

# UNREHEARSED, UNPREDICTABLE

**FOR ADVENTURE TRAVEL PRODUCER AND HOST RYAN PYLE, CONTRACTION AND RISK AVERSION HAS CRUSHED THE INDUSTRY'S APPETITE FOR THE INHERENTLY UNPREDICTABLE PROGRAMMING HE CREATES AND LOVES. AND SO? IT'S PIVOT TIME.**

INTRO BY KERI LEE

Known as the Road of Ghosts, BR-319 is a 540-mile stretch of unpaved road that cuts through the Amazon rainforest from Manaus to Porto Velho in Brazil. When it rains, the dusty road becomes an endless pit of knee-deep mud that thwarts travelers at every turn.

Straddling his trusty motorcycle, Ryan Pyle eyes the start of BR-319 a month into *Tough Rides: Brazil*—season three of his *Tough Rides* series—with excitement and dread.

At one point during the long, brutal, rainy ride that would follow—after the millionth time he's wrestled his sideways bike free of the relentless mud—Pyle admits, eyes wild with exhaustion, "This road, it just eats you up ... and leaves you with nothing."

In this moment, you believe him. And moments like this—unrehearsed, impossible to foresee—are exactly the point.

For Pyle, adventure is by definition unpredictable. As such, he says, it's hard to find true adventure travel series on TV today. Where they do exist, they're built around celebrities, a competition, or the ability to know "what's going to happen at the 35th minute of a 42-minute television show that you haven't even gone out to produce yet."

The point for Pyle is to take the journey first: Enter the culture, connect with people, reflect, and then find the story. That process, rooted in his own travels while living in China for two decades, is what he built several popular shows around, including *Tough*



Ryan Pyle in Kotor, Montenegro.



The adventure always comes first for Pyle. Here, filming *Extreme Treks: Bolivia*.

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*Rides*, *Extreme Treks* and *Expedition Asia*, all of which he independently produced and found funding and distribution for.

"Today, industry executives want you to completely produce and script the episodes before you've even been to the place and put boots on the ground," he says. "That's completely the opposite of an adventure."

So, ever the fighter, Pyle has chosen to pivot rather than quit or change his ethos. In addition to pondering further possibilities for his extensive YouTube channel, he is setting his sights on a new medium—documentary film—as a vehicle to carry his franchises forward.

While working to secure financing and complete preproduction for a *Tough Rides: Argentina* documentary, he also produces and hosts a biweekly podcast, during which he talks with other creatives in his new home city: Los Angeles.

### Morning

I love waking up at 6 and doing the tough work first. I played basketball for the University of Toronto, and we practiced in the mornings. I spent practically my whole life waking up at 6 a.m. That's ingrained in me now forever.

I might start by doing research on various locations, reaching out to people for fundraising, reaching out to broadcast partners, setting up some calls. For the documentary, I might be figuring out how many days, what kind of crew, what kind of gear. And: What's the magic number budgetwise?

Also, a lot comes in overnight. When you're working with people in Europe and Asia and connecting with people around the world, you can wake up in the morning to a bunch of responses. Sometimes I'll need to do an hour or more of



**Above:** Filming *Expedition Asia* in the Badain Jaran Desert, China.

**Below:** Hosting *The Ryan Pyle Podcast*.





research about a location or something before I can get back to people.

I try putting all these deeper thinking tasks in the morning, because I'm quite sharp, quite awake. Plus the only way I've ever known is: Just do the hard stuff first. Then I go to the gym around mid-day. That's kind of like my cleansing.

### Afternoon

In the afternoon, I do the easier work, the more chill work: scheduling, connecting with podcast guests, planning and editing. I'll confirm times with guests, sending them the Google Maps link to where the studio is, that kind of stuff. It's pretty fun.

I only do face-to-face podcasts in my home studio. I do that because, number one, the audio quality is much, much better (than remote interviews). But also, this is about human-to-human connection and really getting to the heart of what makes someone tick. I feel like face-to-face is the way to do that.

### Evening

I start my podcasts around 3 or 4 in the afternoon, and they last between an hour and a half and three hours. So I finish off with the best part of my day, which is getting to learn about someone new.

To prepare, I'll check out the person's IMDB or LinkedIn page—or if it comes from a PR company, I'll read whatever brief they give me—but otherwise I don't plan out questions. It's nice when two people can just sit down and talk without an agenda. I'm always amazed at what comes out of it. You can't anticipate it and you can't prepare for it. It's organic and kind of beautiful.

You know, I love sleeping in a tent. I love waking up in the morning, cold, and having that first warm tea or coffee and then going out and hiking for 10 or 15 miles through the most gorgeous scenery in the world. That's preferred. But if that's not available, then getting to have some wonderful person come to my studio, excited to talk, is the next best thing.

Everything's trickier now in this business. It's harder to raise money and it's harder to do things. But I still love the process. I don't know how to be anything other than a storyteller. It's not something that I could just stop. Stopping is like—that's when your heart's not beating anymore and you've checked out. Until then, you just keep fighting. So, yeah, I wake up every day just ready to fight. And I love it. ■



Above: Filming *The Nomad*, Dubrovnik, Croatia.  
Below: Climbing in Verbier, Switzerland.

