

## Around the world with Sam Neill

He took on T Rex in *Jurassic Park* and a seafaring psychopath in *Dead Calm*, playing everyone from Cardinal Wolsey to the Antichrist along the way. But, true to his Kiwi roots, he's a winemaker at heart



### Where are you just back from?

I'm not back yet. I am working in Sydney for a few months. No complaints; I love it. Along with Vancouver, it's the world's most beautiful city. They are both all about water.

### Where in the world have you felt happiest?

In my Two Paddocks vineyards, in the South Island mountains of New Zealand. Not only am I at home, but also, in summer, I am 30 minutes away from some great fly-fishing, and just as close to skiing in winter. But more than all that, it's my place, my soil, my grapes, my life...

### Name a place that most lived up to the hype

I spent a week in Istanbul once, and it felt like I needed another year to get my head around it. What a city, and what a country. Lovely people, too.

### And a place that least lived up to the hype

You know, if I am really honest, I got fed up with Paris after two or three days. It's all a bit the same, and they don't really like you at all. Romance, shomance... Oh God, now I say that, I just want to be back there!

### What is your favourite city and why?

Probably London. It has everything a city should have: culture, history, high-life, low-life, theatre, architecture, great food and, best of all, friends.

### Which is your road most travelled?

The road between my vineyards. Of course, it's wildly beautiful, but the random-track option on my iPod also makes for a different journey every time.

### Describe your favourite view

My front door. I travel a lot for work, so getting home is a distinct pleasure.

### What do you pack first?

Toothbrush and wallet. What else do you really need?

### Where did you go on your first holiday?

Not sure about a holiday, but my first real journey was a month on *HMS Rangitiki* when I was seven and we were returning to live in New Zealand. We went through the Panama Canal – thrilling – we swam in the ship's pool and we stopped at the Pitcairn Islands. We bought a carved toy canoe from descendants of mutineers, and Dad smoked a cigar. We got ice cream at 4pm every day. Then I got the mumps and spent 10 days in the infirmary at the stern, with only an albatross for company.

### What was your first holiday without your parents?

In the 1970s, my then girlfriend and I tootled around Europe for six months or so in a VW van. It was a great journey. It cost us next to nothing; just as well, as we didn't have any money. The only thing we lacked was a little more music – all we could afford were five cassettes, and one of those was a ghostly album by Wings. It nearly drove us mad.

**'I ran into Harrison Ford on a beach once. Then we had a few evenings when we drank too much and he told great travel stories'**

### Describe a holiday disaster

Every summer we camped in the mountains of New Zealand, fishing being the main attraction. Despite having spent 20-odd years in the British Army, Dad was a hopeless camper, always picking the wrong spot. So we usually experienced some kind of catastrophe – blown away or flooded out. Somehow it made things more memorable, even more fun.

### Tell us about a great little place you know

Northern Ireland. No one goes there, and it's beautiful. I am not sure if it's a DNA thing or something to do with spending my first years there, but I always feel happy and connected in that part of the world.

### Which is the smartest hotel you've ever stayed in?

Maybe the Bristol in Paris. But I wasn't nearly well-dressed enough.

### Sightseeing or sun-lounger, barefoot or bling?

I cannot think of anything more boring than getting a tan on a beach. I'm always exploring.

### 'I would never, ever go back to...'

Slovakia.

### Confess to one thing you've taken from a hotel room

Some hotels have Hermès soap, and you can't say no to that.

### Who is the most interesting person you have met on your travels?

I ran into Harrison Ford on a beach once. Then we had a few evenings when we drank too much and he told great travel stories.

### Which foreign phrase do you use most often?

*Une autre, s'il vous plaît.*

### What is your guilty pleasure?

Airline food. And wine. It is the excitement of going somewhere new, getting on a plane, seeing what's playing on the entertainment channel and opening the menu. Bring it on.

### What would you most like to find in your minibar?

Some of my own wine, to be frank. Failing that, there is hardly anything in those minibars I don't like. Apart from the damned 'mini' thing.

### Your most regrettable holiday souvenir?

Something I once caught in the East.

### How do you relax?

I don't. Relaxation is overrated. Life is way too short for that sort of nonsense. **f**

*Sam Neill was talking to Francesca Babb. He stars in 'Peaky Blinders', to be shown on BBC Two this month*