

Seated on a 1,796 acre forest is Malu, full of its own surprises and perfect for a weekend gateway for the entire family
By Nikki-Anne Stanley

Naiivasha's COUNTRY LODGE

If like me, you have small children, live in Nairobi and are looking for that weekend opportunity to get away with the family, Malu could be just the answer. Less than two hours drive from Nairobi, Malu is perfectly set in the forest-covered hills above Naiivasha. The bumpy 11km drive along the dusty road from the tarmac gave the kids the feeling of really being out in the bush and was a great start to their weekend adventure.

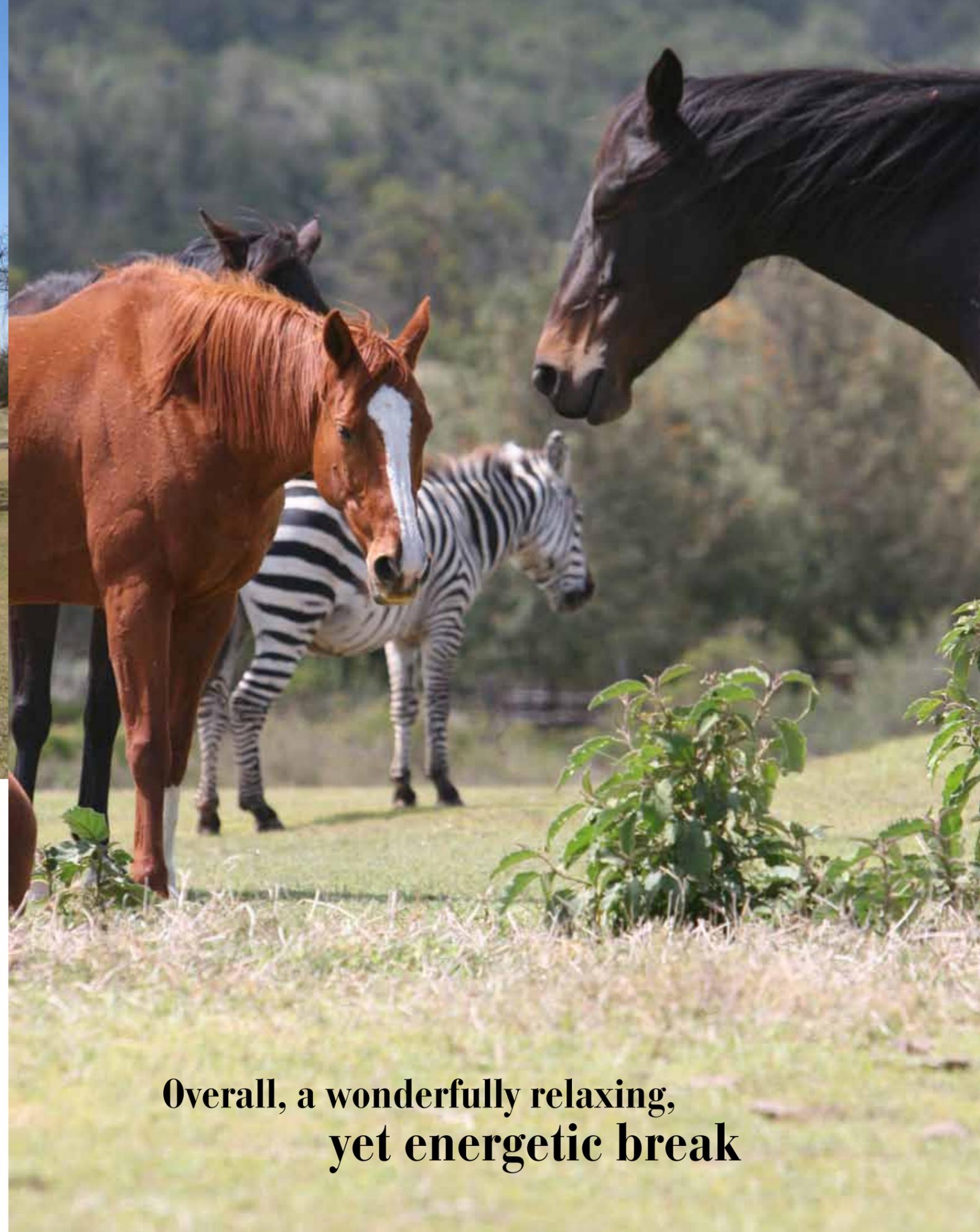
We had booked the manager's house, as it has three bedrooms and self-catering facilities and it was situated right beside the farm animals. Perfect. On arrival the kids went immediately to help milk the

cows. This was followed by playing with rabbits, feeding the horses and meeting the chickens, geese and ducks. The staff on the farm were just excellent with kids, carefully showing them how to be safe around the animals as well as how to handle and care for them. The kids were thrilled with the opportunity to help out and be responsible.

We had dinner at the restaurant which lived up to its reputation of being fabulous. We were asked what the children might like and they were given homemade fish goujons, fresh home grown vegetables and tasty chips – not forgetting the obligatory tomato ketchup! They ate early at 5:30pm, went back to the house for a lovely hot

bath and into bed for 7:30pm – when Emily the sitter arrived to babysit and allow us adults to go for dinner. Dinner was a much needed time of kicking back and exhaling. The service was very friendly and the atmosphere in the little restaurant was homely and warm, with the central open fireplace creating that inviting feel. It was divine. Walking back in the dark to the house only took five minutes, although it was a magical night to look at the stars peppering the sky. Back at home, Emily had lit the fire and the living room was really cosy and the kids asleep. A tremendously relaxing evening.

Photographs: Nikki Anne- Stanley, Malu



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yet energetic break**

Next morning we awoke to the shrieks of the children watching the donkeys graze in the garden, although the resident cat wasn't much bothered by them. They did move on, only to be followed by Tamba the dog and five horses. Never a dull moment. We booked horse riding for four of us – leaving our youngest who is only 19 months with Emily. We went on a hack for 40 minutes down to the airstrip and back, which the kids thoroughly enjoyed – mostly because their dad went with them on a horse much to their amusement, as it was the first time they had seen him on a horse. The horses were very docile, perfect for the youngsters. The handlers were great with the kids, helping them on and off and keeping them safe on the hack. 40 minutes for a three and four year old was great, though quite enough.

Whilst they had been horse riding, our friends had gone for a guided walk up the hill, into the forest to see the magnificent views from the top. The guide showed them the ancient indigenous forest of red cedar, which needs to be protected from theft by a high electric fence and razor wire. Other trees included olive, fig and acacia. They spotted monkeys and a huge variety of birds and saw signs that buffalo had recently been in the area – hence the need for a guide. The trails are also suitable for mountain biking and bikes can be hired on site.

The highlight of the afternoon was the much anticipated donkey-cart ride down to the plunge pool at the river. The 10 minute ride was rather bumpy and with

only hard wooden planks to sit on, rather uncomfortable for adults – but the children LOVED it. Sitting – and frequently standing, the kids held on tight to the bar at the front and gee'd on the donkey – and her two handlers. It was like 'chariots of fire'! Leaning one way, then the other to counter-balance the bumps. Laughter. Shouting. Giggling. The fun was immense. And the children will never forget the 'donkey with one ear' that struggled to keep her footing on the way down to the river and then raced back up the hill afterwards; that homeward bound rush that all animals have. Apparently Maasai women cut off half of a donkey's ear and place it around the neck of their child to prevent him/her from getting a cold.

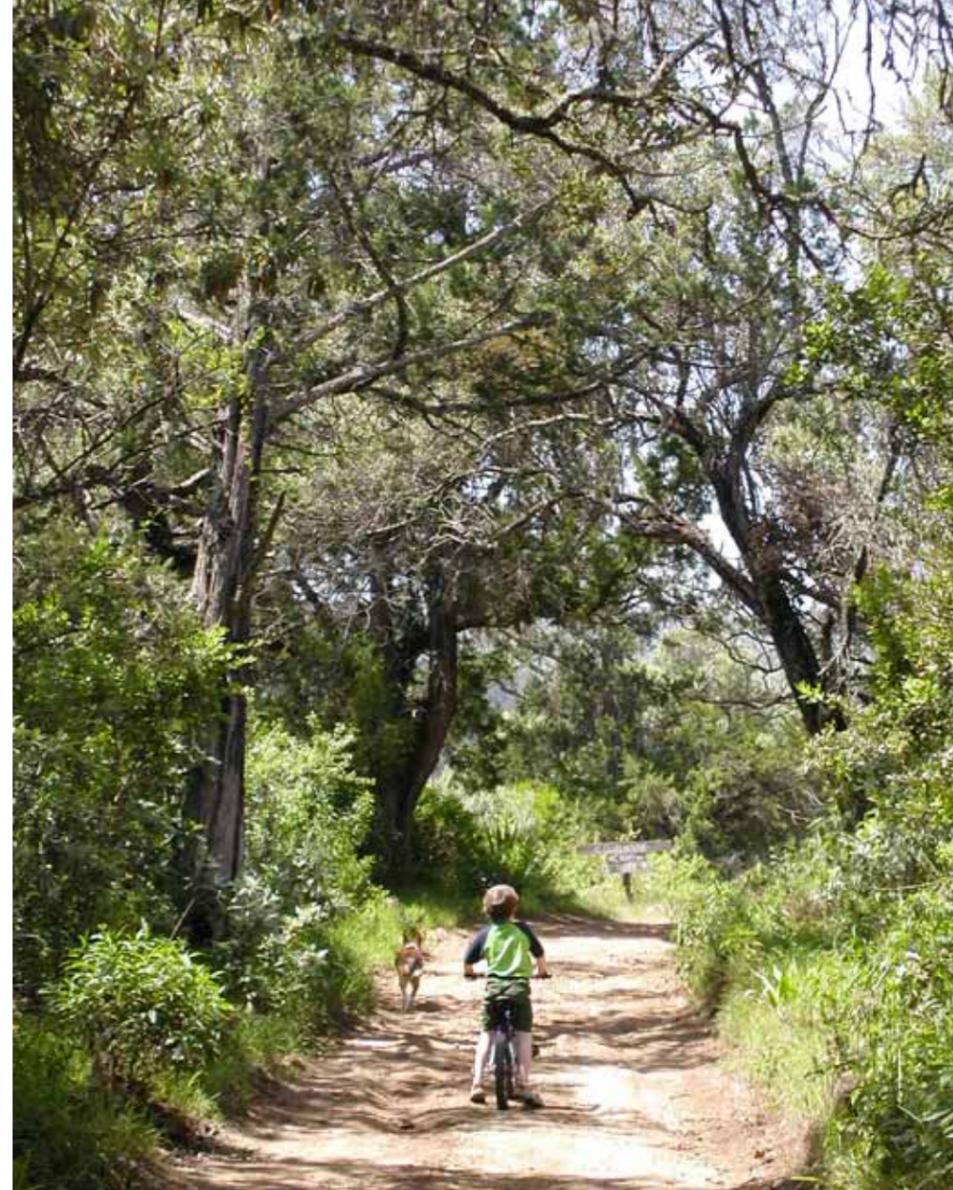
The plunge pool by the river was amazing, filled with water from a hot spring. We were four adults and three children, all comfortably splashing about, tussling over who got to sit by the inlet of warm spring water. Refreshed by the dip we made our way back along the little path, over the river and back to the lane and our awaiting chariot. You can either walk to the pool, which takes 20 minutes or so from the reception, or take a 4x4 if there are very small children.



Other accommodation on the ranch includes three bandas with lovely views over Lake Naivasha, two family villas and a treehouse. The treehouse is situated a five minutes drive from the main farm area beside the river, where hippos swim. It is not a house for very young children due to its many steep wooden stairs, open bannisters and a balcony that wouldn't stop an adventurous child. My recommendation would be to have children older than seven years staying here – though a perfect adventure for those that can use it.

The next day was filled with more feeding of the farm animals, riding in the donkey-cart and playing with the cat and dog. We were very sad to hear that one of the horses, Sala, had died during the night after being bitten by a snake. It was a stark reminder that we were actually out in the bush.

Overall, a wonderfully relaxing, yet energetic break. We adults became children for most of the weekend, taking part in all the activities that were on offer for the children. The children were exhausted each evening having been busy all day long. Everyone had a fantastic break and I would highly recommend Malu as a weekend retreat from the hustle and bustle of Nairobi. **D**



Useful Info

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