

Telegraph

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—*Matthew Williamson*



Matthew Williamson's travelling life

The designer Matthew Williamson on a dash to Cuba, hiding out in the Caribbean, and winding down (with his dog) in Somerset.

Interview by Lisa Grainger, Published: 10:44AM GMT 05 Nov 2009



Fashion designer Matthew Williamson, 38, launched his first collection of 11 outfits in 1997, with friends such as Kate Moss, Helena Christensen and Jade Jagger queuing up to model in exchange for dresses. His multi-million-pound brand – whose colours and designs he says are inspired by travels in India, Mexico and Miami – is now sold in 170 stores, as well as his own boutiques in London, New York and Dubai. He also designs for H&M.

How many holidays do you take?

As many as possible. I'm out of the country at least once a month, exploring new places for work as well as pleasure, and returning to favourite haunts such as Mykonos and Ibiza for holidays. This year, I've been to Cape Town, Tulum in Mexico, Cuba, Rio de Janeiro, Turks and Caicos and New York.

Your next trip?

In March I took one of the private villas at Amanyara in Turks and Caicos with 10 friends. It was spectacular and the perfect hideaway, with luxurious pavilion bedrooms with big glass walls looking out over the Caribbean. So I'm going back there after my next shows.

Where do you stay during your shows?

Hôtel Costes in Paris, Soho House in New York. If I didn't live in London, I'd stay at Claridges.

Light or heavy traveller?

I go with minimal luggage, and come back laden. My constant companion is my soft brown leather bag from Doors by Jas M.B. I even carry it about in London.

Items you always carry?

Ray-Ban Wayfarer sunglasses, Blackberry, camera, sketch pad and iPod, with various tunes on it – recent favourites were Florence and The Machine, Hercules And Love Affair, plus a mix my show DJ, Hanna, created for me, so that I could choose music for my next show.

Flying – love it or hate it?

Love it, because I can switch off and relax, and no one can get hold of me. I fly between London and New York a lot, always with Virgin, who really look after me.

Favourite city for a weekend away?

I love Florence. I stay at J.K. Place, in Piazza Santa Maria Novella. It's a lovely combination of classical exteriors and modern interiors, small, low-key, with great service. To eat, I stroll around the corner to a little family restaurant, and I spend the days in museums. If I do shop, it's for cashmere or shoes from a classic Italian gentleman's boutique.

Favourite restaurant?

Nobu at the Belvedere in Mykonos. It's the only outdoor Nobu in the world, and a great mix of natural surroundings and fresh food.

Favourite holiday spots?

One&Only resorts – particularly Reethi Rah, in the Maldives. And Amanyara, Turks and Caicos, because the level of service is really extraordinary. Last time, the hotel organised a surprise sailing trip for me and my friends.

Do you do simplicity?

Not really. The last place I stayed was the Belvedere in Mykonos – which is boutique, but very flash. I don't backpack any more.

Did you ever backpack?

Yes, when I began my business, 12 years ago, and had just started to travel to India. I remember landing in Delhi for the first time with £60 in my wallet and no hotel. We found somewhere in Nizammudin for about £20 a night and didn't sleep a wink. The room was like a prison cell, the linen was scratchy, and it was freezing. Very different from the places I stay now. Luckily we made a lot of friends, though, so home-cooked food made up for it.

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What food do you most enjoy abroad?

I'm afraid I am pretty British in my tastes – wherever I am, steak and chips is my thing. No vindaloo or hot Thai curries for me, thanks.

Your most memorable dinner?

In a decadent, crumbling, family-run townhouse in Havana called La Guarida. We were in Mexico, shooting the H&M campaign, and realised that we had a day off and Cuba was an hour's flight away. So we jetted in for 18 hours. We went straight to the restaurant from the airport and felt as if we were in a pop video; all these dodgy guys standing outside with their big cars and big cigars, and then Cuban families inside, eating dinner by candlelight. Visually, it was incredible.

Little luxurious things that make a holiday special?

There's nothing nicer than the feeling of checking in to a hotel, bathing, ordering room service and jumping into fresh white bed linen.

The most glamorous hotel room ever?

The penthouse of the Atlantis in Dubai, where I spent 24 hours last year. It is utterly decadent. A gold mosaic lift takes you to your room, which has more marble than you can imagine, mosaics on all the walls, and a huge banqueting table in the middle. There are even peacocks in the courtyard outside. Too much to live in, but amazing for a party.

What treats do you buy abroad?

I try to buy a charm from every place that I visit, and add them to a necklace I often wear. And a big orange feathered headdress from Cape Town is now on my chimney breast.

Favourite shop abroad?

L'Inde Le Palais, in Bologna, which is a bit like Colette, in Paris: a great old historical building with a super-modern interior. Its buyer has a really refined eye, whether she's choosing fashion or interiors or books. When I worked for Pucci, in Bologna, I was there all the time.

Where do you shop in New York?

Kirna Zabête in Soho, Canal Street Jeans, which is fantastically cheap, and ABC Home, where I always seem to find something.

Best British spot to escape to?

Babington House, which has a very relaxing spa, a really chilled-out feel, lots of privacy and proper country walks. I usually take my dog, and we wind-down together.

Wardrobe staples for travelling?

Suede slip-on brogues by Harry's of London, Comme des Garçons T-shirts, cashmere jumpers from Thomas Pink and staple Levi's.

Wildest holiday ever?

I've never been on safari, so it would probably have to be Ibiza, partying in friends' houses.

Matthew Williamson

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