

GE Financial Assurance *brokers have* traveled to nearly every corner of the globe. It's lucky, too, because their next trip would prove to be the adventure of a lifetime. Nancy

Brockman didn't know that, either, when she began planning it. The "adventure of a lifetime" started out more as a predicament for the leader of strategic events and incentives at GE Financial Assurance, Lynchburg, Va. Brockman had planned incentive trips for groups of insurance brokers to Morocco and Turkey in 1995 and to Indonesia and Thailand in 1990. The brokers had also taken previous trips to China (in 1985) and Kenya (in 1980). Topping these destinations would be tough.

"We have always had to offer something exotic, something to differentiate ourselves from other life insurance companies," Brockman explains.

She decided to team with Performance Enhancement Associates, a travel company in Waltham, Mass., that specializes in off-the-beaten-track incentive packages.

"We started off asking, 'Where in the world?'" says Colin Higgins, owner of Performance Enhancement.

That led to South Africa, still a politically incorrect destination in the early 1990s. As time went on, however, more Americans began traveling there, and that was the break Brockman was hoping for. Over the next few years, she worked with Performance Enhancement to plan a South Africa trip that combined adventure and luxury.

"One of the primary attractions was the adventure aspect of the trip," says Higgins.

"Our target audience, the principals of the top insurance brokerage companies, have been everywhere," Brockman adds.

Part Adventure, Part History

For GE Financial Assurance, South Africa was the right combination of the exotic and adventurous—even historic—and it was able to provide the high service levels demanded by her group. Last April, Brockman's group of 275 insurance brokers started off in Cape Town for four days. There they visited vineyards, hiked, took a city tour, and visited the prison where Nelson Mandela was incarcerated for 25 years.

But the real adventure came at the next stop, the game lodges. With so many attendees, Brockman had to split them among 14 different camps—no easy feat. "To move this many people, we had to fan out to different airports, and even had to charter planes," Higgins notes.

To make things even more complicated, the month before the group's arrival, floods washed away 25 rooms in one of the major game camps that Higgins and Brockman had booked for participants. "We scrambled to find alternative accommodations and ended up having to go to five different game camps," says Higgins.

Once the groups arrived at their camps, they were in for some incredible experiences. Each day, they boarded open, tiered-seating Range Rovers and were driven through acres of bush country.

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Lions, elephants, leopards, and Cape buffalo were among the wild game that came so close to the vehicles that adventurers could reach out and touch them, says Higgins.

Of course, everyone was told not to stick their arms out of the

“There is nothing like these camps in the United States,” Higgins adds. “Being out there with the animals is something that leaves you speechless.”

The trip finished off in Sun City, a gaming and entertainment district

whose centerpiece is the Palace of the Lost City hotel. “We wanted to get everyone back together so they could compare notes” on their experiences, says Brockman.

For the top qualifiers, however, this wasn’t the end. They headed on to Pretoria, where they boarded the Rovos Rail luxury train to Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe. The rail experience combines the opulence of pre-war travel with subtle modern innovations. The coaches, half of which date to the 1920s and ’30s, accommodate up to 72 passengers.

“It’s the best rail experience out there today,” Higgins says. “Each room has a king-size bed and private bathroom, and the train has world-class dining.”

The smaller group took helicopter trips over Victoria Falls and canoe trips down the Zambezi River, catching views of crocodiles, elephants, and hippopotamuses along the way.

Victoria Falls’ basalt lip is 1,700 meters wide, and it sports the world’s largest sheet of falling water. Right after the falls, the Zambezi offers adrenaline junkies some of the world’s most terrifying white-water rafting adventures (the best time to traverse the rapids is in August when the river is at its fastest and most unforgiving).

Brokers who went on the trip described the whole experience as “life-changing,” Brockman says. “Many of them are planning to take trips back.” ■



Above, Doug and Nancy Brockman, site leader, await the start of the welcome dinner at the Lady Barnard Room, cape of Good Hope, Cape Town. Right, just another day on safari: GE qualifiers got up close to the Big Five (elephant, rhinoceros, buffalo, lion, and leopard) during their South Africa incentive.

Range Rovers. Many animals, even lions, would simply brush by the vehicles and continue on their way.

“Sure, there’s nothing to stop that lion from jumping in and having lunch,” Higgins says. “But they are used to the vehicles, and there is plenty of game to eat.”

The “camps” where the adventurers stayed are really more like upscale, chalet-style hotels, with stucco walls and real bathrooms. All meals are gourmet, and park rangers even serve snacks and drinks between meals. “It was not roughing it,” says Brockman.



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