

How do TOUR OPERATORS impart that luxury feeling?

Luxury tourism to Africa is a lucrative niche for tour operators but it also involves an exceptional level of professionalism and know-how. Dorine Reinstein chats to luxury tour operators about how they impart that 'luxury holiday feeling' for their wealthiest clients during the entire booking process.



1. BEFORE THE TRIP

2. DURING THE TRIP

3. AFTER THE TRIP

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1. BEFORE THE TRIP



ELIZABETH GORDON
EXTRAORDINARY
JOURNEYS CO-FOUNDER

The first step in preparing a luxury booking is to offer a detailed proposal with incredible visuals. Sean Kritzing, MD Giltedge Travel, says attention to detail is of the utmost importance when preparing a luxury safari proposal. "Luxury clients want accuracy as well as impeccable visual information. They want to be able to see exactly where they're going." Kritzing says Giltedge Travel will send potential clients a full-screen, high-quality visual itinerary, as well as videos of the highlights of the trip.



SEAN KRITZINGER
MD GILTEGE TRAVEL



JEAN FAWCETT
ABERCROMBIE & KENT MEDIA
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JULIA NESBITT
AFRICAN SAFARI COMPANY
SALES AND MARKETING



NICCI LENFERNA
PULSE AFRICA DIRECTOR

Emily Baldwin, Director of Communications Micato Safaris, agrees and says the quality of brochures, mailings and pre-safari documentation needs to be of the highest standard. "Our brochure is basically a coffee table book – a work of art that people tend to hold on to as it is so lovely."

Elizabeth Gordon, Co-Founder of Extraordinary Journeys, adds: "We send out beautifully prepared and highly informative proposals that give a wide range of options and enough information to give them a good idea of what they will be buying." She says, however, that luxury is getting what you want, which means it differs from one person to the next. "We pride ourselves on being able to pick up the cultural cues that indicate what kinds of luxury appeal to our clients. Their idea of luxury may be sleeping under the stars in a remote area where there are no other tourists. For others it is a stunning room near a golf course at a property with a world-class wine cellar and sleeping out is the last thing they would want."

For Abercrombie & Kent's Media Relations Manager, Jean Fawcett, the entire booking needs to convey the fact that it is a tailor-made and personal experience. "We arrange for our sales directors to meet with travel agents and their clients and work with them to ensure the trip is customised to meet all their personal needs and interests."

Julia Nesbitt Director of Sales and Marketing for African Safari Company adds that the first approach to luxury is irreproachable product knowledge. "One of the most luxurious things in the world is personal and attentive service by someone who knows their product. As a small family-owned company with extensive personal travel experience, we offer an unlimited number of custom safari proposals to ensure that the client has the opportunity to review all the options and offer honest opinions on destinations and properties based on our own travels."

Dave Bennett, Wilderness Safaris Chief Sales Officer, agrees that excellent product knowledge is one of the most important aspects of luxury travel. He says you need experts in their field, with first-hand experience. "They will be able to convey a sense of luxury to the agents and impart the right knowledge and recommendations to ensure that travellers will experience the luxury safari of their dreams." Bennett says Wilderness has launched a new department called ROAR (Reservations, Operations and Guest Relations) to assist with all documentation, travel packs etc, so that the Journey Specialists can focus on providing exceptional, personalised service to the agents and travellers. "This will also assist with quicker turnaround times and more time for extra personalised service," he adds.

Regular phone calls go a long way to convey to luxury clients that they are special, says Nicci Lenferna Director of Pulse Africa. She says one of the key elements is to establish a relationship with the client on the phone. This will give you a feeling of what the clients are like and what their preferences are. "A phone call the night before their trip to wish them a great holiday and to offer last-minute advice is also a nice touch."

2. DURING THE TRIP

The luxury service doesn't end once the client has stepped on to the plane. Gordon says constant communication with suppliers is important. "At its most basic, luxury is being treated with the utmost respect, which means lots of space, beautiful surroundings, intelligent service, being addressed by name, exclusivity, minimal paper work, minimal waiting and maximum flexibility."

According to Gordon, it is advisable to talk to lodge and camp managers, giving them info on special desires, interests or needs of clients. "Anything that can help the managers start a conversation and provide the most personalised service possible. Since the lodges and camps we use are all about 'special treatment' we find the camp staff to be very receptive to our requests. If it is a VIP, we say why that is so, for others we just give the property as much information as we can about the client's personality, interests and background to help the staff."

Fawcett says Abercrombie & Kent introduced the Travelling Bell Boy to impart a sense of absolute luxury. The service entails guests simply leaving their packed bags in their room when they depart in the morning and find them waiting in their room at the next hotel that evening.

The secret to success with a luxury traveller is to have someone on the ground at the destination, explains Kritzinger. It is reassuring for travellers to have a consultant's phone number, who is residing in the country, and whom they can phone at any time. The consultants will meet the traveller at the airport to introduce him/herself and to go over the itinerary. They will also make contact with the travellers during their trip to ensure the trip is going well and to enquire whether they require any assistance.

3. AFTER THE TRIP

Kritzinger says Giltedge's consultants will always follow up after a trip with a phone call to enquire about the travellers' experience. He says travellers will be asked whether there was any part of their trip, from hotels to tours to meals even, that they felt weren't up to standard. Besides the phone call, Giltedge Travel will also send clients a gift or card from Africa to welcome them back home.

Gordon agrees and says: "Immediately after they return we send a gift and evaluation form. Sometimes we call the client as well, and often the clients call us. Some even come to visit bearing gifts, or take us out to dinner as a thank you."