

TRAVEL



Take a walk on the wild side

OUT OF AFRICA: Nature in all its glory awaits safari-goers in Kenya, but for those wanting to kick back and relax, a stay on the Spice Islands is hard to beat

KENYA & ZANZIBAR

Madeleine Keane

“I HAD A farm in Africa, at the foot of the Ngong hills.” Karen Blixen’s wistful refrain had echoed in my head since I watched *Out of Africa* a couple of days before setting off on my adventure there in October with my teenage daughter Julia. So it was with delight that I discovered that the second leg of our trip landed in a place called Karen (apparently named after the great Dane), a district of Nairobi, and home to Giraffe Manor, a quirky cross between a Scottish baronial home and a sanctuary for these long-legged beauties.

It was first established in 1979 by Kenyan Jock Leslie-Melville and his American wife Betty, who were passionate about the plight of the endangered Rothschild giraffe — there were only 120 left on an 18,000-acre ranch in western Kenya that was scheduled for sub-division and resettlement and so Betty brought two young giraffes home. Today it is an attractive,

eccentric hotel (part of the Safari Collection), with an education centre at the bottom of the garden where you get to feed the giraffes and learn all about them. We were handed a leg bone and could feel from its sheer weight, how easily one of these graceful creatures could kill you. Thanks to the African Fund for Endangered Wildlife (founded by the redoubtable Betty) there are now more than 300 giraffes safe and breeding in various locations across Kenya.

Back up on the terrace, there was afternoon tea and the giraffes, joined by the warthogs (“the prettiest and the ugliest together” quipped a fellow guest), entertained us all.

Next morning, before breakfast, Ed the giraffe poked his head through the window and Julia got a kiss: with a flick of his long grey tongue, the creature whipped an animal food pellet off her lips. Seeing my worried expression, the waiter helpfully pointed out that giraffe saliva is antiseptic.

It was less than a 10-minute car ride to the nearby Karen Blixen Museum, located in the writer’s home where it was very moving to see her small typewriter, a copy of the menu of the dinner she served in her mahogany-panelled dining-room for the Prince of Wales, and the

stone bench where she sat and gazed at those Ngong hills where her lover Denys Finch-Hatton (killed tragically young in a plane crash) was buried. After the loss of both Finch-Hatton and her coffee plantation, Blixen returned to her native Denmark and reinvented herself as the celebrated writer Isak Dinesen (*Seven Gothic Tales* and *Babette’s Feast* are among her best known works as well as *Out of Africa*.) Alongside her paintings hangs a photo of her with Arthur Miller and Marilyn Monroe taken not long before her death at the age of 77, of malnutrition caused by anorexia. Ironically, in the grounds of her home, there’s an education centre for eating disorders.

Kenya attracted a fascinating array of characters and I whiled away many pleasurable moments in the bookshop at Nairobi airport reading about, among others, the extraordinary Beryl Markham, horse-trainer, author of *West into the Night* and aviatrix (she was the first woman to fly solo from England to America) and another lover of Finch-Hatton: sensing disaster she refused to join him on his final fatal flight. All three were associated with the infamous Happy Valley set — whose exploits were so memorably recalled to screen in the film *White Mischief*.

Delighted as we had been by safari, we were both ready for sand, sea and surf. It took a very long time to get to paradise. We flew from Nairobi to Zanzibar, and then another small aircraft took us to Pemba, one of the famed Spice Islands of this exotic coast.

Not to be confused with the Maluku Islands of Indonesia which are also known as the Spice Islands, the Zanzibar archipelago comprises Unjuga (known colloquially as Zanzibar) and Pemba as well as a host of smaller islets, including the interestingly named Mafia Island. Where Unjuga is flat and sandy, Pemba’s terrain is hilly and heavily vegetated. Indeed in the 17th Century so beguiled was the Sultan of Oman by Pemba that he seized it for himself, settled and ruled his kingdom from there. When the western colonial powers arrived, the British made the Sultanates of Muscat and Zanzibar separate and took over, running the Spice Islands themselves in the name of the Sultan.

A local lad ferried us in his taxi across this enchanted isle, through lush verdant groves, down to the glittering Port of Mkoani, where a canary yellow speedboat waited to ferry us on the final lap across the turquoise Indian Ocean to the jewel that is Fundu ▶

Travel



MORNING KISS: Ed the giraffe greets Madeleine's daughter Julia at Giraffe Manor in Nairobi, a hotel and sanctuary for the long-legged animals established in 1979. The hotel includes an education centre where guests can feed and learn more about the animals

◀ Lagoon. The adjective that leaps out the most, reading their visitors book is "amazing" and even that doesn't do this heavenly place justice. The brainchild of fascinating Ellis Flyte, her former husband and business partner Brian Hensen (son of Jim Muppets fame) and entrepreneurs Marcus and Alex Lewis (identical twins whose harrowing story was told last year in their memoir *Tell Me Who I Am*), the vision of this Nirvana was conceived 15 years ago.

Ellis, a Scottish award-winning film and costume designer was looking in these parts for a holiday home. "Then I thought why not share it with others," she told me before describing how the local chief was rowed over to her catamaran which was moored in the bay, and signed the contracts of sale. The hotel opened just in time for the Millennium.

There are 18 bedrooms in total comprising hillside bungalows, beachfront rooms, junior and superior suites. We stayed in a superior suite — with its extensive decking, mezzanine areas and plunge pool, it was spacious and comfortable. The vibe at Fundu is shabby chic: think Robinson Crusoe with style and comfort. The luxury is there, but discreetly so, and you're encouraged to dress down — in fact they prefer you to go barefoot.

“All you really want to do is kick back, read and loll in the baking sunshine, sipping your lime daiquiri, occasionally dipping into the infinity pool before going for a restorative massage”

The local staff, under the guiding eye of genial German general manager, Hannes, have a matchless warmth and charm and go out of their way to make sure you have a ball. Though Fundu is an obvious choice for honeymooners, they love families too and there's enough going on to keep the young ones entertained.

Filbert and Kris who run the diving centre with laidback brio, organised a magical morning for Julia and me — snorkelling off nearby Misali Island, where metres from the shore, we saw powder blue surgeonfish, delicate anemones, trumpetfish, sea cucumbers and teardrop angelfish — a colourful community thriving in the spiky fronds of the coral

reef. According to legend, the infamous Scottish pirate Captain Kidd used this island as a hide out in the 17th Century.

That was us at our most active. While Fundu offers plenty of activities — deep sea diving, canoeing through mangrove swamps, sunset cruises in traditional dhow boats (originally these vessels were used to ferry cloves to India, returning with silver and wood to the Spice Islands), this is a sybaritic place where all you really want to do is to kick back, read and loll in the baking sunshine, sipping your lime daiquiri, occasionally dipping into the infinity pool before going for a restorative Balinese massage. Or having your arms covered in intricate exquisite henna tattoos by the housekeeper.

I'm lucky enough to do a lot of travelling so I think it's a bit spoilt brat to start crying when I leave a place. However, as we walked down the jetty, scene of some memorable sundowners and dinners, to that same yellow speedboat which would bring us back to our everyday lives, we passed the bar where Ellis and her staff were laughing as they decorated it with masks and candles and lanterns. It was Hallowe'en night and voodoo is still practised in these parts so the mood was very high. Readers, I wept.

GETTING THERE



Giraffe Manor, Nairobi

Rates start from approx €390 per adult sharing in a standard room. Based on mid season (Feb, March, April, Nov). For more info on the Safari Collection visit: www.thesafaricollection.com
Tel: +254 (020) 502 0888

TOTALLY FUNDU OFFER

Stay four nights and pay for only three. Rates start from approx €275 per person per night based on two sharing). All meals and non-premium drinks are included. Flights and transfers are extra.
Email: reservations@fundulagoon.com
Website: www.fundulagoon.com
Before you travel check details of exit and entry taxes for Kenya and Tanzania.



VIEW FROM THE ROOF: Madeleine and her daughter on safari in Kenya

TAKE THREE

Book

THE BOLTER BY FRANCES OSBORNE (VIRAGO)

Lady Idina Sackville, a glamorous Edwardian, was known as the woman who put the Happy into Happy Valley. Wild, reckless and promiscuous, she had two divorces under her belt before she was 30 and fled a scandalised London leaving behind her two young sons. She set up home in Clouds, near Nairobi, notched up numerous lovers and three more husbands, including Josslyn Hay, Earl of Erroll whose murder inspired *White Mischief*. Her great-grand-daughter, Frances Osborne, (wife of the British chancellor George) tells Idina's riveting story and provides a compelling portrait of that wife-swapping, drug-taking, boozy set whose amoral antics were an indelible part of Kenya's rich history.



Animal Rescue

THE DAVID SHELDRIK WILDLIFE TRUST.

Located near Nairobi's national park, this elephant orphanage was started to honour the memory of David Sheldrick, dedicated naturalist, game warden and founder of Tsavo National Park. The work he started is carried on by his widow Daphne and their daughter Angela and every morning between 11 and 12, tourists can come in and watch the adorable pachyderms being bathed and fed. The trust also runs an elephant fostering scheme to help fund their rescue and rehabilitation. For more info visit www.sheldrickwildlifetrust.org



New Wonder

GREAT WILDEBEEST MIGRATION.

Considered one of the Seven New Wonders of the World, this is the largest movement of animals on the planet as over two million (mostly) wildebeest migrate from the Serengeti National Park in Tanzania to the Maasai Mara National Reserve in Kenya. The wildebeest, accompanied by antelopes, gazelles and zebra and stalked by hungry lions and other predators, make the long perilous journey to cross the Mara River where they face the possibility of death by drowning or by crocodile.