

INTERVIEW: Catherine Gordon

The real Indiana Jones

From living with a tribe of cannibals to learning kung fu with Shaolin Monks, no adventure is too challenging for Oliver Steeds

*Oliver Steeds, 32, is a man of many talents: journalist, TV presenter and adventurer. Best known for TV's **World's Lost Tribes**, he has led expeditions across the globe, from Mauritania to New Guinea. Oliver is known as much for his disastrous incidents as his daring successes. He's broken limbs, been held hostage and was even hunted down by bandits, yet nothing seems to deter his adventurous spirit. Oliver is also the founder of **iNomad**, a group of explorers who aim to tackle the twin issues of environmental conservation and cultural understanding.*

EMP: Which of your many roles do you find the most challenging?

In many ways I think they're all the same; learning about the world and then communicating whatever I find. But they all present slightly different challenges. With journalism it's about finding people in the industry to air important international stories. Presenting is learning not to behave like an 11 year old like I usually do. And exploring involves raising cash.

EMP: When did you first discover your love for adventure?

My first trip abroad under my own steam was to the Transylvanian mountains in Romania when I was 15 to teach at an orphanage. No sign of vampish counts, just a group of amazing kids that changed the way I saw the world. It was my first real taste of the unknown, the contradiction of the joy of learning from new people and then the sadness of leaving new friends.

EMP: When you set out on an expedition, which three items do you never leave home without?

That's tricky because I invariably pack useless stuff, much to the annoyance of everyone I travel



Oliver barmy: (clockwise from top) with the cannibals, in the Middle East, in the Gobi

with. But I never fail to carry some Earl Grey tea to remind me of home, a Moleskin notebook to keep a journal and *Monty Python's – Just The Words*, all their sketches in one volume to ensure I never lose sight of the ridiculous. If there's room I'll

because of naivety, at worst (as is more often the case) it's just incompetence.

EMP: You have been on expeditions from Mongolia to Yemen. Where is your

was 11, he rose through the ranks to lead his nation.

EMP: Were you scared when you spent time with a tribe of cannibals in West Papua?

Not really, as we were never on the menu. Luckily they just eat their own, people they believe have become 'swangis' – which are like witches except without the cat, warts and broomstick. Although there was one moment when my adopted father, Gunare, one of the most feared warlords and consumer of over 23 (the tribe only counted to 23), did ask me to sleep where he could see me. This was after I did a shockingly bad magic trick on him to try to find out where the line between 'swangis' and magic was.

EMP: Do you think you will ever stop travelling and settle down?

Yes, I expect so. The wisest people I've ever met only seem to agree on one thing – whether they've walked on the moon, discovered a cure or reconciled a nation, they all say that having kids is the greatest adventure of them all.

EMP: When you go away, what do you most miss about home?

It's my friends and family for sure. Although while walking across the Gobi I contracted an insatiable urge for a Scotch egg – so now I have to travel with the permanent desire to eat one. It's becoming rather annoying and I've yet to find any medication to cure the disorder.

EMP: Where do you live?

Currently I'm a bit of a nomad, travelling up to 11 months a year. I guess I live in airports, stuck somewhere in purgatory between missing friends and the abandon of the nut-strewn roads.

The President's Tour of Botswana is on the Travel Channel and Discovery Channel. Living with the Mek (World's Lost Tribes) is on the Discovery Channel.

“Was I scared of a tribe of cannibals in West Papua? Not really, as we were never on the menu”

always carry a set of boules to spread the good word of pétanque.

EMP: You have scuba dived uncharted wrecks and trained in kung fu with Shaolin Monks. Are you an adrenalin junkie?

No, I don't think I'm an adrenalin junkie – some people attract athlete's foot, sadly I seem to attract danger – at best it's

favourite travel destination?

The people I meet invariably make the places for me and my last destination is always the favourite – perhaps because I've got a shocking memory. So it's now Botswana where I was lucky enough to be taken around by the then President, Festus Mogae – he's one of the most remarkable men I have ever met, illiterate until he