right?

With wholehearted feeling, slowly, look at the camera, tenderly, and as if you are meeting old friends, say the words. As if you are Bogie in *Casablanca*, saying, "Here's looking at you, kid,"—Suntory time! *Interpreter* [In English, to Bob]: He wants you to turn, look in camera. O.K.? *Bob*: ...Is that all he said?

In addition to the meaning and detail lost in the translation of the director's words, the two central characters in the film—Bob and Charlotte—are also lost in other ways. On a basic level, they are lost in the alien Japanese culture. But in addition, they are lost in their own lives and relationships, a feeling, amplified by their displaced location, that leads to their blossoming friendship and growing connection with one another.

By her own admission, Coppola wanted to create a romantic movie about two characters that have a moment of connection. The story's timeline was intentionally shortened to emphasize this moment. Additionally, Coppola has said that since "there's not much happening in the story besides [Bob and Charlotte's relationship]", the filmmakers tried to keep an ongoing tension.

The academic Marco Abel lists *Lost in Translation* as one of many films that belong to the category of "postromance" cinema, which he says offers a negative perspective of love, sex, romance, and dating. According to Abel, the characters in such films reject the idealized notion of lifelong monogamy.

The author and filmmaker Anita Schillhorn van Veen interprets the film as a criticism of modernity, in which Tokyo is a contemporary "floating world" of fleeting pleasures that are too alienating and amoral to facilitate meaningful relationships.

Aesthetics

The author and lecturer Maria San Filippo contends that the film's setting, Tokyo, is an audiovisual metaphor for Bob and Charlotte's world views. She explains that the calm ambience of the city's hotel represents Bob's desire to be secure and undisturbed, while the energetic atmosphere of the city streets represents Charlotte's willingness to engage with the world.

Robert Hahn, an essayist writing for *The Southern Review*, has suggested that the filmmakers deliberately use chiaroscuro to support the story. He argues that the film's dominant light tones symbolize feelings of humor and romance, and they are contrasted with dark tones that symbolize underlying

feelings of despondency. He compares this to the technique of the painter John Singer Sargent.

The film's opening shot, which features a close shot of Charlotte resting in transparent pink underpants, has been noted by various commentators. In particular, it has been compared to the portraits of the painter John Kacere and the image of Brigitte Bardot in the opening scene of the 1963 film *Contempt*. Filippo has written that while the image in *Contempt* is used to remark on sexual objectification, Coppola "doesn't seem to be making a statement at all beyond a sort of endorsement of beauty for beauty's sake." Geoff King, a professor of film at Brunel University, contends that the shot is marked by an "obvious" appeal in its potential eroticism, and a "subtle" appeal in its artistic qualities. He uses the shot as an example of the film's obvious attractions, which are characteristic of mainstream film, and its subtle ones, which are typified by "indie" film.

Production

Development

"I remember having these weeks there that were sort of enchanting and weird ... Tokyo is so disorienting, and there's a loneliness and isolation. Everything is so crazy, and the jet lag is torture. I liked the idea of juxtaposing a midlife crisis with that time in your early 20s when you're, like, What should I do with my life?"

—Sofia Coppola, 2003

The idea for *Lost in Translation* emerged after Coppola saw her friend Fumihito Hayashi perform a karaoke version of the Sex Pistols song "God Save the Queen", and she wanted to put it into a movie. At that time, Coppola was working in Japan after Hayashi hired her to take photographs for his fashion magazine. Before *Lost in Translation* was written, she had visited the country numerous times and based the film's setting on her experiences there in her twenties. Coppola was attracted to the neon lights of Tokyo and has described the Park Hyatt Tokyo, where most of the film's interior sequences take place, as one of her "favorite places in the world." Particularly, she was attracted to its quietness, design, and "combination of different cultures", which include a New York bar and French restaurant. Coppola spent six months writing the film, beginning with "short stories" and "impressions" that culminated into a 70-page script. She wanted to create a story that was "a little more funny and romantic" than her previous feature, *The Virgin Suicides*, and she spent little time planning or rewriting it. Coppola has called the film a "valentine" to Tokyo, in which she has

displayed the city in the way that it is meaningful to her.

Ross Katz, who co-produced the film, said that Coppola "wrote the movie for Bill [Murray]", and that "she wasn't going to make it if he didn't do it". Coppola said that she had always wanted to work with Murray and that she was attracted to his "sweet, lovable side". She pursued him for five to eight months, relentlessly sending telephone messages and letters. She enlisted help from Wes Anderson, who had directed Murray in two films, and screenwriter Mitch Glazer, who was a mutual friend. In July 2002, Coppola and Murray finally met in a restaurant, and he agreed to participate because he "couldn't let her down". Despite this, Murray did not sign a contract; when he finally arrived in Tokyo, Coppola described it as "a huge relief". Coppola first noticed Scarlett Johansson in *Manny & Lo*, where she related to her "understated" and "subtle" demeanor. Johansson, who was 17 years old at the time, immediately accepted the part and Coppola was happy with the maturity she brought to the character. In writing the story, Coppola said she was influenced by the relationship between Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall in Howard Hawks' *The Big Sleep*.

Filming

Lance Acord, the film's director of photography, has written that the cinematographic style of *Lost in Translation* is largely based on "daily experiences, memories and impressions" of his time in Japan. He worked closely with Coppola to visualize the film, relying on multiple experiences he shared with her in Tokyo before production took place. Location scouting was carried out by Coppola, Acord, and Katz; and Coppola created 40 pages of photographs for the crew so that they would understand her visual intentions. Acord sought to maximize available light during shooting and use artificial lights as little as possible. He described this approach as conservative compared to "the more conventional Hollywood system", for which some of the crew's Japanese electricians thought he was "out of his mind". In particular, Acord did not use any artificial lights to photograph the film's night-time exteriors. *Lost in Translation* was largely shot in an improvised, "free-form" manner, which Coppola described as "stealthy" and "almost documentary-style". The crew shot in some locations without permits, including Tokyo's subways and Shibuya Crossing; they avoided police by keeping a minimal crew. Acord avoided grandiose camera movements in favor of still shots to avoid taking away from the loneliness of the characters. Most of the film was shot on an Aaton camera with 35 mm film stock, using Kodak Vision 500T 5263 stock for nightlight exteriors and Kodak Vision 320T 5277 stock in daylight. A smaller Moviecam Compact was

used in confined locations. Coppola said that her father, Francis Ford Coppola, tried to convince her to shoot on video, but she ultimately decided on film, describing its "fragmented, dislocated, melancholic, romantic feeling", in contrast with video, which is "more immediate, in the present". In interviews, she said she wanted to shoot Tokyo with a spontaneous "informality", similar to the "way a snapshot looks", and she chose to shoot on high-speed film stocks to evoke a "homemade intimacy". Some scenes were shot wholly for mood and were captured without sound.

Lost in Translation was shot six days per week in September and October 2002, over the course of 27 days. During this time, videotape footage was mailed to editor Sarah Flack in New York City, where she began editing the film in a Red Car office. The scenes with Bob and Charlotte together were largely shot in order. Many of the interior scenes were shot overnight, because the hotel did not allow the crew to shoot until after 1 a.m. Various locations were used during production; in particular, the bar featured prominently in the film is the New York Bar, which is situated on the 52nd floor of the Shinjuku Park Tower and part of the Park Hyatt in Shinjuku, Tokyo. Other locations include the Heian Jingu shrine in Kyoto and the steps of the San-mon gate at Nanzen-ji, as well as the club Air in the Daikanyama district of Tokyo. All of the locations mentioned in the film are the names of actual places that existed in Tokyo at the time of filming. Murray described the first few weeks of the shoot as like "being held prisoner", since he was affected by jet lag, and Johansson said the shoot made her "busy, vulnerable and tired". Coppola spoke of the challenges of directing the movie with a Japanese crew, since she had to rely on her assistant director to make translations. Much of the performances were improvised, and Coppola openly allowed modifications to dialogue during shooting. For example, the dialogue in the scene with Harris and the still photographer was unrehearsed. Coppola has said that she was attracted to the idea of Bob and Charlotte going through stages of a romantic relationship all in one week — in which they have met, courted, hurt each other, and discussed intimate life. To conclude this relationship, Coppola wanted a special ending even though she thought the concluding scene in the script was mundane. Coppola instructed Murray to perform the kiss in that scene without telling Johansson, to which she reacted without preparation. The whisper was also unscripted, but too quiet to be recorded. While Coppola initially considered having audible dialogue dubbed into the moment, she later decided that it was better to keep it "between the two of them." After filming, Coppola and Flack spent approximately 10 weeks editing the film. In the bonus features of the film's DVD, Murray called *Lost in Translation* his favorite film that he has worked on.

Music

The film's soundtrack, supervised by Brian Reitzell, was released on September 9, 2003 by Emperor Norton Records. It contains five songs by Kevin Shields, including one from his group My Bloody Valentine. Allmusic gave the soundtrack four out of five stars, saying "Coppola's impressionistic romance *Lost in Translation* features an equally impressionistic and romantic soundtrack that plays almost as big a role in the film as Bill Murray and Scarlett Johansson do." Agathi Glezakos, an academic writing a review of *Lost in Translation* shortly after its release, wrote that the music in the film's karaoke scene constitutes a common "language" that allows Bob and Charlotte to connect with some of the Japanese people amidst their alienation. In that scene, the rendition of the Pretenders' "Brass in Pocket" was selected to showcase a lively side of Charlotte, and "(What's So Funny 'Bout) Peace, Love, and Understanding" was chosen to establish that Bob is from a different generation. Both Coppola and Murray finally selected Roxy Music's "More Than This" during the shoot itself because they liked the band and thought the lyrics fit the story.

Reception

Reviews

Lost in Translation was boosted by universal critical acclaim and audience word-of-mouth. It has a rating of 95% "Certified Fresh" on Rotten Tomatoes and a rating score of 89% based on 44 reviews on Metacritic. It was praised not only for Sofia Coppola's script and distinctive directing, but also for the performances of Murray and Johansson. Film critic Roger Ebert gave the film four out of four stars and rated it the second best film of the year, describing it as "sweet and sad at the same time as it is sardonic and funny", while also praising Bill Murray and Scarlett Johansson. In his review for *The New York Times*, Elvis Mitchell wrote, "At 18, the actress gets away with playing a 25-year-old woman by using her husky voice to test the level of acidity in the air ... Ms. Johansson is not nearly as accomplished a performer as Mr. Murray, but Ms. Coppola gets around this by using Charlotte's simplicity and curiosity as keys to her character". *Entertainment Weekly* gave the film an "A" rating and Lisa Schwarzbaum wrote, "working opposite the embracing, restful serenity of Johansson, Murray reveals something more commanding in his repose than we have ever seen before. Trimmed to a newly muscular, rangy handsomeness and in complete rapport with his character's hard-earned acceptance of life's limitations, Murray turns in a great performance". In his review for *The New York Observer*, Andrew Sarris

wrote, "The result is that rarity of rarities, a grown-up romance based on the deliberate repression of sexual gratification ... It's worth noting that at a time when independent films are exploding with erotic images edging ever closer to outright pornography, Ms. Coppola and her colleagues have replaced sexual facility with emotional longing, without being too coy or self-congratulatory in the process". *USA Today* gave the film three-and-a-half out of four stars and wrote, "Coppola's second feature offers quiet humor in lieu of the bludgeoning direct assaults most comedies these days inflict". *Time* magazine's Richard Corliss praised Murray's performance: "You won't find a subtler, funnier or more poignant performance this year than this quietly astonishing turn." His performance has been likened to the sardonic persona of W. C. Fields.

In his review for *The Observer*, Philip French wrote, "But while *Lost in Translation* is deeply sad and has a strongly Antonioniesque flavour, it's also a wispy romantic comedy with little plot and some well-observed comic moments". In his review for *The Guardian*, Joe Queenan praised Coppola's film for being "one of the few Hollywood films I have seen this year that has a brain; but more than that, it has a soul."

Rolling Stone magazine's Peter Travers gave the film four out of four stars and wrote, "Before saying goodbye, they whisper something to each other that the audience can't hear. Coppola keeps her film as hushed and intimate as that whisper. *Lost in Translation* is found gold. Funny how a wisp of a movie from a wisp of a girl can wipe you out." J. Hoberman, in his review for the *Village Voice*, wrote, "*Lost in Translation* is as bittersweet a brief encounter as any in American movies since Richard Linklater's equally romantic *Before Sunrise*. But *Lost in Translation* is the more poignant reverie. Coppola evokes the emotional intensity of a one-night stand far from home—but what she really gets is the magic of movies". *Entertainment Weekly* put it on its end-of-the-decade, "best-of" list, saying, "Six years later, we still have no clue what Bill Murray whispered into Scarlett Johansson's ear. And we don't want to. Why spoil a perfect film?"

The Los Angeles Film Critics Association and National Society of Film Critics voted Bill Murray best actor of the year. The New York Film Critics Circle also voted Murray best actor and Sofia Coppola best director. In addition, Coppola received an award for special filmmaking achievement from the National Board of Review. *Lost in Translation* also appeared on several critics' top ten lists for 2003.

Roger Ebert added it to his "great movies" list on his website. *Paste Magazine* named it one of the 50 Best Movies of the Decade (2000-2009), ranking it at #7.

The film has met with some criticism. In a *Guardian* article about the film, Kiku Day, a musician specializing in the *shakuhachi*, questioned the praise the film was receiving, saying she "couldn't help wondering not only whether I had watched a different movie, but whether the plaudits had come from a parallel universe of values"; according to Day, "[t]here is no scene where the Japanese are afforded a shred of dignity. The viewer is sledgehammered into laughing at these small, yellow people and their funny ways." Day also said "while shoe-horning every possible caricature of modern Japan into her movie, Coppola is respectful of ancient Japan. It is depicted approvingly, though ancient traditions have very little to do with the contemporary Japanese. The good Japan, according to this director, is Buddhist monks chanting, ancient temples, flower arrangement; meanwhile she portrays the contemporary Japanese as ridiculous people who have lost contact with their own culture." In another *Guardian* article, journalist David Stubbs described *Lost in Translation* as "mopey, self-pitying drivel", and its characters as "spoiled, bored, rich, utterly unsympathetic Americans". In another article published in a 2004 issue of *Macleans*, Steve Burgess criticized the film as an ethnocentric "compendium of unpleasant stereotypes ... indicative of the way visitors and foreign workers often view Japan." Robin Antepara, an educator writing for an issue of *Commonweal*, opined that while the story embodies stereotypes, "Charlotte is the personification of Japanese watchfulness," an often neglected virtue. Another opinion was written by the academic Maria San Fillipino, in which she stated that the "retreat into America-centrism would be disappointing if, again, it were not so truthful ... Coppola knows firsthand that American tourists rarely get to know any Japanese well enough to discover their depth as sympathetic human beings."

Earnings

Lost in Translation was screened at the 2003 Telluride Film Festival. It was given a limited release on September 12, 2003 in 23 theaters where it grossed \$925,087 on its opening weekend. It was given a wider release on October 3, 2003 in 864 theaters where it grossed \$4.1 million on its opening weekend. The film went on to make \$44.5 million in North America and \$75.1 million in the rest of the world for a worldwide total of \$119.7 million.

Accolades

Lost in Translation won an Oscar for Best Original Screenplay in 2003. It was also nominated for Best Director and Best Picture, but lost both to *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*. Bill Murray was

also nominated for Best Actor, but lost to Sean Penn for *Mystic River*.

The film won Golden Globes for Best Musical or Comedy Motion Picture, Best Screenplay, and Best Musical or Comedy Actor. It was also nominated for Best Director, and Best Musical or Comedy Actress.

At the BAFTA film awards, *Lost in Translation* won the Best Editing, Best Actor and Best Actress awards. It was also nominated for best film, director, original screenplay, music and cinematography. It won four IFP Independent Spirit Awards, for Best Feature, Director, Male Lead, and Screenplay. The film was honored with the original screenplay award from the Writers Guild of America.