

The Seale of Approval: A Conversation with the Queen of International Events, Judy Seale



For the last

eighteen years, Nashville based Judy Seale has been a constant presence on the international festival scene. Since 1991, she has been the president and

CEO of Judy Seale International after years with the Halsey Company and Refugee Management. Tour Guide Journal sat down with Judy and discussed her passion for what she does and the problems in staging international events.

Judy was working for Jim Halsey when in 1987 she was thrown into the deep end when she was promoted to Vice President of International Relations. She laughed "I'd never been out of the country!" Her first trip was to Japan with Brenda Lee.

"A different city every night and I was in charge." She remembers. So I learned quickly because we were gone for 2 ½ weeks in a country that didn't speak any English; it was a great experience. I never looked back. Immediately I started doing more and more things internationally. It's my passion: I love traveling overseas. I love the challenge of going into a country that doesn't have Country music and I've taken the first Country music festivals to Japan. I actually met with a promoter in 1988 when I was on tour with Pat Boone in Japan and we started the Country music festival; this year will be our 17th year. I had the first Country music festival in Brazil, Thailand, Hong Kong; places that had never had Country music before.' Frankly, we were somewhat interested in how she could make Country music work in Europe from an economic standpoint. "I try to focus on the larger festivals because quite honestly with Country music, there's no money to be made off of the little date or the little unknown artist:" she advised us. "I try to take an artist and package the entire festival. Country Gold is my biggest one in Japan. That is the largest one. I have several in Switzerland including Interlaken in Switzerland which is the largest Country and Trucker festival and Schupfart which is held in the city of Schupfart.' Judy is also involved with events in Denmark, Sweden and Norway.

Although Japan is not a third world country, Kyushu where Country Gold is staged is about as far from Tokyo as you can get and we were interested in production problems that she encountered. "A lot of the equipment that the bands want for backline, has to be brought in from Tokyo. So we have to start really early and say we can't get this, can you get that? And they all think because everything is made in Japan, it's readily available where it's not; it's not only available in the U.S. and we've sometimes had to fly over things like one year we had to fly over a Hammond B3 and Leslie speakers.

Judy has worked with the same production company in Japan, Our House, for seventeen years and "they know exactly what we want".

I always take a production person from the US to handle the stage." She said. "I use a guy called Scott Olson out of Minneapolis. I met him when he was traveling with the Desert Rose Band. There have been a couple of years he hasn't been available and then I'll find someone else who I'm comfortable with. They pretty much have to coordinate the production. Before we leave, they get with every artist, get a copy of the rider and then they work with Japan on getting it all together. So that each artist, five artists, don't have to contact Japan. It runs smoother than anything you've ever seen in the US. Everything is right on time.

Judy again has shown her loyalty by sticking with the same travel contact and company, Debby Jarvis at Creative Travel out of Los Angeles. "I've used her since the Halsey days; it's where I met her. She gets me really great deals. We've never been able to have an airline that actually came in and sponsored us."

However, a lot of stateside performers are apprehensive about traveling overseas; especially to Japan. Firstly, it's a long trip, secondly they are concerned about nobody speaking English and thirdly, they fear there will be only raw fish to eat. Judy answers these problems by assigning a translator to them (even if not needed) and has a Big Mac awaiting them when the artists arrive on Japanese soil.

As well as running her company, Judy also operates the no-profit organization, Stars for Stripes (www.starsforstripes.com). I've started the organization to take entertainment to our troops stationed overseas, we take entertainment to our troops deployed overseas and it's only celebrity entertainment. We go live with the soldiers in Iraq for two weeks, we travel with them, we sleep in tents and we get to the soldiers that we think need entertainment the most.

Judy Seale is perhaps the only industry person in the U.S. taking Country Music to an international audience and for that she is owed a debt of gratitude.