

# BAZAAR

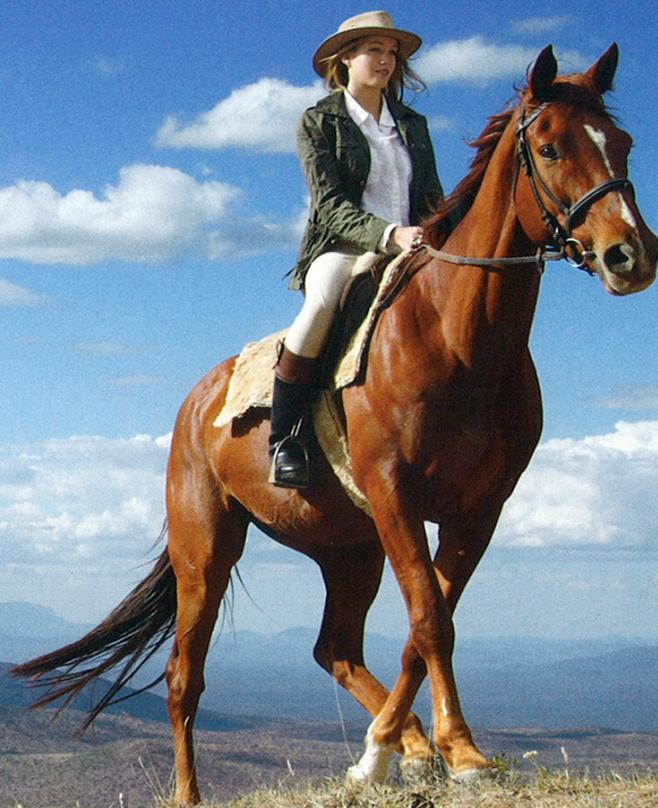
EDITED BY CATHERINE FAIRWEATHER

## ESCAPE

### Saddle up!

Get closer to nature on a horseback safari over the wild plains of Laikipia in Kenya.

**Plus** Mariella Frostrup enjoys sunrise with dolphins on Paxos; and we pick out the best weekend escapes for some early-spring sunshine



# High-plains drifters

A horseriding trek puts you right among the wildlife. In Kenya, **MILES BREDIN** mounts his steed to discover the magnificent landscape of Laikipia, with its vast bush teeming with animals, soaring mountains, lush forests and wide, open grasslands

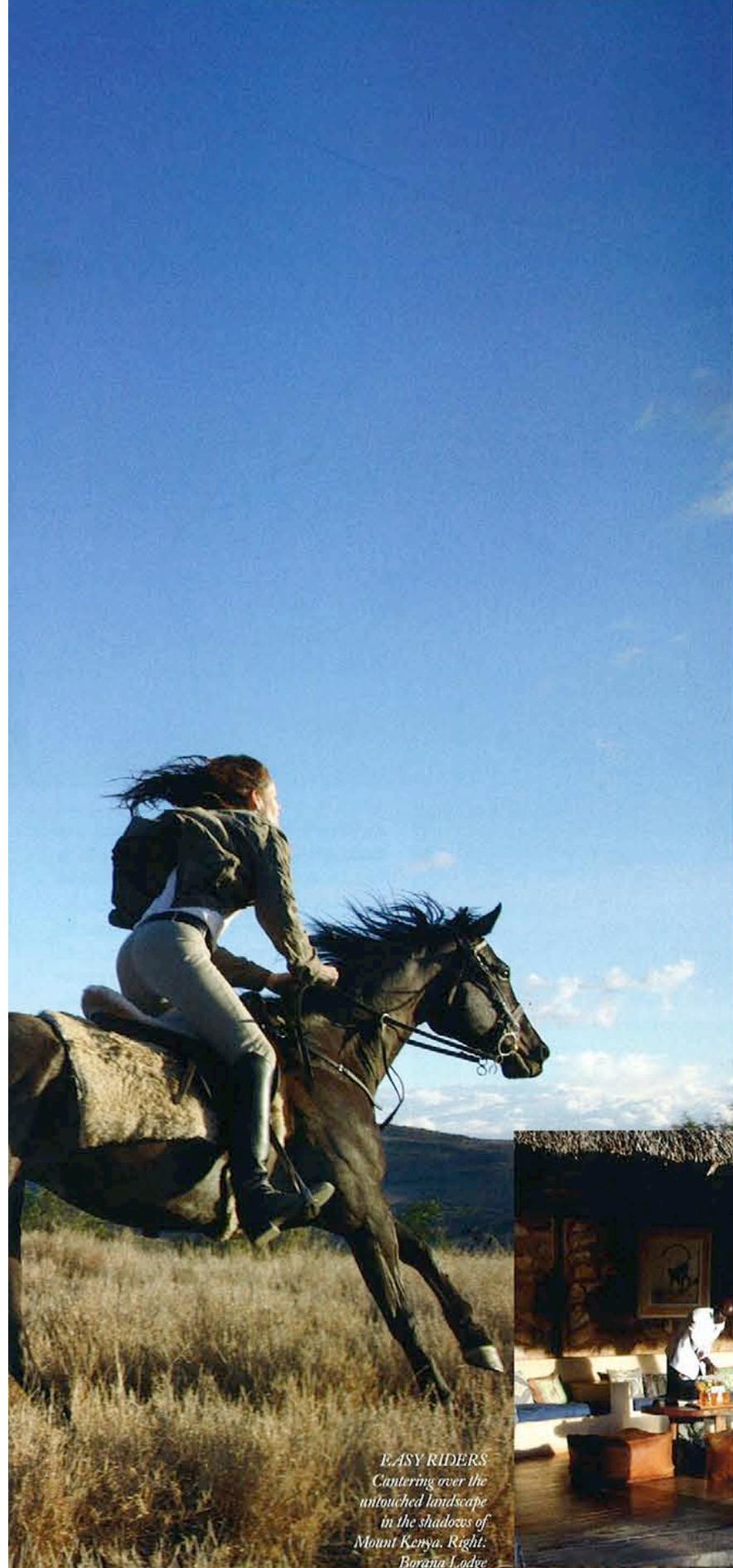


**H**ere in Laikipia, the sun lights up the peaks of Mount Kenya before it even lifts over the Nyambene Hills. Then – in just a few minutes – light races down the mountain's sides to flood the Laikipia plateau with golden light. This is the best time of day to be out in the bush; all the night's tracks are sharply outlined in the angled light, cobwebs dazzle with dew and the wildlife is out in the open before the heat of the day sends them into the shadows. On horseback you can see all this with an intimacy it is impossible to achieve from the back of a car – you smell the elephants long before you see them, hear the bark of zebras and touch the long grass as you hack across the plains. And coffee never tastes better than it does back at camp after a morning ride.

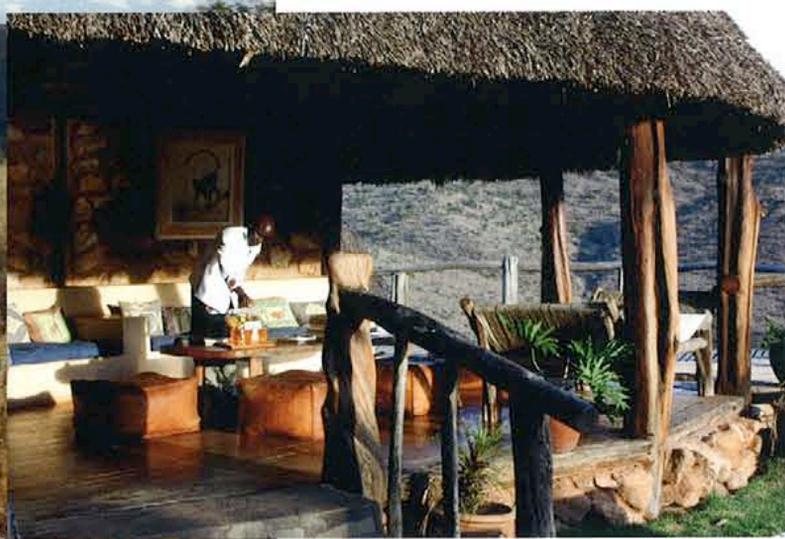
'On horseback, you are a participant rather than a passenger,' says Riding Wild owner Michael Dyer.

Just yesterday, I saw a pack of wild dogs chasing, catching, then losing an impala. Red in tooth and horn, the antelope shook off the last exhausted dog and staggered to safety. The sighting was a first – even residents tend only to see such nature-action scenes through the lens of wildlife cameraman, author and Laikipia regular Simon King. But from the saddle of a horse, such sights are all the more likely. The wildlife is not bothered by the presence of the horses: antelopes jerk up their heads to see what's going on, then immediately return to grazing.

On a Riding Wild safari through Laikipia, you can witness the small miracle of sunrise every day, and you may even see a hunt. The Laikipia plateau stretches over 3,500 square miles across the equator and is the perfect



*EASY RIDERS*  
Cantering over the  
untouched landscape  
in the shadows of  
Mount Kenya. Right:  
Borana Lodge



Laikipia has forest, plains, rocky outcrops and an almost-perfect climate. There are very few people, and those who are there have a true pioneering spirit



region for any kind of safari – be it on horseback, on foot, 4WD or in a helicopter. It has forest and plains, rocky outcrops and an almost-perfect climate. Cool by night and warm by day, it boasts an air of great clarity, which lends the place a very special light. The district is made up mostly of private land-holdings, huge ranches and nature reserves where great herds of antelopes and zebras can – and do – roam free. It has very few people; and those who are there have a true pioneering spirit – be they enterprising Samburus or enlightened descendants of European settlers. There are no game parks here, just a tolerant population willing to put up with a little wildlife predation in return for the privilege of living here.

No game parks means no rules, no crowds and the freedom to travel wherever you want. Seeing the country in one of the three helicopters that Tropic Air runs out of Nanyuki's bustling airstrip is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. A helicopter allows you to cram years of experiences into a day. Climbing Mount Poi, for example, is a major expedition; the Chalbi is one of the harshest deserts on earth – but in a chopper we picnicked on the first in the morning and surfed a sand dune in the other after lunch, before landing back at Borana Lodge at dusk.

Riding Wild is based at Borana – the true

Africa of your imagination. An eight-room lodge on a 35,000-acre ranch where Michael and Nicky Dyer have been running safaris for more than 20 years, it has stables nearby where guests saddle up and set off into the unknown, crushing sweet-smelling *leleshwa* (wild sage) beneath their horses' hooves, the only alien sound the creak of saddle leather and clink of stirrup against boot.

The Dyers have traversing rights clear across the county, from Lemarti's achingly glamorous camp on the banks of the Uaso Nyiro River to Sirikoi on the Lewa Wildlife Conservancy, where rhinos graze and millionaires party. And horses can take you where not even a 4WD can go, far from the slightest hint of a crowd. Indeed, on the last safari he led, Michael Dyer says he saw only two people – 'and they were bringing us freshly baked cakes'.

Though Laikipia is short on people, it's big on wildlife, especially its growing number of elephants; it has lions, leopards, rare Grevy's zebras and more rhinos than anywhere else in Kenya. All except rhinos live on Borana, where most safaris start.

There are no hard rules on a Riding Wild safari: some guests ride up the flanks of Mount Kenya through the high cedar forests to Rutundu, the log cabins where Kate and William got engaged. Cool and

mysterious after the heat of the plain, the forest looks as if lit for Zeffirelli. Harsh equatorial sun radiates through layers of branches and creepers, causing the ginclear pools of the Ngare Ndare River to glow invitingly. It's an invitation you shouldn't resist – there are few better places for a swim and a picnic after a morning's ride.

In the opposite direction are the Lolldaiga Hills, which feature some of the most outstanding and varied landscapes in this picturesque area. Cloud-scraping fingers of gneiss claw the skyline, and vast paddle-winged Verreaux's eagles patrol, cruising for hyrax and bushbuck.

The Dyers often set up a camp at the foot of these hills, leading guests on daily adventures – up among the kopjes or into the gorges. 'We go to areas of the ranches where no-one else goes,' says Dyer.

Their camp has everything you need and nothing you don't. There's a huge mess tent strewn with rugs and cushions, enthusiastic camp staff who always have a hot shower ready, and big sleeping tents with comfy beds to fall into after a long day in the saddle. Simple and well organised, the camp is moved while you are out riding, only to reappear later in another site yet more beautiful than the last.

To participate in a safari like this, you

## REST OF THE BEST: Horse-riding holidays



### SHADED REPAST

*A break for lunch after a morning's ride*

don't have to be Zara Phillips, but you do need to be comfortable riding in open country and confident of your skills; the horses are mainly thoroughbreds, many of them trained as polo ponies, all accustomed to life in the bush. It's a great way to spend time with your family. Indeed, staff have led children as young as six – as long as they know how to ride well.

And it's the riding that makes the difference – allowing you to relax and live life at a more leisurely pace, with plenty of time to stop and watch the sunset (just as good as the sunrise) – before kicking back for an evening of good food by a raging fire.

Soon after dark, the hyenas start to whoop as they set about their night's work. A lion grunts in the distance, momentarily silencing the bush. Then it's bedtime, with another day to look forward to. Maybe we'll watch the sunrise again, then canter across the plains before breakfast. □

*From about £355 a person a night all-inclusive with the Safari and Conservation Company (email [reservations@scckenya.com](mailto:reservations@scckenya.com)).*

Despite recent warnings about travel to Kenya, visitors can relax and enjoy Laikipia, a remote, little-developed district where the only crowds you'll see are of elephants and black rhinos. The areas to avoid are the coast, especially places within 100 miles of the border with Somalia (including Lamu), the Garissa district and the poorer parts of Nairobi. Flying into and out of the capital, and continuing onwards to Laikipia, should be trouble-free.



### Best for EPIC LANDSCAPE

#### Hacienda de San Antonio, Mexico

Sir James Goldsmith's little-known home in the Mexican highlands is horse heaven. Go on Western-style gallops around lagoons and exotic woodland. The stucco-pink and basalt-black hacienda has a working farm, producing 30 types of cheese. Returning riders can expect total tranquillity.

*From about £225 a person a night; horse-riding costs from £70 (0808 101 3780; [www.hacienda-desanantonio.com](http://www.hacienda-desanantonio.com)).*



### Best for RELAXING RIDES

#### Estancia Los Potreros, Argentina

Take the sure-footed native Argentine Criollos or easily controlled Paso Peruanos breeds on riding tours over rocks and craggy hills. Accommodation on this 6,000-acre cattle farm is in the main house, or there's a separate three-bedroom building ideal for families to rent.

*From £390 a person a night full board, including transfers and expeditions, with Ride World Wide (01837 82544; [www.rideworldwide.com](http://www.rideworldwide.com)).*



### Best SAFARI ON HORSEBACK

#### Wait a Little Horse Safari, South Africa

This resort, situated on the outskirts of the Kruger National Park, offers a chance to observe the Big Five close-up and on horseback. Guests are matched with different steeds – riders have to meet a competent standard, to be able to canter away to safety if necessary.

*A seven-night safari costs from about £2,520 a person full board, with Ride World Wide (01837 82544; [www.rideworldwide.com](http://www.rideworldwide.com)).*



### Best for CONFIDENT RIDERS

#### Rohet Garh and Mihir Garh, India

The Wilderness Camp at Rohet Garh, the atmospheric ancestral home of the Singh family, offers the best riding in Rajasthan. New palatial stables at sister property Mihir Garh, a fortress in the wilderness, are the base for rides staying at mobile camps.

*A three-night stay in a suite at Mihir Garh costs from about £1,020 a person full board, including horse-rides, with India Beat (+91 141 651 9797; [www.indiabeat.co.uk](http://www.indiabeat.co.uk)).*



Luxe for LESS

### Best for FAMILIES

#### Nolton Stables, Wales

With spectacular beach riding along the dramatic Pembrokeshire coast, and riding packages for all abilities, Nolton Stables is ideal for families. Other local accommodation includes the atmospheric Druidstone Hotel, set in wild gardens above a beach.

*Nolton Stables (01437 710360; [www.noltonstables.com](http://www.noltonstables.com)); two nights, from £207 a person half board. The Druidstone Hotel, from £80 a night B&B (01437 781221; [www.druidstone.co.uk](http://www.druidstone.co.uk)).*