



The Bear essentials

Usually busy risking life and limb in the world's most inhospitable places, adventurer **Bear Grylls** takes time out from lighting fires and eating grubs to talk to **Rowena Carr-Allinson** about his remarkable exploits, plus one of his biggest thrills in life – enjoying some peaceful downtime with his family on his favourite island, **Malta**

Getting hold of Bear Grylls is nothing short of a miracle. One minute he's filming in Mexico, then in the Alps before disappearing off on another Everest expedition. But then again, this chap is all about endurance, courage and spirit. Grylls first appeared on our TV screens ten years ago, after his triumphant ascent of Everest aged just 23. As the youngest British climber ever to reach the summit and return alive he earned the country's instant respect.

The twist in this young man's story came a few years earlier when he suffered a horrendous parachuting accident in southern Africa breaking his back in three places during his time with the British Air Service (21 SAS). Grylls spent two years in rehabilitation focusing on a picture of Everest hanging on the wall in his room, the childhood dream he never gave up on.

Since then he's gone on to make a living out of his adventures, whether crossing the North Atlantic and Arctic Ocean in a small, open, rigid inflatable boat, jet-skiing around Britain or paratrooping over Everest.

His photogenic looks quickly caught the eye of the media and Grylls is now one of the small screen's favourite explorers. His Channel 4 series 'Born Survivor' has taken him from Ecuador to the Florida Everglades via the Sahara in the most unpleasant conditions. Dumped with only a knife and flint, Grylls makes his way to civilisation often dicing with death. He's done it all: drank his own urine, taken refuge inside a bloody deer skin and been circled by a 16-foot tiger shark in the South Pacific.

This modern day Indiana Jones has been described as "a schoolboy on Red Bull", "the next Steve Irwin" and even as "a sex symbol" but he doesn't seem comfortable with any of these labels.

Asked to describe himself, he balks. It soon becomes clear Grylls isn't one for self-promotion. Interviews make him nervous



How to cope with the call of the wild

Survival instinct

Travel light but always pack at least a pen, water, whistle, matches or a lighter. (Other useful items if you can take them: a map, compass, large bright plastic bag, flashlight with batteries, food and water, extra clothing, sun protection including sunglasses, sunscreen, and long-sleeved clothing, sharp pocket knife, candles, first aid kit, flares. Pack a comfortable backpack with around 18kg (40lb) average.);

Don't go it alone. Being with someone is



key for morale in the wilderness;

- Bring cash and credit cards, in case you change your mind;
- Let the wildlife be. They might just leave you to it;
- Wear a cap or hat to prevent sunstroke;
- Drink plenty of water to avoid dehydration;
- If injured, deal with the injury immediately before it gets worse;
- If cold, don't stop moving or fall asleep unless sheltered. Cold lowers the ability to think, numbing the body and reducing the will to survive.

even though he's been through the mill: Oprah, Jonathan Ross and David Letterman among others. It's surprising to find him so reserved.

His TV persona is brave and easy going, his blog is honest and forthright, and I clearly remember my first meeting with him at university when he was quite decidedly an extrovert.

During his long road to recovery following the parachute accident, Grylls found strength in his belief in a higher power. He says, "My faith has always been my backbone through so many expeditions." He admits his must-have piece of kit isn't the usual Swiss army knife but "my small New Testament". He's been quoted as saying he's never met an atheist in a lifeboat.

His belief is what keeps him going when the

system and we would die within minutes."

Grylls has his ways of coping. He says his secret is to "live in the moment".

Each trip takes its toll on the happy-go-lucky 33-year-old. "It is hard to return from the big expeditions unchanged. Everest, they say, always leaves a mark: emotional and physical. If I'm honest, I'm covered in marks."

Becoming a father has made his daredevil stunts harder too. He smiles, "I am maybe a little less brave now, but also determined to be as good a dad to my two boys as my father was to me." His late father, Tory MP Sir Michael Grylls, who taught him to climb, is the person he cites as his ultimate role model.

Being away from his wife, Shara, and two

of doing whatever I need to survive."

To treat himself and his wife, Grylls escapes to Malta. After visiting with Shara on their first anniversary, it's become a tradition. He confides: "I often take Shara on our anniversary. We stay at the beautiful Xara Palace in Mdina."

Their favourite hideaway is a 17th-century Relais & Chateau hotel furnished with antiques and original paintings by Maltese masters. Oozing charm, the Xara Palace is all about indulgence and pampering, a far cry from Grylls's makeshift huts in the Amazon jungle.

Part of Malta's attraction could be that it's an outdoorsy paradise, with great rambling trails and scuba diving. But the intrepid adventurer admits he comes here to take time



Above and right: Away from his feats of derring-do, Malta's luxurious Xara Palace offers sanctuary for Grylls and his family

going gets tough. "My three golden rules for survival: faith in yourself; faith in others; and faith in God... and keep smiling when it gets hard."

Another thing that keeps him going is that he chooses all his projects. "I am always very clear to sponsors or TV guys from the start – they are there to support and watch, not intervene with decisions... ever. They tend to respect that. I believe it is how we have stayed alive through so many close calls. I try to trust my instinct: It is the nose of the mind." He adds: "I feel lucky, but also aware of how fragile life is. We lost four climbers on Everest."

He confesses that his most terrifying expedition to date was his latest Everest visit this year. "The flight over Everest was intense in -65°C, alone under a small parachute above the roof of the world. Any fault in our oxygen

boys Jesse, four, and Marmaduke, one, for long periods of time is one of the downsides of Grylls's lifestyle. "There are some lonely times whilst stuck in the middle of the Amazon alone and scared," he says. "I keep a laminated picture of them in the sole of my shoe."

It's the simple things he does with his family which he most looks forward to: "Baths with the whole family and making fairy cakes with my two boys!"

It's a long way from the revolting things he's become famous for eating on his adventures. After his most recent trip to Panama, Grylls came back covered with over 100 mosquito bites, and suffering from a new form of food poisoning: "from some dodgy snake I ate in the jungle". From tucking into live fish, grubs the size of apples or biting into a zebra carcass, Grylls has done it all. He's even squeezed water out of elephant dung to the delight of the world's media. "It's often pretty horrible, but I leave my prejudices at home and get in a zone

out. "I go to Malta to relax – the rest is my work." As for foraging for food on the island, Grylls has the answer: "Easy... head to the coast and the nearest taverna," he jokes.

Grylls has also been to the island as a motivational speaker. "I have spoken at a lot of big international conferences in Malta, telling large corporations what kept us alive on Everest and how that relates to business. Talking about teamwork, friendship, leadership, and going that extra mile when it counts."

His life motto is: "Follow your dreams, look after your friends."; his advice to wannabe-adventurers: "focus on the dream not the publicity. Do the job well and the rest will follow."

Indeed, his own celebrity status makes him laugh "I don't feel like a celebrity and I take it all with a big handful of salt." ml

GB Airways operates British Airways flights to Malta from Gatwick and Manchester. For more details visit www.gbairways.com