

melt into the long grass in front of us, it looks certain that at least one unlucky gazelle is unlikely to see the day out. We follow slowly behind the lionesses, and while it's easy to believe that safari vehicles can disrupt the hunting patterns of lions and other predators, it's also fascinating to find out that they sometimes actually use the vehicles themselves as cover when creeping up on their intended victims. Just when we think the lionesses are about to start their sprint at the gazelles, they change their mind and decide to take an afternoon nap instead. The male lion joins them, and within minutes they are all fast asleep in the afternoon sun.

No trip to the Mara is complete without a visit to a Masai village, and we spent an hour with these colourful and friendly tribespeople in their traditional dwellings. Playing host to tourists is an important part of the Masai's living nowadays, and you can only admire these people's desire to retain their traditional way of life while also adapting to changing times.

LAP OF LUXURY

To round off our Kenyan experience, Gillian and I decided we fancied a few days of out and out indulgence before heading home, so off we went to the Shimba Hills in search of the ultimate in luxury. On arrival at the Kutazama lodge, we were met by owners Garry and Gill Richardson who showed us around their stunning residence.

Words alone cannot do justice to the setting of Kutazama, which has panoramic views for literally hundreds of kilometres across lush green hills to Mount Kilimanjaro.



Kutazama's guests have exclusive use of the pool backdropped by miles of spectacular views

Perched up in the hills with a river meandering along the valley beneath, it's hard to tear your eyes away from the view, with the light changing minute by minute, and families of elephants roaming through the Mwaluganje Sanctuary that stretches for miles around.

As the only guests staying here (there's one lone suite), we have sole access to the chef, our own butler and exclusive use of the facilities which include a stunning dual-deck swimming pool set against the backdrop of a 30ft cliff face. The design and construction of the place is just exemplary, with each room built around natural features such as the location's rockfaces and trees.

Gill and Garry have worked in Africa for many years with various charities, and their passion for the people, culture and wildlife is utterly infectious. "We bought this land as a place to come and unwind at weekends," says Gill, "but we loved it so much that in the end we had to come and live here permanently."

The area is home to some of the wealthiest people in Kenya, attracted by the stunning, unspoilt landscape and its close proximity to the country's finest beach, Diani. But anyone who lives here would be hard-pressed to ignore the local communities, and Gill and Garry themselves are very much involved with various teaching and conservation projects going on throughout the area.

In between sumptuous spreads of top notch cuisine and relaxing by the pool, the hosts keep us entertained with endless stories of their African adventures, including Garry's forays into the Congo jungle in the 90s during which he documented evidence of the region's bushmeat trade. A very pleasant evening was also spent learning more about Garry's impressive collection of African art that he has collected during his many adventures.

One last treat before we headed home was an early morning trek down to a waterfall in deep jungle near Kutazama. With the danger posed by a close encounter with a bull elephant in the deep vegetation, Garry led the way with his gun at the ready. But with only baboons for company we came across an almost Tarzan-esque scene of cascading waterfalls, rockfaces, thick vines, and a huge cave where legend has it a monster python has its lair. This magical place is still used by the locals to make sacrifices, and indeed we spot the remains of a chicken on one of the huge rocks.

Kenya had definitely proved to be an ideal introduction to Africa, and the perfect prelude to further forays into this amazing continent. And just like with Tony and Ali and Garry and Gill, Africa will get under your skin like no other place. And once it does, you'll want to scratch that itch again and again. ■

infobox.

Chris and Gillian flew to Mombasa with Monarch Airlines, return fares cost £485 each. Transfers, accommodation and game drives were arranged through Juletabi African Adventures.
www.juletabi.com

ACCOMMODATION

Kutazama Lodge: Exclusive use of the property from \$300 each per night.
www.kutazama.com
Pepo Mingi: Double room B&B from £145 per night, with activities available on request.
www.divingsailing.com
Fig Tree Camp: from \$400 per night.
www.madahotels.com
Kalifi Bay Resort: Doubles from \$200 per night.
www.madahotels.com

SUGGESTED TOUR OPERATORS

Aim 4 Africa
0845 4084541
www.aim4africa.com

The Mighty Fine Company
0845 0720090
www.mightyfinecompany.com

Noah's Ark Travel
0121 5526691
www.noahsarktravel.com

Gecko's Grassroots Adventures
0844 7360175
www.geckosadventures.com

Guerba
01373 826611
www.guerba.co.uk

Dragoman Overland
01728 861133
www.dragoman.com

VISAS

UK passport holders require a visa to visit Kenya. You'll need a photo, application form and six month passport validity to stay for three months (£30). Issue takes five days. For £25, Travcour (UK) Ltd apply for you. Call 0207 223 5295 or visit www.travcour.com



VACCINATIONS AND HEALTH

Visitors to Kenya should be up to date with childhood vaccines. Tetanus and polio boosters are advised if you've not had them in the last ten years. Recommended vaccines are hep A and yellow fever. Consider typhoid if access to safe food and water is uncertain, however, risks are low for short stays. For long stays, travel to remote areas or close contact with locals, consider vaccines for rabies, meningitis ACWY, hep B, TB and diphtheria. All visitors to Kenya should take prescribed malaria tablets. Reports of fake anti malarials sold in Kenya, mean it's advised to get supplies at home. Use insect repellent to avoid bites. For travel health advice worldwide visit www.masta-travel-health.com

