

Meet Phil Keoghan: 'Amazing' host, amazing experiences

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Been around the world: Phil Keoghan is the host of CBS' hit reality show *The Amazing Race*, which is now in its 13th season.

By **Laura Bly**, USA TODAY



An avid traveler with visits to more than 100 countries, *The Amazing Race* host **Phil Keoghan** has eaten dinner on top of Italy's Stromboli volcano and narrowly escaped an oil tanker while swimming across Turkey's Bosphorus strait. As the reality show launches its 13th season Sunday, he shares some other on- and off-air adventures with USA TODAY.

Q: You're returning for the seventh time to India, which makes it the show's most-visited destination after the USA. What's the appeal?

A: It's my favorite (place for the show). I don't know a more diverse, colorful, dynamic country in the world. There's a sameness and comfort level you get living in a country like America. For people like Nancy and Emily (a first-season mother and daughter team who had a tough time negotiating crowds in New Delhi and Agra), it was like being on another planet.

Q: You're also going back to your birthplace, New Zealand, the adventure capital of the world, for the third time. What new thrills can we expect to see?

A: New Zealanders are very proud of their indigenous Maori culture, and we were looking to get something of that in the show. We ended up having the teams search for Maori warriors on an extinct volcano (near Auckland), and it was the most magical morning when they arrived: As the sun was rising, there were these warriors doing the *haka* (a traditional war dance) with a magnificent rainbow over the top of the hill.

Q. This season's show includes stops in three new countries: Bolivia, Cambodia and Kazakhstan, the former Soviet republic best known as Borat's fictional homeland. Impressions?

A. La Paz, Bolivia, is the most extraordinary city. We fly in (to one of the world's highest airports at 13,000 feet) and climb from there up to this place where the teams have to

perform with *cholitas*, or female wrestlers. And Borat didn't do Kazakhstan any favors with the way he depicted it. I was surprised at the sophistication and their dry sense of humor.

Q: You created a "things to do before I die" list when you were 19 after surviving a near-fatal scuba-diving accident. How has it changed over the years?

A: My original list was adventure-based (from shark diving to sky diving, both of which he's checked off) and pretty selfish. Once I got married and had my daughter, I realized that life was not just what you do for yourself, but "how can I help others write their own lists and overcome their own challenges and obstacles?" And, at the end of the day, it's not about where you are but who you're there with.

Q: One of your favorite traveling companions has been your dad, John.

A: We made a pact to travel together at least once a year, and so far we've done some extraordinary trips. We did a cross-country driving trip that was probably the best of my life. ... we just talked for 10 days straight. And you'll see my dad make an appearance in this season's New Zealand episode, where I was able to help him celebrate his 66th birthday.

Q: People have dissed *The Amazing Race* for perpetuating "Ugly American" stereotypes, from screaming at cabdrivers to running around in tank tops in a conservative country. Guilty as charged?

A: There are some people in this country who travel as an ugly American, and some who don't. We can't play it one way and make a show that's only about those who are respectful and try to do the right thing, because that's not reality. Hopefully, discerning viewers are saying, that is a side we don't want to perpetuate, and contrasting it with a team that takes the opposite approach. With Chip and Kim (married parents who won the race in Season 5), that's exactly what happened: They were very respectful to the locals, and the locals went out of their way to help them, and they ended up with good karma. Five minutes later, another team came in that were very rude and judgmental. That's what makes our show interesting.