



At one with giraffes in the wild

## DIANA NABIRUMA

I generally do not like food. God did not bless me with the greatest of appetites. He also did not bless me with an adventurous spirit in as far as food is concerned.

I am also no longer fascinated with wild animals ... or so I thought. Having visited a number of national parks in Uganda, I considered myself 'sooo over animals'.

Finally, I suffer from an excessive case of allergic reactions to cold weather. If it so much as threatens to rain and temperatures drop, I suffer nasal congestion, cough, headaches, nausea, stomach pain, back pain and other symptoms. My voice sometimes abandons me because of these allergies!

Based on the above, when I was delegated to participate in a research peer review exercise on East Africa's energy sector at Aberdare Country Club in Nyeri, Kenya, I did not expect any pleasure to be mixed with the work.

Boy, how wrong I was!

Aberdare Country Club is three hours away from Nairobi and having woken up at 6am to catch an 8:45am flight to Nairobi, I thought the journey to the country club too long.

However, when I got there, the journey was worth it.

## HEALING, COLD, CRISP AIR

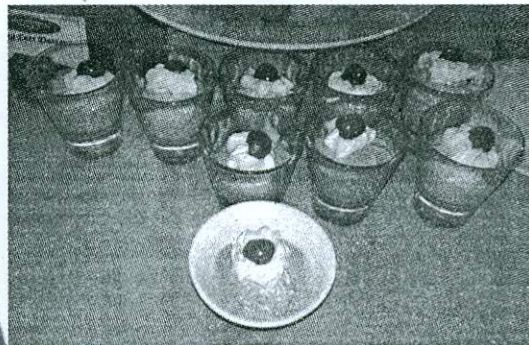
Before any travel, I google my destination's weather forecast so that cold weather conditions do not catch me unawares.

It was May and before packing, I googled the weather



The author at Aberdare country club

# Give me scenic, healing Nyeri anytime



The chef was creative

forecast for Nyeri. The results showed it would not be too cold, with temperatures in the 20 degrees Celsius range.

Despite the assurances of warm weather, I packed my arsenal of cold-resistant clothing including my faithful leg warmers, an autumn coat, a fleece sweater and various other jackets.

I also had socks and several scarves.

Aberdare Country Club is located near Mt Kenya and mountainous areas are synonymous with cold weather.

I was emerging out of an allergy flare-up and despite three injections and a regimen of tablets, I still had a racking cough. I prayed Nyeri would not make it worse.

I was surprised when the cold (the place was cold despite the

weather forecast!) did not make it worse.

A day after getting to Nyeri, I noticed my cough was gone.

I had noticed that the air at the country club was clean, crisp, and cold. In fact, I felt re-invigorated when I breathed it in.

But for the air to clean my long-suffering airways and rid me of a cough that had held strong against medication? I did not expect that.

## CREATIVE FOOD

As earlier noted, I mostly eat to survive and I never adventure.

My lack of adventurousness, however, waned and my curiosity peaked when I encountered *mukimo* - a Kikuyu traditional dish made of avocado, potatoes, maize and other ingredients.

I cannot eat plain avocado - it is too slimy for me - but at a number of meals, the chef creatively sneaked avocado into a dessert or this and that dish that even I was tempted to try some of the avocado dishes.

The *mukimo* looked safest. Though it looked like it had been made with a good amount of avocado, it had been thoroughly mixed with the other foods to remove the sliminess that puts me off avocado.

Besides, I wanted to taste a traditional dish and, encouraged by a chef, I dropped some *mukimo* on my plate. It was very enjoyable!

After that experience, I sampled foods that I otherwise ignore.

I tasted a red gelatin dessert - I generally avoid foods that have not decided whether they are full liquids or solids - and it was OK.

I, however, did not taste the avocado desserts that were packaged in cute little glasses and were topped off with whipped cream and a cherry.

They looked cute but I knew my tongue would protest against the avocado base.

I also did not taste the maize dish, which had soup and vegetables!

A colleague, Robert Ddamulira, did and said it was good. I don't think my stomach would have taken the oily nature of its soup, however.

The club also served an interesting matooke dish that I did not understand and, therefore, did not venture into eating.

Yes, I am a picky eater, but the Muganda waitress at the club, who looked like she had not gotten used to that style of cooking matooke just told me: "*Munnange*, this is how the matooke is cooked here."

We also met a white man in a managerial role at the club, who informed us he is our *muko* (in-law). He has a Muganda wife.

At Aberdare, one can see Mt Kenya. That was cool and relaxing.

The country club is also green, has pretty flowers and cute peacocks, adding to its relaxing environment. The fact that the rooms had no Wi-Fi also forced me to shut out the world at night, which was absolutely relaxing.

However, the most exciting part for me was when, with other participants, we took a nature walk and came up close with giraffes.

I had mooted the idea of missing the nature walk, because I have seen animals several times before and did not think seeing them again would be exciting.

However, when we came across giraffes, I shrieked with delight.

I had never imagined I would take a walk with giraffes in my life. We also saw zebras, various types of antelopes and warthogs.

Now, that was fun!

dnanbiruma@gmail.com