

An adventure ride through the Masai Mara and unique experiences at the Deloraine and Laikipia Safari Lodge

Experience the wilderness up close and in its natural state

This time, in February, I travelled to Kenya – a long-cherished dream of mine finally came true! The Masai Mara lies right next to the Serengeti (Tanzania) and is regarded by many as Kenya's finest nature reserve, as it is also the country's most wildlife-rich reserve, both in terms of the number of species and the total number of animals. Giraffes, lions, leopards, cheetahs, elephants, hippos, crocodiles, antelopes and gazelles are just some of the many animal species found in the wildlife reserve, which is considered one of the most popular in the whole of Africa.

I got ready for my flight in Frankfurt and was looking forward to the warm weather, the beautiful countryside and seeing lots of wildlife. Where better to spend a riding holiday than in Africa, and when better to leave Germany than during the dreary, wet and cold weather of February? The daytime flight went by surprisingly quickly. After watching films and having a few quick naps, I stepped off the plane in Nairobi at 10 pm feeling almost fully rested. I was already being met and taken to a hotel near Wilson Airport. This meant I had less to worry about the next morning and could be taken straight to the national airport after breakfast. There I met my fellow travellers for the first time – an American, an Englishwoman and a Frenchwoman who currently lives in Switzerland. A colourful, entertaining and lovely mix! We waited for our charter flight and got ready for the journey. Luggage is usually weighed here, and the 15 kg allowance for checked luggage and hand luggage can only be exceeded for an additional fee.

After waiting for a few minutes, we were taken to the runway, where a small charter plane was waiting for us.



From above, we had a fantastic view of the African bush and spotted the first wild animals as soon as we landed – I felt like I was in paradise! Simon, our guide, welcomed us and we got ready in the jeep for our first drive through Kenya's stunning landscape. The drive took us past so many wild animals that we didn't know where to look first. On the left, a little baby giraffe with its mother; on the right, a herd of impalas and another



a large herd of zebras. A hyena was hiding amongst them, and we kept spotting various species of antelope with their young.



What was supposed to be a journey of only about 45 minutes turned into an hour and a half because we couldn't get enough of the various wild animals. We were all the more surprised when we reached our campsite for the night. The tents had been set up for us, complete with beds, a mirror, towels, torches and fresh water supplied daily. In addition, there was a toilet tent for each tent, as well as a shower with hot water shared between two or three tents. The tents were situated right by the river, allowing us to experience the magnificent views and the sounds of Africa up close.



After everyone had had a short rest, we sat together as a group in the lounge area. The table was already laid, the drinks were ready, and we had a magnificent view of the river winding its way right past our tents. Many hippos were swimming in it, entertaining us with their calls throughout the day and well into the evening. Even today, I can still hear those evening sounds and feel as though I'm travelling through the heart of magnificent Africa. This is what defines the beauty, tranquillity and uniqueness of Africa – here, you experience pure nature every day, without schedules, without stress and without noise. Only the sounds of the animals and the endless expanses of the African bush accompany you.

In the afternoon, we went on our first ride and I got to meet the horse I would be riding for the week. He was a real gem – easy to ride, eager to move forward, keen to jump and fearless. We explored the area and spotted a few giraffes, elephants and antelopes. I've been to various parts of Africa several times now, but I still can't get enough of the wildlife. Watching a herd of elephants bathing, playing or feeding, or observing a giraffe using its long neck to pick out the best parts of a tree – these are all experiences that keep coming back to me in my mind's eye long after the holiday is over, and which photographs can only partially capture. These are moments to last a lifetime!





Over the next few days, we got to know the area in all its different facets – at times we looked out over a seemingly endless savannah dotted with scattered, solitary bushes. Then again, we came to a rockier area with small hills, known for its large population of wildcats. You certainly couldn't feel safe or unobserved here – keeping a watchful eye is absolutely essential in the bush at all times. On one occasion, we were looking for a bush to take a short break and had to ride past a few because a lioness or a pair of lions had just settled down inside for their midday rest. Naturally, you wouldn't want to disturb lions whilst they're napping, and certainly not on foot!

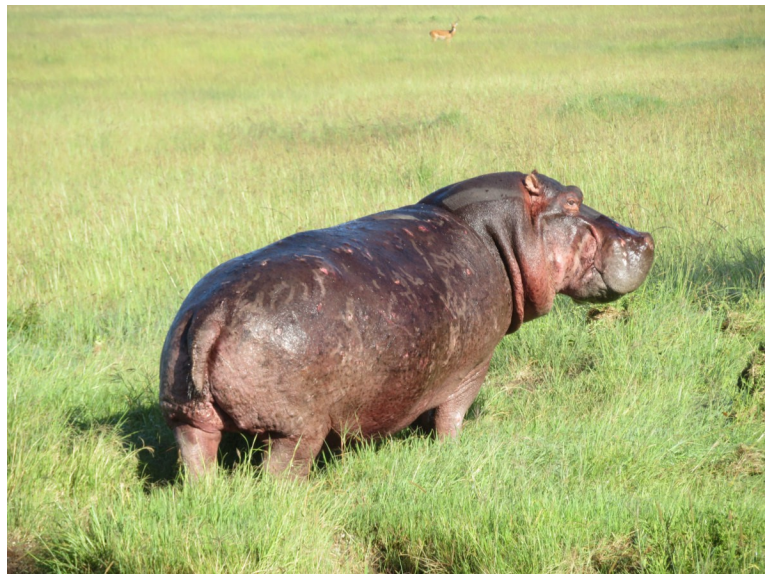


We were in for a little surprise, too, when we were feeling our way through some thickets

and suddenly heard a distinct hissing sound ahead of us. The lioness had cubs with her, and we began our retreat, moving slowly and cautiously. A short time later, we spotted the same lion at

We watched her hunt an antelope – moving slowly, cautiously and on silent paws, she tried to get closer to her prey, but lost sight of it on a slope. Absolutely impressive!

We also spotted the odd hippopotamus or two during our rides, standing outside the water. Here too, caution was required, as they can easily feel provoked. Rule number one: never stand with your horse between a hippopotamus and the water!



Once, whilst out riding, we were startled by a black rhinoceros – we were riding through thick grass when suddenly a rhinoceros reared up to our left, clearly disturbed by our footsteps. It paused briefly before striding away from us.



During the week, we would occasionally switch to the car in the afternoon or early evening and go on the odd game drive. This allowed us to get closer to the animals and really savour the experience at our own pace. It wasn't uncommon for us to stop at sunset and enjoy the magnificent view with a sundowner – there's no better way to round off a wonderful day. On one occasion, we spotted a giraffe that had just collapsed from our horseback, already surrounded by a few lions. Unfortunately, we couldn't get too close, as there were some young lions present and it's best not to disturb them whilst they're feeding when on horseback. So in the evening we returned by jeep and came across about 20 lions feasting on the giraffe. It was a sad sight to see the giraffe, but at the same time incredibly fascinating to see how the lions were all standing or lying around it. I had never seen so many lions in one place before, and there were even a few cubs among them.



The Masai Mara and the surrounding area are renowned for their high concentration of big cats, and so we were treated to some thrilling sightings over several days. On one occasion, we spotted a pair of lions during the day, who were busy raising their cubs.

On another day, we spotted several cheetahs. These animals never cease to fascinate me – they are long-legged, graceful, elegant, swift and agile, combining majestic beauty with strength and expressiveness. They usually travel alone or in pairs. They are often shy, and one is not always lucky enough to get a close-up view of them. We got quite close to them on horseback and once by jeep, and were able to admire them resting during a midday break and once striding away with an elegant gait – these moments stay with you.





Time and again, on our horse rides, we came across huge herds of zebras, buffalo or antelopes and saw large numbers of giraffes, including some young ones, as well as a few jackals. We also encountered large groups of elands, which I had never before seen in such great numbers. Sometimes we didn't even know where to look first, as wild animals accompanied us everywhere, showing little fear of us or the horses. Whenever we came across a tree trunk or some other small natural obstacle, we were free to jump over it. That's the beauty of Africa: there's so much space – you can and are allowed to, but you don't have to.





Aside from the numerous wildlife sightings, the comfortable accommodation, Africa's breathtaking scenery and the excellent food, there was another highlight that I had never experienced quite like it before. We reached the river we had to cross, and the whole group was already feeling a bit nervous. Some were eagerly looking forward to the river crossing, whilst others were visibly tense. Our guide Simon first went ahead to assess the situation and ventured into the water. Hippos and crocodiles often make their home in the river, and they don't always find unexpected visitors very amusing. Having reached the middle of the river, Simon drifted slightly to the left; he almost went under with his horse, and immediately several Hippos. But Simon was an experienced guide for a reason – undaunted, he cracked his whip twice until the hippos submerged. Then he turned around, rode back towards us a little way and led us into the water. We were told to hold on tight, keep our eyes on the bank at all times and ride through the water one behind the other, maintaining contact with the reins and not losing our bearings. So we waded through the water; for a few metres we lost touch with the bottom and had to swim a short distance. My horse handled it all with ease and without hesitation, and it was incredibly exciting. Everyone arrived safely and beaming on the other side – some with shining eyes, others visibly relieved as the tension finally eased. That was pure adventure!

The next day, we rode through the river again, a little further upstream, and here too we all made it safely through the water. This
It's an experience I'll remember forever. In the evenings, we usually sat together by the fire and enjoyed a sundowner, followed by a delicious meal and a cosy get-together with the group. We wanted for nothing that week. Everyone was very warm and hospitable, and the meals offered a plentiful and always delicious selection. The tents were comfortably equipped with all the essentials. You could freshen up at any time, either in front of or inside the tent

...and soak up the unique atmosphere of Africa. The staff were always attentive, hard-working and friendly, taking care of setting up and taking down the tents, looking after our needs and those of the horses – a truly hassle-free experience!

The week flew by and it was time for us to say our goodbyes. We'd had an eventful few days, sharing so many experiences and spending some wonderful, fun evenings together. Some of us headed back home, whilst I was able to stay a little longer and explore two more parts of Kenya.

After a hearty breakfast, the three of us set off in the Land Rover towards Deloraine, driving through the impressive tea plantations of Kericho. After a breakdown that cost us a few hours, we finally reached our destination and rounded off the evening with a sumptuous meal followed by a glass of wine in cosy company. The sprawling estate is one of the most exclusive accommodations in the whole of Kenya and offers every comfort one could wish for.



More than 80 horses graze on lush pastures around Deloraine House, and are plenty of great riding opportunities, as well as a swimming pool, a tennis and polo court, and a cross-country course. The next morning, we set off on a leisurely ride through the beautiful countryside. It looked very different compared to what we'd seen over the past few days. Lots of bushes, all thickly overgrown

with a few hills. After the ride, we were allowed to let off some steam on the cross-country course before meeting up for a delicious breakfast, where we sat together one last time.



For me, the journey continued alone. With my driver, I set off through a few African villages until we reached the Laikipia Safari Lodge. I received a warm welcome there. The lodge is in a great location – 30,000 hectares of unfenced wilderness, teeming with wildlife and boasting magnificent scenery, lay before me. In the heart of the Laikipia Highlands, just 50 km from the equator, at the foot of the mighty Mount Kenya, I found an impressive variety of wildlife: big game such as elephants, buffalo, lions and leopards, as well as rare species such as wild dogs, plus plenty of antelopes, gazelles, giraffes, zebras, wildebeest and over 350 different species of bird. The flora and fauna are also unique, and the wealth of different ecosystems is impressive. Vast savannahs in the north provide a home for animals such as antelopes, cheetahs and ostriches. In the south of the ranch, the bush is denser and gives way to acacia forests, which are home to several herds of elephants. The Laikipia region is one of the areas in Kenya with the highest density of elephants. With 70 species of mammals and 30 species of reptiles, the lodge boasts a truly exceptional abundance of wildlife.



There's so much to do here, and everything is tailored to your individual preferences. I was able to explore the area on horseback and by jeep, and enjoyed an extraordinary bush breakfast not far from a waterfall.



From there, you can also take the plunge if you fancy it.



I was able to enjoy the view from high up on a camel, which I was allowed to ride for a while – a completely new and wobbly perspective. I enjoyed the wonderful tranquillity by the pool, the delicious food and the comfortable accommodation, which left nothing to be desired, and was able to relax and enjoy life to the full. It was hard for me to say goodbye to the lovely people at the lodge, who made the experience so special and unique, to the wonderful horses, the stunning landscape and the abundance of wildlife – I'd love to come back soon!

February 2020, Angelika Kaiser

Links to the programmes:

Masai Mara horse ride with an optional extension at Deloraine:

www.equitour.com/mmr011.htm

Laikipia Safari Lodge: www.equitour.com/sossta.htm