



The Great Game

A new offering from one luxury travel company is inspiring clients to change the way they travel by transforming a standard journey into a game full of unexpected scenarios with strangers, intellectual puzzles and physical experiences.

By Kelly Potts

Philippe Brown, founder of Brown + Hudson, knew that it was time to shake up the way people travel when a client came to his company and mentioned that their kids are more excited to play computer games at home than they are to experience new destinations. Enter The Great Game — a tailored journey that includes challenges, clues, puzzles and chance encounters to help you discover a location in a completely new and engaging way. “We started researching the particular games the kids were playing and the mechanics of how those games become utterly addictive and engaging,” Brown says. “We had to take everything that’s so messed up about these computer games and translate that to the real world, to include varying levels of challenge, prizes and a sense of competition.”

For this family, and many others, Brown notes that the issue wasn’t where they should travel, but rather how they should travel. The Great Game can

range from physical stimulation to intellectual challenges, but every trip encourages clients to travel in a way they’ve never traveled before. “We turn it into a game and then the client has a better chance of seeing a place with new eyes or childlike wonder,” he says.

Where you play the game is totally up to you, though Brown does recommend you allow enough time in a destination that offers much to experience, such as Downtown Buenos Aires or Patagonia, for example. “Places that are more intense offer a richer palette,” he says. “To get the full benefit of the trip, it’s better to have it be longer than four days because then you really get into it.”

Before embarking on this unique getaway, there’s a planning process that Brown compares to working with an architect. “We get to know you, get a feeling of what you’re looking for and make sure we ask the right questions so we get the trip right,” he says. “We believe that before getting

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excited about places, the client is the destination.” The trip planning interview consists of questions that may seem random, but were crafted with the assistance of a therapist to really get to the heart of the person and understand their motivations, fears and goals for the trip. “Unless you ask the questions, there’s no point in talking about places,” he says.

Brown + Hudson currently has three Great Game trips in the works and one that occurred in India last year. One trip the company is planning to Costa Rica includes a challenge with zip lining. “When people come to us and say we want the kids to build up confidence, zip lining was the perfect way to build physical confidence,” says Brown.

Of the game that took place in India, Brown says, “This particular story was really interesting because they came to us with their great aunt’s diary. We realized, we can integrate this between what this family does and what the great aunt did to make the story richer and more connected.” One aspect of this trip involved a young boy, a complete stranger to the family, taking their hand and leading them to the entrance of Mehrangarh Fort in Jodhpur, Rajasthan after closing hours to enjoy time alone with the director of the fort museum.

If a meaningful or insightful journey is on your agenda, Brown + Hudson can certainly incorporate these aspects into the game. “If the family wants to learn about important issues of a particular area, part of the game might be meeting refugees,” he says. There’s also the chance to have a trip full of physical adventures and activities, a vacation that offers intellectual challenges and puzzles or a voyage offering interaction with strangers and family alike. Brown says, “There isn’t one recipe, it changes for each client.”

During this journey, clients can choose to have the help of a ‘guardian,’ a local guide who understands the game and the family’s needs, and ensures that the family is enjoying the game and moving through it in a timely manner. They can offer as much or as little assistance as the client wants, while also helping to ensure that everything the family hopes to get out of the trip is accomplished. “We want them to achieve their objective, so we control what happens to a



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certain extent,” says Brown. “Sometimes the guardian needs to be there to help them see the big picture.”

While The Great Game was not inspired by the traditional escape rooms that have been gaining popularity around the world, Brown notes that they have much in common. “The parallels are there — going into an unfamiliar environment, not knowing the rules, having someone guide you.” Just like an escape room, Brown notes that the loss of control is what sparks interest in The Great Game. “People realize that it’s a return to child’s play... how many adults get to play and think ‘it’ll be fun to not worry about anything and let myself be guided through this game’? It’s utterly relaxing,” he says.

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The Great Game can be enjoyed by families, couples or individuals of all ages and backgrounds — and each client will gain something different from the experience, whether it’s solving a problem they’re facing, learning more about themselves, or just have a unique and unforgettable trip that opened their eyes to a new way of travel. “The Great Game is suitable for anyone who is willing to question how and why they’ve traveled in a specific way,” Brown says. “It’s perfect for someone who wants to get more out of their time abroad and someone who’s got an appetite to devour a place.”

While the pricing of The Great Game does vary from trip to trip, figure on a minimum of \$25,000 per person (Brown +



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Hudson recommends a minimum of one week), in addition to a retainer fee of \$4,000 for the planning and creation of the game (including the involvement of specialist experience and game designers). Brown does have some advice for those playing the game — “Trust, use your brain, expose yourself and the answer could be in something random.”

His hope for The Great Game is that it will awaken clients to realize that they deserve more from their travels. “If you could leave yourself behind and be a completely blank canvas everywhere you went, then your experiences would be much richer, more memorable and actually have therapeutic effects,” he says. “That’s what our approach does.” 