

THE 
INDEPENDENT

TRAVELLER

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▷ Florida ▷ Andorra ▷ Indonesia ▷ Budget B&Bs ▷ Plus: 48 Hours in Geneva

Round the world in 30 days

Simon Calder's voyage of a lifetime



Giles Foden

'I love the smell of the dust as you go through the bush in a Land-Rover'

First holiday memory?

Going with my parents to Portugal in about 1969. I'm not sure whether it's an actual memory or one that has been reconstructed from a photograph. I have visions of being there in a carrycot on the beach.

Best holiday?

That would have to be my honeymoon, in the South of France. I can still remember the smell of fennel and thyme and the view of vines stretching off into the distance. We stayed in a village called Aragon, near Carcassonne. I also remember a very happy holiday with my parents in the Seychelles. I was about eight or nine, and I remember that there was a man digging up pirate treasure on the beach.

Favourite place in the British Isles?

North Devon – it has stupendous cliffs and views. Also the ploughed fields of Warwickshire, where my father's family were farmers.

What have you learnt from your travels?

Always remember that you are a traveller and that you're passing through somebody else's space. More generally, I have learnt that all life is like travelling and that every action has an impact.

Ideal travelling companion?

I would like to have gone somewhere with Dr Johnson, but I'd settle for someone equally witty and amusing today. Unfortunately, such a person no longer walks the earth.

Beach bum, culture vulture or adrenalin junkie?

I like a mixture of everything. I grew up in the African bush in Malawi, Tanzania and Uganda, which is my thing. I love the smell of the dust as you bump along in a Land-Rover. I go back there often.

Greatest travel luxury?

A fishing rod.

Holiday reading?

I often pick something quite challenging. I read Wordsworth's *The Prelude* on a beach in Greece, which mixed oddly with the scent of sheep's cheese and retsina. During another holiday in Zanzibar, I read *Paradise Lost*, which was appropriate as that stretch of African coastline is mentioned in it.

Where has seduced you?

Africa. I remember



going to a particular ebony grove in northern Zambia a few years ago. We had a wonderful safari guide called Robin Pope, who made us sit down and be quiet. It was a very moving if not eerie experience. One felt that human beings and animals had been coming to it for thousands of years.

Worst travel experience?

I once went on a press trip where most of the other journalists were sub-editors from the tabloids. In the bar of the Kampala Sheraton, one of them decided to pull down his trousers and moon at the bar girls. That was pretty awful.

Worst hotel?

A truckers' stop on the border between Kenya and Uganda. It was a gruesome experience. You had to lock yourself in a cage at night to avoid being robbed.

Best hotel?

The Mount Nelson in Cape Town. It has these wonderful gardens and, of course, you are right at the foot of Table Mountain. Churchill stayed there on his way to the Boer War.

Favourite walk/swim/ride/drive?

Swimming out into the sea at Heddons Mouth in North Devon. It's a very beautiful place and pretty bracing.

Best meal abroad?

I can't think of a specific meal, but my favourite country for food has got to be France. I love those restaurants in the middle of the village squares.

First thing you do when you arrive somewhere new?

Buy a drink.

Dream trip?

Fishing, anywhere in the world. I go fishing quite a lot.

Favourite city?

Paris – street for street, it's the most pleasant experience.

Where next?

I've been toing and froing to Uganda a lot recently for work, which I expect to continue; I'll probably go back for the Commonwealth Conference in November. In the interim, I've been invited to a literary festival in South Africa and shall also make trips to Ireland, Madeira and Devon.

INTERVIEW BY SOPHIE LAM

'The Last King of Scotland', based on Giles Foden's novel, goes on general release in cinemas on 12 January