

The Mystery I Solved on Vacation

Follow clues, uncover secrets, and share how your curiosity and courage solved the mystery, turning an ordinary trip into an unforgettable adventure.

Planning

300-500 Words

Words in Red Strings

The red string was wrapped around a tree at Sunstone Ridge.

I stopped walking.

It was thin, like a sewing thread, and bright enough to stand out against the gray bark. I crouched and trailed my fingers against it.

I'd heard of Akai before this trip. According to the legend, Akai was a mythical creature that lived near Sunstone Ridge. Its red feathers looked like strings, and it was said to disappear whenever humans came near.

I wasn't doing this for me. I was doing this to fulfill my grandmother's unachieved ambition. She'd spent her entire life searching for the creature from my family legends.

Long ago, one of my ancestors noticed that the feathers appeared in patterns. Where Akai rested, they gathered. Where it flew, they stretched in certain directions. After observing the creature for years, someone recorded the patterns and created a decoder. Akai's strings weren't meant to be messages. They were just what it left behind.

I pulled the decoder from my backpack and placed its yellowed pages over the first knot.

The symbols aligned.

“East.”

The next knot meant five steps.

The second string curled around a stone.

“Left.”

The farther I went, the quieter it became. The voices of other tourists dulled until I could only hear the wind chiming through the branches.

Another string hung from a branch. I held the decoder under it.

“Seven steps.”

I counted carefully, stepping over roots and stones until I reached a narrow trail hidden between two cliffs. The string disappeared beneath a pile of leaves. I brushed them aside.

Another knot.

“Stop.”

There was nothing in front of me. Just a large slimy stone. I checked the decoder. One final symbol remained.

“Below.”

I stared at the empty ground. A crack ran beneath the stone. Crouching, I pushed the dirt away.

Two golden eyes opened in the darkness.

Something moved beneath the rocks.

A creature emerged into the light. Dark fur. A long tail. Thin, string-like red feathers. Its ears twitched as it watched me.

It was Akai.

Neither of us moved.

It took one cautious step toward me. I held my breath as it approached.

Akai sniffed the air. Then, as quickly as it had appeared, turned and slipped beneath the rocks.

I smiled. The legend was real. And somehow I had followed a trail Akai never meant to leave. Maybe that was what made the mystery so fascinating.

Akai wasn't guiding anyone. It was simply living its life. Hidden in the shadows.

My ancestor had noticed and observed for long enough.

And now, years later, I had followed the patterns Akai had left all the way to its hiding place.

I stepped back from the stone, deciding not to follow it. Some secrets were meant to be discovered. Others were meant to stay hidden.

I had found what I came looking for. Now, the best thing I could do was leave Akai alone, and let its legend remain exactly where it belonged: in the mountains.