

KENYA BOUND

On a tailor-made luxury safari



Even with good flight connections and business-class seats, the trip to Nairobi is pretty arduous. And there's an 8-hour time difference; you do not want to hit the ground running. So the first thing to do when you land in Kenya for your safari vacation is to be transported to Giraffe Manor for a day and night of relaxation.

The old stone Scottish hunting lodge is where Jock Leslie-Melville, descendent of an earl, and his wife, Maryland-born Betty, began protecting the endangered Rothschild giraffe in 1972. The domesticated creatures now roam the gorgeous grounds and insist on sharing your breakfast, poking their heads through the windows awaiting some toast ... or a kiss!

I met up with my great traveling

buddy Suzanne there and we availed ourselves of sumptuous accommodations, magnificent meals, and the best massages ever—the perfect place to get our bearings and begin our great adventure.

A morning trip to the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust in Nairobi was also on our agenda. The Trust rescues baby elephants that have been orphaned by the relentless ivory poachers still rampant all over Africa. Currently there are 25 little ones living at the nursery, fed a special formula developed by Dame Daphne Sheldrick, David's widow, until

Maasai society is polygamous, with men striving for as many wives, children, and cattle as possible. These junior warriors live in a family compound comprised of dozens of kinfolk.

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TRAVELER

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they are able to be reintegrated with another matriarchal herd in the wild.

You can watch these adorable waist-high elephant babies drink out of their very large baby bottles and frolic in a mud bath each day for one hour, when the Trust is open to the public.

We were enroute to our first safari camp, Lewa House in the Laikipia plateau, when our driver/guide Daniel, a junior Maasai warrior, pulled over our Land Cruiser. He had us walk to a small “blind” near a watering hole.

Secreted in the tiny edifice of sticks, we watched in awe as groups of rare black rhino, elephant, zebra, wildebeest, and African buffalo mingled together in front of us as at a Saturday night Happy Hour.

“It’s because they feel so safe,” we were later told by a staffer from Lewa Wildlife Conservancy. The Conservancy has helped the local population abandon negative land use to help build up herds of indigenous animals. At last, the

endangered black rhino are making a comeback, along with other species

Lewa House, an enchanting camp run by the fifth generation of the British Douglas/Craig family to inhabit the original ranchlands, was indicative of all the five camps we visited in different areas of Kenya. Just three cottages built with an eye to extreme luxury yet in harmony with their surroundings; glorious meals eaten

by candlelight, game drives with our own personal guide and vehicle morning and evening, high tea at 4pm; laundry hand washed and ironed daily; swimming in a pool in sight of Mt. Kenya (or, later on, Mt. Kilimanjaro). Solar panels provided the power, purified rainwater all our drinking and bathing needs.

The next day Daniel brought us to his home village—a privilege, as the hundred



Ol Malo Lodge overlooks the deserts of Samburuland, Northern Kenya, on what had been an over-grazed cattle ranch. The 5,000-acre holding has been transformed into a conservation site.

or so people living there are not on the tourist beat, but are going about their ordinary lives: grazing cattle, sheep, and goats; beekeeping; learning the skills to become warriors or wives.

We were flown by small plane to the other areas of our visit: a rock escarpment on the edge of the Laikipia plateau, home to Ol Malo, overlooking 5,000 acres of spectacular bush country. An evening camel trek there was unforgettable.

Next on to Mara House, in the Maasai Mara, where we kept lookout over our own watering hole. We were fortunate to be in the vicinity of the Thursday market, where farmers and ranchers brought livestock and food to buy and sell—quite a lively scene after the peaceful, vast expanses of land where one often doesn't see another human being.

The Mara was the first place we were able to see the big cats—lions and cheetah—and hippos galore wallowing in huge, muddy groups in the river. Next up, the divine Mara Plains Camp. We loved our tent nestled in a bend of the Ntiakatek River, with playful monkeys running around on our porch, and our own croc sunbathing on the sandbank just below us. During the night, we had to laugh every time we heard the distinctive mooos of nearby hippo, seemingly right outside our tent flap.

Visiting the Maasai Mara in October was perfect—dry, sunny weather and catching the latter end of the annual wildebeest migration from the Serengeti in neighboring Tanzania.

And finally, Ol Donyo, in Amboseli National Park. Perhaps the very best day of our whole trip was a long morning walk through the savannah, wandering amidst curious giraffes; we examined animal bones, learning how to identify which species had met its death by lion or hyena; ending in a surprise breakfast cooked for us over an open fire and eaten on lovely table linen in the shadow of snow-capped Mt. Kilimanjaro. Then a swim in our private pool. Later

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Trail Creek Outfitters

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an evening game drive where we saw more and more and more groups of giraffe and elephant.

Ol Donyo also features multi-day riding safaris for those who want to combine their love of riding with the thrill of spotting game from atop a horse. We confined our riding to one evening; then it was back to our lavish accommodations and a starlit dinner outdoors in the velvety darkness. □



JOURNEYS BY DESIGN

Our trip was designed and implemented by Will Jones, managing director of Journeys by Design; he is an environmental scientist and Africa specialist. Born and raised in Africa, Jones can create a custom trip for you based on your particular interests. He can tell you where to go now and why and how. He can design a trip around the most luxurious lodges, secure stunning private homes as your base camp, take you into the most remote areas of Africa via helicopter, dhow, horseback, and foot, and introduce you to legends like Dr. Richard Leakey who will show you his recent findings about the origins of man.

The trip will be seamless. Thanks to a great group of drivers and guides we never had to pick up our bags once we landed in Kenya, or, indeed, even think about how to get anywhere, connect between charter flights, or be on time for anything.

RESOURCES

- ◆ www.journeysbydesign.com
- ◆ www.lewahouse.com
- ◆ www.olmalo.com
- ◆ www.greatplainsconservation.com
(for Mara Plains and Ol Donyo Lodge)
- ◆ www.sheldrickwildlifetrust.org
- ◆ "Love, Life and Elephants,"
by Daphne Sheldrick

Hardcastle Gallery

Westtown School