

# Exclusive! The shopgirl who's saving the world



Like any other twentysomething, Stacey Dooley loved fashion, shopping and hanging out with her friends – until a chance phone call changed her life overnight

FOUR YEARS AGO, Stacey Dooley was a 20-year-old promotions girl working on a make-up counter at Luton airport. The furthest she'd ever travelled was to Ayia Napa on holiday, and her day-to-day worries were no bigger than how much perfume she could sell and whether she would be able to afford the designer top she'd had her eye on in Selfridges.

"I was your typical twentysomething," Stacey says. "I worked hard and saved enough money to go on holiday with my friends to places like Ibiza and Marbella. But I loved shopping. I'd spend between £1,500-£1,800 a month, almost my entire wages, on things like Dior gloves or Matthew Williamson tops."

Today, you're still likely to find Stacey, 24, at the airport, but she'll be in the departure lounge. And instead of a girlie holiday, she'll have packed her bulletproof vest and malaria tablets and will be heading, with a film crew in tow, to a Third World country.

Stacey has visited Cambodia, Nepal, Africa and Thailand and investigated serious issues such as sex trafficking, child labour and boy soldiers. Her most recent trip was to Kenya, where she filmed an eye-opening documentary, shown on BBC3 this week, about the darker side of tourism.

## WAKE-UP CALL

So, how did a girl who left school at 16 with no GCSEs, and whose only ambition was to be an 18-30s rep, find herself in the kind of places that only hardened news hacks tend to visit?

"It's my mum's fault," laughs Stacey. "I'd lost focus after leaving school, and even though I loved my job at the airport I knew I wanted to do something else with my life."

"So when Mum spotted a newspaper advert that said: 'Like fashion? Like travel? Want to be on television?', I rang up and applied. The next thing I knew, I was being picked over hundreds of other people to appear on a show on BBC3."

The show was Blood, Sweat And T-shirts, which followed Stacey and five other British fashion lovers as they travelled to India to live and toil alongside local garment workers, earning just pennies each day making clothes destined for sale in Europe. The show was nominated for the Best Factual Series award at the 2008 BAFTAs and altered Stacey's life for ever.

"Before we left for India, we were warned we might see some things that could upset us, but I didn't think it would get to me," admits Stacey. "I was so wrong. I didn't stop crying the whole time – I couldn't believe people lived in such squalor."

"I remember walking down the street one day when my shoelace came undone, so I put my foot on to what I thought was a pile of rubbish and it moved. A little boy peered up out of the pile and I realised that was his bed."

Words: Jill Foster



Kenya 2011 "Meeting the Maasai tribe was awesome. They dressed me up and we danced for an hour. The chief was such a character - he had six wives but kept asking if I wanted to stay in his mud hut for the night!"



The way we were: Stacey on holiday in Marbella

"I've changed so much. Now, I'd rather donate to charity than spend money on clothes"

When Stacey returned home, she helped publicise the programme – even appearing on current affairs show Newsnight, where she managed to hold her own against the show's formidable host Jeremy Paxman.

"My mum is always taking the mick out of me for stuff like that," she laughs. "The other day, I said someone's shirt looked ghastly and she said: 'Since when do you use words like ghastly?' I replied: 'Mum, I'm a serious journalist now, I have to use words like ghastly' – and we both cracked up."

"She keeps my feet planted firmly on the ground. I once called her to tell I was appearing on the news and she said: 'Yeah, so what? I'm at bingo and my numbers are about to come up. I'll have to call you back.' So there's never any chance of me getting all starry about things."

## A LIFE LESS ORDINARY

Born in Luton, Stacey had a typically ordinary childhood with her mum, Diane, 49, stepdad Norman, 50, and her 17-year-old stepsister, Olivia. Now that her career is, well, pretty extraordinary, they couldn't be more proud.

"My family are very supportive, but Mum really worries about me," says Stacey. "In fact, she says the best thing about my shows is that she loses lots of weight when I'm away, as she's far too nervous to eat."

Who can blame her? When TV producers told Stacey they wanted her to present her own show, Stacey Dooley Investigates, it meant she'd be visiting some of the world's most dangerous places. And there have been plenty of moments when Stacey ended up fearing for her life.

"Oh God, there have been so many times when I've thought I was going to die," she says. "The worst was when we were in the Democratic Republic of Congo and our vehicle was stuck behind a truck that had broken down."

"The truck was packed with men carrying huge guns and the atmosphere became very hostile."

I thought: 'Oh no, I've left my bulletproof vest in the boot of the car,' so I just locked the door, my heart pounding with fear, and waited. Thankfully, the truck eventually moved and we were able to get out, but it was pretty frightening for a while."

Despite her hair-raising experiences, Stacey insists she's a normal girl. She's single – "When am I going to meet someone? He'd have to be a pilot or a cameraman because they're the only men I meet" – and when she's in the UK, she loves hanging out with her friends.

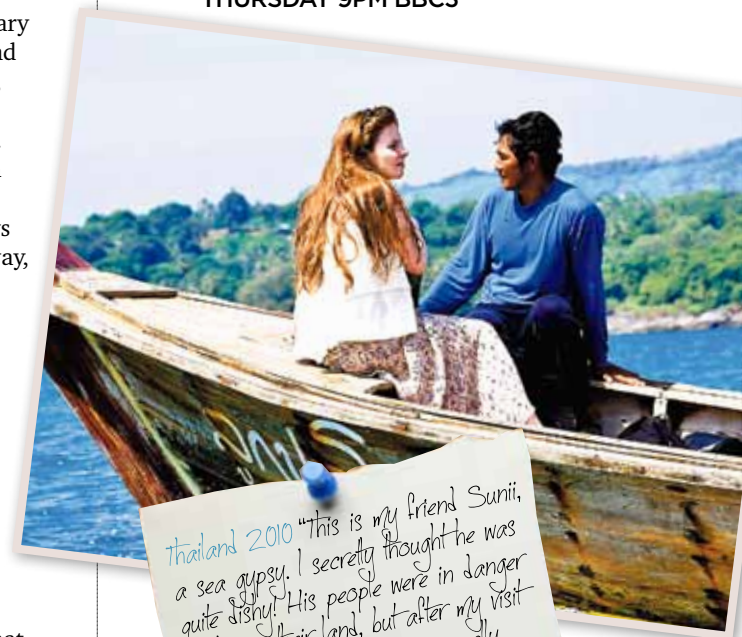
But she's definitely grown up since she answered that newspaper ad. "I'm less self-obsessed and more savvy now," she says. "I don't want to get all preachy because I still love fashion, but I can't spend the amount of money I used to on clothes. I'd rather give it to charity. My friends understand, but they still laugh at me."

Aside from documentary-making, Stacey also has plans to launch her own fashion accessories line – with a difference.

"A lot of ethical fashion doesn't sell because it's not that fashionable," says Stacey. "But my friend and I are planning to travel to India and find some ladies who can make really fashionable bits of jewellery, which we can then sell in places like Portobello Market in West London. It's going to be hard work, but I'm so excited about it."

"My life has changed so much since filming Blood, Sweat And T-shirts, and if I hadn't made that one phone call I'd probably still be working in a shop or as a waitress. Now I've seen so many incredible places all over the world, heard so many languages and met so many interesting people. I can't believe how lucky I am."

**WATCH IT! TOURISM AND THE TRUTH: STACEY DOOLEY INVESTIGATES KENYA THURSDAY 9PM BBC3**



Thailand 2010 "This is my friend Sunii, a sea gypsy. I secretly thought he was quite dshu! His people were in danger of losing their land, but after my visit the Thai Prime Minister personally promised to look into the issue."



Nepal 2009 "I was shocked to learn some families are so poor they have no choice but to sell their children to work as servants. I joined forces with an organisation who gave them goats so they could make money from farming instead."