

Liz Earle

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CALL OF THE WILD

From a Kenyan hotel that's home to endangered giraffes, to a quintessentially English retreat and a Channel Island wildlife camp – get back to nature and totally disconnect with these truly unforgettable breaks.

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PHOTOGRAPHS:
GEORGIA GLYNN SMITH



Breakfast with
a difference at
Giraffe Manor

Arriving at a typically British manor house on the outskirts of a very hot and sticky Nairobi is a somewhat surreal experience, but the warm welcome from super-friendly staff quickly helps you settle into the surroundings. As you sit on the sunny terrace, sipping a much-needed refreshing drink, your eyes are drawn to the front of the house, with its beautiful arched doorway, large airy windows and old stone walls covered in a botanical creeper. Your eyes gaze upwards, noticing how carefully the creeper has been pruned all the way to the second floor, where it suddenly becomes much leafier and more densely grown. You imagine the gardener, carefully balanced at the top of a tall ladder, who couldn't quite reach any further.

And then you remember where you are – Giraffe Manor – the clue is in the name, and there's clearly no need for any long ladders here. The master gardeners are a herd of endangered Rothschild giraffes, who wander freely around the property at certain times of the day, grazing on the creeper and other nearby vegetation, together with edible treats hand-fed to them by the manor's paying guests. Yes, that's right, you read that correctly! These wild giraffes stroll up to the manor most days at breakfast and teatime, in search of a snack, before returning to their



Colonial-era Giraffe Manor offers an experience like no other

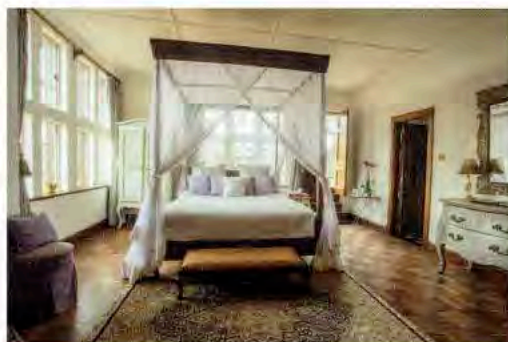
neighbouring forest sanctuary. They have become accustomed to taking food pellets straight out of human hands, or, if you're brave enough and don't mind a bristly giraffe chin, even from human lips – giving guests the opportunity to momentarily 'kiss' one of the most beautiful, graceful wild animals on the planet. This is the reason why this extraordinary and celebrated hotel is booked up a year, if not two, in advance by people from every corner of the globe looking for a memory they will never forget and that simply cannot be found anywhere else.

Set in 12 acres of private land, within 140 acres of indigenous forest, this imposing building was originally built in 1932 as a family home for Sir David Duncan, who wished it to resemble a Scottish hunting lodge. In the 1970s, it was bought by Betty and Jock Leslie-Melville, passionate conservationists, who learned that Rothschild giraffes were on the brink of extinction soon after moving in. They founded the Giraffe Centre next door to the manor and, starting with two young Rothschild giraffes called Marlon (after Marlon Brando) and Daisy, introduced a breeding programme which has had great success. Young calves born at the centre are reintroduced into the wild at the age of two, and there are now thought to be more than 300 Rothschild giraffes safe and breeding well in various Kenyan national parks.

Since 1983, Giraffe Manor has been a small boutique hotel, its ten rooms fiercely fought over by the rich and famous, including Mick Jagger and Richard Branson. The luxurious suites, wood-panelled dining rooms and sumptuous velvet upholstery evoke the White Mischief era – a combination of



Share afternoon tea with one of Giraffe Manor's beautiful Rothschild giraffes





A trip to Giraffe Manor is one for your bucket list

opulence and wild times. The hotel is now owned by Mikey and Tanya Carr-Hartley, and is part of The Safari Collection group of lodges and hotels. Their great sense of style, attention to detail, caring team and excellent menu ensures a wonderfully relaxing and luxurious stay. Whether you're after classic English tea from the finest rosebud china or a sundowner cocktail known as a *dawa* (meaning medicine in Swahili), nothing is too much trouble and you will be treated like royalty.

While it can't be guaranteed that the giraffes will pay a visit to the manor during your stay – they are wild animals after all – it's very unusual for there to be no interaction at all with the giraffes. Food pellets are provided by the bowlful when they make an appearance, and the giraffes don't seem to be able to get enough of them. Their vast appetites are

hardly surprising when you discover that the average giraffe needs to eat up to 65kg of food per day. In the absence of their favourite acacia tree leaves, these pellets, made from corn, wheat, grass and molasses, are a very palatable alternative. And so eager are the giraffes to munch on them, that you need to be a little careful when you're running low. Faced with an empty bowl, you need to watch out that the giraffes don't headbutt you in disappointment and knock you off your feet. You also need to be careful not to get close to their back legs – one kick can be fatal.

But despite any fears you may have, the feeding experience at Giraffe Manor is truly one of genuine joy and wonder. It gives you ample time to connect with wildlife, and to marvel at its beauty. The giraffes' long eyelashes (which they need for protection against the thorny acacia bushes), their striking markings (every single giraffe has a unique pattern, similar to a human fingerprint), their extraordinary grace, elegance and sheer size and strength, are all intoxicating and awe-inspiring. While feeding them, you have a tremendous feeling of wellbeing, of completely living in the moment. A trip to Giraffe Manor is one for your bucket list.




Things you may not know about giraffes

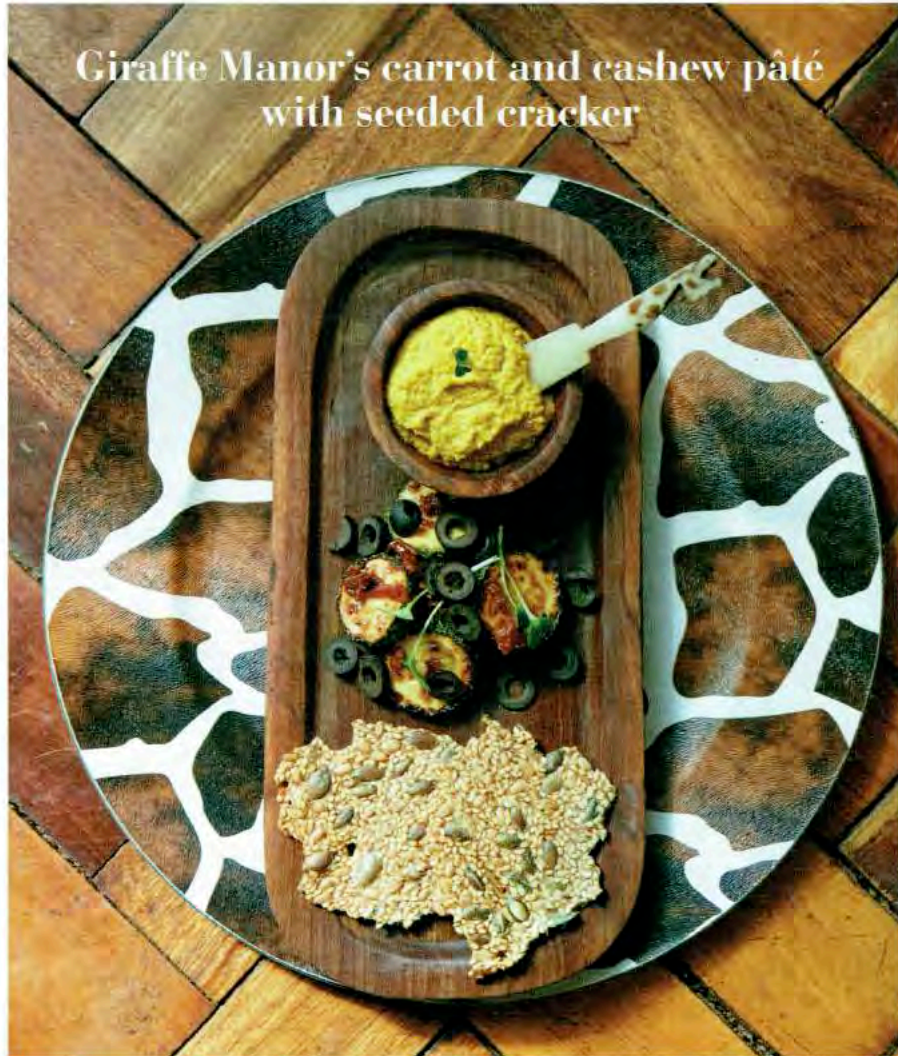
There are four distinct species of giraffe and several subspecies, each living in geographically distinct areas across Africa.

Due to poaching and habitat loss, the Rothschild and West African species are endangered, with only approximately 550 of the latter left in the world.

Giraffe calves enter the world from quite a height. Their mothers give birth standing up, so the calves fall more than 1.5m before hitting the ground. Often, the infant will attempt its first steps within an hour.

Giraffes only need five to 30 minutes of sleep a day, often taken in quick naps that only last a minute or two.

As the world's tallest mammals, giraffes can run as fast as 35 miles an hour. Their hearts are 50 times larger than ours. 



Giraffe Manor's carrot and cashew pâté with seeded cracker

FOR THE PÂTÉ

- 100g grated carrots
- 150g cashews, soaked in water for at least 1 hour
- 3 tbsp tahini paste
- 3 tbsp lemon juice
- 1 tbsp ginger paste
- 3 tbsp chopped coriander
- ½ tsp sea salt

Place everything except the coriander in a blender and process for about three minutes until mixture is completely smooth. Add the coriander and salt to taste if needed.

FOR THE CRACKER

- 250g sesame seeds
- 250g sunflower seeds
- 100g pumpkin seeds
- 700ml water
- 100g Parmesan, finely grated
- 4 tbsp psyllium husk
- Sea salt and black pepper

Mix everything together, then spread out thinly on a baking tray lined with foil. Bake at 150°C/300°F/gas mark 2 until golden brown.

Find out more about Giraffe Manor at thesafaricollection.com. Rates start from US\$565 per person per night on a full-board basis, including airport and local excursion transfers within check-in and check-out times.

Entry to the Giraffe Centre is included in a stay at Giraffe Manor and costs \$10 per person for non-guests (giraffecentre.org).