



How To Stay Alive - From Shark Attacks to Plane Crashes

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Survival is at the very core of who we are as a species. There's no other way to say it—if early man didn't have some strong survival chops, we wouldn't be here today. And though some may argue that the human race has gotten collectively weaker as we've evolved, with our heated towel racks and panini presses, time and time again we have borne witness to harrowing tales of survival ... surviving 10 weeks adrift in a life raft, amputating one's own arm to escape the snare of a boulder, enduring sub-freezing temperatures for two weeks in an ice cave. For all the laziness and complacency modern luxuries have brought, ordinary humans have shown a remarkable ability to stay alive.

Getting yourself out of a dangerous situation in the wild is about two things—will and knowhow. You've got to want to get out of the jungle alive, and your chances are greatly increased if you know a little something about your predicament. Outdoorsmen and adventurers are generally well prepared to deal with emergencies. It's the person who slides off a desolate mountain road on a snowy night who may be in trouble.

So even if your idea of adventure is watching Bear Grylls on TV, you'd be wise to read the following collection of survival strategies—the bare essentials on how to stay alive in most scenarios.

EXCERPT FROM THE BOOK

In the 1979 Francis Ford Coppola film "Apocalypse Now," a young Martin Sheen learns a valuable lesson as Capt. Ben Willard: "Never get out of the boat." In that movie, Capt. Willard and Chef, a fellow soldier, disembark from their PT boat and venture into the jungles of Vietnam in search of mangoes. What they're greeted with instead is a wild tiger with designs to eat them. Luckily, Willard and Chef make it back to the boat safe, and Willard is able to complete his mission. Just ask Col. Kurtz.

A wild tiger is just one example of what could kill you in a jungle survival scenario. You could also die from a mosquito bite carrying malaria, bacteria in collected water or a poisonous plant you ate for dinner. The good news about the jungle is that water and food are plentiful—you just need to know what to look for and where. The bad news is the jungle's thick overhead canopy makes it nearly impossible for anyone to spot you, so you'll probably need to hike to your rescue.

Weather in a jungle environment is harsh. One thing you'll get plenty of is rain. Lots and lots of rain. The dry season in a jungle means it rains once a day. Monsoon season means a nearly constant rain. The temperatures are generally very high, along with the humidity. Low altitude jungles average about 95 degrees Fahrenheit (35 degrees Celsius) with nearly 100 percent humidity. The rain will cool things down, but it's brief. After a storm rolls in, it gets even hotter and steamier. It'll also get dark much quicker in the jungle because of the thick canopy. Your days won't be shorter, but they'll seem like they are.

Jungles, or rainforests, are lush, green areas teeming with life of all shapes and sizes. They only cover about 2 percent of the Earth's surface, but they account for 50 percent of all plants and animals. If that doesn't describe how flourishing they are, consider this: A 4-square-mile (10-square-km) area of a rainforest can contain as many as 1,500 flowering plants, 750 species of trees, 400 species of birds and 150 species of butterflies [source: The Nature Conservancy].

All that life makes it both easier and more difficult to survive in the jungle.

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