

TRAVEL

THE BUCKET LIST

Russia holds a deep fascination for Ralph Fiennes, says *Holly Rubenstein*



The rugged beauty of the Wild Atlantic Way

What destination most reminds you of childhood holidays? Growing up, holidays were rare and very much a luxury. My family moved for a time near to Cork, on the rugged Irish coast. It's a region of tremendous beauty, known as the Wild Atlantic Way. It's somewhere that I would love to return to and explore further.

When you need to unwind, where do you escape to? For years I have returned back to my holiday home in Umbria. It's nothing grand, but it's a peaceful, rural setting where all I do is read, eat, walk and sleep.



The historic town of Assisi in Umbria, Italy, near Ralph's holiday home



Ralph dreams of visiting the Antarctic - before it's too late

WHAT'S AT THE TOP OF YOUR BUCKET LIST?

I have a curiosity about Russia and I'd like to visit the Siberian Steppes – though maybe not in the heart of winter. I'd take the Trans-Siberian Express train to Vladivostok, because I love train journeys. The pristine places of the world are diminishing and from the images and documentaries I've seen, I'd also love to go far south, to the Antarctic.

Ancient meets modern at the Roman Forum



Do you have a favourite city? It's hard, but I'd have to pick Rome. You go to Rome and you're confronted with its ancient past, everywhere. It has a buzz and energy and it's also quite village-like, with narrow streets in which you can get a little bit lost. I was playing Marc Antony in a production of Julius Caesar around the time that I visited, and I remember visiting the Largo di Torre Argentina where researchers believe Caesar was murdered. You look down from street level at the ruins below, and there's a great community of wild cats living there. That's the thing about Rome - around you are the cars and bustle of the city and then you look down and there is the site of a momentous occasion that changed the course of history.

What do you enjoy most about travelling? I like history - going to places and imagining their past. I find the modern world not very attractive, so I like to invest my travelling time thinking of how places got to be where they are and what they were like before.

Women wash clothes on the ghats at Ahilya Fort



What is your favourite hotel? I have particularly fond memories of my stay at Ahilya Fort, in Maheshwar, India. Once a fortress, it's now a hotel on the sacred river Narmada. I remember waking up to the sound of wet fabric being slapped by local women washing clothes on the ghats (riverfront steps).

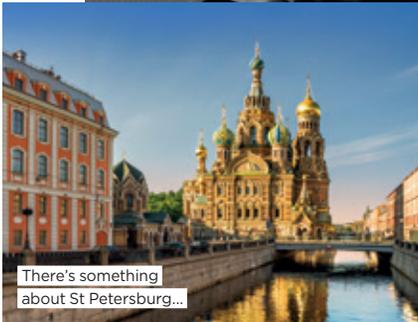
A move to the Suffolk coast is on the cards



COUNTRY OR TOWN HOUSE? I LIVED MOST OF ALL OF MY ADULT LIFE IN LONDON, BUT AS TIME PASSES I CAN SEE MYSELF SPENDING MORE TIME IN THE COUNTRY. I'M LOOKING IN EAST ANGLIA - I PARTICULARLY LOVE THE SUFFOLK COAST.



Ralph Fiennes directs Oleg Ivenko in *The White Crow*, in cinemas now



There's something about St Petersburg...

The White Crow was filmed in various countries across Europe. Which of the locations was the most memorable? There is something that keeps bringing me back to Russia, in particular St Petersburg. I first visited the city back in 1997, when I was working on a film adaptation of Eugene Onegin. The city has a very strong northern atmosphere. The sense of huge grey skies and Baltic winds that are blowing through

and over these grand palaces has a melancholy feeling at times, which I'm drawn to. It's imposing, challenging you with its size and its authoritarian feel, but it's also beautiful. For the first-time visitor, the most picturesque aspect is the canals, and the handsome facades of the buildings that front them. It's why some call it the Venice of the north.

What is your happiest holiday memory? I had a very happy time in Madhya Pradesh, India. I wanted to get a taste of ordinary travel, so I travelled by train, avoiding first class. There are amazing old fortresses and temples in the region, in particular, the Khajuraho temple in Chhatarpur, known for its erotic carvings.



The spectacular Kandariya Mahadeva Temple in Khajuraho