

“At one waterhole there were elephants on one side and zebras on the other – beautiful!”

Our Dream Safari Came True!

By Sue Wheatcroft

Sue Wheatcroft is full-time carer for her friend Vicky Eller, 51, from Chesterfield, who was diagnosed with MS in 1989. Vicky now has progressive MS and is able to stand for only a few seconds but that did not stop her from having a safari holiday of a lifetime.



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Vicky and I love our holidays abroad but as her illness has progressed we have found it increasingly difficult to find suitable accessible accommodation, transport, and everything else. Vicky needs the full package: adapted vehicle, roll-in shower, and **NO STEPS!**

One of Vicky's ambitions was to experience a safari, and for some years we had been searching for a company which could organise appropriate transport and perhaps one or two lodges from where we could take part in day safaris.

None of the regular travel

companies was interested, and even those who specialised in disabled travel could not meet our specific needs in Africa. That is, until we met Yvonne from GoAfrica Safaris and Travel, whose motto is: 'We make it possible.'

Dutch-born Yvonne lives in Diani Beach, south of Mombassa in Kenya. I found her through Gordon at Able-Travel, who told me that if anyone could make Vicky's dream come true, Yvonne could! I contacted her immediately and our 'big adventure' began to take shape.

Last September, Vicky and I were met at Mombassa airport

by Yvonne. Also there was our driver/guide, Peter, who then drove us in an adapted vehicle to Voi Wildlife Lodge in Tsavo East (a two-hour journey).

Unfortunately, our luggage did not arrive until two days later but, although we had not booked the flights with GoAfrica and so it was really not her responsibility, Yvonne arranged for one of her drivers to bring the luggage to Voi.

Wheelchair-Friendly Wildlife Lodge

Voi Wildlife Lodge was an excellent choice for us, as the room had a roll-in shower and the whole area was totally wheelchair friendly. Nowhere is perfect of course; more grab rails were needed and some could have been more strategically placed.

Vicky cannot transfer to the seat in the shower unless the grab rail is in exactly the right place. Fortunately, we were able to get round this because Yvonne had thoughtfully provided us with a shower chair/commode.

The issue of grab rails is one



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of the concerns raised by Yvonne when inspecting lodges for access (and every lodge is inspected personally before she sends her clients there) but she tells me that most (but not all) are willing to make the necessary alterations.

Peter and the adapted vehicle were with us for the whole of our 5-day stay at the lodge. We had them to ourselves, which was a great help as we could go out at our own pace.

Peter was willing to take us wherever and whenever we wanted. But in order for Vicky to get sufficient rest we decided to space out our trips.

One day we had a late afternoon safari and on another day we had two: the first from 6.15am until breakfast (when it's much cooler) and then from 10am until lunch.



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We were out for an average of two hours each time. In the van there's a portable loo, as there aren't any accessible loos out in the wild.

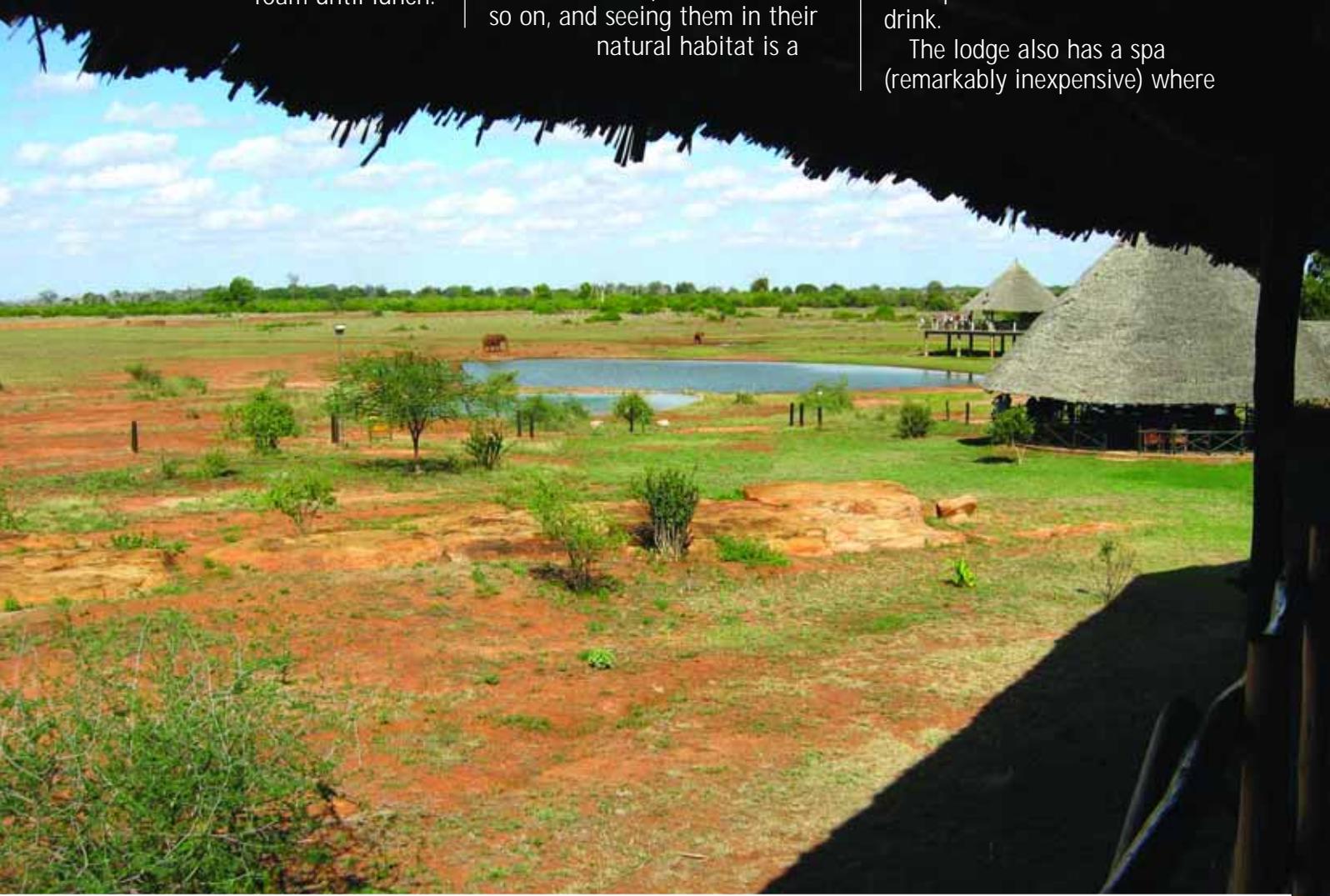
Stunning Scenery

The scenery in Tsavo National Park is stunning. Of course you want to see elephants, lions and so on, and seeing them in their natural habitat is a

humbling experience, but just being there is special. Best of all, Vicky had the same experience as everyone else; her disability made no difference!

When we weren't out on safari we spent time at the lodge, on the terrace overlooking the watering hole where herds of elephants would come to drink.

The lodge also has a spa (remarkably inexpensive) where





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I had a pedicure and Vicky tried reflexology (despite her heat-induced swollen feet!).

Although the lodge was comfortable, with lovely food and friendly staff, Vicky was always looking forward to the next safari. She said: 'It's so exciting, driving along, not knowing what you are going to see next!'

Animal Magic

While on safari we saw many different animals but our favourites were the elephants; to see how the elder members take care of their youngsters

was a surprisingly emotional experience.

We also loved the lions and were lucky enough to come across seven lions feeding on a buffalo which they had killed about two hours previously (not everyone's cup of tea I know, but this is Africa!)

Vicky says: 'Its difficult to describe how you feel coming face to face with that many animals all together. At one waterhole there were elephants on one side and zebras on the other – beautiful!'

On the last day, Peter took us to Diani Beach, where we spent

three very relaxing days at the marvellous (and largely accessible) Leisure Lodge Beach and Golf Resort.

As Yvonne lives nearby we were able to spend some time with her and get to know her better. Yvonne appreciates the difficulties encountered by disabled people, especially when embarking on an adventure such as a safari.

She keeps her organisation small, which means that clients get the personal touch, which makes such a difference. Peter also knows the value of getting the right balance between being there to help whilst also allowing the client the space to do their own thing.

I cannot recommend this company highly enough; as Vicky says 'why can't there be an "Yvonne" in every country?!' Thanks for a great adventure!!

Says Vicky: 'It really was a dream come true – I can't wait to go back!'



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Info Box

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email info@go-africa-safaris.com

Whilst we were in Kenya, Gordon was also investigating accessible safaris. See: www.able-travel.com
Gordon@able-travel.com

The lodge where we stayed in Voi:
www.voiwildlifelodge.com

The hotel in Diana Beach:
www.leisurelodgeresort.com
Leisure Lodge Beach and Golf Resort
P.O. BOX 84383, MOMBASA - KENYA
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NOTE: The political unrest in Kenya has not affected the wildlife parks and reserves, the beach resorts, and other tourist areas.