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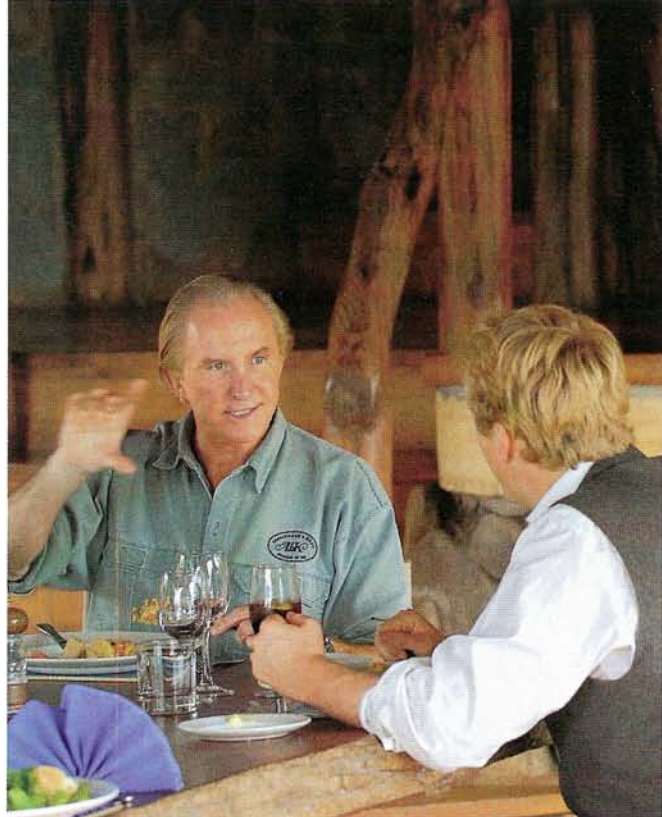
It may seem like **GEOFFREY KENT** has done it all, from biplaning over the African veldt to diving with bronze whaler sharks in Australia, but the Kenyan swashbuckler says he's just getting started. Next up for his ubiquitous luxury-travel operation, Abercrombie & Kent: an audience with emperor penguins in Antarctica—and maybe even a jaunt into space.

BY KELLY CARTER

PHOTOGRAPHS BY NAASHON ZALK



ABERCROMBIE WHO?
Geoffrey Kent, checking up on the
biplane flight that's included in A&K's
new Uncharted Frontiers adventure



PACK YOUR TRUNKS
Clockwise from top left, Kent hashes out logistics for the Kenya excursion; pachyderm party; African motifs at Wilderness Lodge, in Lewa Downs.

listings. Kent's parents turned over the business to him in 1967, and he continues to strive to maintain the family vision. "Abercrombie & Kent is a passion. It's [a way for me] to find great things for my clients," he says, gesticulating to make his point. "When I was a guide, I couldn't let anybody down," he

continues, his accent a blend of British, American, and Kenyan English. "I still have that philosophy."

Kent's the kind of entrepreneur who needs to vouch for every trip, down to the last component. He's so driven to excel that he has personally interviewed the majority of the company's guides. And the resolve has paid off. Since 1962, A&K has grown from a \$24,000-a-year, one-truck company that focused solely on luxury safaris in East Africa to today's \$500 million-a-year global machine.

The CEO is counting on new ventures to turn A&K into the multi-billion-dollar company he envisions. A&K recently bought a collection of homes to launch its Residence Club, which, unlike other destination clubs, offers equity. Research for A&K Space—an initiative involving a partnership with an aerospace company—is under way. And then there's Extreme Adventures, Kent's trophy trips that will take travelers to the planet's extremes. "We're going to the north and south poles because everything in the middle has been done," he says unabashedly. "We have always been the leader, and I want to maintain that lead forever."

A&K trips range from mild to severe, as do the prices: \$1,790 to \$98,900. "It's not just to make money," says Kent, whose clients include Bill Gates, Warren Buffett, and *Survivor* creator Mark Burnett. "It's 'Am I fit enough to do this? Am I adventurous enough?'"

KENT NEVER HAS TO ASK HIMSELF THOSE QUESTIONS. IF HE WASN'T SO BUSY running A&K, he'd go on every Extreme Adventure. He's booked on the polar bear expedition to Norway, but he really wants to find time for the audience with emperor penguins in Antarctica in November.

GEOFFREY KENT'S

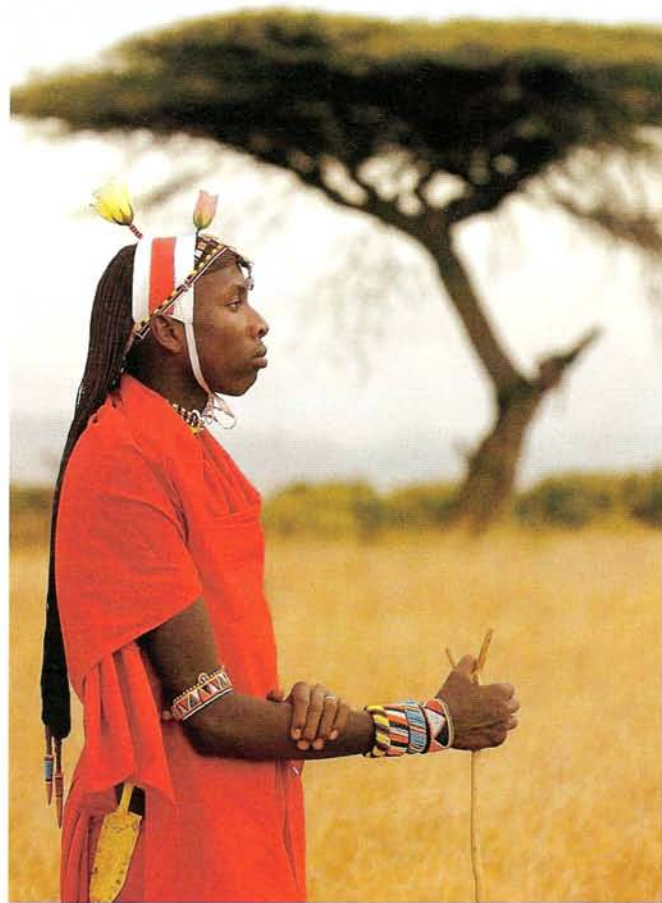
hair whips violently around his head and a grin spreads over his face as he peers out of the bright-yellow Waco biplane buzzing 500 feet over Kenya's rolling hills. We're squeezed in the front of an open-cockpit, two-passenger plane that looks like something the Wright brothers might have flown. Kent points toward herds of elephants grazing obliviously below us. "The fun of it is it goes so slowly and you have such a good view," Kent, 66, says later. "It's like you're floating—with a bit of an engine."

The chairman and CEO of luxury-travel operator Abercrombie & Kent has just arrived at Lewa Downs, a private wildlife reserve on the northern slopes of Mount Kenya, on the tail end of a reconnaissance for a new VIP safari in the country's northern frontier. It's just one of many stops for the man who traveled 220 days last year, hopping around to 60 global offices and stacks of holiday destinations. Kent has visited this area before—he grew up in Nairobi—but this itinerary is one of the company's 15 Extreme Adventures launching this fall, and Kent wants to personally check up on it.

"Abercrombie & Kent has a model: Basically, I go and do it myself," says the exec, who has climbed Kilimanjaro twice, dived the Galápagos with hammerheads, and made countless jumps from a plane. "Everything we've ever done, I've done myself." Given that A&K travels to more than 100 countries, it's clear Kent is a man who possesses not only a serious work ethic but also the mother of all passports.

LATER IN THE STEAMY EQUATORIAL MORNING, KENT RELAXES IN THE LAVISH

African sitting room at the Laragai House, on Borana Ranch, outside Lewa Downs. When Kent talks about the company he and his parents started in Nairobi in 1962, he becomes animated. First of all, there is no Abercrombie. Never was. It was Kent's idea to add the name, to make sure the company would come first in alphabetical



Where others need caffeine, Kent requires adrenaline. And he has a dizzying number of stories to prove it. Later in the afternoon, over lunch on the terrace at Laragai, he regales me with his tales. He tells of his flight in an English Electric Lightning fighter jet that whisked him to 65,000 feet, traveling at Mach 2.2. From the cockpit, he could see the curvature of the earth. "I felt like I was having a bad dream on safari, like I was in a sleeping bag and an elephant had sat on my chest," he says. "I couldn't talk or do anything." He tells how, at age 16, having been kicked out of boarding school in Nairobi, he made a two-month, 5,000-mile motorbike trek from Kenya to Cape Town. En route, he even conned his way into strangers' homes for a place to sleep.

The tales continue after the meal, as we climb into a Land Rover and head down a two-track, past elephant, giraffe, and kudu, to the Tassia Lodge, owned and operated by the local Masai. Tassia is one of the stops on the Extreme Adventure, and Kent wants me to see it.

As we beat through the bush, it occurs to me that all of the places we're visiting take care of their staff and environment. Borana Ranch is a member of the Eco Tourism Society of Kenya. The Laragai House sends all profits back to conservation and community development. And no trees were felled to construct Tassia Lodge, which is built from low-impact materials and runs on solar power.

The Kenyan lodges reflect A&K's broader conscience. In 1982, Kent, along with then-wife Jorie Butler (who remains A&K's vice chairman), formed Friends of Conservation to preserve the ecology of Kenya's Masai Mara National Reserve. Today, A&K makes a charitable donation for every booking anywhere in the world and furthers conservation through Global Foundation, which promotes the survival of sensitive ecosystems. Globally, A&K Philanthropy raises money for health, education, and the environment. When aid to Myanmar was blocked after Cyclone Nargis, A&K's local team



responded, delivering supplies and tractors to help farmers get their fields back into production.

"This isn't a PR exercise. We're using our brand expertise to raise and donate money and our logistical expertise to get the job done," Kent says on our drive back to Laragai. "At the end of the day, money is no use. You have to deliver it to the people in real time."

BACK IN THE SITTING ROOM, AS THE HEAT OF THE DAY DISSIPATES, KENT SIPPS

a glass of red wine. An employee of Laragai House enters to remind us that the generator will shut down at midnight and won't start again until 6 A.M., the same time as our wake-up call to go riding polo ponies. Kent is excited at the prospect; he's an old polo hand. He assembled polo teams that won the U.S. Gold Cup in 1978 and the U.S. Open in 1982. Those successes attracted the attention of Prince Charles, and Kent went on to captain the Windsor Park polo team, playing alongside His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales.

Now Kent confides that he hasn't been on a horse since a polo accident in 1995 left him in a coma. After his five-month rehab, doctors warned him to never play again. "I cut polo out of my life like a drug," he says. "I couldn't even watch, as I knew I would take it up."

I'm worried about the ride tomorrow, but Kent shows no trepidation. The next morning, as he straddles a stallion at the Dyer farm, in Borana, I hear him speaking to A&K guide Toby Fenwick-Wilson. "Wow. Wow!" he says, with the disbelief of a car-accident victim who realizes he can walk. "Toby, this is my first time up in some 13 years."

"How does it feel?" Fenwick-Wilson asks.

"Funny."

We ride along the plains until we spot giraffe. Thankfully, there are no mallets in sight to stir Kent's fancy, and the pace remains a walk. When we return to the ranch, we sit down to eggs, sausage, and fresh fruit. Kent catches up with Rose and Tony Dyer, friends of many years.

After breakfast, we drive Kent to Lewa's dirt airstrip, where a charter full of A&K execs meets him. They will head to Mombasa for a summit, where Kent will address the company's local staff. He's not thrilled about missing his first Wimbledon final in 22 years, but that's the price of his dedication.

At the hangar, I bid Kent adieu, and his plane rumbles down the runway. Another day, another destination. ☺

MASAI MARKETING

A&K is launching 15 Extreme Adventures this fall, including a safari that will take clients to some of Kenya's most iconic locales.