

# Get hitched in a hurry with the self-service wedding machine

## China

Didi Tang Beijing

It may not be many couples' romantic vision of their ideal wedding but a Chinese province has introduced a self-service terminal where the marriage process can be completed in minutes.

Couples can use the machine, which resembles an airport's automated

check-in terminal, to scan their identification documents, input further personal information and have images of their faces taken.

It then automatically reviews the application and prints a marriage certificate. All the newlyweds then have to do to complete their legal bond is put their fingerprints on the paperwork in front of an official. Done and dusted in

15 minutes. "It has greatly improved our work efficiency," Liu Xiao, who heads the marriage registration office in the city of Xinghua in Jiangsu province, said.

The self-service marriage registration terminal arrived after Beijing ordered local government to use technology to improve public services. It might also lift marriage and birth rates.

The number of marriages fell to 8.13 million last year, compared with 13.47 million in 2013. Divorces rose to more than four million couples in 2019, up from 3.5 million in 2013.

Not everyone was impressed with the new wedding technology. Xu Shan-shan, a lawyer from Shanghai, told the *Global Times*: "The lack of careful consideration before getting married may

bring potential risks to a couple's life after marriage."

Others were enthusiastic. In Xinghua about 200 couples have already received their marriage certificates from the terminal, prompting a local television anchor to urge young people to act now. "For those who have not applied for the [marriage] licence, wait no more," she said. "Hurry up."

# Adventurer dives deep for latest test of endurance

## United States

Jacqui Goddard Miami

He has journeyed to both poles, orbited the planet, explored jungles, peered into volcanoes and hunted meteorites. Now Richard Garriott, 59, is heading for the rarely visited depths of the Mariana Trench in the Pacific Ocean to become the first person to have travelled to Earth's four extremities — the North Pole, South Pole, beyond the atmosphere and the deepest point in its hydrosphere — the ocean.

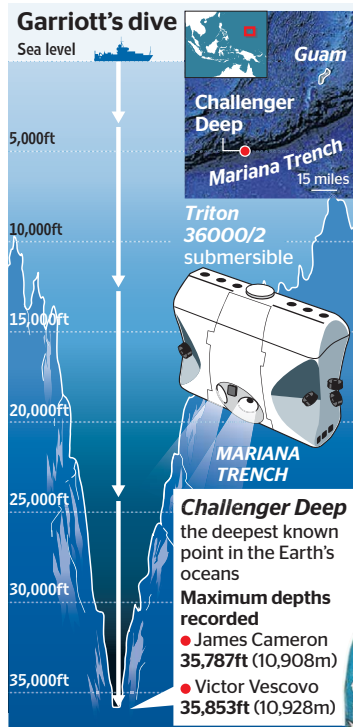
Garriott, a Cambridge-born British-American computer game entrepreneur, will dive next week to Challenger Deep, the lowest known point in the world's oceans, in a titanium-shelled Triton submersible, Limiting Factor.

The sub will be piloted by Victor Vescovo, an American explorer who recorded a depth of 35,853ft (10,928m) after traversing the sea floor and finding that it sloped, taking him deeper than the 35,787ft (10,908m) recorded by James Cameron, the Hollywood film director during a solo dive there in 2012.

It is known as the Hadal zone, where light never shines and it is so deep that the water pressure equates to 100 elephants standing on a human head.

"What I enjoy about all these incredible extreme environments I've been to is that it really does feel like you're in an alien world," he said. "You're in a profoundly different physical environment and I find those moments to be awe inspiring in the truest sense of awe."

Garriott, known as Lord British in the computer game world, will pursue several scientific goals, studying and sampling the sea bed and the life that inhabits it. Using a robotic arm on the sub, he will scoop samples of mud and water for marine scientists at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography in California, to help inform studies into



ocean pollution and the presence of microplastics. "We're pretty close to 100 per cent confident they will be there in unfortunately large abundance," he said. "We have polluted pretty much every corner of our planet."

He will also look for extremophiles — organisms that have pushed the extremes of where life can exist and whose presence on Earth bears important lessons for scientists hunting life on other planets.

Garriott helped to pioneer private space travel through the co-founding



A submersible will take Richard Garriott, who spent ten days in space in 2008, into the Mariana Trench. He will carry with him a digital gallery of artwork inspired by his journey, including Gus Brooks-Simpson's skateboard

of Space Adventures, an "orbital tourism" company in 1998 and spent ten days on a mission to the International Space Station in 2008. He is a father of two and the son of Owen Garriott, the late Nasa astronaut.

His travels on and off the planet have aimed to educate and inspire. His motto is "explore, create" and his dive to Challenger Deep will take schoolchildren with him through interactive ac-

tivities that include a poetry contest run with the National Association of Teaching English and the Ideas Foundation.

"We're going to be in a metre-and-a-half sphere, two of us, with life support systems around us and we can't take anything extraneous — so we thought 'Let's give kids a similar challenge,'" he explained. Children have submitted cinquains — poems comprising 22 syllables, spread across five lines comprising a set pattern — and drawings of what they think he could see.

Garriott will take the cinquains with him, then mail them back to young con-

testants stamped with certification that they journeyed to the bottom of the ocean. He will also take a digital art gallery submitted by the London-based arts agency Disrupt Space, which showcases black artists' work.

"Nerves? ... Like going to space, I expect to absolutely get that butterfly feeling and the sense of enormity of what you're putting yourself and this machine through as we swing the sub out from the ship over the ocean, drop it in and begin the descent," he said.

"That's the point when you think to yourself: 'This is no small thing.'"

# How Italian superstar conductor paved way for rock'n'roll tours

Tom Kington Rome

The rock'n'roll musicians who criss-cross America playing a new city every night work hard and play hard for their place in the mythology of the mega tour.

They may be unaware they are following in one man's footsteps.

Arturo Toscanini, the Italian conductor, played a concert to adoring crowds on average every 45 hours over the course of eight months in 1920-21.

A new book seeks to give him, his 98-piece orchestra and their record-breaking tour of 125 concerts across the US, Canada and Italy their rightful place in

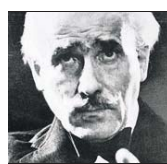
the annals of musician worship and endurance. "Toscanini was the 20th century's first rock star, he had a fanatical following, there had never been an eight-month tour before and no one played to 10,000 fans in Kansas City like he did," said Mauro Balestrazzi, author of *The Tour of the Century*.

He got his first job conducting an orchestra in 1886, aged 19, conducted the world premiere of Puccini's *La Bohème* in Turin a decade later, and became a hero after conducting an orchestra on Italy's front line with Austria in the First World War.

By 1920 he was setting up an orchestra at La Scala in Milan and heading for

the US, taking advantage of a following gained running the New York Metropolitan Opera.

After warm-up dates in Italy in October 1920, the orchestra arrived in New York in December where the only venue large enough to hold fans was a circus arena where Houdini performed and which had a strong whiff of animals. Balestrazzi dug into local newspaper reports from the time, including the *Hartford Daily Courant*, which reported how a sheriff and lawyer arrived during a concert in Connecticut to seize the night's takings — a debt was owed by the theatre owner — only for the women in the ticket office



Arturo Toscanini embarked on a gruelling tour with his orchestra

to stuff the money into her clothing. "Being a married man, the sheriff was naturally unable to recover the missing money," the paper reported.

Crossing America in a special train, the orchestra discovered the delights of jazz in New Jersey, with Toscanini entranced by a drummer who threw his sticks in the air during solos.

When they sailed home from New York, 2,000 fans turned out as musicians on a boat in the harbour played the US and Italian national anthems.

"Toscanini had a maniacal energy and I think that concert tour still holds the record as the longest and most exhaustive ever," Harvey Sachs, Toscanini's biographer, said. He also had an "extraordinary ear," said Sachs. "If just one instrument was slightly sharp or flat he would hear it immediately."

A stop-off in London was cancelled when the promoter ran out of money. "When the exhausted members of the orchestra heard this, most will have breathed a sigh of relief," said Sachs.