

Life & Arts

Great escapes

Andy McNab, Lawrence Summers, Florence Welch, Andrew Roberts and others are all going on a summer holiday



'Sorrento' by Olivo Barbieri. 'Sorrento' is from the exhibition 'Do You Remember the First Time?' at the Atlas Gallery, London, www.atlasgallery.com © Olivo Barbieri

Interviews by Mika Ross-Southall JULY 20, 2012

Andy McNab, Writer and former SAS soldier

How are you spending the summer?

A bit of time in Italy and some surfing in the UK. Any free weekend and good weather, I head down to Cornwall for a bit of surfing and a good cup of tea and sticky bun afterwards.

How do you like to get there?

If I had all the time in the world, I'd like to get down to Italy on my bike. I have a BMW R1200 GS and it is a great way to travel but flying is quicker and I get less grief from

my wife, who always expects me to crash (I have a couple of times).

What will you be reading this summer and in what format – paperbacks/ebooks?

I've been reading *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury recently, which I'm really enjoying. I'd like to get a copy of James Holland's *Dam Busters*, which looks interesting. And finally, I'm tempted to have a look at EL James's *Fifty Shades of Grey*. What can all the fuss be about?

What do you do on the first day of your holiday?

Go to the supermarket. Then, if abroad, complain about the exchange rate.

What do you do on the last day?

Panic and try to find cheap gimmicky booze to take home for the lady who has looked after the cat.

What is your essential holiday item?

My laptop and phone, and whatever novel I'm working on. My latest, *Battle Lines*, is out this month, so I can have a break over the summer.

Who is your ideal travel companion (historical, fictional, dead, alive)?

Hemingway, because he did it all. Served in the first world war, present during the Normandy landings and the liberation of Paris, as well as a life on safari. Oh, and he wrote a few books.

Online or offline?

Almost always online. I go out to Afghanistan regularly, where, for obvious reasons, it isn't always possible, but I spend a fair amount of time with a satellite phone glued to my ear to compensate.

Most memorable holiday?

I was sent by a newspaper to a fantastic spa in Taiwan once. I got really into the whole Zen business: lots of deep breaths and thinking about nothing. It was fantastic until I

got home, wrote up the piece and it appeared illustrated by a photo of me in a bath of rose petals with cucumber over my eyes. My mates loved that one.

Where would you like to go next?

I'd love to go surfing in Costa Rica and on the way go and see the grey whales in Baja California. I've got some research to do for my next thriller along the Mexican border so, hopefully, I'll be able to use that as an excuse.



Author Harold Robbins with his wife Grace on board his yacht off the Côte d'Azur in 1982

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Florence Welch, Singer, Florence and the Machine

How are you spending the summer?

I'm doing a major tour of America, Europe and the UK until December. I'll be back home for a short time in August for my birthday but that will be around the time of the Reading and Leeds festivals.

How do you like to get there?

I'm scared of flying but to get to the US I have to bear it. I much prefer the tour bus –

you hang around watching movies, talk shit with the band and make cups of tea. It's like a big camping holiday.

What will you be reading?

Ben Marcus's *The Flame Alphabet*, Dana Spiotta's *Stone Arabia* and Gwendoline Riley's *Opposed Positions*. I'm halfway through the latter and it's fantastic – not massive on the LOL [laugh out loud] factor but the writing is wonderful. I've got all these in hardbacks.

What will you be listening to?

Frank Ocean's new album *Channel Orange*, the new album from The xx, and the new Twin Shadow record. I love Haim, a band called Polica, ASAP Rocky and The Weeknd.

What do you do on the first day?

Explore. I try to get a sense of where I am through lots of walking.

What do you do on the last day?

I go back to the place I like the most for a last hurrah, which is usually a last supper.

Ideal travel companion?

I would like to do a Grand Tour of Egypt, Africa and Europe with Oscar Wilde or F Scott Fitzgerald. I want Cleopatra as my tour guide for Egypt.

Most memorable holiday?

When I went to Mexico. We hired scooters and the landscape is so prehistoric, like *Jurassic Park*, that when we were scooting through the jungle to get to the beaches I expected pterodactyls to fly out at me. We also took little boats, which I was terrified of, that bumped over the waves to a remote island. Everyone was saying how amazing it was but I was freaking out trying to read. When everyone is on a speedboat enjoying the view, I'll be there reading.

Do you buy postcards?

I'm a postcard obsessive. One of my favourite artists is John Stezaker who uses

postcards in his art. I collect them everywhere and write them but never send them so they hang around in my bag until I give them to people when I get home.

Lawrence Summers, Charles W Eliot University Professor of Harvard University

How are you spending the summer?

Reading, writing and hitting all kinds of balls, especially tennis and golf, in Truro on Cape Cod.

What will you be reading?

I'll be reading good non-fiction and bad fiction on Kindle and iPad but I like real books best. This year I'm focused on the history of turbulent times when economic, financial and technological change challenged existing political institutions. So Richard Hofstadter's *The Progressive Historians*, Niall Ferguson's *Civilization: The Six Ways the West Beat the Rest* and Robert Caro on Lyndon Johnson.

What do you do on the first day?

Enjoy the sunset over Cape Cod Bay after exhausting myself in rather pathetic attempts at athletic pursuits.

What do you do on the last day?

Seek to contrive excuses to extend my holiday.

Essential holiday item?

An iPad for keeping in touch, informed and entertained.

Ideal travel companion?

My wife, who does not share my interest in sports, policy or finance but brings her passion for Cape Cod, good food and talk, and life.

Most memorable holiday?

Celebrating my children's graduations with them on a boat in the Aegean early this summer was a special holiday I will never forget.

Do you buy postcards?

I pass postcard stands with a real sense of regret. I miss the childhood ritual of picking them out and sending them but don't do it in an era of constant travel and email.

Where would you like to go next?

I would like to play golf at St Andrews and see Antarctica.



Albert Camus, right, with his friend Michel Gallimard in Greece in 1958

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Katherine Boo, Journalist and writer

How are you spending the summer?

After five years of stateless suitcase-living, I'm intent on a very still summer. I'll be in India for the July rains, reconnecting with some of the slum dwellers whose stories I tell in my book [*Behind the Beautiful Forevers*]. And in August I'll be back in London. Americans call this a "staycation" – a term that formerly struck me as a bit defensive

and sad. But this year the idea of being home is pretty much my personal Bhutan.

How do you like to get there?

I'm still new enough to London to view an Oyster Card with automatic top-up as a pocket-sized flying carpet.

What will you be reading?

The new translation of Clarice Lispector's *Agua Viva*, Don DeLillo's *The Names*, the collected Terry Castle essays, *The Professor and Other Writings*, anything John Jeremiah Sullivan decides to write next, and Sheila Heti's *How Should a Person Be?* In non-virtual editions – the better to abuse with dog-ears and marginalia.

What will you be listening to?

Bismillah Khan on the *shehnai* [a wind instrument] makes a damn fine soundtrack to a Sunday morning.

What do you do on the first day?

Inform my mother that the plane/train/bus did not crash.

What do you do on the last day?

Inform my mother of the plane/train/ bus she ought to be worrying about.

Most memorable holiday?

When my husband, Sunil, introduced me to India a decade ago. I spent my first afternoon in Mumbai in the tent of a travelling circus, and then walked the surrounding streets at rush hour, which at the time seemed as death-defying as a lunge towards a swinging trapeze. What I felt about the city that day was weirdly similar to what I felt when first meeting my husband – that I'd be sweating to keep up but not bored.

Andrew Roberts, Historian

How are you spending the summer?

Working. Fortunately, the Allen Room of the New York Public Library, where I am researching a biography of Napoleon, is kept very cool. I'm having a week off to take my children to Los Angeles and another week off to go wine-tasting in Napa Valley with my wife Susan, who is the CEO of Brunswick Group and works much harder than me.

What will you be reading?

I tend to read fictional accounts of the subject I'm writing about, so this trip it'll be Stendhal's *The Charterhouse of Parma*, Arthur Conan Doyle's short stories about Brigadier Gerard, and Anthony Burgess's *Napoleon Symphony*. I take my Kindle then never use it, preferring the printed version every time.

What will you be listening to?

Short stories from the wonderful Audible Books, preferably from writers who grew up wherever we are at the time. Listening to Faulkner short stories when we drove through Mississippi this year was a delight.

What do you do on the first day?

It's a ritual: I get into my polo shirt, shorts and docksiders and chillax in the shade with a glass or two of cold rosé and the latest Robert Goddard thriller. This year it's his 23rd, *Fault Line*, and I'm no more likely to work out whodunit before the end than I have with his other 22 books.

What do you do on the last day?

Mourn, promise to go on longer holidays next time, and then don't.

Essential holiday item?

A Garmin GPS system we nickname "Bossie Flossie". Susan and I love to go on road trips around some of the less well-travelled states of the US and Flossie hasn't let us down yet.

Ideal travel companion?

Usually, whoever I'm writing about at the time. Napoleon would have been a

fascinating companion with a wealth of anecdotes. I'd think twice before accepting an invitation to join him on a trip to Moscow, however.

Online or offline?

Depressingly, online, because Susan and I are both hopeless news junkies. That said, I was thrilled when at the sublime Blackberry Farm in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Tennessee this year, her BlackBerry couldn't get reception. Hallelujah!

Most memorable holiday?

Romantic that I am, the first day of our honeymoon was spent touring the Japanese PoW camp of Kanchanaburi in Thailand, when I was writing *The Storm of War*, a history of the second world war. Later on that trip we visited the War Remnants Museum in Vietnam, where we were startled to see the foetus of a two-headed baby in formaldehyde. (On the holiday that I proposed to her, I took her to where Mussolini was shot, on Lake Como, so she's used to it).

Do you buy postcards?

I send a dozen postcards each trip, partly because I love receiving them. I like to get relatively obscure ones, and still have about 50 from Kursk in Ukraine, where I dragged Susan on yet another battlefield holiday.

Where would you like to go next?

I'm off to St Helena in March to see the place where Napoleon died. It's five days by boat there and five back, and I know that the emperor was violently seasick on his journey, yet for some reason I'm hugely looking forward to it. I don't think you can really write about someone's life if you don't visit the important places where the story unfolded. In all I'll have visited 50 of his 56 battlefields by the time I write the book – as anything else would be like a detective not bothering to visit the scene of the crime he's investigating.



The Rothschild family at their villa in Marbella, Spain, in 1980

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Erdem, Fashion designer

How are you spending the summer?

I am spending most of it in Shoreditch, designing the next collection, but I will escape to Greece at the end of July.

What will you be reading?

A good paperback. I pull out everything that I've not managed to read throughout the year and bring them with me. I'm thinking of looking at *Monty: A Biography of Montgomery Clift* by Robert LaGuardia.

What will you be listening to?

The new Santigold album, *Master of My Make-Believe*.

What do you do on the first day?

Try not to burn.

What do you do on the last day?

Pretend I'm not leaving.

Ideal travel companion?

My boyfriend Philip. He is a *bon vivant*. Likes to explore, but also likes a lazy beach-snooze as well.

Most memorable holiday?

With my parents, as a child, exploring all the markets in eastern Turkey where my dad is from. It was lovely to feel totally lost.

Where would you like to go next?

Argentina would be fantastic.

Joanna Hogg, Film-maker and screenwriter

How are you spending the summer?

I'm preparing a new film but in August I'm escaping to Göcek in Turkey to relax for a week with 15 friends on a *gulet*, a traditional wooden sailing boat. Being with close friends in a warm place with nothing urgent to do is special. I dream of spending a whole summer like this but it never happens.

How do you like to get there?

Ideally by train – I love watching the world go by and reading and thinking. I'm gradually conquering my fear of flying but I still hate airports.

What will you be reading?

Something chunky, like Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, and it'll definitely be in paperback. I'll chop it into sections to lighten my luggage – I'm a slow reader.

What will you be listening to?

The local sounds. I don't want to drown out the sound of the sea and the wind in the sails with music.

What do you do on the first day?

In Turkey I'll take recommendations from friends Natania Jansz and Mark Ellingham, who founded the Rough Guides and organised this trip, on what to see and where to eat. My idea of relaxation is not having to make decisions – I do too much of that in my job.

Essential holiday item?

A miniature watercolour box and a sketchpad.

Ideal travel companion?

My artist husband Nick Turvey, who is a fount of knowledge and curious about everything.

Online or offline?

Offline. On the *gulet* I won't have a choice, which is perfect.

Most memorable holiday?

My first holiday without my parents in a rented villa outside Florence. It was 1973, I was 13, and I got drunk for the first time and discovered the joys of Italy.

Do you buy postcards?

I buy postcards and put stamps on them but they usually come home with me. I have a great collection at home. I try to send a postcard to my dear architect friend Louisa Hutton, because she is the busiest person I know but also the best letter-writer.

Where would you like to go next?

Japan in the autumn with Nick but, because of filming, this trip will have to wait until 2013. We've never been there and, uncharacteristically, we are already planning it.

Keith Williams, Chief executive of British Airways

How are you spending the summer?



German novelist Thomas Mann on a beach holiday

I'll be spending most of the summer in and around Heathrow because it's the Olympics and we're an airline. Hopefully, I will get away for the occasional overnight stay to Stratford-upon-Avon to see some Shakespeare matinees.

What will you be reading?

If I get the opportunity, I'd like to read *Inside Steve's Brain* by Leander Kahney. I knew Steve Jobs when I worked at Apple.

What will you be listening to?

The Clash's *London Calling*. I saw them live in the late 1970s and I'm still a fan. I like listening to Fountains of Wayne and anything through to

classical.

What do you do on the first day?

I'm not one to drift on a lilo; I like to get out and about. My passion is history and archaeology, which I studied at university, so I'll start off by exploring a historical site.

What do you do on the last day?

I'm always prepared for the journey back, so it's the one relaxed day I'll have on holiday.

Essential holiday item?

A Powermonkey – it hooks up to your own gadgets and gives you access to all the plugs around the world so you're never without power.

Ideal travel companion?

My wife, because she's more knowledgeable than me about classical archaeology. And a chap called Edward Gibbon from the 18th century who wrote *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* because I find Roman history very interesting.

Most memorable holiday?

To Japan in 2007. Kyoto is a fantastic place with lots of Japanese castles and villas. It was also memorable because, once back in Tokyo, we were in an early morning earthquake that measured about 4.8 on the Richter Scale. We were high up in a hotel built to withstand the shakes, but it was still an experience.

Where would you like to go next?

Beirut. It's a place I'd be fascinated to see soon for a weekend – people liken it to the south of France. The other places are New Zealand and Sri Lanka. The next time the English cricket team go to Sri Lanka, I'd love to be in Colombo to watch them.

Geoff Dyer, Writer

How are you spending the summer?

At home in London. I've been travelling so much in the past three months that staying put is the perfect holiday. And I'm looking forward to the Olympics.

What will you be reading?

At Canaan's Edge, the third volume of Taylor Branch's *America in the King Years*, an epic trilogy on the history of the civil rights movement. And *Liberation*, the third volume of Christopher Isherwood's diaries. Both are very heavy hardbacks.

What will you be listening to?

The Necks, Bach, the sound of sport on the TV.

What do you on the first day?

Work, play tennis and drink beer.

What do you do on the last day?

Ditto.

What is your essential holiday item?

A vast dispenser of Diprobase. It's the most wonderful moisturiser.



Virginia Woolf and her sister Vanessa Bell playing cricket in 1894

Ideal travel companion?

New people – clever, funny ones.

Online or offline?

Always on.

Most memorable holiday?

In recent years it would be the trip my wife and some friends made to Walter De Maria's land-art piece, "The Lightning Field", in New Mexico. We were only able to stay one night but it was one of the greatest nights of all our lives.

Do you buy postcards?

Yes, for my parents-in-law and sister-in-law, though invariably they don't get posted till the last day or when we're back in London.

Where would you like to go next?

I'm going to Telluride, Colorado, (for the film festival) and Iowa at the end of August.

Chris Stewart, Travel writer

How are you spending the summer?

In summer the farm and garden at home become even more tyrannical, so I spend the whole time racing around catering to the demands of flowers, trees and sheep. But we're going to escape for a couple of weeks to Turkey.

What will you be reading?

I shall be rereading JA Cuddon's *The Owl's Watchsong*, to remind me of Istanbul, and *Portrait of a Turkish Family*, by Irfan Orga, to keep me in the Turkish mood. All paperbacks; we're sailing and an ebook is a bugger when it falls in the water.

What will you be listening to?

The lapping of the water against the planking, the sounds of Turkish birds, the happy gabbling of my fellow holidaymakers and, if I'm lucky, one of those Turkish jazz bands with clarinet and oud. But no recorded music. What's the point of going away if not to get away from what you have the rest of the year and try something different, like a different quality of silence?

What do you do on the first day?

Normally I go for a long walk to get my bearings but in view of the fact that we're on a *gulet* (a Turkish boat), this might be unwise, so I shall just snoop around and check out the boat.

Essential holiday item?

I'd feel a bit lost without a pencil and some paper.

Ideal travel companion?

My wife. I've spent 35 years learning to understand her and, like Flann O'Brien's policeman's bicycle, we have exchanged so many molecules that we are more or less two complementary parts of the same person. It's tough being separated.

Online or offline?

Offline with a big O.

Most memorable holiday?

Travelling through southern China in the 1980s with my wife. It was a world away and it will never be the same again.

Where would you like to go next?

I like the sound of Syracuse in Sicily.

By numbers: Brits abroad

3 Average age at which Britons take their first trip abroad.

32.9 Percentage of flights at Gatwick airport that were delayed by more than 15 minutes in 2010, compared with 28.3 per cent at Heathrow.

66 Percentage of trips abroad from the UK that are for holidays; 80 per cent of those trips are to European destinations.

68 Percentage of women likely to wear sunglasses on holiday. Only 53 per cent of men will wear them.

£88 The average amount British holidaymakers spend each day while they are on holiday; holidaymakers to the UK spend £74 each day.

385 The number of hours the Queen's helicopter was airborne between April 2010 and March 2011.

£561 The average amount British holidaymakers spend on each trip.

1841 The year of the first package holiday in Britain, when Baptist minister Thomas Cook hired a train to carry holiday-makers from Leicestershire to a temperance rally in Loughborough.

£4.6m Amount spent on the royal family's air travel last year, compared with £3.9m in 2010.

20m Number of Britons who holiday only in the UK. 56m Britons made visits abroad last year, the same number as Americans, who outnumber them by a factor of five.

£135m Amount expected to be spent on postcards sent to the UK this summer.

£529m Amount spent on suntan lotion in the UK each year.

£1,766m Amount spent on duty free shopping in the UK each year.

Sources: ABTA; Department for Transport; Brian Viner's 'Cream Teas, Traffic Jams and Sunburn: The Great British Holiday'; Centre for Economics and Business Research; Foreign and Commonwealth Office; Royal Mail; Cancer Research; www.royal.gov.uk

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