

love letter to a life in the wilds of kenya

Meet **Sophie Grant** – safari lodge owner, advocate of green living and author of **The Bush Kitchen: Notes and Recipes from the Wild**

We have spent the past 12 years building and creating an eco-tourism lodge and safari experience called El Karama Lodge in Northern Kenya's Laikipia region. Our primary focus is family travel, sustainable tourism and positive impact safaris. Through this work I have met many encouraging guests, both from our country and from abroad, who have connected with the natural world and how we live in harmony with it here.

Through these relationships, and those we have nurtured within our team for many years, I could see there was an opportunity to write about our story, sharing our recipes and tips for green living with those who might be inspired by it! We live and work completely off-grid in the heart of the Laikipia ecosystem, using 100 per cent solar power and renewable energy for all we do, including electricity, hot water and powering Kenya's first chemical-free swimming pool. We operate a water-harvesting system and recycle all our waste, including green waste which is used in organic growing and feeding our chickens.

Our own food is grown organically on site in raised beds using drip irrigation and no pesticides. I am responsible for creating all our menus using local and seasonal produce. Anything we can't rear or grow ourselves we source from within 70km of our lodge, ensuring a strong ripple effect in neighbourhoods through local procurement. We are

known for our fresh, hearty fare and the passion we put into creating a haven for our guests, both in the natural design of the lodge and peace and serenity of the bush we welcome them to.

As an English Literature graduate, I have always loved to write, so it was always a dream of mine to write a book – but with two children and a lodge to run, it wasn't an easy dream to bring to fruition! During the past two years of the pandemic, we have been exceptionally busy with our loyal domestic following, but I knew it was time and so I allowed myself permission to sit down and begin committing our world and experiences to paper. It has been very cathartic to look back and I feel such gratitude for where we are now.

Our team has always doubled down in times of challenge and this book is a celebration of the spirit and resilience we share and our continued commitment to hard work and the enhancement of a unique habitat that supports both the wildlife and people in our community.

We are proud of our identity as a sustainable tourism operator in Laikipia and hope to continue thriving and sharing this dynamic and holistic way of life with a wider audience, including the next generation of children and parents. ➔

SOPHIE'S TOP FIVE TIPS ON HOW TO CREATE A GREENER WAY OF LIFE

- 1** Be intentional about your consumption even in tiny ways – just think about what you really need and not always what you want.
- 2** Always choose glass over plastic so that you can reuse and recycle at home.
- 3** Tune in to the seasons and eat what is available seasonally.
- 4** Buy local and eat local to ensure that the community around you thrives off your consumption.
- 5** Choose organic: the insects and pollinators, the soil and the plants are essential components to a healthy ecosystem; using pesticides and chemicals is bad for the planet and for your body.



Above left to right: Fresh herbs are one of the mainstays of the organic garden at El Karama Lodge – fennel, shown here, is grown for its flowers, seeds and pollen, all of which are used in cooking; beef stir fry with Chinese five spice marinade is a favourite dish; Sophie Grant tending the garden. **Below:** The ultimate roast chicken, fresh from the oven, and flavoured with herbs

Below: Delicious produce, fresh from the lodge garden, includes courgettes



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR





Slow cook, pull apart lamb with fennel, apricot, cumin and smoked paprika SERVES 8

- 4kg piece of lamb, back leg preferred
- 3 tablespoons of olive oil
- 1 cup of red wine
- 1 whole garlic bulb, smashed, skins still on
- 1 teaspoon of ground cumin
- 1 teaspoon of smoked paprika
- 1 teaspoon of sea salt flakes
- 3 large leeks, trimmed and split down the middle
- 100g dried apricots

few extra garlic cloves dotting all over to imbue the meat with some flavour.

2. Chop your fennel and apricots into pieces and layer the bottom of a deep roasting tin with them. Place your lamb on top and pour over the wine and a little drizzle of olive oil. Season on top with salt and pepper and cover with foil.

3. Cook in a medium oven for 4 hours with the foil on. Every hour, baste with the juices and, at the very end, remove the foil and allow it to crisp up before resting on a wooden board. Decorate around the edges with the sticky sweet fennel and apricots and serve with grilled pita breads, a wilted cabbage salad with lime juice and plain raita.

1. With a mortar and pestle grind your salt, pepper, cumin and smoked paprika together. Take your leg of lamb and drizzle some olive oil over it, rub the spices in over both sides. With a sharp knife make some small slices in the flesh and tuck a

MEET THE TEAM:



LOVI MARITIM
ASSISTANT MANAGER

Lovi has been here for 15 years and built El Karama from the start with us. He's worked his way up the ranks and now helps runs the lodge.

"Committing to the health of the land to me means: healthy land happy life. Conserving land and indigenous species of trees and plants and practising holistic grazing with livestock. Crop rotation and using organic compost to feed the soil and grow organic vegetables."



JANE WANJIKU HEAD CHEF

Jane began as a home help and worked her way up to become head chef in our lodge kitchen. She is also our neighbour and has a vested interest in supporting the environment around us.

"I cook with organic food straight from the land so that my food is fresh and tasty for my guests and family. Being aware of what is hazardous to the environment for our health, our workplace, friends and family. Creating awareness in our community about environmental conservation."



ANDREW LELEI GUIDE

Andrew grew up here and is now one of our guides with a special interest in botany. He is currently training as a walking guide for overnight adventures at our mobile camp.

"I am passionate about conserving indigenous wildlife and plants and educating people, but I also help the lodge manage its beehives. This means supporting bees and pollinators by never using chemicals for pest control and this allows us to harvest honey which makes us happy and healthy!"



The Bush Kitchen: Notes and Recipes from the Wild is a love letter to the last 15 years of Sophie Grant's journey creating El Karama Lodge. More than a cook book, it is a manifesto for life filled with recipes, thoughts, poems and hand-drawn illustrations depicting a rich and precious way of life in a wild and magical place in Kenya. All profits from the book will be reinvested into a unique and fragile ecosystem to benefit the people and wildlife of El Karama Conservancy. 