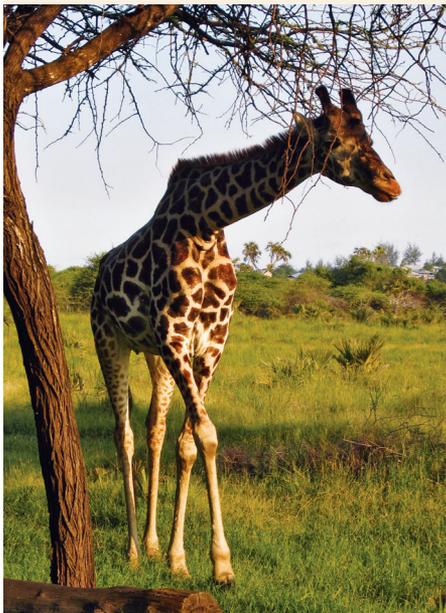




Animals such as elephants and lions (below) aren't hard to find in Kenya



Dan was expert at searching out wildlife for Chris and Gillian



garden that runs right down to the sea, and its own little beach surrounded by rocks, the setting really is amazing, and watching the moon rise out of the ocean one evening while sipping wine on the verandah will be one of the abiding memories of our trip.

Ali is a very accomplished cook, and as well as serving up amazing seafood, offers cookery courses for those interested in Swahili and coastal cuisine. Tony, on the other hand, is a dive and sailing expert, and under the monicker Dive Safari Kenya runs cruises on their beautiful yacht Aristos to Pemba island, where the scuba diving is said to be superb. Deep sea fishing is also on the menu, and the first evening we tucked into delicious sailfish which was caught just the day before by Peop Mingi's previous guests.

ANIMAL MAGIC

With our batteries by now well and truly recharged, we headed back to Mombasa to pick up our flight out to the Mara. A couple of hours into the flight, our pilot tipped the aircraft's wings and through the windows we had a stunning view of Mount Kilimanjaro in all its glory. Kili is so breathtaking because it stands alone, surrounded by hundreds of miles of, by comparison, flat terrain. Captivated by its snowy peaks, we resolve there and then to come back one day to attempt the climb up Kili and see the view from the Roof of Africa.

Landing at a small dusty airstrip on the Mara, we are met by our Kenyan guide Dan, co-director of Juletabi African Adventures, and the man who would be at the wheel of the special safari-customised 4x4 for the next three days. As Dan drove us to the Fig Tree Camp on the banks of the Talek River, our base for the next three days, we immediately started coming across more animals than we could ever have imagined. Long trains of wildebeest stretched as far as the eye could see, and everywhere we looked there were zebra, gazelle and buffalo.

"We'd expected to have to search for the animals," we joked with Dan, who laughed and corrected us.

"Right now the wildebeest are everywhere, and the other animals aren't far behind."

The excitement of seeing so much wildlife so close up and raw is hard to explain to anyone who hasn't safaried before. The lives, and sometimes deaths, of animals are played out right in front of you on a huge scale, and never more so than now during the migration of the wildebeest from the Serengeti to the Masai Mara.

Once checked into the Fig Tree Camp, whose deluxe tented rooms provide an almost perfect balance between comfort and proximity to nature, we headed out again with Dan in search for the big five. We started seeing animals just a few hundred yards from the camp, and over the next couple of hours we were on the edge of our seats in awe. The first time we saw lions was certainly a highlight, and the way in which they lie in the middle of the tracks, virtually ignoring the vehicles that gather around them, is just wonderful to watch.

As much as we were amazed by the number of animals, we were also disappointed to see so many vehicles, and by the way they all congregate once something interesting is spotted. Watching a lioness play in the long grass with her cubs was undoubtedly a very