

As we're eating the sea around us turns leaden and heavy. We're passing through the thick, viscous smear of an oil slick. It extends for several miles, and is so obscene it silences us all. Osman being flat on his back against a sack of pistachio nuts, Mahomet has taken his role as our guardian. Mahomet, wafer-thin and with a crop of curly black hair, is the father of Anwar, the cabin boy, and brother of the captain. He speaks more English than most because he worked for a while as an international seaman. He produces a carefully kept notebook which lists the details of all his journeys away from home. The time he left, the time he returned, all neatly rounded up to a grand total of nine years, seven months and three days away. He will receive 300 rupees for this journey, about £20, but he's much happier to be working for this company than for the P & O group. Here he's with friends and family and though no one gets rich, everyone is in it together.

Day 24

18 October

An air of anti-climax hangs over the boat. The elation of the first few days has been replaced by impatience and now resignation. At one time on the dhow I wanted time to stand still; now that it is, I just feel frustrated.

Our speed has been cut to 4 knots, a pervasive odour of fish hangs over the boat, for most of yesterday's catch is being dried for the return voyage. ... As I'm not eating I feel my energy reserves dwindling. Nowhere on the boat is comfortable any more. The clear bright skies are gone and it's cloudier, humid and very still. Even the weather seems to be waiting for something to happen.

Our seventh and last night on the dhow should be celebrated but, as the *Al Sharma* turns in endless circles, wasting time, Passepartout [the film crew] and I are subdued and quite soon get our heads down, taking refuge in the world of personal stereo whilst the crew sit round in groups, talking, for most of the night. There's an end of term feeling aboard, and I feel that our inertia must be something of a disappointment to them.

Day 25

19 October

At about 10 o'clock we are opposite the port, but as the dhow cannot go alongside until customs and immigration have come aboard, the crew prepare to weigh anchor. This procedure, like raising the sail, involves all hands – old men and boys, side by side, releasing the anchor and lowering it into the murky water. Scavenging crows board the ship, followed by three well-built customs men in dark glasses.

So the time comes to say goodbye to the people in whose hands we have entrusted our lives for the last week. It's been a unique relationship, for I can't imagine any other circumstances in which we would have become so close so quickly to people like this, and of course it's hard to come to terms with the fact that it must end so peremptorily. But I clutch a batch of addresses and Kasim clutches me and I climb down the rope ladder to waves and smiles and 'Goodbye Mi-kels!' Then my launch speeds me to the quayside and I know I shall never see them again and I shall miss them.

From Around the World in 80 Days with Michael Palin by Michael Palin

- 1 Where was Michael Palin planning to go in a dhow?
Mark your answer in your answer booklet.

- A Somalia
- B China
- C Berbera
- D Dubai
- E Bombay

PLEASE TURN OVER