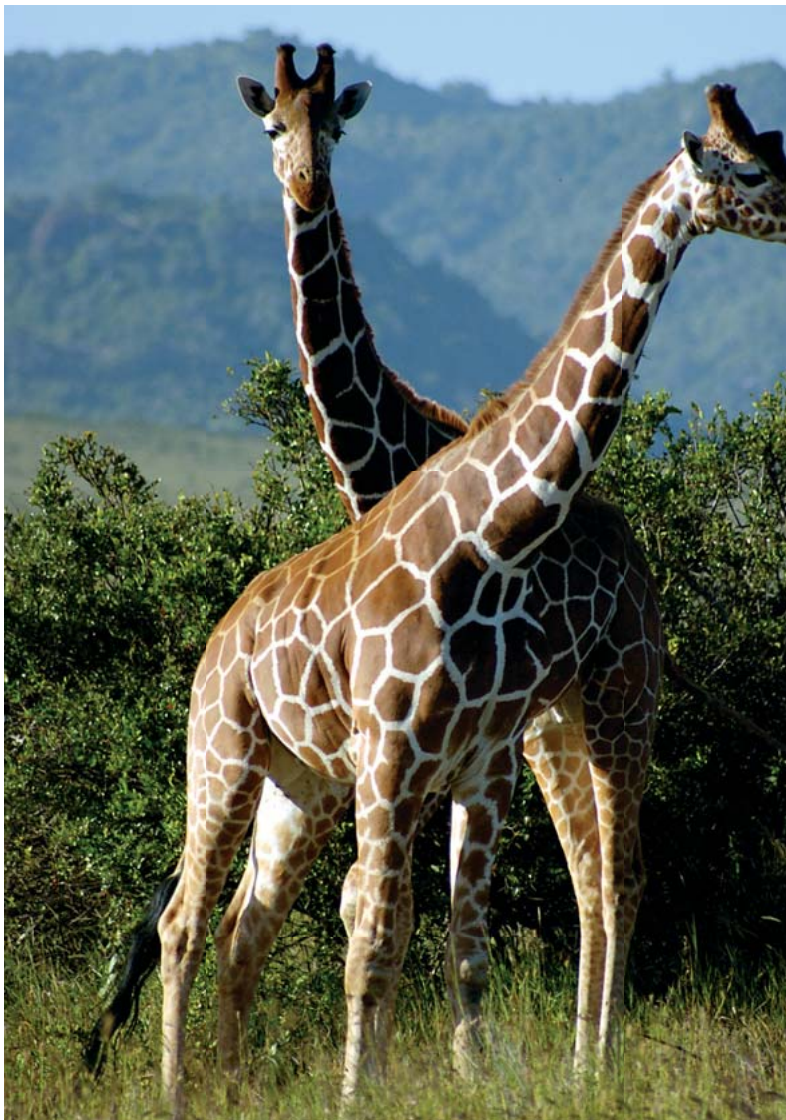


WINNER Borana, Kenya

# Meanwhile, back at the ranch

## WHAT THE JUDGES SAID:

*'Borana has made a sustainable contribution to the alleviation of poverty through generating employment, improving school facilities, funding a mobile clinic reaching thousands of people and for innovative initiatives like "Hide and Sheep" adding value to local products for the benefit of the economically poor.'*



**D**awn on Borana is seldom short of spectacular. As the sun rises, giraffe browse the acacia trees with a delicacy and poise that belies their astonishing size. Lilac-breasted rollers swoop from euphorbia to cabbage tree and Pottos forage in the long grass. To the north, a dark forest harbours elephants, caracal and Verreaux eagle owls. Overseeing all is Mount Kenya, the tallest free-standing mountain in the world, its icy peaks sharp in the clear morning sun. For David Lesham, 26, the view is routine. He was born here but still he values it highly – indeed, has devoted his life to sharing it with others.

'I teach people about animal behaviour, how to track animals and the medicinal properties of plants. I learned all this when I was very young, walking to school or out herding,' says Lesham, in perfect English. To do his training as a safari guide, he had to learn it all again in English so that he could write the exams and explain things to visitors at Michael and Nicky Dyer's Borana Lodge, a 32,000-acre working ranch within the Laikipia-Samburu ecosystem, one of Kenya's most important outside the national parks and reserves.

The cottages where guests sleep overlook a watering hole that is visited by lions and leopards, buffaloes and elephants. Visitors eat spectacular meals made with ingredients from the local area: Borana



beef and Nanyuki vegetables cooked by Maasai chefs and served by Meru waiters. Staying at Borana is wonderful for the beauty, the variety and the high concentration of animals, but adding to the experience is the fact that a stay will benefit the local community both indirectly and directly.

Lesham is living proof of the Borana philosophy of sharing its wealth with the communities that surround it. Tourism in Laikipia is crucial to the local economy and brings much-needed investment to the area; traditional ranching and pastoralist herding have never been able to achieve big earnings.

'It is very good to see people coming from overseas and wanting to see our culture. This was slowly eroding, but tourism means we will hold onto it because there are people making a living out of it,' says Lesham.

'Tourists pay a fee to come here,' he says with a nonchalant sweep of his hand that encompasses four species in the flash of an eye – hyrax, sunbird, augur buzzard and ground squirrel. 'And that money is spent on local schools or medical clinics.' Borana has recently set up a mobile clinic carrying out medical treatment, vaccination programmes, antenatal care and HIV-awareness, at a monthly cost of £800. It also operates an ancillary enterprise called Hide and Sheep which buys hides from local farmers and employs physically

disabled people to turn them into slippers, boots, cushions and rugs for sale locally – and internationally.

Borana takes its social responsibility very seriously. Canon recently launched its new camera on the ranch having own in photographers from around the world to marvel at the new EOS in surroundings that offer more photographs per square foot than almost anywhere in the world. Of course they were paying for the privilege, but more importantly for the area, Borana had obliged Canon to build three classrooms for local schools. Borana gives 15 scholarships a year to the best students at the schools.

Lesham won a scholarship to secondary school and college from the Catholic mission in his nearby hometown of Doldol but his is a very special case and only one of his classmates has completed college and found a job. Borana's scholarships allow children to go on to secondary school and college but more importantly they offer the prospect of employment at the end. The ranch and lodge buy produce locally and employ about 200 people but Borana also actively looks for people it can train for specific jobs.

'If I can find people with potential, Michael likes to train them up. Here at the lodge we have two guys we are training on the job to become guides. They are pastoralists from Chumvi [a local village]; already their English is improving and they

have learned to drive. This year Borana will sponsor them to do their bronze guiding badge. It is very encouraging.'

Others, too, have been trained as managers, guides, cooks or drivers before going on to work at lodges owned by the local communities like neighbouring Tassia, which was set up with assistance and funding from Borana but is wholly independent. The knock-on effect is notoriously hard to quantify but the lodges in Laikipia, of which Borana was one of the pioneers, bring money in the form of conservation fees and dollars spent by tourists in the local shops. But there is much more to it than that. Now there is an alternative to going to the city or eking an existence out of pastoralism in the fragile environment of Northern Kenya. People like David Lesham – born into a pastoralist community but now the holder of a diploma in hotel management – can give a huge amount to their communities if given a chance of finding employment at places such as Borana.

'I would like to help the area,' says Lesham, 'maybe by starting an organisation for the conservation of endangered species around Laikipia or maybe by starting a small lodge. Some people have to walk six hours to hospital or 20 miles to school. I would like to be involved in community development projects, bringing services closer to the people.'

[www.borana.co.ke](http://www.borana.co.ke)