

'I'm so excited to be going on MY BIG LIFE ADVENTURE'

At 37, Ingrid Böhme is taking the gap year she never had to go on an epic overland journey through Africa and Europe with 13 other women from around the world. She tells Lee-Ann Orton about her adventure of a lifetime



Ingrid Böhme, 37, is a media sales executive in magazines. She's divorced and lives in Milnerton, Cape Town with her two golden retrievers, Raffi and Thomas.

"I've always been a free spirit, but the decision to put my life on hold for nine months to explore Africa is by far the most impulsive one I've ever made. In just over a month I'll be leaving the comfort of my home and work for completely unfamiliar terrain when I join 13 other women I barely know to drive over 40 000km across two continents on a trip from Cape Agulhas to Nordkapp in Norway.

This all came about in February last year after I'd been at an animal communication workshop in Mozambique, where I'd swum with dolphins. Being a single woman with an adventurous spirit has meant I have more freedom and opportunity than most

women my age to go on daring holidays, and while I was on the animal workshop, an extraordinary thing happened. I was in a group taking part in a Native American exercise where we were asked to 'let go' of people and things we felt we'd struggle to cope without. We wrote down the six most important things to each of us on bits of paper, then threw them, one by one, into a huge bonfire. For some it may have been material things – for me it was my family and my dogs, then my career and home.

Looking back, I realise life had been preparing me for the giant step I was about to take.

Back home in Cape Town I was sitting leafing through Getaway magazine when I spotted a tiny ad calling for adventurous women to go on an epic trip

across Africa and Europe. I was intrigued and immediately checked the website out to find out more. The ad was for the first-ever all-female team to tour Africa, with the purpose of promoting tourism to Africa and South Africa in the lead-up to 2010. It was to

'I saw an ad calling for 13 women to go on an adventure'



be called the "Mitsubishi Africa Adventure Cape to Cape Expedition" and it required 14 physically capable and mentally strong women to make up a team. I took one look at the map of the route through Africa and Europe and thought, 'I can do this'.

I typed up a motivation about myself and what I considered my strengths, like having endurance, being level-headed and able to stay calm in stressful situations, and being a people's person, e-mailed it off and within just a few hours a reply popped into my inbox, detailing the application process. The next four days were a whirlwind of filling in application forms and getting the necessary medical approval from my doctor. It was only when I'd posted off the chunky envelope with my application in that I had the chance to sit back and realise just how much I wanted to be selected. After two nerve-racking weeks I heard the fabulous news that I'd made the pre-selection team and had to attend a two-week selection



the major cities of Europe, promoting Africa and South Africa through what we have learnt. I'm so excited by the prospect of it all, but I particularly can't wait to see Malawi, Ethiopia, Egypt and Tunisia. And, in Europe, we'll be driving over the Alps! I can just imagine the stir we'll create when we park our dusty Pajeros on busy roads in major cities to share our experiences...

Apart from the rigorous physical activity we'll be undergoing, one of the big challenges I think we'll face will be to

'I can imagine driving our dusty cars through the streets of Europe!'

stay alert and on top of our game 24/7 for nine months. We'll be camping for most of the trip, which will be quite interesting, but fortunately we've been kitted out comprehensively by Echo 4x4 Centre.

When I tell other women about the incredible journey I'm about to undertake, some think it's fabulous and wish they could be doing it while others look at me as if I'm mad. That's when I think about an inspirational quote I recently read by Christopher McCandless, an American adventurer: 'The very basic core of a man's living spirit is his passion for adventure. The joy of life comes from our encounters with new experiences and hence there is no greater joy than to have an endlessly changing horizon, for each day to have a new and different sun.'

A few weeks ago, when I was wishing that my dogs, whom I'll miss terribly, could come with me, I realised that everything I was doing tied in with that Native American exercise, and I know that from now till we officially leave from Cape Agulhas on 6 April, I'll have to let go a little every day. But, I also know everything I've learnt in life till now has meant I'm ready for this challenge, for the next big adventure in my life." w&h Keep up with Ingrid's trip to Norway at www.womanandhomemagazine.com, or visit www.africa-adventure.travel for more information on the trip.

workshop in Plettenberg Bay.

From the second I, along with all the other entrants arrived, the competition was on. Small alliances were formed à la Survivor, with each of the women determined to make the final cut. Throughout the two weeks there we did team-building exercises, like the Tsitsikamma Falls Adventures' famous Zipline tour across rivers, waterfalls and ravines, and we bungee jumped off the Bloukrans bridge. We also got to know the Pajeros we'd be travelling in by doing a 4x4 driving course, dune driving and changing the enormous tyres.

At the end of the selection workshop the team was announced. They read out the names and, as my name was last on the list, I almost accepted I hadn't been chosen. When they called out: 'Ingrid Böhme' I almost fainted! Twelve women were chosen – a diverse mix from Holland, Peru, the UK, Germany and mostly South Africa,

ranging in age from 23 to 51 – with the final two members, Enya Fehler and Andrea Doefert, from Africa Adventure, a group specialising in adventure explorations and who created the concept of the trip.

I knew I was going to have to arrange a lot of things in order to take nine months out of my life. There were so many things to do, from finding ways to cover my expenses to getting 14 visas and 15 injections just to enter Africa. My company was amazing about it all and agreed to hold my job for nine months while I took unpaid leave, and my parents have kindly offered to rent out their house and move into mine while I'm away so my golden retrievers will have less of a disruption to their lives.

For the first four months of the trip we'll be travelling overland through 13 African countries, stopping off in each to gather information about their culture and main tourist attractions. Then, for the second half of the trip, we'll be doing a roadshow in