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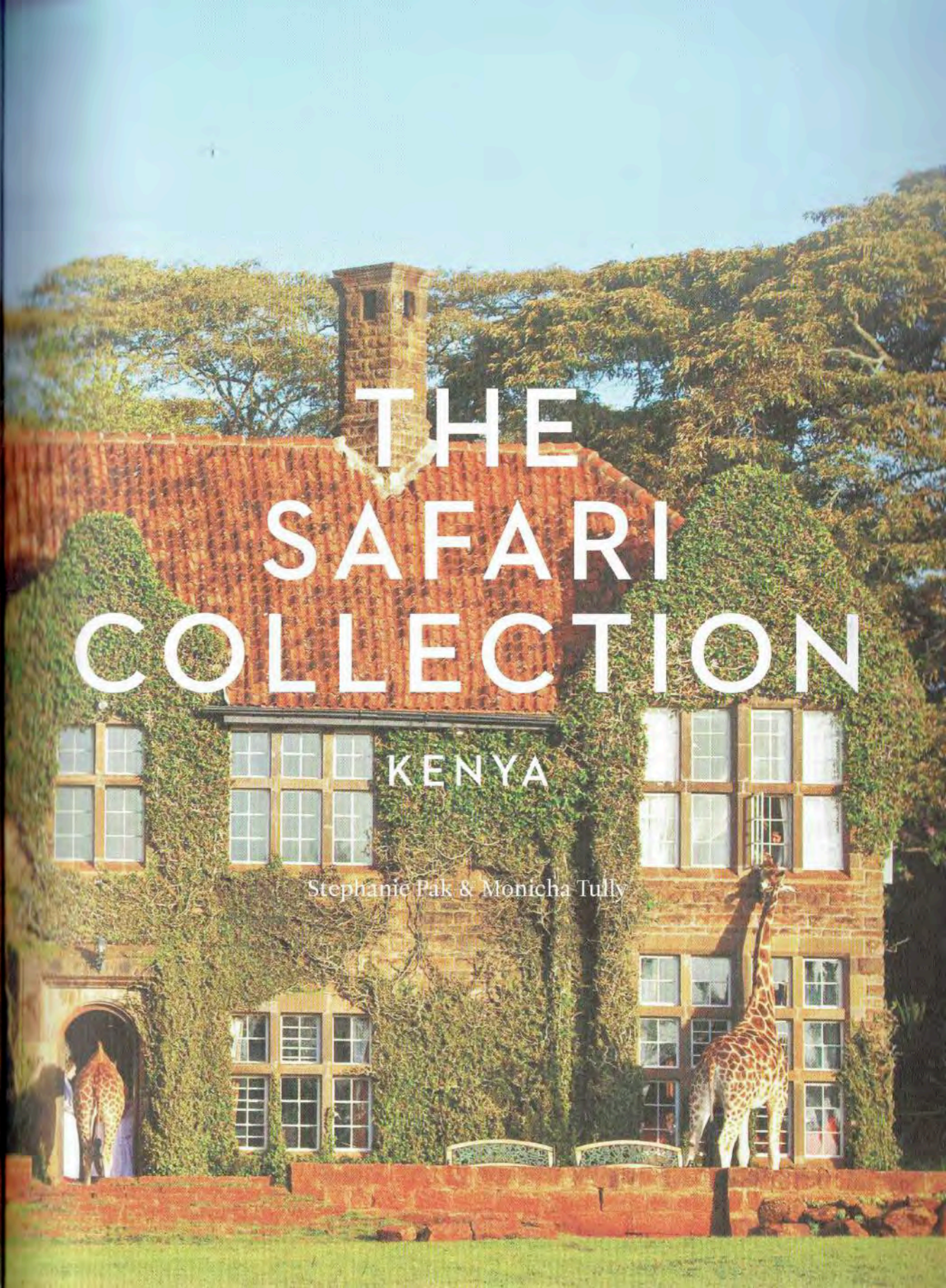


ISSUE 6 £8.00



PRINTED IN THE UK

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THE SAFARI COLLECTION

KENYA

Stephanie Pak & Monicha Tully

Kenya is filled with incredible changing landscapes and inhabits the most majestic creatures on the planet. The Safari Collection manages a portfolio of four boutique camps and lodges in the finest locations across the country. They conserve and support the land and local communities, in the most luxurious, exciting and intimate way. Safari is not for the faint-hearted but it is one of the most extraordinary and beautiful experiences you can have in your lifetime.

GIRAFFE MANOR

Constructed in 1932 and modelled on a Scottish hunting lodge, Giraffe Manor was purchased by Betty and Jock Leslie Melville in 1974. They discovered that the remaining 100 Rothschild giraffes in Kenya were in danger of becoming extinct and made it their mission to reverse this prospect.

The couple adopted baby giraffes, Daisy and Marlon, to be raised on the grounds of the manor. This started the breeding programme that would slowly reintroduce the Rothschild giraffe back into the wild to expand their gene pool; there are now over 800 Rothschild giraffes in Kenya. Today, Giraffe Manor is a luxury hotel that offers guests the unforgettable experience of coming up close and personal with one of the most fascinating animals on earth.

Our car pulled into the the world-renowned estate, and we were immediately drawn to the impressive red brick building covered in vines, which you'll find the giraffes snacking on. The manor has stayed true to its colonial roots and is a joy to explore. The entrance opens into a grand reception, complete with a cosy fireplace, high ceilings and a beautiful mahogany staircase.

We stayed in Helen's room, located in the garden manor, a spacious twin room, featuring a charming ensuite bathroom made up of a

waterfall shower, wooden bathtub, and twin basins with perfectly polished gold-plated copper taps.

The best part of the day was undoubtedly afternoon tea on the terrace where we witnessed the residential giraffes walk over from the indigenous forest, through the rich red soil, joining you for the magical golden hour. We became overwhelmed with joy as the giraffes started to appear, and forgot about the decadent spread of sandwiches and cakes perfectly laid out.

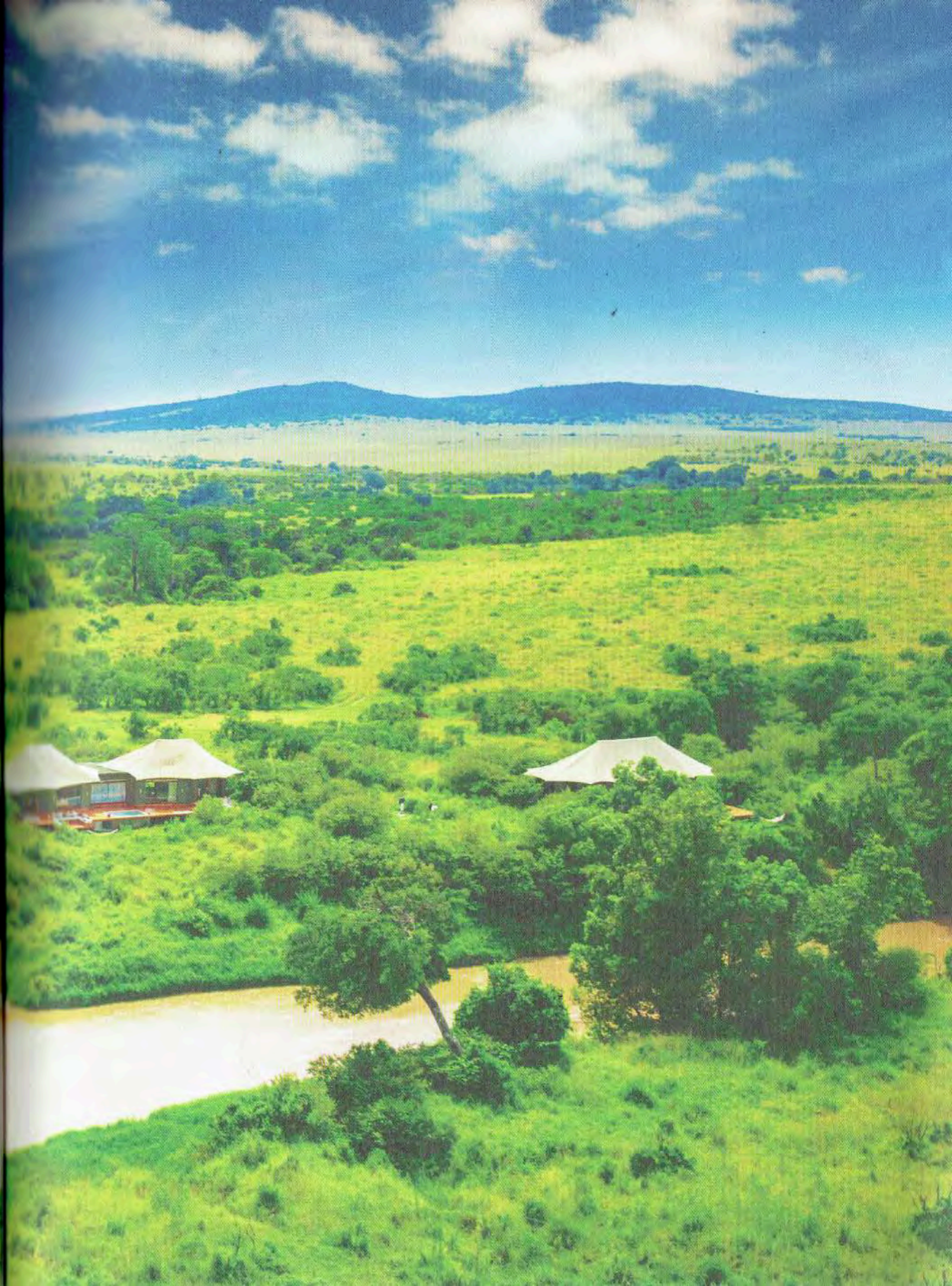
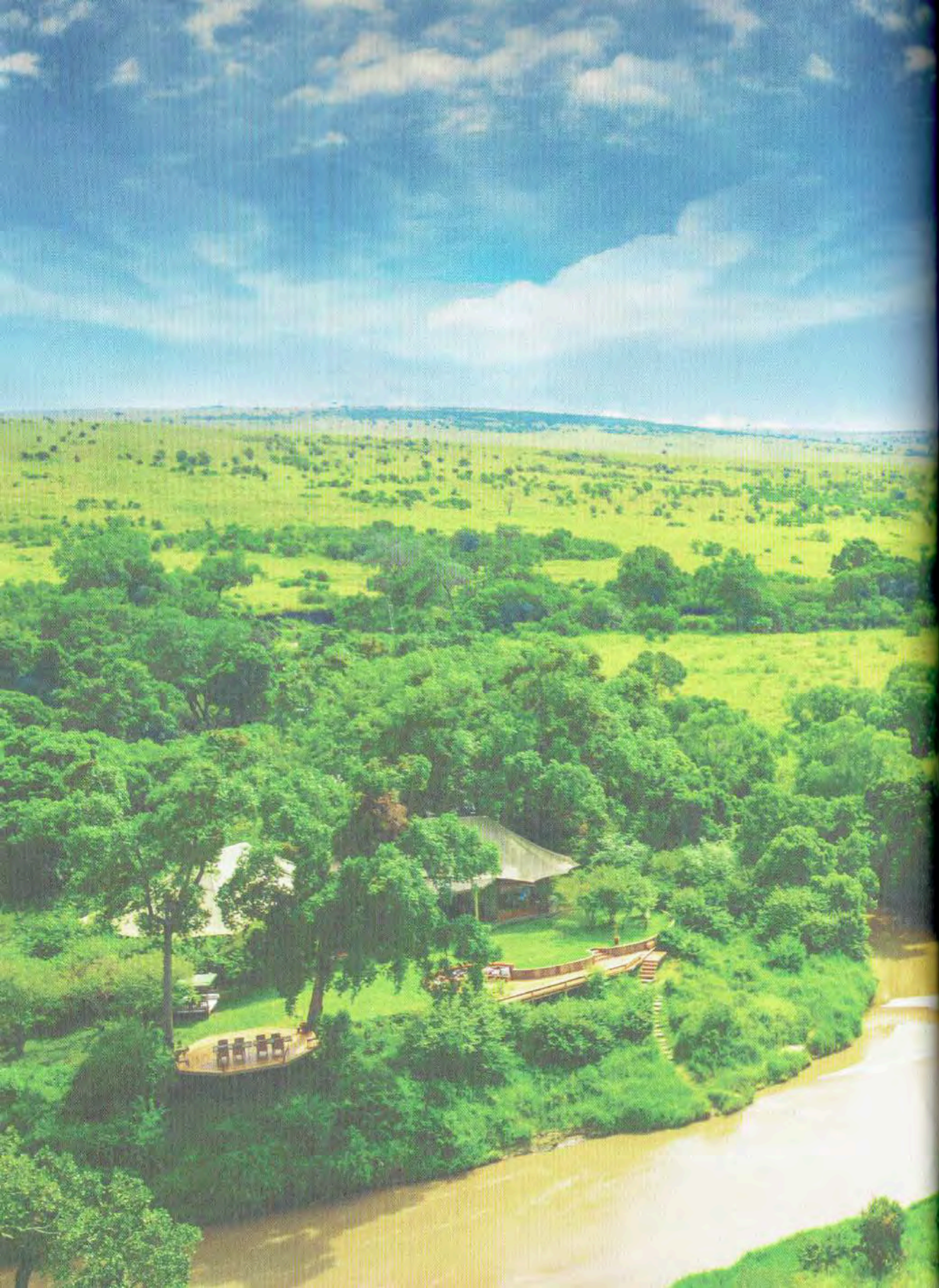
Ed, the only bull and the largest of all the giraffes, is also the friendliest and even lets you snuggle into his chest. Kelly, the matriarch of the group, is the best to experience your first giraffe 'kiss' with but beware, she is also known for a cheeky headbutt. Also a mother, we learnt giraffes are pregnant for 15 months and can become pregnant again three months after giving birth. Look out for the wild Pumbaas (warthogs) running around the grounds; they also enjoy a pellet or two.

Dinner was an intimate affair, we were seated in the dining room, along with 10 other guests, over a long, candle-lit table. We enjoyed a delectable three-course meal filled with good conversation comparing safari and other marvellous worldly tales.

In the morning, we were woken up by loud footsteps that could only belong to a tall, four-legged creature knocking at the window. It was Ed, our personal wake up call, visiting for morning pellets. Feeding Ed at 6am as he poked his head through the window and eagerly snatched the pellets from our hands with his soft black tongue, was one of the happiest and extraordinary moments of our lives.

The fairytale continued as we headed down for breakfast inside the splendid tea room. As we entered the room, Kelly was patiently waiting







at the window, before leaning down, poking her head through the window to greet us. The perfect start to a beautiful day.

Gogo Falls Road, Nairobi, Kenya

SALA'S CAMP

The easiest and quickest way to travel across the country is by the Safarilink planes. It is also an incredibly special way to see the changing landscapes of Kenya, especially after the rainfall, where there are swirls of red, beige and green as life begins to form. As we approached the south-western region, Maasai Mara, there were patchworks of emerald fields, houses, small hills with mini valleys dotted along with trees. Unsurprisingly, the Masai Mara National Reserve is teeming with magnificent wildlife such as lions, cheetahs, zebra and wildebeest.

We landed at the Mara Keekorok Airstrip and were greeted by our spotter, Anthony, and guide Daniel, "Karibu!" they said in unison, "You're welcome" in Swahili. They handed us Safari Collection flasks filled with cold, fresh water, "For yours to keep as part of our commitment to reduce plastic," said Daniel.

We commenced the 35-minute drive towards Sala's Camp, passing golden fields and beautiful green rolling hills; it could have been the Cotswolds. It was not until we spotted the first wildebeest that confirmed that we were indeed in Africa. Anthony laughed at our astonishment, "You haven't seen anything yet." We soon discovered what Anthony meant; we came across thousands of wildebeest. The famous Serengeti Migration was happening before our very eyes.

We pulled into Sala's Camp and were greeted by the wonderful team and handed a 'Dowa', their signature drink, a concoction of honey, lemon and sparkling water. Our tent was a luxurious, colonial-themed pavilion, with

khaki mesh walls looking out onto the forest, and huge floor to ceiling glass doors, which led to the patio overlooking the Keekorok river.

The game drives were magical. We saw lionesses with their cubs feasting on a buffalo for breakfast as well as hyenas gorging on a wildebeest, while hoards of vultures, the cleaners of the land, waited impatiently nearby. We spotted a cheetah on the hunt amongst a herd of wildebeest and zebras, while we cheered from the sidelines willing them to get away; luckily they did.

At one point, we were amidst a herd of wildebeest and zebras, while elephants walked through. It was so harmonious and exactly as it should be. We also came across a couple of sleeping lions lying on their backs; they looked so peaceful in their slumber, it was tempting to reach out and rub their bellies. The kings of the pride knew that no enemies would dare to come close.

During an evening game drive, we parked up at an Acacia tree to watch the sun set. The conversation was flowing, we spoke about everything from politics, to conservation, to falling in love. As we snacked on banana chips, popcorn and nuts and sipped on our fresh mango juice; we saw the silhouettes of wildebeests walking one by one, in line at the bottom of the purple fire streaked sky. It was a sight, we will never forget.

Maasai Mara Game Reserve, Narok, Kenya

SASAAB

Against the devastatingly beautiful backdrop of Kenya's Northern Frontier District and at the foot of Mount Kenya is Sasaab, a place of rich natural diversity and opulence. Aesthetically it resembles a Moroccan riad with Swahili influences. It has a decadent yet bohemian feel, with gilt lanterns and rich fabrics in a rainbow of jewel colours.



Each of the nine villas is over 100m² with an open-air bathroom and private plunge pool. The veranda offers panoramic views across the Laikipia Plateau. As it is located on the river, it is a hotspot for bathing elephants, lions, leopards, cheetahs and the 'Samburu Special Five'; the Beisa oryx, Reticulated giraffe, Grevy's zebra, Gerenuk antelope and Somali ostrich.

During our daily game drives, we developed a close bond with our fantastic guide Daniel who had been a guide for David Attenborough a few years beforehand and our spotter Jacob, a prestigious Samburu warrior dressed in a cobalt blue dress and red beads.

They showed us things we had only read about in storybooks; Leopards napping in trees, a herd of elephants playing in the mud and a lion, and lioness having a lovers tiff. One morning, we drove to the Samburu National Reserve where Daniel and Jacob spotted a herd of elephants enjoying some fresh leaves for breakfast. They decided to set up a Bush Breakfast for us right next to the elephants; we ate fried eggs with focaccia, fresh watermelon and fluffy pancakes drenched in butter and maple syrup.

There may be luxurious lodgings, excellent staff and mesmerising wildlife but it is the local people that capture your heart. Daniel and Jacob took us to a nearby Samburu village where we were welcomed warmly by the women and children of the village. The women offered us tea, put their necklaces around our necks demonstrating the incredible craftsmanship of their intricate beadwork and invited us into their homes, small mudhuts with plastic bags layered on top to create a makeshift roof, with no windows or electricity and everyone sleeps on the floor. The children were barefoot, smeared in mud, and wore no shoes but they are richer than we can ever know, rich in happiness and love. They smiled from ear-to-ear, proudly showed us how their

puppy and we showed them videos we had taken on Safari and how to use Snapchat filters, which made them scream with laughter. That afternoon was one of the most enriching days of our lives and the kindness we were shown will remain in our hearts for a lifetime.

The magic of Sasaab is that there is an unspoken promise of peace amongst the local people and the animals. Over generations, an unbreakable bond of trust and respect has formed which enables them to live side by side in harmony.


As Daniel and Jacob drove us to the airport, we passed the local villages and dozens of children ran barefoot from their homes, thundering down to the roadside, screaming and smiling as they waved goodbye to perfect strangers. The look of joy and warmth on their faces will stay with us for the rest of our days.

Kenya will change your life, after experiencing the beauty of the landscape, the wildlife and most importantly the people, you will never see the world in the same way again. It is Disney's *The Lion King*, brought to life. Hakuna Matata.

The Safari Collection runs a Conservation Scholars programme, focused on sending girls to secondary school. The programme is for talented students from poor backgrounds who would not otherwise be in a position to attend school, in the hope that they may one day become Kenya's future conservation heroes.

To learn more about the programme and to sponsor a young girl's education, email Mark Boyd, Community & Conservation Manager sustainability@thesafaricollection.com.

Westgate, Samburu National Reserve, Kenya

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