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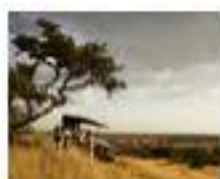
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Safari In Kenya

OCTOBER 2013

Google 'safaris in Kenya' and you will be faced with incredibly beautiful and tasteful offerings from this vast and diverse country. I decided to go with a family-run company that had conservation at its heart - a decision that was to be one of the best I could have made for our family's first foray into Africa. By Susan Harte

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Flying into Nairobi over miles of shanty towns and industrial estates was a far cry from Merryl Streep's arrival in 'Out of Africa', with Robert Redford riding up alongside her train. I did however arrive with my ruggedly handsome husband and three gorgeous children in tow, feeling every bit as excited, but possibly less dusty, than Karen Blixen would have 100 years ago.

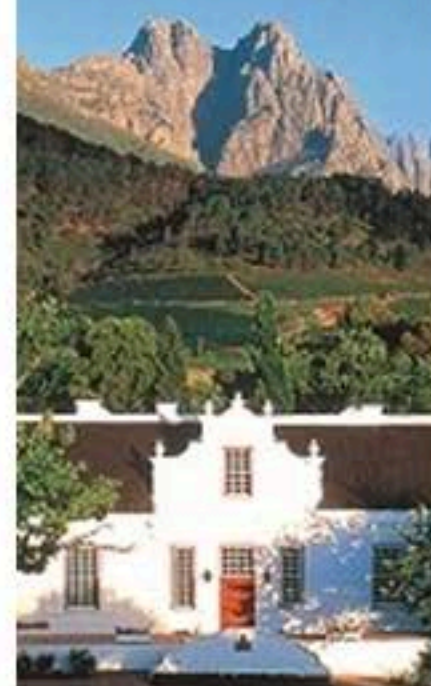


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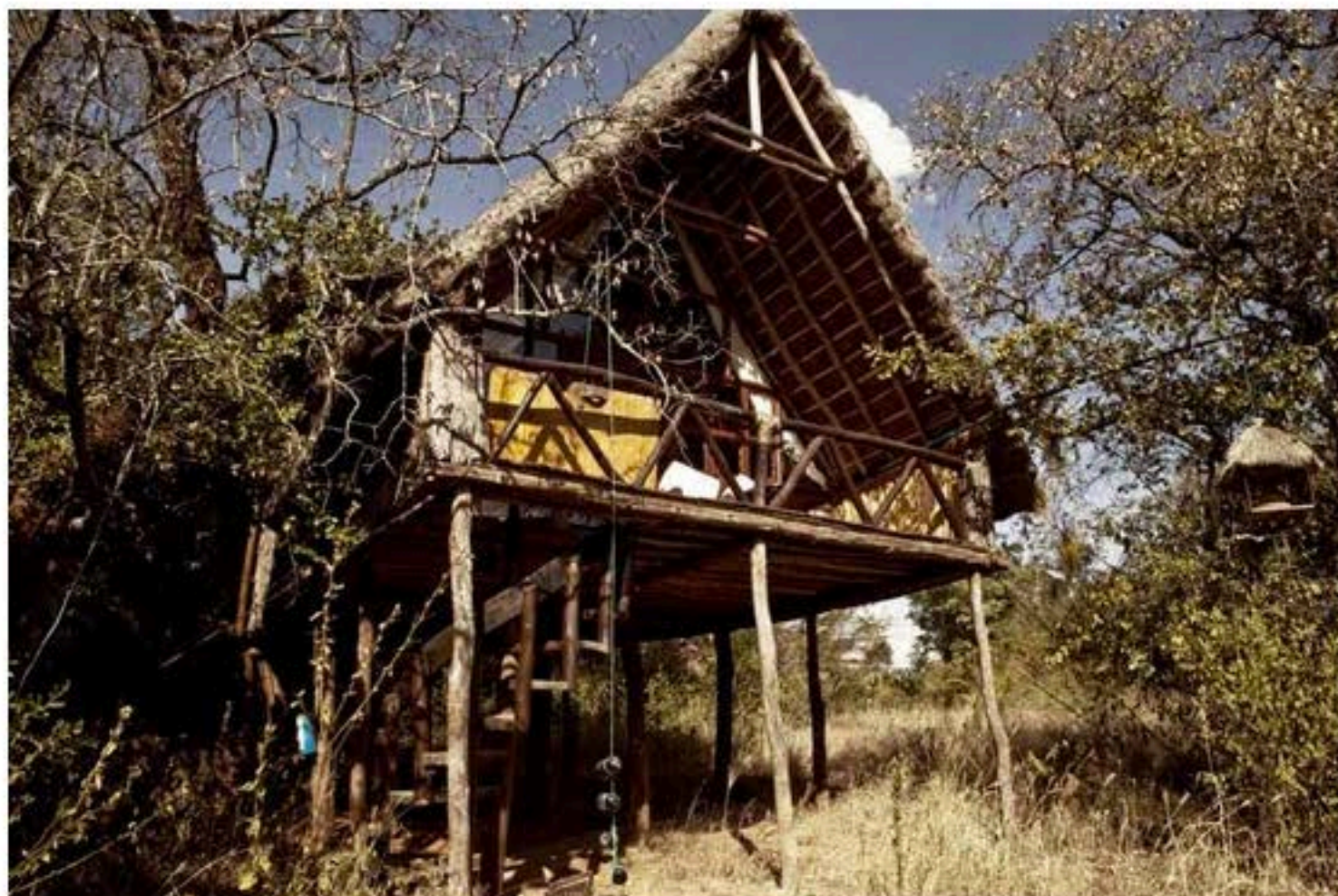


Nairobi is now a bustling metropolis with a city of over three million, meaning that my romantic dream of a drive to the Ngong Hills along deserted rural dirt roads did not transpire. Rather, our path was a four-lane highway marred by dodgy driving and peak hour traffic, not to mention a good tail-end collision. All a part of the spirit of adventure that greets you in Nairobi.

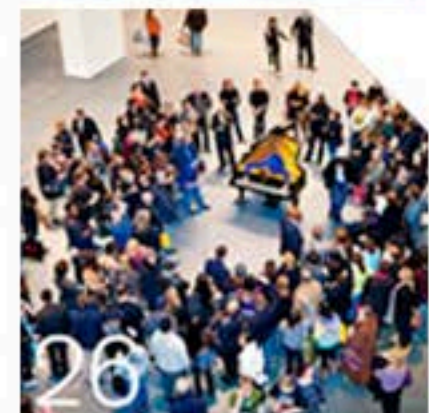
Ngong House is a million miles from that urban bustle, and soon enough we arrived in a land of lush gardens, colonial hospitality and romantic treehouses. A candlelit dinner awaited, to be enjoyed with the sound of birds all around us. Ngong House borders the Nairobi National Park so the animals you hear are not actually that far away, especially as you wind your way by lamplight, through the long grass, to the comfort of your treehouse.



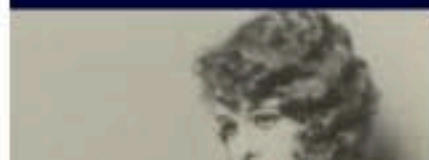
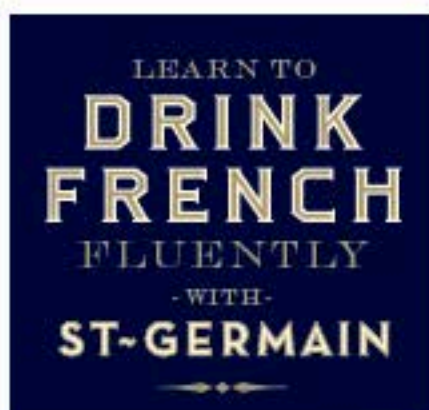
Ngong House



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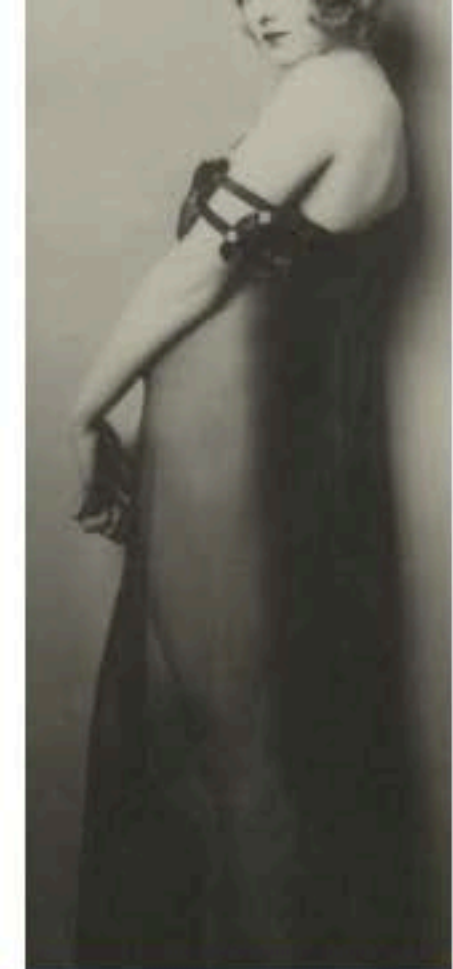


My family were understanding of my need to visit Karen Blixen's home as featured in the movie, and it still has a large established garden and sweeping drive, and a wide, tiled verandah full of antique furniture, but disappointingly the area is somewhat built up and is now Nairobi's most exclusive neighbourhood, full of embassies and tennis courts. It was certainly difficult to envisage Dennis Finch Hatton flying in on the neighbouring field...

Close by is the **David Sheldrick Elephant Orphanage** that is only open for one hour a day. You get to experience the baby elephants, orphaned by poaching, playing and feeding at close quarters - be prepared to be covered in mud. Down the road is the **Giraffe Centre**, next to the famous and very english looking Giraffe Manor hotel, for up-close time with Giraffes.



David Sheldrick Elephant Orphanage

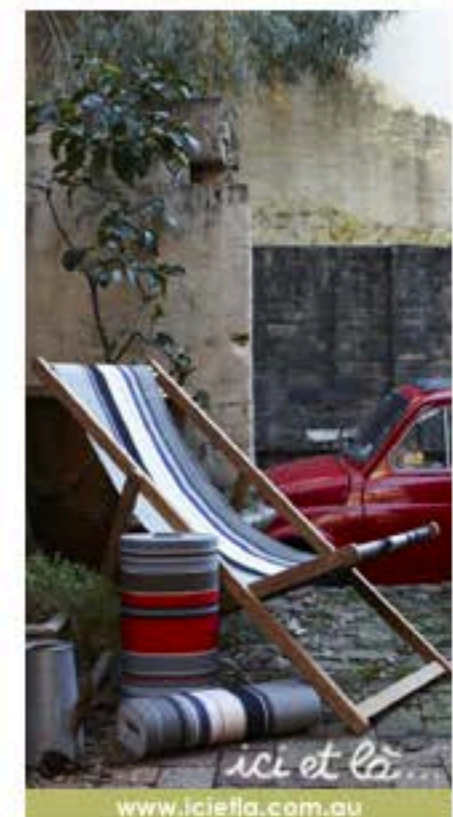


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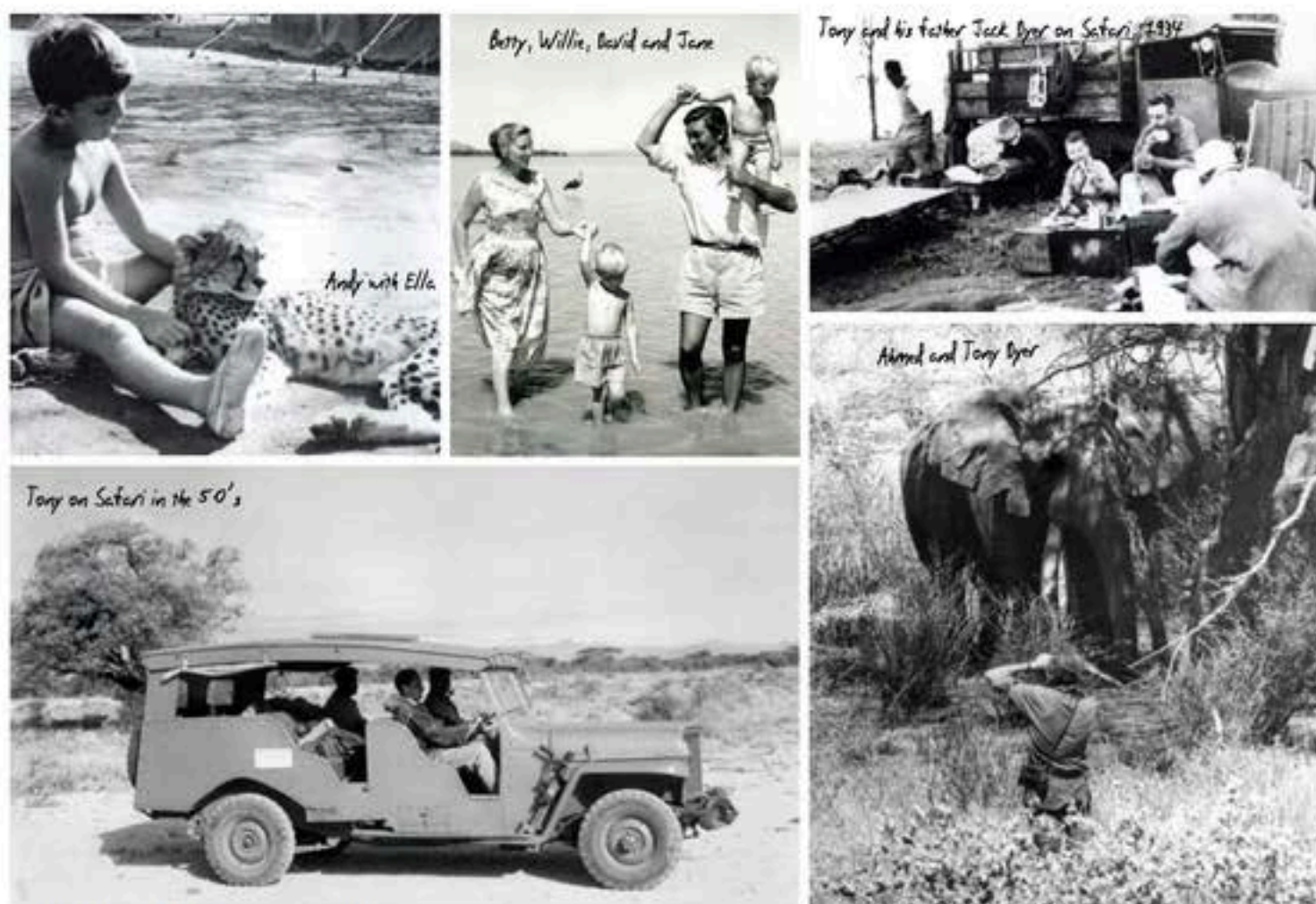


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Giraffe Manor hotel

Two days was enough city for us and we were ready to head out on safari. Having not been to Africa before, this was a new adventure for all the family. We were travelling with **Safari and Conservation Co.**, run by two Kenyan families, the Roberts and the Dyers, which we were soon to discover was like going on holiday and staying with family.



Roberts and Dyer family photos

Our safari was to take us south to **Richards Camp** in the Maasai Mara, and then north over the equator and Mt Kenya to **Borana Lodge** in Lakapika, and then two days by helicopter up to **Desert Rose** - the most remote of all of Kenya's eco lodges, perched on a lush hilltop high above the desert. Then we were to travel south again into lower, hotter altitudes where **Tassia Lodge** resides, a beautiful eco lodge, run by a charming English couple in conjunction with the local community.

All very different places, offering different accommodation, but all with an overriding theme of a love for Africa and Kenya, its people, and very importantly, their quest to save and preserve its incredible wildlife - hence the name of the company: Safari and Conservation Co. With the risk of sounding like we were on a school trip with sandal wearing eco warriors, rest assured, these people could not have been more fun, passionate and down to earth. We were so privileged to spend some time in their world and see the magical way of life that they love and the amazing work they do.

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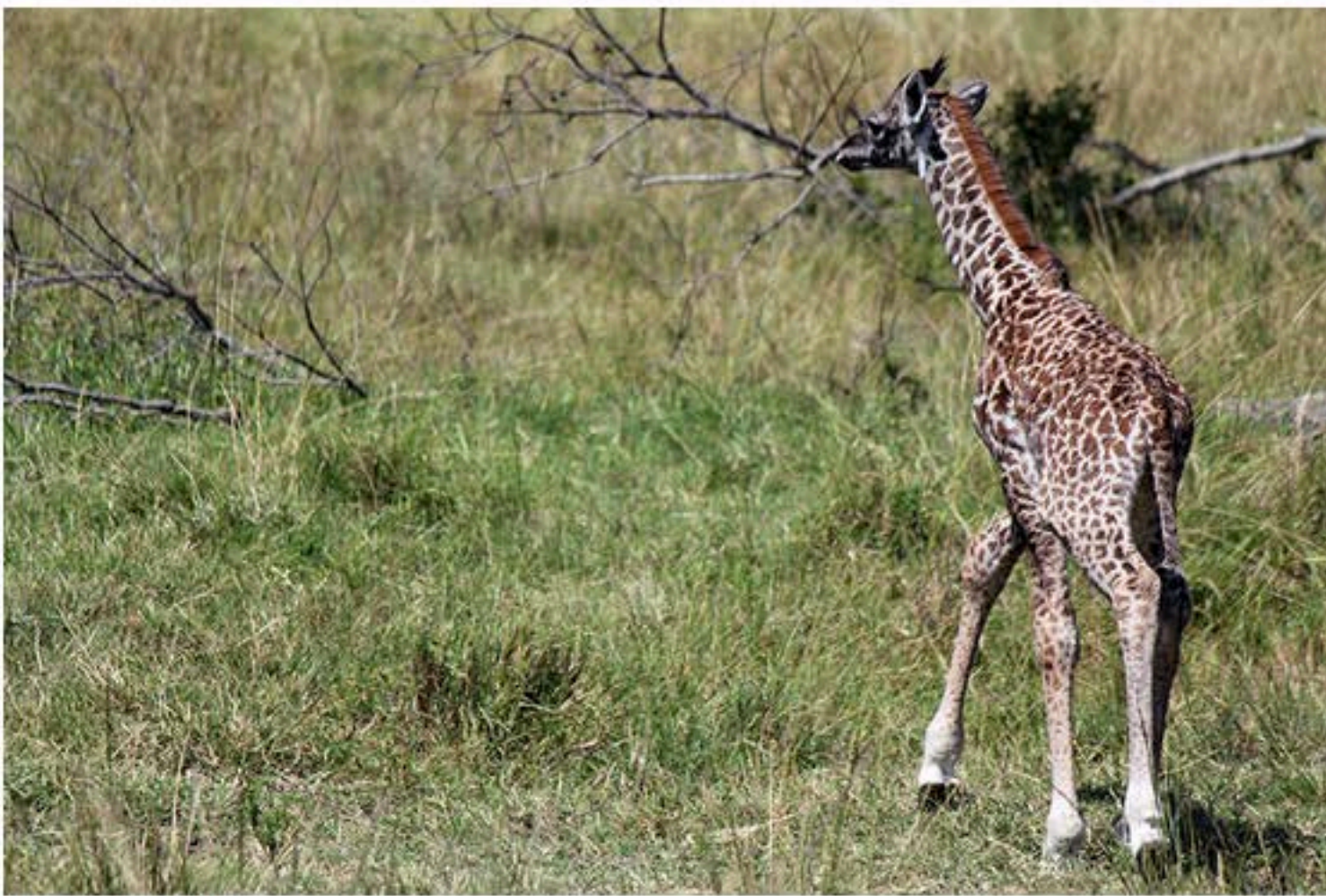


Lenkume, our guide at Richards Camp

Richards Camp

An hour's flight from Nairobi lands you on a dirt runway. We couldn't quite believe that we were actually seeing zebras, warthogs and giraffe greeting us as we touched down. What should have been an hour-long drive to camp turned out to be two, to accommodate our stopping every five minutes to witness yet another majestic animal, bird or landscape: a new born giraffe all wobbly and wet, herds of mongoose running across the plains, two baby lion cubs trotting along the track in front of us, 100's of wildebeest, the bounding antelope, the herd of elephants and their babies following alongside. Nothing prepares you for that first excitement at the sighting of an animal in the wild, and our cameras were clicking furiously.





Newborn giraffe



The camp is set in a beautiful riverside clearing (yes, there are hippos in the river) which was all very natural and wild, with eight unobtrusive tents dotted around the camp. Our tents were beautifully furnished, with all the comforts of a very stylish house, including a large armchair on the front verandah to sit and watch the animals go by.

There was nothing rough about this campsite, with a beautiful central tent complete with sofas and libraries, providing a constant meeting place for lunch, drinks and catching up - we were truly 'glamping'. In the early evenings you are either off by foot or in the Landrover, spotting too many animals to name, and then retiring to a picturesque location for a sundowner; nothing like a gin and tonic or chilled wine next to a roaring fire on the African plains watching the sun go down.



tent bathroom



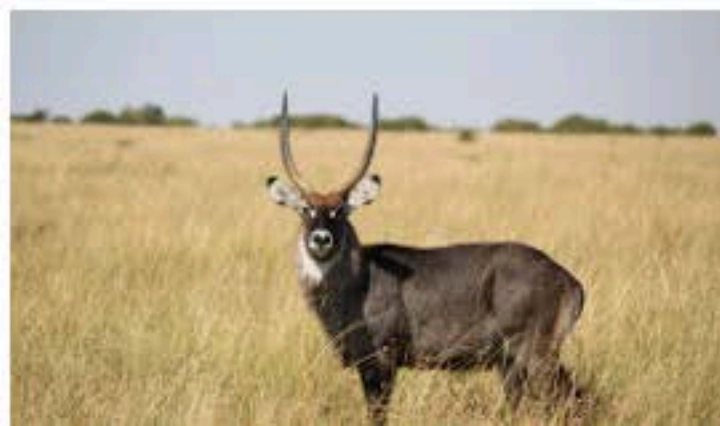
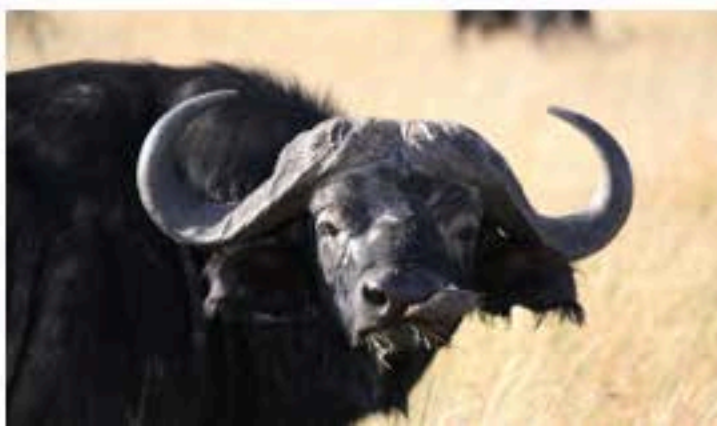
The main tent - Richards Camp

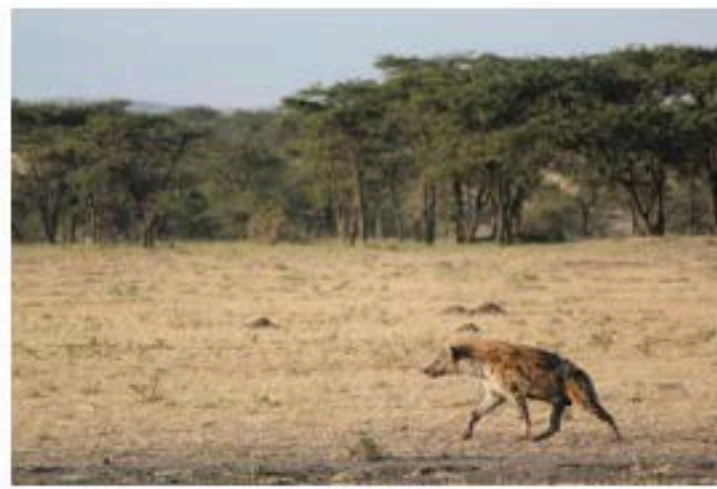
Dinner is always under the stars, out on the plains or under the trees at camp. Richard Roberts, whom the camp is named after, has grown up barefoot in Africa and is a wildy colourful character who arrives in style in his 1958 Cessna 180 plane, swooping over the camp. Our children were the lucky ones who got in a quick flight over 10's of thousands of wlderbeests on their famous migration below, 'looking like a river of ants ' is how our son described. Richard's stories of flying around Africa, the Congo being the latest adventure - are exciting and daredevil and always involve, and come back to, the preservation and protection of elephants from poachers. Nothing is ever too much trouble and laughter is heard continuously from the hosts, Shawn and Kaila (like all the wonderful folk we met, are related to the incredible Roberts and Dyer families), even over the roar of the lions. Kaila is a talented designer and jeweller - more of that to follow in *A Magazine*.



The wonderful staff at Richards Camp

Richards Camp is the place to go for animal spotting – large plains of wildebeest casually walk by the camp. One night we saw a herd of 32 elephants as the sun set, a male lion eating a rotting carcass, a precious leopard at a distance on the hillside, groups of chubby hyrax watching from overhanging rocks, masses of zebra, giraffes elegantly loping along in groups of four or five, their heads peering over the iconic flame trees - every incredible sighting was a thrill and exceeded all expectations.





Our dashing guide, Lenkume, was from the local Maasai village. He completed schooling and obtained guiding courses that, along with his knowledge from having grown up amongst these animals, make him a wonderful guide, not only for spotting and finding animals, but he was also incredibly knowledgeable about the land formations, local medicine and customs, and all forms of plant and animal life. His passion for the land and the animals was tireless and inspired our children to constantly ask questions.

Borana Lodge

A short flight over majestic Mt Kenya, with a glimmer of snow on top, takes us to Kenya's first real eco lodge, started 25 years ago by the Dyer family. It is a working farm and now refuge for the very rare black rhino. Conservation of wildlife and providing a safe environment for these animals is the reason behind the Lodge. It pays for the upkeep and also provides animal welfare education. When we arrived for our first lunch around the pizza oven by the pool, the team from the wildlife charity, TUSK (Prince William being the much publicised patron) were there, having just run the Lewa marathon for awareness of the Rhino's plight. There was a real sense that these people really do put their money where their mouths are.



The Lodge was everything you imagine a safari lodge to be - established, lush gardens and winding paths to houses with white-washed walls, stone floors, fireplaces and views down to the valley and lake, where you can watch the elephants swim from your balcony. Borana was the only place we stayed that actually had glass windows, as this was the highest altitude we stayed at and evenings were chilly. Sam and Flick Taylor who manage Borana do so with incredible energy and a little touch of kiwi hospitality, from organising all our adventures, arranging our incredibly knowledgeable guide, Rianto, to surprising us with a secret dinner in the wilderness.



Accommodation and communal rooms - Borana

Borana is home of Pride Rock of *Lion King* fame. It sits out high over the valley, making you feel like Simba the lion cub as you perch on its precipice, yet again watching the sunset with gin in hand after fishing for tilapia in the creek below. There was no shortage of action at Borana, including horse riding across the plains (available at all levels of ability). I do not think there is anything more beautiful than the peace and quiet of riding overland on horseback, alongside giraffes and zebras at close quarters.

Food at Borana is delicious, particularly the breakfasts of fresh squeezed tamarillo juice, eggs benedict and the best crepes ever according to my children. Much of the produce comes from Mrs Dyer senior's incredible vegetable garden. Somehow it just makes it all taste so much better.



Wild euphorbia trees



Mrs Dyer's vegetable garden



Elephants make their way to the waterhole

Since our return we have been following the amazing introduction of the black rhinos from Lewa to Borana, a process that has taken a couple of years in the planning and close to a million dollars to implement. I take my hat off to the guys who are hell bent on saving these massive, incredible creatures. Their decimation is tragic, and what is the most terrifying statistic is that if the poaching continues at its current rate, the world will be lucky to have any elephants or rhinos in the wild in Africa in less than 10 years. A sad indictment of our world.



From Borana we headed out by helicopter to further Kenyan adventures...

Photography, Ngong house, Richards Camp, Borana and Henry Harte.

October 2013

Camps

Richards Camp, Kenya

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<http://www.richardscamp.com>

Borana Lodge

Laikipia District, Kenya

<http://www.borana.co.ke>

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