

# magic WANDERER

Most of us consider travel to be a kind of magic – but for Liam Power, trips and tricks collide to form a series of sometimes surreal experiences. By **Jan Villalon**

**N**OW YOU SEE HIM, NOW YOU DON'T. Liam Power can be a tough one to catch these days, popping in and out of his home base in Sydney like a classic disappearing act.

When the restless magician isn't jetting off to gigs around the country, he can be found performing on cruise ships destined for Vanuatu and Tahiti. Or perhaps you might run into him giving an impromptu show at a Nicaraguan bus stop, or in a teahouse in the Himalayas. Suffice to say, Power is full of surprises. The one-time chef only made the

transition from the kitchen to the magic circle five years ago, and he's been busy building his profile ever since, appearing on television and radio programs worldwide and performing for a growing list of athletes, politicians and celebrities.

Naturally, the first thing everyone always asks a professional magician is to see a trick, and Power is always happy to oblige – even when he isn't expecting it.

"I was in Nepal doing the Annapurna trek, and the first night I did a show for the guy at the guesthouse," Power recalls. "He invited me to a dancing show, and then he sort of

sprung it on me, telling everyone, 'We've got a magician here from Australia!' So I went and did a quick show for them, and word got ahead on the trek... so I literally did shows all along the trail. I even did a show for the army and the police."

Performing tricks off the cuff is Power's specialty, and a unique way to interact with locals wherever he is. "It's a great icebreaker," he says. "People open up to you a lot more."

He points to an instance where he was invited back to a family's home for dinner in Cappadocia, Turkey, after a performance.



Liam performing at a boy's birthday gathering in Pokhara, Nepal. Photo by Julian DeLorenzo



Doing card tricks in the back of a tuk tuk on the way to Pakse in Laos. Photo by Julien Chraibi



The sorcerer's apprentices, children from a hill tribe village near Muang Sing in Laos.

"It was amazing. They had satellite TV, but they were living in a cave – it was one of the most surreal things I've ever seen."

Backpacking through Central America, he thought it would be a good idea to perform his magic for underprivileged communities along the way. He contacted a non-profit trekking organisation that supports orphanages and schools in Guatemala and Nicaragua, and soon he was putting on shows for kids throughout the region.

The performances proved very popular. "They'd never seen a professional magician before in real life, so for them it was a whole new experience," he grins.

And it's an experience that Power can now share through his mini YouTube series *The Magic Traveller*. Currently only a couple of episodes are up online, but he has plans on producing more – whenever he can conjure up the time.

Meanwhile, the videos that are available provide a small glimpse into what he

has to offer. The pure wonder and joy on the children's faces when he performs is infectious. It's easy to see why he's becoming such a global sensation.

Fittingly, the origins of the travelling magician stem from an experience overseas. Years ago, while spending a Christmas

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holiday in Thailand, a young Power received a gift that would change his life.

"We were staying with a friend of my dad, and he had another friend there. This American guy was a magician doing charity shows for the Red Cross. He showed me all this magic on Christmas morning. After that, I was hooked."

Power began practising tricks for family

and friends, performing at the odd party while still in college. He also spent some time in the US honing his skills and learning from other magicians before returning home to try his hand on the mean streets.

"Busking was the hardest, definitely. You can't start your act until you have a crowd," he explains. "It's not like playing an instrument, where people can walk by and watch. You've got to get through to 20 or so people before you can start the act and actually make any money."

These days, Power has no trouble drawing crowds, and he recently performed at the Sydney Opera House. His show is a fascinating blend of humour, skill and pure entertainment, with illusions ranging from the amazing to the absurd. He cites among his influences fellow magicians Rune Klan and David Williamson, as well as comedian Tim Minchin and chef Heston Blumenthal, arguably a wizard of the kitchen in his own right.

And now that he's been able to establish himself as a master of magic, there have been a couple of times Power has found himself on the other end of the equation, teaching apprentices of his own.

"At a school in Nicaragua, which was having a school talent play, one little kid asked me especially if I could teach him a few tricks. I took him aside after a show and taught him a couple of tricks with rubber bands and a deck of cards. So he went and performed them at his talent show the next week. He was pretty excited!"

Reception to his impromptu gigs is, he says, "overwhelmingly positive", and a highlight of his far-flung adventures. "Magic transcends language barriers and I love it because I can give something back to the areas that I'm travelling in."

There is, however, one occasion he can remember when his act wasn't entirely appreciated. "I did a show for a hill tribe in Laos during a two-day trek. I just did some tricks for some kids with foam balls, making them appear and disappear – just

a very basic trick. But one of the guides came up to me and said I had to put them away," he says.

Apparently, the village elder believed he was a witch doctor. "She thinks you're a bad omen in the village," his guide warned. "And if you keep it up, they're going to banish you."

Power took that as his cue to disappear. ☹