

Intrepid travel: the search for Moore

By [Adam Sloan](#)

Tuesday 14 March 2006

For most people, travelling involves getting your hair braided and washing off your henna tattoo. Peter Moore, the intrepid travel writer, tells *Adam Sloan* how he prefers to hitchhike in Bosnia and attend dictators' birthday parties

When most of us go to work, it involves waking up on a cold morning, digging your uniform out from the back of the wardrobe and waiting in the rain for a bus that never seems to come on time. When Peter Moore goes to work, it involves travelling to a far flung corner of the globe and embarking on the kind of adventure that most can only dream of. Peter grew up in Sydney's western suburbs and while studying at University for a degree in Medieval History became hopelessly addicted to travel. Now he is able to fuel his habit by writing books about his adventures. Peter has so far published five books as well as writing articles for The Sydney Morning Herald, The Australian and formerly a regular column for TNT. This has led to him becoming the voice of alternative travel in both Australia and the UK.

At last count, Peter had visited 95 different countries, including some of the most conflict-ravaged regions on the planet. He tries to explain to me exactly where it all started: "When I was about 19 and had just started at Uni, my dad, who's a plumber and Seventh Day Adventist, took me out with him to a mission school in Vanuatu to help build a shower block. The principal of the school rewarded us for our work by taking us to a neighbouring island which was home to two tribes, called the 'Big Nambas' and the 'Small Nambas'. All the men wore was a piece of cloth around their penis and since the Big Nambas believed a big penis was good, they used a lot of cloth, whilst the Small Nambas believed a small penis was good so used less! This was my first moment of realisation that the world is full of interesting places, and, after that, every chance I got I would go travelling. Each trip I did whetted my appetite further and I was never disappointed."

Peter's most popular travel book so far in the UK has been *The Wrong Way Home*, in which, after a spell working in Britain, he decided he was going to use the remainder of his budget (just over £2,000) to get home to Sydney without going on a plane; "I wanted to travel home overland - without flying - as a way of blowing my mind and enriching my life." The trail followed by Peter was originally popular with the hippies of the 1960s, who often took the journey to the Far East in droves.

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On his way back to Australia, Moore decided he would use this opportunity to take a jaunt through the war-torn Balkans. "I was in Budapest during the time of the Balkan War and I thought a trip down to the former Yugoslavia was in order." Peter ended up travelling down through Croatia, Albania and Bosnia-Herzegovina. "I saw this bus with 'Mostar' on the front, which is a town in Bosnia, and I thought if the buses were going there then it must be ok!" This sense of adventure coupled with an apparent disregard

for self-preservation sometimes has the tendency to get Moore into fairly harrowing situations, as he found out when he eventually arrived in Mostar. "The bus arrived and I saw it was still a war zone. I decided I would just sit on the bus and wait for it to turn back, but it turned out that it was stopping for the night. Understandably, the town was pretty much deserted and anything resembling a place to stay was shut long ago. I was even considering heading down to the police station and asking them to put me in a cell for the night! As it happened, I bumped into a couple of guys who offered me a place to stay at their uncle's flat. I later found out that when the war started their uncle had taken the family to safety over in America and left the keys to his flat with his nephews."

One of the major motivations for Moore to continue exploring the world is the frequent kindness he experiences. "The thing I love about travelling is the people. When I go somewhere, the hospitality of the people I meet sticks in my mind rather than a monument or grand vista." During his trip from London to Sydney, Peter ended up spending some time travelling through Iran. "I have never in my life been anywhere where the people are so pathologically hospitable! Everywhere I went people were coming up to me and inviting me to have tea or offering to show me around."

The openness of his books is the essence of why Moore is so popular with his audience. Travelling on his own, he always seems to be able to go with the flow, allowing him to meet some of the most genuine, interesting and friendly people in all corners of the globe. For his book, *Swahili for the Broken Hearted*, Peter travelled overland from Cape Town, the most Southern city in Africa, all the way up to the Egyptian capital of Cairo. At one point he found his path taking him through the coastal country of Mozambique. Whilst on the bus between South Africa and Mozambique, he started talking to Claude and Leonard, two people on their way to the capital Maputo, who invited Moore to go and stay with them. "It just so happened that Claude's mother had just arrived back from Portugal. It was this big occasion and they brought the old Portuguese pop records out and had a big family celebration. It didn't matter that I was just this weird foreigner they had never met before, I was still included in it." Peter believes that after you have travelled for a while you develop a sixth sense which allows you to gauge whether a situation is dodgy or not. "I guess I have this thing where if people invite me somewhere I size them up, think 'is this a con?' and then just go with the flow."

Despite having travelled through regions plagued by civil war and conflict, Peter says the only time he has really felt in danger while travelling was in Birmingham. "It was midnight and I was sitting outside the Bullring, which hadn't been done up at the time, and I could see all these guys stumbling by and checking me out. The sixth sense was telling me 'shit, I'm going to get robbed here.' It was my first trip to England and I just wanted the bus to come and take me to Stratford. Eventually a drunk guy rolled up to me, looking threatening, yet he ended up befriending me and we went for a beer together."

One trip that Peter decided not to take alone was the six-month trip around Central America, which was the subject of his book *The Full Montezuma*. He invited his girlfriend whom he had only recently started going out with, along with him, which turned out to be a mistake. "My advice is don't do it," he chuckles, "it really puts a relationship into hyper mode. You have just started going out with this girl and she is sitting in the bathroom making noises like a cappuccino machine, it really advances the relationship to a whole different level! Besides that, it also limits the possibilities of interacting with the locals, which is the reason that I really love travelling."

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One of Moore's first major trips was taken back in 1991, aged 26, when he decided to quit his job and spend a year travelling around the equator. This trip took him through places such as Indonesia, Somalia, Uganda and Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo). Talking about his travels through Central Africa, Moore's passion for the unpredictability of travelling becomes apparent. "When I was in Zaire I wanted to get from Kisingani down to Kinshasa, and was planning to travel by a river that goes all the

way. I ended up getting on this barge where I was assured by the captain that the trip would only last four days, but it ended up taking six weeks! My walkman batteries went after two days, my food was gone after three, but luckily I befriended the captain's wife, who would bring me a bowl of watery fish soup and rice every day." This turned out to be a saving grace for Peter, as the only other food on offer was the charred monkeys that people were selling wherever the boat pulled up (or more commonly broke down) along the river.

In 2001, on a trip from Cape Town to Cairo, Moore happened to be travelling through Zimbabwe at the time of President Mugabe's birthday. Mugabe's birthday bash was taking place at Victoria Falls, the town where Peter was staying. He decided he would try and go along, and managed to get into the stadium where the party was being held by accompanying a guide he had met a few days ago. Before he could catch a glimpse of the man himself though, Peter was singled out in the crowd and approached by one of Mugabe's security team. "It was like a comic book scene, this guy opened his jacket and revealed a gun. I realised at this point it was time to back off."

Later on in the journey, Moore ended up going through Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia, just as the student riots were breaking out. "I got out of the mini van and suddenly I see this angry mob waving sticks and placards advancing down the street. Luckily this guy grabs me and drags me into a little mud brick shop at the side of the road. As I hid, I looked around and found out it was actually a coffin shop. Outside there were gunshots and cars being turned over and I was thinking 'I wonder if I will have to end up hiding in one of these', but luckily it never came to that." When he did go outside though he was approached by some angry protesters who started yelling at him "American! American!" in a rather threatening manner. "Luckily, the guy from the shop went over to calm them down, and they were having a conversation for a while. He came back over to me and said 'It's ok, I have explained to them you are Australian, they have seen your Skippy!'"

Peter's latest book is *Vroom with a View*, which saw him move away from the kind of travelling he had previously done in order to travel around Italy on a forty-year-old motor scooter. "When I was a teenager I remembered seeing these fantastic old black and white movies of people going around on Vespas and I always thought that was something I really wanted to do." Moore made the trip shortly after his 40th birthday and was very aware of the differences between this journey and his other adventures. "The thing that worried me before I went on the trip was if I was on a Vespa, am I going to just be passing through places rather than becoming involved with the people? As it turned out the Vespa was often a real ice breaker with the people, and I got to see a side of Italy I had never previously seen."

For two weeks of that trip, Sally, a girl from London whom Peter had just started going out with, came out to Italy to spend some time travelling with him on the Vespa. They are now happily married and have recently become first-time parents. Moore is unsure if being married with a child will affect the audaciousness of some of his future travels. "I don't know, I haven't done a big trip since my daughter was born, so I guess we will find out later if it affects the way I go about things. Once you start travelling it gets addictive, and I'm still constantly scanning the horizons for new places to go."

As for the future, he is currently working on his latest book, *Crikey!*, the story of when he and his wife bought an old car and headed off around the circumference of Australia. *Crikey!* is getting finished and there will also be a sequel to *Vroom* on the way, which will see a return to Italy and a reunion with his beloved Vespa for a trip through Sardinia, Sicily and the Amalfi Coast. "After that it's going to be something big, possibly around the former Soviet States or South America, something with the hardships."

Although the devil-may-care attitude of Moore towards travelling may be daunting to many, he has a simple word of advice for would-be explorers. "If you want to travel, go and travel, it is a fantastic world out there. If you really have the time and the inclination you can do it."

To find out more about Peter's adventures and writing visit his website:
www.petermoore.net

The Wrong Way Home, Bantam (1999)

Having spent some time working here in the UK, Peter decides it's time to head home to Australia. With only AUS \$5,000 to his name, Peter tries to make his way thousands of miles back to Sydney without stepping on a plane. Following the trail set by the hippies of the sixties, not even the threat of civil war or the prospect of breaking international law will deter Peter in eventually reaching his goal. Peter's eight-month journey sees him dodge mortar fire in Bosnia, have tea with the local Muhajeddin in Afghanistan and make a pilgrimage to see the legendary 'Willie Bob' in Nepal.

Swahili for the Broken-Hearted, Bantam (2003)

After breaking up with his girlfriend back in Sydney, Peter does what any sensible guy would do in the same situation: he runs off to Africa! The route he will take will be that of Cecil Rhodes' dream when he decides he will travel overland from Cape Town to Cairo. This book is a brilliant read for anyone who is looking to reassure their faith in humanity since Peter is helped in reaching his goal by all manner of people as he makes his way through 12 countries surviving student riots in Addis Ababa, attending Robert Mugabe's birthday party and also finding his way into a role in an Academy Award Winning movie!

Vroom With A View, Bantam (2004)

Peter is turning 40. Despite having travelled in over 90 different countries, there is a niggling feeling, something that he feels he must do and that has been building up since childhood. After becoming enchanted by old Sophia Lauren movies in his youth, Peter decides that he is going to travel in style around Italy on a 1962 Vespa, the same age as him, a little rough around the edges but overall still in good working order. Peter ends up seeing a side of Italy rarely encountered by the beach-goers and inter-railers and makes some friends-for-life after a truly magnifico journey through the country's heart.



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