

Spirit of Adventure

A popular personality in the world of travel, Catriona Rowntree reveals that it is the people that make each journey special. By Valerie Chew



Travel host of Australian Nine Network's *Getaway* programme, Catriona Rowntree, was voted one of the 'most travelled women' in Australia. Here, she shares with us her colourful globetrotting life.

A life lived out of the ordinary, your lifestyle must be fascinating; tell us something interesting about yourself, something not many people know about.

I come from a long line of adventurous spirits. My great-great grandfather was a ship captain, and my grandfather was a great adventurer as well. I really am just fulfilling my family potential of being obsessed with travel. And of course, I try to live an adventurous life too, and I love taking risks.

Your job as a travel host probably satisfies your wanderlust. What's great about it?

When I first started on the show 10 years ago, the best thing was wondering 'where is life going to take me this week?' Now, the wonderful surprise is 'who am I going to meet?' I am constantly inspired by various characters all around the world.

Who, then, are the interesting folks you've encountered in the course of work?

Everyone from Sir Richard Branson to Donald Trump, and also wonderful women from around the world. An unforgettable woman was an old lady I met in China. I visited a village near the Great Wall during winter. It was built from the remaining stones of the Great Wall, by the very people who built the wall. The locals were just as curious about this Westerner as I was about them. In a distance, I could see a small woman hobbling towards me to have a closer look. I was looking at her too, and I saw that she had bound feet! She invited me into her home and treated me to the most delicious dumplings I had ever tasted in my entire life. I can just smell the dumplings right now! She opened up her home and her heart to me. She didn't have a lot; what she did have, she offered to me. I knew in that moment that I may never meet anyone like that again.

And what is the most intriguing place you've been to?

I have a fascination with tradition and am drawn to the cultural experience. I am obsessed with China, Egypt and ancient Greece. Singapore came alive for me when I delved into the cultural aspect: the food, the history, and the characters – all of which can only come about from being inquisitive and talking to the locals. It is the people who determine the culture. They give the travelling experience some depth, and this is what provides the best memories and the best friendships. As an Australian, I grew up amongst beautiful beaches and great mountain ranges; but on a cultural level, what we have in Australia cannot compete with what I've experienced overseas. After so many years on the road, China remains my greatest trip.

You travel a lot and that can be stressful. When it's time for rest, what do you look for in the perfect accommodation?

I have had so many bad experiences that my threshold for bad accommodation is pretty low. For me, the best accommodation has very little to do with location or design; rather, what is important is service – that's what you remember, that's what you value, and that's what money cannot buy. What I like about Ascott's residences is how they embrace the heritage of their buildings, unlike some hotel chains that are the same around the world. Some people like that because they know what they are going to get, but I like a place that brings to the fore the unique qualities of the building at its location.

When I think of Ascott, the rich history of where it's housed comes to mind. I appreciate how they are proud of it and this is a distinctive feature that makes the property stand out from the rest. On top of that, the level of service is second to none. Often, when I do stay in magnificent hotels, they tend to be noisy and the service pretentious.

What do you miss most about home when you're travelling?

The beaches, fresh fruits, picking flowers from my garden and just being really relaxed with my family. I try to spend time with my loved ones and to be amongst nature.

I travel 42 weeks of the year, and have really forgotten the concept of nine-to-five or Monday-to-Friday. It is one trip to the next: packing and unpacking. I love it. But I know that there will come a time when I will be a mum and travelling may have to take a backseat. I'm 35 and my other half has expressed an interest in having a family, so it is in the back of my mind.

Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

My passion in life is communication, travel and people. I really want to make the most of the 10 years of experience I have built up in the travel industry, and to share my knowledge. Having released my first book – something I never thought I would have the skill or the time to achieve, but which seems to be going well – I hope to publish more books. The greatest gift that travelling has given me is learning to be non-judgmental of other cultures. I have learnt that underneath it all, we have the same desires, the same wants, and the same joy. It is difficult to balance work and family, but I intend to just take on the challenges as they present themselves. I believe in appreciating the moment and making the experience work for me. I like my life. ■



Catriona's Australia: My Favourite Aussie Locations is a colourful collection of 100 of Catriona Rowntree's favourite spots in Australia. It combines Catriona's humorous personal anecdotes and practical tips on the best places to visit Down Under. Gathered from over 10 years of first-hand experience, it is an entertaining yet handy book on holidaying in Australia.

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