



PHOTOGRAPH: ANNEMARIEKE VAN DRIMMELEN/AUGUST IMAGE

THE GLOBETROTTER SOPHIE DAHL

THE FORMER MODEL WHO INSPIRED HER GRANDFATHER ROALD BEFORE BECOMING A BEST-SELLING AUTHOR HERSELF HAS LIVED IN 17 COUNTRIES AND EVEN AN INDIAN ASHRAM BUT NOW CALLS A SMALL ENGLISH VILLAGE HOME

Where have you just come back from?

'The Sussex coast. My best friend lives on the seafront in Littlehampton, and it is heaven on a stick. That beautiful pebble beach, with candy-coloured Regency houses and beach huts... It's where I set my new children's book. My paternal grandmother lived in Angmering-on-Sea, which is just down the road, so that was every seaside holiday when I was a little girl. I like going back to nostalgic places and rediscovering them through your children. I love cities, but I feel incredibly at peace by the sea.'

Name a place that lived up to the hype

'Pompeii. I loved it. I've been obsessed with it since I was a little kid. My siblings and I had a wonderful Scottish nanny called Maureen, who helped raise us. She's a total history geek, and for her 60th birthday I took her to Pompeii as a surprise. It's so weird, because you're seeing something that is frozen in time. Eerie and moving and fascinating.'

And one that least lived up to the hype

'Less a place and more a thing: glamping. Either camp or stay in a hotel; it's too in between-y for me. I went glamping at a festival and woke up with somebody peeing against our tent – so, so unsavoury. You're on an air mattress, and there's a carpet, but you're still nose to the grass with someone peeing on your tent.'

Which is your favourite city, and why?

'I only went to Havana once, 20 years ago, but it was everything I wanted it to be. I went with a girlfriend and her husband – we stayed in a hotel called Santa Isabel and found amazing little restaurants and drank rum. It either absolutely pissed it down or was searingly hot, but everything about it was magical. The smell of raw petrol and earth and coffee – it was so removed from anywhere I'd been. Then New York, where I lived for 10 years – when I was 12 for a year, then from 21 until I left at 30, when I had met my husband. It was a very different time, both in the world generally and politically, and it felt very liberating.

I still get a real jolt of excitement when I first see the skyline; it gets you in the groin and the heart and the brain. There's a lot wrapped up in that city for me.'

Which is your road most travelled?

'Historically it was Albert Bridge Road, which I would clip-clop over in platforms to get from my home in Battersea to the King's Road, which was the height of glamour and all terrible and exciting adult things. Now I've got a real soft spot for the Portobello Road and I often find myself gravitating that way if I'm in London.'

What do you pack first?

'My Filofax, because I'm so Eighties and I'm an annoying, anal Virgo.'

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A memory from a childhood holiday?

'I went to the Isle of Wight with my family when I was about nine and was allowed to share a hotel room with my best friend, which felt incredibly grown up – I'm not sure it would be allowed now, actually. She fell asleep and I then watched *Hellraiser* and was traumatised for the whole holiday. It's a real old habit, that, from childhood – watching or reading something that you know is going to terrify you, then torturing yourself with the images from it. I read *It* when I was about 14 in Budapest and every time I had a shower I thought there was a clown down the plughole.'

Where did you go on your first holiday without your parents?

'Because I grew up in a somewhat unconventional family, it was quite rare to go on holiday with my parents. I went with friends, or on my own, and I was a very independent traveller. Both my parents lived in the USA, and I used to fly to see them from boarding school – my kids are fascinated by the thought of travelling

unaccompanied. But I used to love it. It fostered a real sense of feeling safe as a traveller. However, the actual answer to this is that I went to Gozo with a girlfriend when I was 16, and we had all of my younger siblings with us, so it was quite chaotic. I'm not sure how responsible we were.'

Describe a holiday disaster

'Once, when I was flying to India, a man died sitting two rows behind me, and they left him! They didn't move him for the duration of the flight. They were serving lunch around him. It was bizarre.'

'I lost my heart in...'

'London, because that's where I met my husband. And Haiti. I loved Haiti. It has that same magic and wildness as Cuba, and the Haitian people are so warm and generous. My aunt, Ophelia, is the founder of a global non-profit called Partners In Health, which was providing anti-retrovirals for people with HIV in Haiti many, many years ago, so I went with her to see where it all began. It's a place that is properly close to her heart, and I felt that by proxy.'

What would you like to find in a mini-bar?

'Salted chocolate and tequila, which I would have together.'

Nominate your travel Holy Grail

'The cliffside hot springs at Esalen in Big Sur. We spent part of our honeymoon there, and it's the most romantic and life-affirming place. You're on these incredible Jurassic cliffs, and they've got outside baths in the rock, overlooking the ocean. It was lashing with rain, cold outside, but hot in the baths and I had one of those "oh my god, it's good to be alive" epiphanies. Also in Big Sur is a fantastic place called Deetjen's, which is a roadside B&B, with a lot of history because it was a Henry Miller haunt. It has the best breakfast and definitely some ghosts.'

'Madame Badobedah' by Sophie Dahl, illustrated by Lauren O'Hara and published by Walker Books is out now. Sophie was speaking to Francesca Babb