

# Oceans, continents, pandemics, their love traverses all

COUPLE FROM CI

Shifra's faced a new obstacle in 2020: Pandemic-related travel restrictions around the world wiped out months' worth of plans and decimated morale.

Some couples saw relations deteriorate and eventually break down under the strain. Others simply canceled reservations, postponed plans and did their best to cope with the disappointment. Sam and Shifra, though, found that the time apart made them more certain than ever that it was time to commit to each other — and to being in the same place — forever.

It started simply enough, at a bar in Manhattan's Alphabet City. Sam and Shifra exchanged what they think was probably Snapchat handles (it was, after all, 2015). She invited him to a work event. He invited her to a Super Bowl party. Shifra, who is from India, was living in the United States on a student visa, and by the time it expired a year later, they were inseparable.

Separate they did, though: Shifra returned to her family's home in Bangalore while she applied to American graduate schools, and Sam packed up his New York apartment and moved west for a job in Los Angeles. In the summer of 2016, Sam was visiting Shifra's family when she received her acceptance letter from Virginia Commonwealth University, and they spent the next two years visiting each other on opposite coasts.

After graduating in 2018, Shifra moved into her own place in Sam's neighborhood. But their brief, blissfully convenient year as a short-distance couple came to an end on June 4, 2019. Shifra got an email saying her company could no longer support her work in the United States. Her H-1B visa application to stay in the country was being rejected.



SAM MORRISON

Devastated, Shifra spent that afternoon dodging Sam's phone calls. "I thought this would break us," Shifra remembered. "I thought I would have to go back to India, so I [was] like, 'I'm not going to ask him to, like, move to India.'"

Shifra called her father, though; then her father called her sister, and her sister called Sam. Sam kept on dialing Shifra's number, and when she finally picked up, through tears, she told him she didn't know what the news meant for their future.

Sam didn't miss a beat. "He was like, 'I'll just move with you,'" Shifra said. "Like, without a hesitation." Sixty days later, the two had given away or sold most of what they owned. They moved to Singapore, where Shifra transferred into one of her employer's overseas offices.

At the time, "people asked us, 'You've already been together for so long. Why don't you just get married to stay in the U.S.?'"

Shifra remembered. "But it felt like a cop-out. That would have been a decision based out of fear of leaving versus, like, a decision out of love for each other."

In early 2020, after finding Singapore was not quite their style, Sam and Shifra decided to try

another city they had been eyeing: Amsterdam. They made what they thought would be a quick stop in Bangalore before their planned arrivals in Amsterdam: He would arrive in March. She would follow in April.

Sam landed in Amsterdam on March 12. Within days, as embassies were shuttered and travel restrictions went into effect worldwide, it became clear Sam would be in the Netherlands by himself indefinitely.

Sam and Shifra spent the next 5½ months video-chatting constantly, sometimes watching movies together. Back when they were taking turns visiting each other in California and Virginia, Sam said, "We would try to cram all of our relationship into those four days every month." But this time, they made an effort to spend time together virtually while apart.

"We did creative projects together," Shifra said.

"We painted together," Sam added.

Still, living apart had its lonesome moments. Sam knew no one in the Netherlands. Time differences led to desolate, empty hours. When they reunited, they decided, they would propose to each other.

"Going through all this put it into perspective for us: 'I don't want to lose you. I want to stay together, no matter what,'" Shifra said. "I've never felt more sure about it."

On a rainy Thursday in late October, two months after Shifra finally arrived in Amsterdam, Sam sent her on a scavenger hunt. It ended with Shifra dancing next to a canal in a homemade tubeman costume and Sam riding up on a boat in a matching get-up, an homage to their first couple Halloween costume. Then he gave her a diamond that had belonged to his family for more than a century.

Shifra proposed back a few days later, giving Sam a custom bolo tie and a card game she had designed. Titled "Monogamy: Seal the Deal," it was based on Monopoly Deal, a game they play often. "Properties" included several of their past addresses; instead of a "Go to Jail" card, Shifra's said "Go to the Airport."

Sam and Shifra aren't the only ones whose engagement was sparked in part by the pandemic. But for them, marriage means something more than just being partners forever.

"When he asked me to marry him, he was like, 'When we first met, we were living in boroughs that were 10 miles apart. Then we moved to different cities that were 3,000 miles apart. Then we moved to different countries that were 9,000 miles apart. Then we were in the same city, just one mile apart. Then, again, we were in different countries,'" Shifra recited by heart. "Now, finally, we are under the same roof." From here on out, Sam and Shifra have agreed, they'll spend no more than the length of the average business trip away from each other. For them, marriage will mean never living under different roofs again.

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SJOERD BOOIJ PHOTOGRAPHY

Sam Morrison and Shifra Samuel in Amsterdam, where their peripatetic romance led to mutual proposals. She popped the question by creating "Monogamy: Seal the Deal," left, which she based on Monopoly Deal, a game they play often.

## MOVIE DIRECTORY

Tuesday, January 5, 2021

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MARYLAND	VIRGINIA	AMC Hoffman Center 22	News of the World (PG-13)	Wonder Woman 1984 (PG-13)	AMC Shirlington 7	News of the World (PG-13)	Fatale (R)	Private Watch Party 4:00-4:10
<b>AMC Columbia 14</b> 10300 Little Patuxent Parkway <i>The Croods: A New Age</i> (PG) 4:00 <i>Wonder Woman 1984 (PG-13)</i> 6:00 <i>Wonder Woman 1984: The IMAX Experience (PG-13)</i> 7:00 <i>Monster Hunter (PG-13)</i> 4:10-6:50 <i>Fatale (R)</i> 4:10-6:50 <i>News of the World (PG-13)</i> 4:05-6:55	<b>AMC Courthouse Plaza 8</b> 2150 Clarendon Blvd. <i>The Croods: A New Age (PG)</i> CC: 6:00 <i>Wonder Woman 1984 (PG-13)</i> CC: 7:00-8:00 <i>Monster Hunter (PG-13)</i> CC: 7:30 <i>Fatale (R)</i> CC: 6:30 <i>News of the World (PG-13)</i> CC: 7:45 <i>Promising Young Woman (R)</i> CC: 7:15	206 Swamp Fox Rd. <i>Alien (1979) (R)</i> 3:00-4:45-7:45 <i>The Croods: A New Age (PG)</i> CC: 3:45-6:00 <i>Wonder Woman 1984 (PG-13)</i> CC: 4:00-8:00 <i>Wonder Woman 1984: The IMAX Experience (PG-13)</i> CC: 3:00-7:00 <i>Monster Hunter (PG-13)</i> CC: 3:15-4:40-6:45-7:30 <i>Tenet (PG-13)</i> CC: 5:10 <i>Fatale (R)</i> CC: 3:00-4:00-5:50-8:30 <i>Honest Thief (PG-13)</i> CC: 8:30	<i>News of the World (PG-13)</i> CC: 3:00-5:30-6:00-8:30 <i>The Rescue (R)</i> 3:15 <i>Promising Young Woman (R)</i> CC: 3:00-5:40-8:25 <i>Pinocchio (PG-13)</i> CC: 4:00-7:25 <i>Freaky (R)</i> CC: 8:30 <i>Wonder Woman 1984 (PG-13)</i> CC: 3:30-5:00-6:00-6:30-7:30-8:30 <b>AMC Potomac Mills 18</b> 2700 Potomac Mills Circle <i>Alien (1979) (R)</i> 8:25 <i>The Croods: A New Age (PG)</i> CC: 5:40	<i>Wonder Woman 1984 (PG-13)</i> CC: 8:00 <i>Wonder Woman 1984: The IMAX Experience (PG-13)</i> CC: 6:15 <i>Monster Hunter (PG-13)</i> CC: 7:20 <i>Tenet (PG-13)</i> CC: 8:20 <i>Fatale (R)</i> CC: 7:40 <i>News of the World (PG-13)</i> CC: 6:00-7:30 <i>Promising Young Woman (R)</i> CC: 6:40 <i>Pinocchio (PG-13)</i> CC: 6:20 <i>Wonder Woman 1984 (PG-13)</i> CC: 5:30-7:00-8:30	2772 South Randolph St. <i>Wonder Woman 1984 (PG-13)</i> CC: 3:00-6:30 <b>AMC Tysons Corner 16</b> 7850 Tysons Corner Center <i>The Croods: A New Age (PG)</i> CC: 5:25 <i>Wonder Woman 1984 (PG-13)</i> CC: 4:40-8:10 <i>Wonder Woman 1984: The IMAX Experience (PG-13)</i> CC: 4:00-7:35 <i>Monster Hunter (PG-13)</i> CC: 4:15-7:10 <i>Tenet (PG-13)</i> CC: 8:45 <i>Fatale (R)</i> CC: 4:05-8:15	CC: 4:30-7:50 <i>Promising Young Woman (R)</i> CC: 4:15-7:15 <i>Pinocchio (PG-13)</i> CC: 4:35-7:55 <i>Shock Wave 2 (NR)</i> 5:35 <i>Freaky (R)</i> CC: 8:05 <i>Wonder Woman 1984 (PG-13)</i> CC: 4:20-5:20-6:50-8:50 <b>Cinema Arts Theatre</b> 9650 Main St. <i>Wonder Woman 1984 (PG-13)</i> CC: DVS: 10:00-1:00-4:00-7:00 <i>The Last Vermeer (R)</i> CC: DVS: 9:45-12:10-2:35	CC: DVS: 9:50-12:05-2:15-4:35-7:20 <i>News of the World (PG-13)</i> CC: DVS: 9:40-12:00-2:30-5:00-7:30 <i>Wild Mountain Thyme (PG-13)</i> CC: DVS: 4:55-7:10 <b>Cinemark Fairfax Corner and XD</b> 11900 Palapa Way <i>Monster Hunter (PG-13)</i> 4:15-6:55 <i>Fatale (R)</i> 4:45-7:55 <i>Solo Brathuoke So Better (NR)</i> 7:20 <i>Promising Young Woman (R)</i> 4:55-8:10	4:10-4:20-4:30-4:40-7:30-7:40-7:50-8:00-8:10 <i>The Croods: A New Age (PG)</i> 4:35 <i>Wonder Woman 1984 (PG-13)</i> 4:50-5:45-8:15 <i>News of the World (PG-13)</i> 4:25-7:25 <i>Wonder Woman 1984 (PG-13)</i> XD: 4:05-6:45-7:45 <b>University Mall Theatre</b> 10659 Braddock Road <i>The Croods: A New Age (PG)</i> CC: DVS: 4:45-7:15 <i>Wonder Woman 1984 (PG-13)</i> CC: DVS: 4:00-7:00

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