Extract from *Around the World in 80 Days*, the book that Michael Palin wrote to accompany the BBC TV programme *Around the World in 80 Days with Michael Palin*. This trip was intended to follow in the footsteps of the Phileas Fogg in the Jules Verne novel *Around the World in Eighty Days*.

Day 12: 6 October

There is no such thing as a tourist in Saudi Arabia. Every visitor has to have a sponsor - a company or a government department - which guarantees his status and suitability. Saudi Arabia may look like America but it can behave like Russia. However, relations with Britain are good at the moment - we've just clinched a multi-million-pound defence deal and Nick reckons we could be lucky. Achmed intervenes to say that under no circumstances would a film crew be allowed to accompany me. Forward one step, back two.

Time to kill in the hotel bookshop. Look for something to follow Stanley and His Women. Find little more than a waterproof edition of Red Sea Reef Fishes and a stack of Time and Newsweek magazines on a shelf marked 'No reading please'.

I have to walk for a while before I find an echo of the conviviality of Egypt in the orderly Sony Panasonic world of Jeddah. It's a pavement café at No. 21 Tanaf Lane in the Al-Balad district, outside which sit two or three people smoking most elaborate hookahs. The old houses round here belonged to merchants who were very well off at a time when Jeddah was making money from two sources, one from the haj, the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, the other from the spice route to the Yemen. Most of these coastal areas would have been very rich, whereas Riyadh, now the capital, would just have been a collection of mud huts. In the middle of all this I chance upon the nostalgic sight of a manhole cover made by Brickhouse of Dudley, impressively inscribed 'The Pennine Drain Cover'. Pass a group of slim, bright-eyed smiling Sudanese guest workers touting for a bit of car cleaning. The Sudanese I've met on this trip I've liked very much indeed; they have a natural grace and wit and smile a lot, as though they like a good time.

Day 12: 6 October

To a courtyarded restaurant called El Alawey for supper. Delicious fresh fruit; and I eat couscous, with lamb, and then almond rolls and sesame seed rolls. The restaurant seems largely for foreigners - Saudis don't eat out much, and when they do they prefer Western-style restaurants. Very nice ambience here, with brass and silver pitchers. I sit with my shoes off and feet up, resting on my side, on a sort of carpeted pillow, like a Roman emperor.

A good chat with Nick from the embassy who used to be in Jordan. We talk about Middle Eastern affairs. Some foresee that Israel will cease to exist in 25 or 30 years because there are so many Arabs living within her borders and reproducing at a rate 50 per cent faster than the Israelis. In 5 years or so, half the population of Israel will be Arab. We walk back together and it's very hot and sticky. Still no word on whether I can move on tomorrow.

Day 13: 7 October

I wake with sulphurous tastes emanating from my stomach and decide to kill or cure by taking some exercise. I am a regular four-times a week runner at home and yet, apart from hopping over the Heraklion waterfront, I've taken no vigorous exercise for almost two weeks. Out on to the Corniche, passing on the way the remarkable Jeddah roundabouts, decorated with huge and playful sculptures: at one a 25-foot-high bicycle, at another a series of enormous Arab lamps, at another a concrete block with the front and back ends of cars embedded in it. The presence of these lighthearted civic ornaments is one of the paradoxes of a country which takes itself and its role in the world very seriously, which can in many ways seem severe and intolerant, which won't allow theatres or cinemas but loves fun fairs and garden centres. Sculpture is everywhere. No human representation is allowed so the abstract and surreal flourish in exuberant childlike designs - spiky cacti, boxes of treasure with jewels inside, stranded ships.

Out on the Corniche beside the Red Sea, I can run in my shorts, which it would be highly disrespectful to wear in the centre of the city, and think myself to be in California, especially when polystyrene Big Mac boxes from the nearby fairground blow across my path.

Day 13: 7 October



And yet, though there are Big Macs and family playgrounds, the women of Saudi Arabia cannot drive, nor, for instance, can they find employment on their own airline, where the stewardesses are English or Canadian. In the shops I can buy every kind of sophisticated communications equipment and yet the Observer newspaper I buy in the hotel is crudely censored. A photo of Olympic athletes Mary Slaney and Yvonne Murray has been scored out with black pentel below the women's necks. A half-page article on the drug Ecstasy has been partially cut out and a feature on Lord Lichfield's Pirelli calendar entirely black-pencilled. To a first-time Western visitor it is all most confusing, this mixture between the primitive and the sophisticated, the plutocratic and the austere, the open and the tightly closed.

Another night in Jeddah. To pass the time Passepartout and I visit one of the fairgrounds. It's family night, which means women and children only. Inside there is neon and music and bright lights, but only a few children, supervised by women in black. On one carousel children ride farmyard animals to the music of 'Old Macdonald Had A Farm'. Another, more energetic ride carries with it the warning, 'for your safety this game is not allowed for those who suffer from . . . hearts, diabetics, nerves, high pressure and the pregnants'. Beneath the sign a group of Arab women, black veils flying, are sitting together in a huge teacup as it whirls round a teapot. Sadly it's too dark to film.

Above the Atallah Happyland flies the Saudi flag, unique in the world for having an inscription on it. It reads, 'There is only one God and Mohammed is his prophet'. I must hope both are on my side tomorrow.