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24 HOURS IN KENYA



24 Hours in the Bush

BY RUTH CUEVAS

Recently, I had the opportunity to visit Kenya. When I mentioned to a friend that I was interested in a safari, she immediately put me in touch with [Lisa Christoffersen](http://lisachristoffersen.com/about-lisa/) (<http://lisachristoffersen.com/about-lisa/>), from *African Tribal*

Arts, Interior Design company who was working with ***Little Governors' Camp*** (<https://www.governorscamp.com/stay/little-governors-camp/>) in the Masai Mara. Right away, their team got busy looking for something special and unique for me, asking questions about the experiences I wanted, my budget, and what time of stay I was hoping for. Keep in mind this would all have to happen in a span of 24 hours as that was the only time I could spend in Kenya, so I had no idea what to expect.

“ I think you'll really love it here,” Lisa she wrote. She was referring to Little Governors' Camp, and she was right. I did love it. I loved every minute of it. ”

From the moment I arrived, it felt like a true adventure. I donned my sunglasses as I walked across the tarmac to the 10-person prop-plane waiting for us on the runway. Everyone knew who I was and they acted like they were expecting me. Once we ascended, we flew over **Nairobi** (<http://www.magicalkenya.com/places-to-visit/cities/nairobi/>), into the clouds and across the mountains in the horizon heading towards Masai Mara, Kenya. I knew there was a good chance I wouldn't see any animals which happens, so I tried managing my expectations. If I saw even one elephant, zebra, hippo or giraffe, I'd be happy.



As the plane descended into the Mara and the spots below became clearer, I noticed a parade of elephants that literally took my breath away. There is no way to describe seeing these lovely creatures from above, roaming in the wild. Shortly thereafter we landed on a runway in the middle of the Bush. It was exciting and I felt like I'd been transported into another world. We hopped off the plane, were introduced to our driver and the other passengers while being escorted into large Land Rovers to where our safari would officially begin.

“ Before we could finish the 10-minute drive to our camp, we were graced by seeing a parade of elephants,

zebras, baboons, plenty of wild boars, and as if on queue, a giraffe was waiting at the entrance of Little Governors' Camp. ”

We exited the vehicle and stepped into a small boat similar to a canoe. On that journey we saw a hippo. That would be enough, but the moments to follow were of sheer awe. Across the river were some stairs inevitably led to our tents. On the way, we came face to face with a giraffe—in the wild, in its own habitat. We didn't want to disturb it, but inside I was elated.

The camp itself was like nothing I'd anticipated. Sure, I'd heard about luxury camping but I didn't fully understand what it meant until I saw the camp. Sitting on the bank of a marsh, is a half-moon of large tents, each equipped with its own deck, a large bed, and a spectacular bathroom. In the event you've forgotten where you are, the furnishings remind you with visual cues everywhere you go. Green-recycled glass jars hold bathroom accoutrements, personalized stainless-steel containers hold Little Governor's own brand of toiletries which, by the way, smell absolutely divine!



If you haven't felt pampered enough, you surely will as you head out for your first meal. Lunch consists of a delightful selection of fresh produce, and main courses that can satisfy even the pickiest eater. After only a short time together, it feels like everyone at the camp knows your name and there is a welcomed familiarity. Sitting down to eat, round tables dot the landscape, and each is adorned with crisp, white linens as a gloved waiter hands you a menu. After lunch, there is still another hour or so to relax before you meet the driver again for the afternoon safari.

This is our first *official* safari, since the other was just a drive to the camp. I stepped out of my tent to find a glorious giraffe eating leaves off the tree right next to me! I was so close I could touch it, but I didn't. Behind the giraffe was a hippo that looked like a huge mound of mud, until it got up and started walking! Of course there were wild boars but also zebras – all right there walking peacefully through our camp.

The adventure didn't end there. We drove up through the forest, out into the wilderness where we quickly saw loads of baboons, zebras, antelope, and later, elephants. Lots and lots of elephants. It was amazing. All around, the horizon was never-ending and deep in the distance, the large sun slowly fell. That evening, my group all sat in the lounge and enjoyed some custom mixed drinks, compliments from the bartender. For dinner, we each enjoyed candlelight and fragrant dishes from Thailand, India, Italy, and France—cooked to perfection.



Behind us, the moon-lit marsh and all its inhabitants were also winding down after another day in the bush. In my tent, I felt like I had just stepped out of a scene from the movie, *Out of Africa* (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0089755/>). A big, fluffy bed beckoned for me to jump in and let go of my worries. Eager to comply, I changed into my pajamas and crawled in. Oh the sweet delight to find a hot water bottle had been placed in my bed during turndown, making the experience even more glorious. Extra blankets were brought out and as soon as the lights were out, I was surrounded by the music of the African terrain. This wasn't just the normal amplified sound of crickets when you go—no, this was the entire jungle saying whatever it had to say. If you listened closely, you could identify the different sounds: a monkey; a hippo slowly dragging its feet across the grass; lighter, hooved animals walking in the distance – possibly antelopes? A slither, birds—tons of birds; a parade of elephants nearby; a giraffe cascading its long neck through the low lying branches. And then, it stopped. Just like that. It was as if something had unplugged the entire jungle and silence ensued. No more slithers, hooves, meandering, chirping, or any other sound from anyone, especially not me. It was clear that the jungle also had a bedtime and this was it.



Our morning safari began at 6am so our wake up call was set for 5:30 a.m. I didn't want to miss it, so I set my own alarm for 5 a.m. The jungle was still asleep and I remained in my bed, reluctant to move. Just when I thought my experience could not be more magical, there it was—the slowly waking jungle unfolding before me. Within a few minutes, the insects had awoken and the ambiance was in full swing. A hot shower in a magnificently tiled bathroom with fragrant shampoos, shower gels, and lotions set the stage for a wonderful day to follow.

As we loaded in the vehicle and drove out of the trees and into the horizon, the native animals were going about their morning routines under the African sun. We saw a herd of wildebeest, baboons with their babies sitting in the tall grass, grey zebra babies with their baby manes all the way down their backs, and baby lions crying for their mamas, completely unaware of how ferocious they will one day become. A lioness lazily laid with her cubs oblivious—or rather, unaffected—by our presence with the exception of occasional side-eye glance that seemed more like a quiet warning to keep a safe distance. A little known fact is cubs are born around the same time so they can nurse on any lactating lioness in the herd. We watched the different herds share the same space and like children would on a playground. Curious as to whether or not our guides had seen them kill, we asked that and if they'd ever been scared, had any animal ever charged at them, or if he had seen creatures fighting one another.

“ Calmly, he answered, “Yes, I've seen plenty of kills; very rarely am I scared; an animal charged at me

once, long ago; and by and large, unless they are threatened, the animals co-exist peacefully, as they should.” ”



(<http://a.co/4uYrgi1>).

A couple of hours into our morning safari, we stopped by a lone tree in the middle of the savannah. Our guides set up a beautiful picnic breakfast of eggs, pastries, sausage, juice, coffee, tea, water, jams, and lots of fresh fruit. As we gathered around the vehicle eating outside in the bush, I realized that even though I was standing in the middle of an unknown country and was surrounded by wild animals, I was sharing a meal with five people I had met less than 24 hours ago. Up until that moment, the thought hadn't even entered my mind. For all intents and purposes, my stress level should've been sky high with my anxiety calling at me to get back into the truck, my depression trying to convince me that there's no point in traveling alone, and my insecurities telling me that I was here without friends. Yet here I was, and I wasn't fighting these emotions because in this setting, those fears and insecurities were nowhere to be found.

The beauty of life had slowly revealed itself to me all morning long. From the gentle wakening of the wildlife to the beautiful choreography of nature, everything had its place and its order. We were merely participants of life in the bush. We stood there with our coffee, recapping the crazy thoughts that ran through our heads when we were face to face with lions or elephants or hyenas. We laughed when we realized

we were all thinking the same thing. We weren't so different after all. I was relieved to hear that I wasn't odd woman out.



After breakfast, we headed to visit the [Maasai people](http://www.maasai-association.org/maasai.html)(<http://www.maasai-association.org/maasai.html>). The women gathered to welcome us with a song. The three women in my group were invited to follow along with the song, and dance. We met the oldest Maasai woman and were taken into a traditional home, which was an eye-opening experience. The Maasai women educate and nurture in their tribes, and surprisingly know how to speak English, which they picked up from tourists like us.

Before long, my stress-free 24 hours were coming to a close. In such a short period of time, my problems vanished and I felt lighter and more connected to the world.

I recalled the breathtaking moments of seeing these large beasts for the first time and the moments that were so beautiful, they literally brought tears to my eyes. In a single day and night, I felt that my horizons had been broadened and my knowledge had deepened - I felt connected to the universe and to humanity in ways I never have before.

Photos by Ruth Cuevas and courtesy of Little Governors' Camp

(<https://atodmagazine.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Photo-Dec-10-6-14-53-AM-e1557866638657.jpg>)