

52 Dream Destinations

AFRICA



TRAILING THE RARE BLACK LEOPARD OF LAIKIPIA, KENYA

WHY: This fabled creature comes to life at a singular safari trip.

THE EXPERIENCE: Stories of black leopards have long swirled about the craggy folds of Laikipia plateau, north of Nairobi. When photographer Will Burrard-Lucas published high-quality camera trap footage of Laikipia

Wilderness Camp's resident melanistic leopard in 2019, news of this anomalous cat's presence made headlines. Guests on Bench Africa's three-day Laikipia safari have a good chance of spotting the big cat themselves:

unlike the handful of other black leopards reported to inhabit the region, Giza ("darkness" in Swahili) is habituated to vehicles. Her welfare is prioritised, however, with strictly limited vehicle numbers and viewing periods. At dusk, trackers scan the scrub beyond the Ewaso Narok river; Giza manifests like a spectre below a ridgeline, weaving a sooty trail towards the water and flashing amber eyes at her stunned observers. Rosettes drift like holograms across her dark pelt; the recessive gene that causes melanism is rare in African leopards, but Giza casts those long-told tales of black leopards in exhilarating, three-dimensional light.

IDEAL FOR: Safari-goers keen for a unique sighting.

LIKE THIS? TRY: Kenya's Amboseli National Park, where melanistic specimens of the long-legged wildcat, the serval, have been sighted. *Catherine Marshall*

PHOTOGRAPHY BY WILL BURRARD-LUCAS; GETTY IMAGES

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