

Chat show host Graham Norton tells James Rampton why he loves having Kiwis on his show.

# Kiwis in the hot seat

**G**raham Norton has a huge fan base in New Zealand – and he is delighted about that.

Chatting to the *TV Guide* in London last week, the 53-year-old star of *The Graham Norton Show* declares, “It’s lovely that people in New Zealand have really responded to my show.”

Norton is particularly pleased that so many New Zealanders have volunteered to sit in the red chair. This is the very funny section at the end of each show where a member of the audience offers to tell a story seated on said item of furniture. They keep talking until the host becomes bored with their tale and flips the chair, sending the volunteer head over heels – to gales of hilarity from the audience.

He says, “I always have people from New Zealand in the red chair because they’re so good at telling stories.”

However, he admits that not everyone is a fan of

the way he treats people from this country. “I was on holiday recently in Umbria in Italy. I was at a wine tasting – because I love the wines – and this New Zealand lady in sandals came over to me. She said, ‘Stop being so mean to people from New Zealand!’ I think she meant I should stop flipping them out of the red chair!”

The red chair is just one example of the sheer sense of fun that he

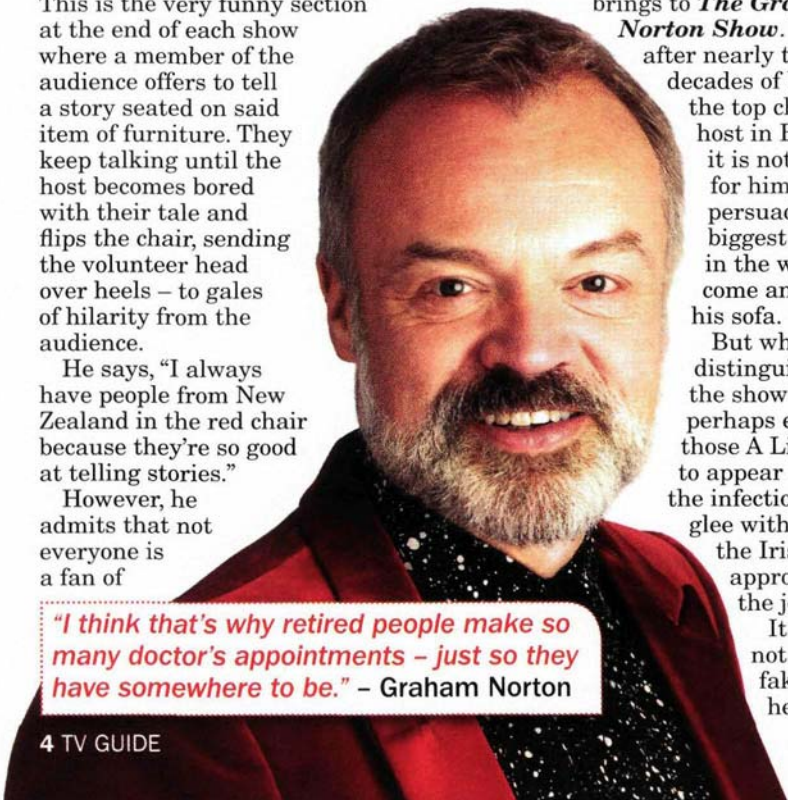
brings to *The Graham Norton Show*. Yes,

after nearly two decades of being the top chat show host in Britain, it is not hard for him to persuade the biggest stars in the world to come and sit on his sofa.

But what really distinguishes the show and perhaps entices those A Listers to appear – is the infectious glee with which the Irishman approaches the job.

It does not seem faked. As he regales

*“I think that’s why retired people make so many doctor’s appointments – just so they have somewhere to be.” – Graham Norton*



the *TV Guide* with enormously entertaining anecdotes for more than two hours, it is easy to see that he is a naturally funny man. He is highly amusing company, equally capable of entertaining an audience of one, or one billion.

Norton, who was born in Dublin 53 years ago and now lives in London, says he particularly enjoys it when big Hollywood names drop the usual cool persona and just let rip. “I love it when random things happen.

“I read in the notes that the Hollywood star Chris Pratt could do an Essex accent because he’d watched a lot of *The Only Way is Essex*. When I asked him to do it on the show, I thought, ‘This will be embarrassing’, but it turned out that he was really good at it.”

The presenter, who has been recognised in countries as far away from the UK as Ethiopia (“that was very strange”), continues that he also adores it when his guests take over the show and pandemonium reigns. “There was one episode where Hugh Bonneville, Matt Damon and Bill Murray just took over. I had nothing to do with that show. I was just sitting in my chair while the couch took control.

“If anyone ever gets injured, then of course I’ve screwed up, but I really like it when I’m not in control. If something wild happens, then it’ll be in the final edit. The bits that we cut are boring. If someone vomits on the show, it’s in – unless I vomit!”

His show is an immense hit all over the globe, but does Norton ever think about retiring? “I was going to stop at the age of 50, but I still love doing it. A lot of the time, it’s not your decision when to finish.”

## Five Things You Didn't Know About Graham Norton

- ▶ His real name is Graham Walker. Norton is his great-grandmother's maiden name.
- ▶ On March 7, 2013, he broke the Guinness world record for 'The Most Questions Asked on a TV Chat Show' on Comic Relief's *Big Chat* which raised £1,022,982 for charity.
- ▶ In 1988, he was mugged, beaten and stabbed by a group of attackers in London. He lost half his blood and nearly died.
- ▶ He has a 2% shareholding in New Zealand winery Invivo Wines. The wine is sold here, Australia, the UK and Ireland with Norton's proceeds donated to a charity for dogs.
- ▶ He played youth group leader Father Noel Furlong in three episodes of the British comedy *Father Ted*.

Norton, whose debut novel is about to be published in the UK, continues that, “One day I’ll be on the phone to my agent saying, ‘Are we renegotiating a new deal for the chat show?’ And he’ll just reply, ‘No’. That element of it is out of my control. So in an ideal world, rather than stopping, I would be winding down the number of shows I do each year.”

Norton concludes that, “Work is about validation – the fact that someone gives you a cheque at the end of a shift is an added bonus. As it happens, doing the chat show is a ridiculous validation. People are sitting there applauding you – you don’t normally get that at work.

“I can live without the applause, but validation is important to everyone. When you’re working, you like the fact that someone cares about where you are. The hardest thing about retirement is that no one gives a toss about where you are.

“I think that’s why retired people make so many doctor’s appointments – just so they have somewhere to be.”