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SATURDAY/SUNDAY August 14-15, 2021

Wikendi

No. 250

SHOP

SPORT

SOCIALISE

MASH UP YOUR WEEKEND

WHEN A LOVER'S
SECOND CHANCE BEARS
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ENCHANTING
NAIROBI SKYLINE AT
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Nature

fm

TUNING INTO THE DECOMPRESSING WILD WITH A BIOPHILIC ESCAPE

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BY HARRIET JAMES

Biophilic escape in Timau

The love of farms has captured my heart, and after research, I found a scenic, serene space filled with warmth, where I could reconnect with nature as well as meet amazing humans. I recently travelled all the way to Timau, (which is around four hours driving, but via a shuttle, it might take six hours), to Olepangi, a farm set on the foothills of Mount Kenya, just to catch a breath from the busyness of life here in the city.

I arrived there in the afternoon after waking up early in the morning, thanks to a shuttle breakdown that ate up travel time. I was welcomed by Mr Thomas Omulo, the General Manager, and being that I was starving, I satiated my appetite first before heading for a brief on how things work, including being shown my cottage.

Named after the great adventurer, Beryl Markham, the cosy Markham cottage is where I spent my days. It made me feel like the adventurer, a woman with such an impressive bio. Markham was a British-born Kenyan bush pilot, who was also a racehorse trainer, an author and the first woman to fly solo from England to America. She was also the only white woman permitted to hunt with the male warriors, as she was equally adept with both a spear and a rifle. She left the memoir *West With the Night*, which I read at the Olepangi party house.

Oh... let me finish about the cottage. So, it is the furthest one, which means privacy, and it's the perfect spot for just a quiet weekend, admiring the views and also bird watching. I would say a romantic weekend, but since I was alone, I can say solo travel works well too. It had a warm, comfy bed, and antique Indian miniatures on the walls, which the owner, Elizabeth Locker and her late husband, had collected over the years.

Opened in 2014, the farm is the result of a deep-rooted desire that Elizabeth and her late hubby had of turning a dry area into a sustain-

able farm. When they bought the land, they desired that it become their weekend escape, but later on felt that it should turn into a riding safari destination as well as a lodge. It started with just one tent when they bought the land in 2011, and slowly by slowly, everything came together. They fenced the property and created the paddocks, and in 2012, began with seven horses. Now they have 20, and horseriding is one of the activities they offer at the farm. I experienced it, thanks to horse trainer Bella Channing, assisted by Benard Kiptoo and Dennis Mwendu. Polo lessons are also offered to

those interested.

The spaces in the farm were created in such a way that one can connect with nature. For instance, the pool and the pool house was inspired by the "boteh", an ancient Persian symbol depicting the tree-of-life. Elizabeth was assisted by her collage roomie, Liz Calabrese, who is one of the world's experts on biophilic design (a concept employed in the building industry that increases connectivity to nature by use of direct and indirect nature, spaces, as well as place conditions). The party house, where guests can relax, read, or do their work, was designed with the concept of the cave man, with elevated



Horse riding, as well as polo lessons, is one of the activities one can undertake at the farm.



Pool house with a view. The spaces in the farm were created in such a way that one can connect with nature.

views down the valley, where the cave man can catch glimpses of predators or invaders, and with the sound of the river at the bottom. That is exactly how the party house feels. It's a comforting space, and on the outside, one enjoys stunning vistas of the valley, Ngishishi River, as well as wildlife from the other side of the conservancy.

You can also enjoy afternoon yoga at the deck, or afternoon tea while taking in the landscape, and at night, just

before dinner, one can wind down with drinks in the company of friends by the fire. I loved the antique furniture, tribal textiles, and oriental rags that I found there, which I later learnt are some of Elizabeth's collections from her travels around the world.

Did I talk about the food? Well, some of it is sourced from the local community, while some comprises their own produce. I had a chance to tour their organic farm, where they produce

broccoli, beetroot, onions, basil and flowers (some of which are placed in the cottages).

At four o'clock sharp, it was time to learn how to milk, and if you are one of those who dwell in the city and have forgotten how to do this, or you have a family and would like your children to learn, this would be one of those activities that you should undertake while here. It's also interesting learning how to bake homemade bread, something I'd recommend. After all is said and done, finish it off with a relaxing spa visit, with the view of the valley and the sound of the river.



Outside the Markham cottage, named after the great adventurer, Beryl Markham.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

● Other activities that can be organised by the farm are heading to Loldaiga Ranch, Ngare Ndare, Samburu National Park, Solio Ranch and Ol Pejeta.

● They also have a young farmers club, which is all about getting children to learn about the rhythms of farm life while their parents relax.

● For artists, there is the Artist-In-residence programme designed to create a space where people and communities come together to share and learn.



Massage with spa manger Joy, with the view of the valley and the sound of the river.

The infinity pool. The pool and the pool house design set-up was inspired by the "boteh", an ancient Persian symbol depicting the tree-of-life.



You can learn how to milk at the farm, or hang out with chef Maggie, who will teach you how to bake homemade bread.