
'This trip has been emotional but so inspiring. It was a big wake-up call'



Soul singer Joss is in Lesotho on the first leg of her epic Total World Tour. "People do 'world tours' all the time, but that doesn't mean a real world tour, going to every country," says the 27-year-old, who aims to do just that. As well as performing in each country, she also intends to take on charitable endeavours. "I wanted to work with a charity in each place I go to because I want to do something more than just gigs," she says

INVITING HELLO! ON A WORLD TOUR WITH A DIFFERENCE

JOSS STONE

TELLS HOW HER FRIEND PRINCE HARRY INSPIRED HER TO TAKE ON A LIFE-CHANGING MISSION FOR SENTEBALE



With Lesotho's Maluti mountains in the background, Joss helps children from the Phelisanong Centre – many of whom are orphans or HIV positive – with voice exercises before they joyfully join her for a song

Joss Stone is not one to do things by halves or conform to the norm. To most musicians, the phrase “world tour” means visiting a few countries on each continent. However, the British soul singer – who has sold many millions of records – has decided that she’s going to attempt to visit every country on every continent over the next couple of years on her Total World Tour.

Some have said it’s mission impossible, a suggestion **HELLO!** puts to Joss as we sit with the singer by a roaring fire in a lodge in the breathtaking Drakensberg Mountains in North Lesotho – the first leg of her epic quest.

“I’ve been planning this trip for such a long time,” smiles Joss, 27, who’s buzzing from the adventures she has already had. “People do ‘world tours’ all the time but that doesn’t mean a real world tour, going to every country. No one country is more important than another

“I also wanted to work with a charity in each place I go to because I want to do something more than just gigs.”

It was an idea she came up with six years ago and despite much planning, she has hit several hurdles.

As well as raising capital to fund the tour and do battle with the naysayers, in 2011 Joss also had to cope with the news that two heavily armed men had been arrested near her Devon home on suspicion of attempting to kidnap her. They were subsequently found guilty of attempting to kill and rob her.

Typically, the singer took a philosophical view. “With that situation I did like I always do in every scenario – take bad situations and somehow make them good. So I really scrambled my brain on how I was going to make this one a positive.”

Animal-lover Joss decided to turn the horrible experience into an opportunity to expand her brood. “I finally thought, ‘I’ll get puppies,’” she beams. “So then I will forever be grateful for this situation because I have the most gorgeous dogs.

“Now, I have four in my house and if anyone wants to come in, they have to get through quite a lot of protective dogs. They’re great with kids but not with big men who follow me.”

LIVE MORE LIFE

Joss started out in the music business at the tender age of 16. Has she changed much in the last

decade? “As you get older you kind of live more life,” she reflects. “I think sometimes when you’re young, you just want to fight. Sometimes you have to. And to be honest, if I hadn’t I wouldn’t be able to do what I’m doing right now.

“I’m cool now and I don’t need to push any more because people have respect for what I say and they believe in what I say. All I do is say this is who I am and this is what I’m doing and they say, ‘Oh, that’s nice.’”

Joss’s latest idea came to her when she was asked by her friend Prince Harry to help raise money for his charity Sentebale. Based in Lesotho, its remit is to provide healthcare and education to some of the most vulnerable children in Southern Africa.

“In October I sang in Dubai to raise money for Prince Harry’s charity, so it was the first I thought of supporting [it]. The name Sentebale, which means ‘forget me not’, wraps it up. Lesotho deserves music too and shouldn’t be forgotten.

“I wanted to help Sentebale build the Mamohato Centre in Thaba-Bosiu that the Dubai concert was raising money for. They are teaming up with the Prince’s Foundation for Building



'Coming here you realise it's not going to fix the whole of Lesotho, but it'll fix a lot for a lot of people'

Community to use their expertise. It will provide emotional and psychological support to children affected by HIV and Aids," explains Joss, who was a guest at the 2011 royal wedding.

"At the time, I was building a wall at my home in Devon so I was really into building. I said to Harry, 'Are you going to come and build, too?' and he said, 'Well, if you do it, then I'll do it.' Unfortunately, I can't now because of my tour but it has been amazing to come here on this trip and see the work first hand.

"Prince Harry is such a good, genuine person so when he or Prince William ask me to do anything, I know it's coming from a good place and I pay attention. Coming here, you realise it's not going to fix the whole of Lesotho, but it'll fix a lot for a lot of people."

For Joss – who started her tour at the end of March and has played in Casablanca, Johannesburg and Mauritius – visiting Lesotho was extra special.

While there, Joss caught up with Prince Seeiso, a brother of the country's King Letsie, who set up the charity with Harry.

"Prince Seeiso and Harry are very similar; their mothers were

campaigners, they're younger brothers of Kings or future Kings and they don't seem necessarily to relish the fact they're royal. We have this idea about royals – as people have an idea about singers – but they're just really nice people in a certain situation."

MISSING HER MAN

From Lesotho, Joss will tour in Swaziland, Australia and New Zealand before heading back to London for a gala dinner in May to celebrate ten years of Sentebale.

Spending most of 2014 away from home, it's inevitable that Joss will miss her dogs, family, friends – and her boyfriend of a year and a half.

"I don't want to say who he is, but it's so great to have a nice man," she tells **HELLO!**. "I've been through some terrible times with relationships and it's not fun. It has made me pretty cynical and unfortunately that's something my boyfriend has to deal with. However, that's my past talking. If I didn't have those experiences, I'd have nothing to write songs about.

"I miss my dogs a lot too, especially when I see other dogs. I worry they'll forget me. My rottweiler gets upset with me – we're

Joss's diary DAY 1

"I arrived in Lesotho from Mauritius, which was the third country I performed in on my world tour, and went straight to one of Sentebale's 12 centres – St Bernadette's in the capital Maseru. It provides primary education and boarding for children with visual impairments.

I got such a warm welcome from Mary Pitisi and Prince Seeiso – it was great to see him

again after the concert in Dubai and see what his charity with Prince Harry is doing. He's incredibly hands on; Lesotho is really lucky to have someone like him and he has such a good relationship with Prince Harry.

Most of St Bernadette's 70 children were sitting waiting to sing with me and my band. It was amazing; they'd learnt my song *Newborn* and were reading

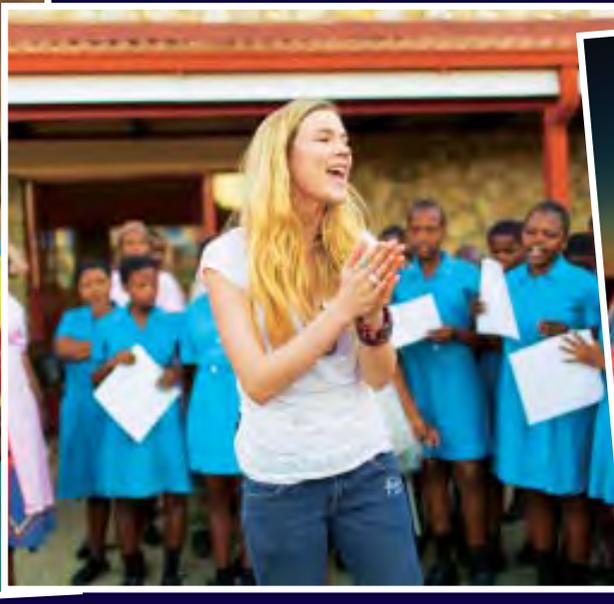
words from Braille song sheets. Even Prince Seeiso joined in the dancing. Music gives so much, it's completely unconditional.

It's hard enough being blind anywhere, but here it's much tougher because a lot are orphans. It made me quite emotional, but at the same time, they were so happy to sing and dance – their big smiles said it all.

This school is crucial. It

teaches the national curriculum and basic life skills in a safe environment. They're reliant on Sentebale funds, not least for equipment like Braille machines and magnifying glasses. The women working here give the kids so much love – they're amazing. I've travelled a lot and you realise there's much more good than bad in this world, which is incredibly reassuring."

Joss greets staff at St Bernadette's (left) and leads a rendition of *Newborn*, with the children reading words from Braille song-sheets (below). Even Prince Seeiso (below right), who set up Sentebale with Prince Harry, joined in the dancing. "Music gives so much, it's completely unconditional," says Joss





Touching moments with children from the Phelisanong Centre: Joss listening to a girl sing a solo rendition of her song *Newborn*; walking the children home from school (below left) and sitting with them while they eat lunch in the room where they also sleep (below)

Joss's diary DAY 2

◊ We drove to the Phelisanong Centre, a community-run organisation in the foothills of the Maluti mountains. Funds from Sentebale helped the centre expand to treat 300 vulnerable children, as well as house orphans and those who are HIV positive. Lesotho has the world's third-highest rate of HIV and there's a real stigma attached, so they need to be educated and given support.

As we walked down the hill, we could hear echoing round the valley the children singing *Newborn*, a song I wrote when I was in the SuperHeavy band with Mick Jagger, Dave

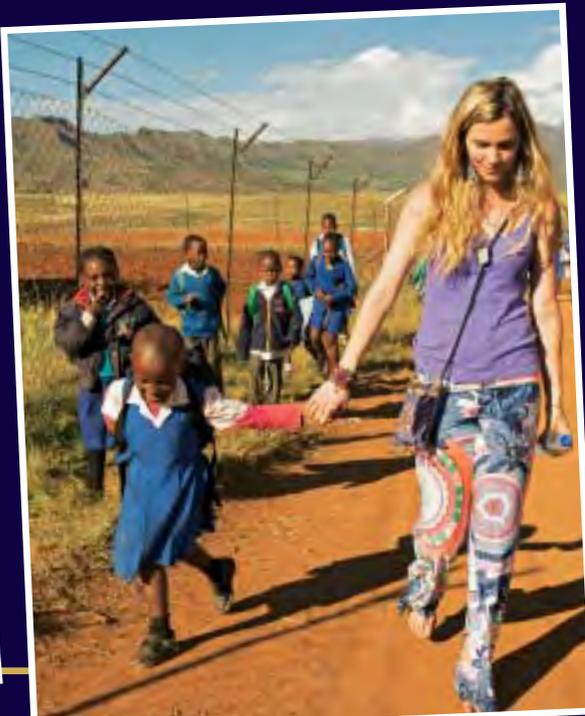
Stewart, AR Rahman and Damian Marley. I'm in Lesotho hearing them sing my words. It was incredible. After a big welcome from the village chief, the kids read poems and danced, even those with physical disabilities. We were told how grateful they are to Sentebale as it has helped them provide food, wages, a new classroom, health clinic, library and a handicraft cooperative to teach skills like dressmaking and gardening.

It's obvious they need more. Up to nine children share a bed and that needs to change. We sat with the little ones as they had lunch and they looked so happy despite having so little.

In each country I visit I try to collaborate with somebody. Here, I had a local guitarist and got all the kids to sing along. I've worked with many musicians who haven't learnt the lyrics, but these kids had.

The saddest thing was learning about the kids who don't have parents, so they self-parent. We visited an orphaned boy aged 12 and his sister, 16, who looks after him and her baby, whose dad refuses to help. They have no money for clothes or food, share the same bed and the boy spends the food money on glue, which he sniffs to forget. It was a desperate situation. When they broke down crying, it was heartbreaking. It was a big wake-up call to remind us how lucky we are.

It has been inspiring to watch the people from Sentebale work – they're so passionate. And although it's a huge job that will take many years, they are walking towards the light in big strides. King Letsie has given land to Sentebale so they can build the Mamohato Centre, which will enable them to care for and educate four times the number of children they've been caring for so far. I'm very honoured to be part of it, even if it is just a little bit.





Joss with a beautiful little girl at the Phelisanong Centre (above) – “I’m going to take this one home with me, she’s so little!” – and meeting Prince Harry at a fundraising dinner in Dubai (top right). The Prince thoroughly approved of Joss’s trip to Lesotho



‘Prince Harry is such a good, genuine person. When he asks me to do anything, I pay attention’

connected, Missy and me, she’s my little soulmate.”

Her new dogs – Igor, a Caucasian shepherd dog, and Maggie, her German shepherd-collie cross – have sparked another ambition. “I got Maggie from Battersea Dogs Home and one day I hope to have my own dog shelter. I love animal charities because they’re helping things that can’t help themselves.”

Will her fondness for playing mum to her dogs extend to having children? “I’ve got to play a gig in every country in the world first,” laughs Joss, who also plans to release a new album – her eighth – this year.

“I have to do stuff like this before that, but I’d like to have kids soonish. I just want to get certain ambitions sorted. I want to come back to Lesotho to see the Mamohato Centre when it’s finished and catch up with those I’ve met on this trip – it has been emotional but so inspiring.” **H**

INTERVIEW: RACHEL CORCORAN
PHOTOS: RICHARD WADEY-JAMES

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