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SPECIAL

Breakfast with giraffes and lunch with zebras



...not to mention nearly landing on top of a lion. No wonder **Lisa Snowdon** was bowled over by her Kenyan safari

PLUS FLORIDA ★ QUEENSLAND
★ ITALY ★ ALGARVE ★ JAMAICA

Our style crush and fashion inspiration for a first-ever African safari adventure? Meryl Streep in *Out of Africa* comes.

My best mate Zoe and I decided we had to have cotton clothes, cool and chic with lots of neutral beiges with khaki, olive and brown tones.

But trying to find a 'cool, chic and practical' safari wardrobe is another matter. The selection was much too cliche. I didn't want something that said 'big game hunter' and 'first-time safari' – all hard helmets and mosquito-impregnated nylon shirts. There's nothing chic about that.

So, we had to resort to digging out everything remotely safari-esque from our wardrobes. We were warned not to take anything blue as that attracts the tsetse fly, which carries a horrible sleeping illness, and nothing bright or white as that would hardly help us to blend into the landscape.

We were visiting three different locations in Nairobi and around Kenya. Our first stop after the BA flight from London to Nairobi was Giraffe Manor, a gorgeous old house set in 140 acres.

We pulled up at night and were led to a candlelit dining room and served a delicious homely meal of potpie and a big glass of wine before being shown to our room for the night.

There were ten rooms named after giraffes lived or had lived there. Our room was called Lynn, a giraffe we were assured would be waiting at our window first thing in the morning and would be expecting to be fed.

We were told to open our window and feed Lynn the bran pellets that were sitting on a dressing table in a metal pale. Super excited but sleepy we fell asleep in our twin beds in a romantically decorated room under mosquito nets.

I opened my eyes at around 6.30am to see Zoe slowly stirring; we looked at each other, smiled, climbed out from under our nets and rushed over to share breakfast with our guests.

Safe enough, Lynn – a beautiful, graceful creature – was gently lolling over to see us. She stuck her face into the room, not shy at all. Nervously we held out the pellets at Lynn's reach not sure what to expect. Lynn's long black tongue gently curled out of her mouth and snaked around the pellets as she batted her beautiful long eyelashes in appreciation. It was such a treat and we continued feeding her till most of the pellets had gone.

We made our way downstairs to the breakfast room where huge windows looked out on to beautiful lawns. There were four giraffes with their incredibly long necks elegantly bowed down inside the windows,

Never look an elephant in the eye...

GIRLS' NIGHT OUT: Lisa joins Samburu women at a traditional dance. Right: She and Zoe meet local children

... And always take 10 people when you try to give a black rhino first aid. Lisa Snowden sees it all on a three-centre Kenyan safari

sharing breakfast with our guests. Alongside the giraffes were warthogs and their babies, who were drinking and snorting around, also trying to be fed – so cute and reminiscent of Pumba from *The Lion King*.

Our next destination was Solio Lodge in Laikipia. The lodge nestles her mouth and snaked around the pellets as she batted her beautiful long eyelashes in appreciation. It was such a treat and we continued feeding her till most of the pellets had gone.

We set off over the gorgeous land-

scape looking out beneath us, straying to see herds of wild animals stamped on the ground. We flew over stunning canyons and the Aberdares with pilot Jamie and our guide William pointing out rose, tea and coffee farms – Kenya's main exports – along the way. As we came into land at Solio we spotted take about four hours and we didn't have time to waste.

Exhausted, soaked and filthy – let's do it again!

Rebecca Stephens discovers the joy – and pains – of a family canoeing trip on the Ardeche

had suggested a two-day canoe down Les Gorges de l'Ardeche might be a fun summer excursion with the kids, and together six parents and five children – aged seven to ten – had signed up for it. There was a sixth child, too: our Katrina. But she was legally too young to canoe in France, so, on the first day, our elder daughter Anna paddled with my partner Jovan, while Katrina and I sneaked off for a chocolate bubble de glace. We then caught up with them by friend Nick – or was it Thana – who we held responsible. One or other

and were told by the boys that they hadn't been spotted in months. We had been blessed by the safari gods. The lodge was impressive, modern yet homely with an open fire, a bar, a dining room and a huge staircase leading to a mezzanine. Our bedrooms were spacious and had fireplaces while the bathrooms had free-standing bathtubs and huge, glass-fronted showers with panoramic views of the surrounding landscape and Mount Kenya.

While unpacking, a family of zebras walked past, stopping to graze right outside my window. We met Avo the manager and had a lunch outside, while watching various game walk by.

We decided on a massage in our rooms followed by an afternoon of drinking tea and eating homemade biscuits before a yummy evening meal.



RARE BEAUTY: Les Gorges de l'Ardeche

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scrum of them, bashing one against another. And Anna wasn't the only one to take a dip. I let this information swim over my head while, beaming, I watched the children pull their canoes up on



SWIMMING TRUNKS: Lisa sees elephants crossing a river before her helicopter flight with Zoe and pilot Jamie, right



WILD BUNCH: Spotting a lioness and her cubs, antelopes and zebras were some of the highlights

GETTING THERE
The Safari Collection (thesafaricollection.com) offers a seven-night package including stays at Giraffe Manor, Solio Lodge and Sasaab from approximately £2,030pp. This includes internal flights, transfers, game drives, all meals, hot showers and soft drinks. Game bush breakfasts, sounders and laundry. British Airways (ba.com) flies daily from Heathrow to Nairobi. Return flights start from £619pp.

The next morning we were up at 4am for our first-ever game drive. It was cold and we had to wrap up as we set off with William in a 4x4. Zoe and I sat up on the roof, eager to spot the wildlife. We didn't have to wait as we came across white rhino straight away.

Next we saw baby leopards, probably brother and sister, rolling around playing with one another. We also



SPOTTED BUFFALOS: Spotted a lioness and her cubs, antelopes and zebras were some of the highlights



ABOUT HALF A DOZEN: Young cubs. It was a wonderful thing to see. Happy and content we headed back to the lodge for another delicious lunch.

As we were eating, Avo got a call from the guards. One of the black rhinos had been injured and doctors in the Japanese and Chinese markets such a cruel waste. Back at the ranch Avo introduced us to Solio's newest arrival, a tiny bush baby jumping around with freakishly big eyes and webbed toes.

The next morning we woke up again before the sun, eager to see more. We came across the most intense scene, a lioness hungrily tearing into the flesh of a freshly killed zebra. Grossome yet mesmerising.

We watched, trying to get a closer look. Eventually the lioness spotted us, became uncomfortable and ran off. We followed her with our binoculars in the direction of some trees and under them was another lioness and

ple, run Sasaab. Our evenings were spent sitting under the stars eating together and exchanging stories. Safari is a very social experience.

We set off early the next day with a safari picnic. We met Sammy our guide and Jacob, a stunning warrior from the Samburu tribe who was dressed in all his regalia. He was our spotter.

Sasaab is also a wildlife conservancy, helping to protect the Ewaso lions who are in danger of becoming extinct and the Grey's zebras (named after a former French president).

We saw hundreds of elephants: some feeding by the river, others crossing the road.

When we met them on the road we had to stop, turn off the engine and avoid making eye contact for risk of being charged (a situation both exhilarating and terrifying).

There were also beautiful reticulated giraffe, native to Somalia and the Samburu region, and a vast array of exotic birds, springbok and beisa oryx.

We were invited the next day to a local village. Goropas children and a few silent, moody warriors welcomed us; we were invited into a mynah, a small hut where a family lived and slept. The roof was a shell made from goat fat, clothes and paper.

The children were taken with Zoe and I, playing with our hair and trying to rub our skin to see if the white came off. We played with them for hours.

That evening, back at Sasaab, we were told we were going for a walk, so we set off with Jacob and a couple of other warriors.

We were met with two camels and Zoe and I hopped on and had an incredible ride, ending the day with a vodka sundowner on a hill with incredible views, followed by sausages cooked by Jacob on a camp fire.

Our last day was spent out and about with a picnic by the river. We followed a family of lions for hours and got close to them. Back at Sasaab that afternoon Zoe and I relaxed by the pool and I had a pedicure.

On the last evening we went to see a display of dancing by the Samburu men and women down by the river. It was a lively jumping dance that involved all the warriors in their glory showing off and claiming their future wives.

It was a mesmerising and an electric atmosphere, everyone dressed up and all the young girls hoping to be noticed by the warriors.

I joined in the dancing; the rhythm and vibrations were intoxicating and it was the most fantastic end to an incredible trip.

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SPASHING TIME: Rebecca's friend Nick with Lucas on the river

to the sandy bank at Le Bivouac de Gourrier. They were exhausted but triumphant after five hours on the water.

The next morning, though, following the storm, the mood wasn't so charged. The air was saturated. The sky was dark. Slowly, though, it dawned on us that the least awful of options was to stick to the original plan. Another five hours paddling and there'd be a vehicle waiting at Saint Martin d'Ardeche to return us and the canoes to the start.

It was my turn to canoe with Anna and we donned swimmies and life jackets and headed for the river. It was warm, at least. And to my surprise, our row of canoes was still safely moored on the river bank. My lifetime's canoeing experience was limited to two short episodes: the Devizes to Westminster canoe race (no rapids there) and a paddle the length of two lakes in the Canadian Rockies (again no rapids), and

both had been in the last century. I played with the paddles to get a feel for them. My friend Josh reminded me of the brake control with a paddle blade, which was to prove invaluable. And off we went. It felt wonderful. We approached our first rapid with a sense-sharpening rise in adrenaline levels and watched a couple ahead topple into the river. But, well-adjusted, we swerved clear of one rock, nicked another, wobbled a bit, paddled frantically through choppy water and shot out like a bullet the other side. This was fun!

Each turn of the river revealed more sculptured rock, inviting beaches on which to picnic and pools to swim. Late in the afternoon, as our muscles tired, the cliffs gave way to a milder, flatter landscape, the river broadened, and slowed, and the end was within sight.

A satisfactory journey which, one day, we will repeat – despite the weather.