A chomping good time for Tan

Globe Trekker host unfazed by sharks, crocs, strippers

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SWIMMING with sharks? No sweat. Check to cheek with crocs? Not a problem.

A walk on the wild side may be heart-stopping stuff for you. But for Lavinia Tan, it's all in a day's shoot. The 23-year-old is the Asian host of the popular Discovery Channel series, Globe Trekker.

The quirky travel programme, originally called Lonely Planet, is beamed to over 70 million households in 82 countries. Its three regular presenters — Ian Wright, Justine Shapiro and Megan McCormick — are known for their off-the-wall antics as they sample exotic food and check out each country's nooks and crannies.

Since the series boasts a faithful following in Asia, show creator and producer Ian Cross decided to put an Asian face into the mix. Cue Tan, who won the bragging rights last year to front the hour-long episode.

In February, she deferred her studies at the Singapore Management University and packed her bags for a four-day crash course in scuba diving. This was followed by a hectic six-week shoot in the Bahamas.

Since her return, Tan has hit the books and resumed her course.

But this self-confessed control freak still appeared heady and star-struck when she met TODAY recently for a tête-à-tête about her trip. Here's her take on swimming with the sharks and such like:

"I have a fear of being underwater. And being underwater was something that was constantly tested because I had to learn how to dive.

"In one situation, I had to dive with over 40 sharks. They tell you they don’t bite but you think: Maybe one of them will decide to take a bite off a human today.

"Honestly, it was enjoyable but because of my fear, I had to work extra hard to look like I was enjoying it.

"There was another time we dived when the current was really bad. The current was as high as two metres.

"You're basically at the mercy of the sea. Every time you dive, you have to give in to the ocean. That's what I hate: Losing control.

"The weirdest thing that happened during the shoot: I was thrown into a swarm in Florida. Thankfully, there were no crocodiles.

"You try to convince yourself you're going into this big tub of coffee but really, it's all mud. I took the longest bath after that!

"The second craziest thing I did: We went to the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Florida. They have this chair, kind of like a strapped-in contraption.

"It's to simulate what it'd be like when you're in space and the space shuttle loses control. You just spin. And you're spinning too fast to feel sick!

"Crazy sights I witnessed: At St Augustine, there's a group of four men, called the Florida Naughty Boys, who are strippers. They're over 70 years old and they strip down to their thongs. I thought I'd be disgusted.

"But when I watched them and saw their good-natured spirit, not giving in to their age, I was really touched.

"I had a good time. I even stuffed dollar bills down their thongs!

"After the shoot, I view things differently. It's made me a stronger person. When you've dived with sharks, some things seem like a piece of cake."

You can catch Tan's antics on Globe Trekker on Saturday, on Discovery Travel and Living, Channel 16, Starhub Cable TV.