

LOISABA WILDERNESS



Laikipia Plateau KENYA

Loisaba is on the edge of the Laikipia Plateau and the rooms and house (above right) look over a vast landscape with distant Mount Kenya visible on a clear day. For a real bird's-eye view, you need to take a trip in the lodge's hot-air balloon (above left).

The cliff-side pool at Loisaba House (opposite).

*O*n the fringe of Kenya's northern frontier and covering approximately 800 000 hectares of wild savanna is the Laikipia Plateau. Fed by the Ewaso Ngiro and Engare Narok rivers, its rich grasslands and woodlands support all of the Big Five, including thousands of elephant and black rhino, plus wild dog, Grevy's zebra, reticulated giraffe, Jackson's hartebeest and more than 260 species of birds.

In the 1960s an Italian count named Carletto Ancilotto came to Kenya on safari and fell in love with the place and its wide views. He called his farm Colcheccio (a rude rendition of 'I told you so' in Italian) and quickly proved to his disbelieving friends back home that he could run a ranch in Africa where cattle and buffalo shared the same waterholes. When the Count began to age and lose interest in the ranch in the mid-1990s, his daughter Luisa negotiated a long lease on the land with a dynamic group of young Kenyans led by manager Tom Silvester. When they took

over the ranch they renamed it Loisaba, or 'Seven Stars'. Through a commercial operation and the Loisaba Community Trust the ranch has focused on building up a model for sustainable development and ecotourism (see box page 137).

Tom, his wife and two children share a bush home near the Loisaba airstrip with a young reticulated giraffe, a Thomson's gazelle, two eagle owls and a host of other orphaned animals. Tom is a large-hearted man, but he leaves the hosting to his team of local warriors, all of whom are dressed in traditional clothing. An exceedingly friendly young Masai met me at the airport with a single red rose on top of his head. 'Samburu means "butterfly", after their penchant for dressing up,' explained Tom when I asked if this was for real, 'and the Laikipiak Masai have inherited many of the Samburu customs. You should see all the tinsel and decorations that they wear at Christmas time!'

Loisaba Lodge is built of stone, cedar and thatch high on the edge of a plateau, with breathtaking

