

Monday profile

Taking the road less travelled

Comic, adventurer and travel writer Michael Palin has set out to unravel another stereotype – Eastern Europe, **REBECCA QUILLIAM AND LYNNE MINION** write

Of all the peculiar experiences Michael Palin has had during his time as a travel presenter, sleeping in a plastic bag filled with carbon dioxide next to Miss World in the Czech Republic ranks near the top. Although it was quite nice meeting her, the former Python said. Palin has just completed a tour of Eastern Europe, visiting 20 countries in 123 days – starting in the Balkans and ending in Germany – discovering their rich histories, vibrant cultures and emerging economies while getting to know the locals. Currently promoting his latest book *New Europe*, Palin visited Canberra this month to talk about dropping by

THE MEANING OF MICHAEL'S LIFE

MICHAEL EDWARD PALIN, CBE, was born on May 5, 1943, in Sheffield, South Yorkshire, in Britain. His first acting experience was at age five, playing Martha Cratchit in *A Christmas Carol*. At the age of 10 he read a Shakespeare play to his mother and acted all the parts. In 1962 he read modern history at Brasenose College, and in 1966 he married Helen Gibbins. They have three children (while still a baby, his son William appeared briefly in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* as Sir Not-appearing-in-this-film). In 1965 Palin became a presenter on a comedy show called *Now!*. He then began writing comedy for BBC programs. He joined the team of writers for *The Frost*

Report, whose other members included Frank Muir, Marty Feldman, Ronnie Barker, Ronnie Corbett, and future Monty Python members Graham Chapman, John Cleese and Eric Idle. Besides his *Monty Python* role, he appeared in Terry Gilliam's films *Time Bandits*, *Jabberwocky*, and *Brazil*. His biggest international movie role outside of *Python* was as stuttering would-be assassin Ken Pile in *A Fish Called Wanda*, for which he won a BAFTA Award for best actor in a supporting role. Cleese reunited the main cast almost a decade later to make *Fierce Creatures*. Palin also campaigns for sustainable transport, particularly in urban areas, and recently became president of Britain's Campaign for Better Transport.



ACTION MAN: Former Python Michael Palin's travels have seen him robbed, shot at and surrounded by rioters. Picture: KIRSTY UMBACK

'I think the difficult places are the ones that are the most interesting.'

Dracula's castle in Romania, walking the grim grounds of Nazi concentration camp Auschwitz, and watching Turkish wrestlers grab each other's backsides. So how did a man go from performing with the Monty Python comedy troupe to hosting travel shows? The answer is simple, says Palin. He had nothing else to do at the time. "In about 1982-83, we did our last Python film, *The Meaning of Life*, which we didn't actually know would be the last one, but it was," he says. "And the next few years I did various films for other people, including *A Fish Called Wanda* with John Cleese. "There was nothing else around with a script that was half as good as that so I was in a kind of limbo, and that's when the BBC came to me and said, 'Do you want to do this *Around the World in 80 Days?*'"

He agreed to be filmed following the path of the Jules Verne story because he liked to travel, but before setting off the veteran performer suffered the onset of performance anxiety. "The camera was going to be there all the time, there was no script, I had to rely on my ad libs and I wasn't any good at ad libs, so I thought this is just going to be potentially awful and the number of nights I'd lay awake thinking, 'I wish I'd said no.' Still, it was a hit. The series was supposed to be a one-off, but he soon set off again. "I thought, 'Well, I've been around the world, how about doing it vertically?' And that was the idea behind *Pole to Pole*. And I've not really been able to stop, only because it was such an enjoyable way to work – so why stop?" Palin says his journeys haven't taken him to the most accessible places.

"I think the difficult places are the ones that are the most interesting. So I deliberately choose places that are off the main highway and that involves a bit of discomfort. "I don't like camping much but a few nights in a tent to see the Tibetan Plateau from a different angle is just superb." If his previous journeys are anything to go by, budding tourists might add Eastern Europe to their destination lists. A curious phenomenon has developed in which out of the way places, such as Peru's Machu Picchu, have become tourist hot spots after the 63-year-old chamo-wearing comedian from Sheffield visited. The phenomenon has been dubbed the Palin Effect. Palin says he hoped to inspire people to travel in his style – "not to walk in assuming you're superior" and to choose the more revelatory of locations, such as this collection of countries which was

closed to visitors for decades. "Every now and then it does look a bit Borat-y but if that's the way the people are, that's the way the people are. Borat is a way of looking at it... and it's very, very funny – but it's a little bit of a continuation of a slightly sneery Western way at these poor people while you're making a lot of money from it." While in Eastern Europe, Palin had an experience that was new to him despite his many journeys – he was robbed. He was at an airport in Budapest in Hungary when his bag, holding precious notes about his trip, was grabbed. "There was a phone in there and some money, but they weren't important. What was important was that my notebook, on which these books depend, went missing and has never been found. "And all my notes on the Baltic province – Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Kaliningrad – are all lying on the bottom of the Danube [River] somewhere." Palin says he suspected the thief was looking for a phone or money rather than the notes. But he didn't panic. Instead, he sat in his hotel room overlooking the Danube and tried to recall everything he had seen. "But little bits of observation, little

notes of things you'd seen that make it quite different and quite special, they perished with the notebook." Being robbed wasn't the first time Palin had a brush with lawlessness, however. Twice he has found himself in potentially life-threatening situations. The first was in Columbia when local drug lords shot at him and his team. "They threw bricks at the car and they missed. And then they fired at us – I don't know if it was a proper gun or an airgun, but they fired at us – and we got out of there pretty quickly." The second occasion was in Sudan where they nearly caused a riot after their photographer took a photo of a woman wearing national dress. "In fact it turned out that behind them was a ball of smoke that had come from a rubbish tip and they thought we were foreigners taking photos of a rubbish tip in the desert and making them look like fools. And suddenly, from being one grumpy person being disaffected, you had 10, then 20, and suddenly you had a near riot and they were rocking the car and demanding the film." But Palin says he was essentially an optimist. "I always think, 'Why would anyone

want to kill us? We're not doing anyone any harm." "Conversely, some of the places where I thought we would get rolled over, like in Pakistan soon after the American invasion of Iraq, they couldn't be nicer – not all of them, some of them looked a bit grumpy, but a lot of others just wanted to take their photo with us. They wanted to know how many children I had, how many wives I had and all of that sort of stuff." Palin has only one wife, and with a smile of pride says he has been married for 41 years. He says she was tolerant of his travels, which was just as well as he still hoped to visit the Middle East, particularly Iraq. "I think what you'd find is extraordinary amounts of ancient history." It was the history that made his *New Europe* adventure different to his trips to the Sahara and the Himalayas, which focused more on "spectacular" landscapes. "Eastern Europe's been a cliché, a stereotype for so long – black and white concrete buildings, police repression, fences, barbed wire – all these images, and [I thought] it can't be like that. Let's show it like it really is."

Weather

Today Afternoon thunderstorm. Max 31°	Tomorrow Mostly fine. Min 14° Max 31°	Wednesday Possible thunderstorm. Min 16° Max 28°	Thursday Fine, mostly sunny. Min 10° Max 26°	Friday Fine, mostly sunny. Min 10 Max 28	Saturday Fine, mostly sunny. Min 11 Max 31	Sunday Fine, mostly sunny. Min 13 Max 34
---	---	--	--	---	---	---

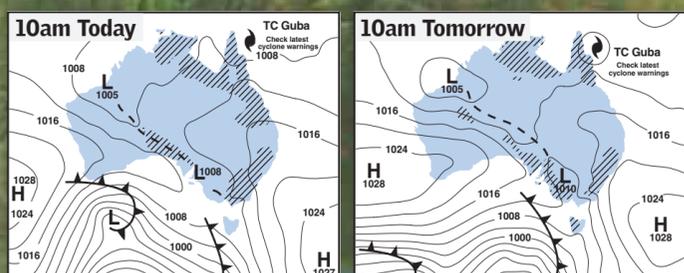
TODAY
Canberra: For latest Warnings: 1300 659 218 www.bom.gov.au/weather
General: Fine until isolated afternoon showers and thunderstorms develop. Moderate northeast to northwest winds.
Canberra lakes: Light winds becoming moderate to northwest 10 to 20 km/h.
Illawarra: Isolated afternoon showers and thunderstorms on the Highlands, but fine on the coast. Light to moderate north to northeast wind, fresh about the coast.
South Coast: Isolated afternoon showers and thunderstorms. Light to moderate north to northeast wind, fresh about the coast.
Southern Tablelands: Isolated afternoon showers and thunderstorms. Light to moderate north to northeast wind.
Southwest slopes: Isolated showers/thunderstorms in the east, fine in the west. Hot. Light to moderate north to northeast wind.
The Alps: Fine until isolated afternoon showers and thunderstorms develop. Light to moderate variable wind.

OUTLOOK
A high over the Tasman Sea in association with a nearby trough to the west of the ACT will bring unsettled conditions today and for most of the coming week. Isolated afternoon showers and thunderstorms will persist until the next ridge develops over the region later in the new week.
Illawarra: Tuesday. Fine. North to northeast wind.



CAPITAL CITY FORECAST

Adelaide	Dry	34
Brisbane	Mostly fine	27
Darwin	Afternoon storm	33
Hobart	Afternoon showers	28
Melbourne	Fine	37
Perth	Morning shower	21
Sydney	Mainly fine	26



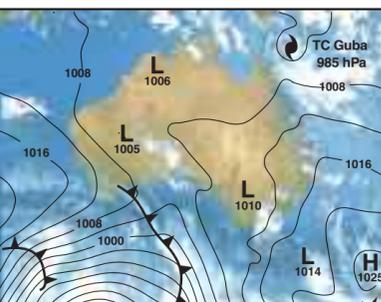
Wollongong 26

SOUTH COAST TIDES
Sydney (Fort Denison):
4:10 am 1.3m 9:47 am 0.6m
4:05 pm 1.5m 10:45 pm 0.4m
Eden:
4:21 am 1.1m 9:47 am 0.6m
3:58 pm 1.3m 10:45 pm 0.2m
Approximate tide time lag after Fort Denison for other locations are: Bermagui 45 mins; Moruya 45 mins; Batemans Bay Nil.

SUN SMART UV ALERT
8:40am - 4:50pm
CANBERRA MAX UV Index 12 (extreme)
EXTREME
VERY HIGH
HIGH
MOD
LOW

THE WORLD
24 hours to 10am yesterday

Amsterdam	windy	0	9
Apia	cloudy	28	29
Athens	storm	15	21
Auckland	fine	14	17
Barbados	rain	24	27
Bangkok	cloudy	27	33
Barcelona	windy	0	12
Beijing	clear	0	10
Belgrade	rain	0	1
Berlin	rain	4	6
Bermuda	windy	18	20
Bogota	drizzle	12	15
Brussels	windy	0	6
Bucharest	rain	2	3
Budapest	fine	0	1
Buenos Aires	windy	18	29
Cairo	clear	15	25
Calgary	overcast	-1	3
Chicago	rain	1	6
Christchurch	windy	11	16
Colombo	clear	25	30
Copenhagen	drizzle	6	8
Denpasar	cloudy	26	29
Dhahran	mist	18	33
Dhaka	cloudy	20	24
Dublin	rain	7	10
Frankfurt	overcast	1	3
Geneva	mist	-2	1
Hanoi	mist	-2	28
Harare	storm	15	27
Helsinki	fine	-6	-1
Hong Kong	windy	-2	26
Honiara	haze	26	30
Islamabad	smoke	8	24
Istanbul	windy	12	20
Jakarta	cloudy	27	32
Johannesburg	lightning	20	24
Kiev	windy	-2	0
Kiribati	fine	25	29
Kuala Lumpur	haze	24	30
Lima	fine	16	18
Lisbon	fine	8	13
London	windy	0	8
Los Angeles	haze	15	17
Madrid	cloudy	-1	13
Manama	fine	23	27
Manila	fine	25	33
Mawson	windy	-2	1
Mecca	clear	23	35
Mexico City	clear	5	9
Miami	windy	14	23
Montevideo	rain	15	27
Montreal	windy	-2	1
Moscow	snow	-8	-2
Mumbai	smoke	22	33
Nairobi	rain	16	23
Nassau	cloudy	19	21
New Delhi	mist	14	24
New York	windy	14	25
Nicosia	windy	-5	0
Nooumea	windy	20	25
Oslo	fog	-5	-1
Paris	clear	-4	7
Rarotonga	rain	24	27
Rio De Janeiro	mist	19	24
Rome	windy	15	17
San Francisco	windy	15	27
Santiago	windy	7	24
Sao Paulo	windy	15	21
Seoul	windy	-2	9
Singapore	rain	25	29
Sofia	rain	4	6
Stockholm	fine	-4	4
Taipei	drizzle	21	27
Tehran	haze	11	20
Tel Aviv	clear	14	24
Tokyo	clear	7	12
Toronto	overcast	-2	3
Valletta	storm	12	15
Vancouver	windy	6	8
Vienna	overcast	-5	0
Vila	fine	20	27
Warsaw	mist	0	1
Washington	windy	0	10
Wellington	windy	10	17



YESTERDAY

CAPITAL CITIES

City	Condition	Max	Min
Adelaide	Sunny	31	15
Brisbane	Rain	25	18
Darwin	Showers	33	24
Hobart	Partly cloudy	23	12
Melbourne	Clearing	31	17
Perth	Clearing	23	15
Sydney	Sunny	24	19

CANBERRA FACTS & FIGURES

Temp	Hum	Bar	Wind
9am to 3pm:			0.0
Average annual:			622.8
To 9am to date for 2007:			438.4
For same period 2006:			344.4
November Rainfall:			66.2
November Average:			63.8

Evaporation (mm): 7.2
Rainfall (mm): 1.2

SUN, MOON & PLANETS

	Rises	Sets
Sun	5:46 am	7:52 pm
Moon	1:42 pm	2:07 am
Mercury	5:05 am	6:31 pm
Venus	3:48 am	4:12 pm
Mars	11:22 pm	8:59 am
Jupiter	7:30 am	9:59 pm
Saturn	2:22 am	1:31 pm

November 19, 2007
www.bom.gov.au
© Commonwealth of Australia 2007

SURF REPORT
ILLAWARRA COASTAL WATERS, PORT HACKING TO ULLADULLA AND 60NM SEAWARDS:
TODAY: N/NE wind 20/25 knots. Sea to 2.5m. Swell to 1.5m.
TOMORROW: N/NE wind 20/30 knots.

SOUTH COASTAL WATERS, ULLADULLA TO GABO ISLAND AND 60NM SEAWARDS:
TODAY: Strong wind warning. N/NE wind 20/25 knots, strengthening to 25/33 knots later. Sea to 3m. Swell to 1.5m. Isolated showers, thunderstorms.
TOMORROW: N/NE wind 20/30 knots.