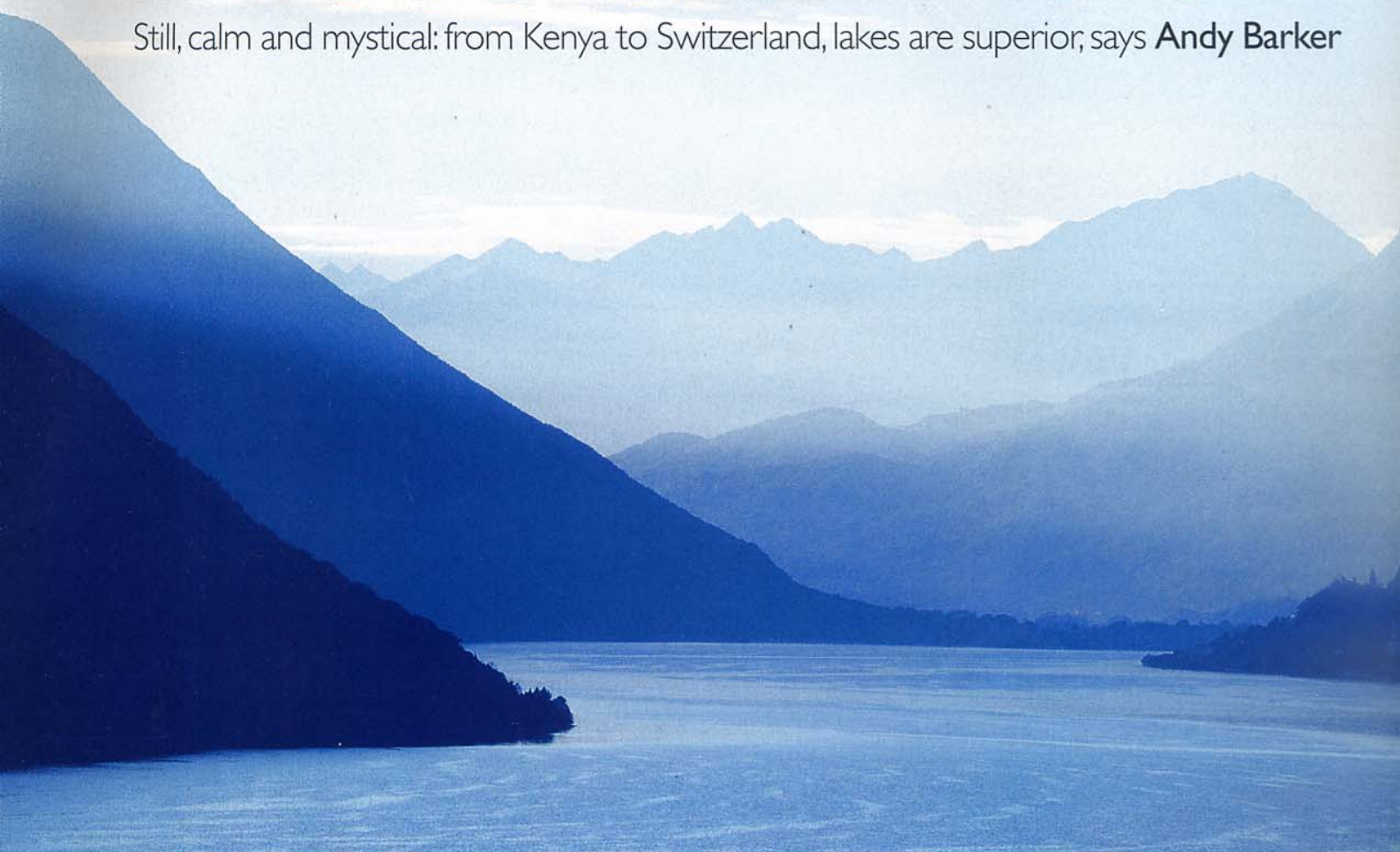


Hotels du lac

Still, calm and mystical: from Kenya to Switzerland, lakes are superior, says **Andy Barker**



HOTEL SPLENDIDE ROYAL LUGANO SWITZERLAND

THE LAKE The town of Lugano sits on the Swiss side of Lake Lugano, near the Italian Alps. Sandwiched between Lake Maggiore and Lake Como, the lake straddles the border with Italy.

THE HOTEL Five palatial storeys of Venetian furniture and neoclassical columns earn the hotel its right to a grandiose name. Not to mention the guest list: Marie, Queen of Romania, George W Bush and Sophia Loren have

all basked in its late-baroque splendour. After the late-19th-century villa was turned into a hotel in 1902 by the Fedele family, a loyal crowd of wealthy Europeans began to frequent the summer resort, which now boasts one staff member for each of its 96 rooms.

ROOMS The suites play on the opulent theme with intricate plasterwork, crystal, gilt on the walls and a generous helping of marble in the bathrooms. The Presidential Suite boasts a Murano-glass chandelier and frescoes of alpine rural scenes on its ceiling.

EXTRAS Prince Philip sampled the French/Italian fusion menu in 2005, but missed out on the impressive oval indoor

A STROLL ALONG THE SHORE TAKES YOU
AND ARCADES OF SWITZERLAND'S TH

GANDALF AND HIS FELLOWSHIP TRUDGED THROUGH A BLIZZARD HERE



Above: Blanket Bay and (right) the terrace of a chalet



BLANKET BAY NEW ZEALAND

THE LAKE At 80km, Wakatipu is New Zealand's longest lake. The nearby glaciers of the Richardson mountain range top it up periodically via a network of streams, giving rise to endless swathes of well-fed beech forest in the surrounding basin.

THE HOTEL The peaked gables and chimney stacks of the Blanket Bay Lodge in Glenorchy echo the jagged skyline of the Southern Alps. A peaceful frontier town, this was the rugged pocket of the South Island where Peter Jackson made Gandalf and his fellowship trudge through a blizzard in the first instalment of *The Lord of the Rings*.

ROOMS There is a choice of suites in the main building, but the sturdy, stand-alone chalets with floor-to-apex glass frontages are hard to beat for breathtaking panoramas. Throughout the hotel a heavy use of schist stone and beech beams brings the outdoors in and remains faithful to the architecture of the Otago region.

EXTRAS For intimate dinners the underground Wine Cave seats six and a sommelier will guide you through the impressive library of local vintages. Alternatively, the starlit terrace affords views of the mountains. The spa with a heated outdoor pool looks on to the southern tip of the lake. After a hard day's yomping across the highlands, a steamy shower and a whisky from the self-service bar are sure to warm the cockles.

ACTIVITIES The jet boats and bungee jumps of Queenstown, New Zealand's adrenaline capital, are only 30 miles away. There's no excuse not to get involved in heli-skiing as the friendly glaciers have endless blue runs. And, weather permitting, a flight over the nearby fjords of Mitford Sound is not to be missed.

TARIFF A double room at Blanket Bay (00 64 3 441 0115; www.blanketbay.com) costs from £375 per night and includes breakfast, cocktails, dinner and activities. Lodge Suites are from £570 per night.

SAMATIAN ISLAND LODGE KENYA

THE LAKE Lake Baringo lies at 3,500ft. Three tribes live off the lake including the Njemps, who call themselves the cousins of the Masai. In true safari spirit, hungry hawks emerge at dusk from the barren surrounds to feast on the low-flying bats.

THE HOTEL In Kenya's Great Rift Valley, a private 30-acre island ensconced in fig leaves offers an Eden-like sanctuary. The imposing 30m-high Laikipia Escarpment creates a magnificent backdrop to the fishermen of the Njemps tribe. Meanwhile, a haze of pink softens the horizon as flamingos gather to feed in the salty shallows.

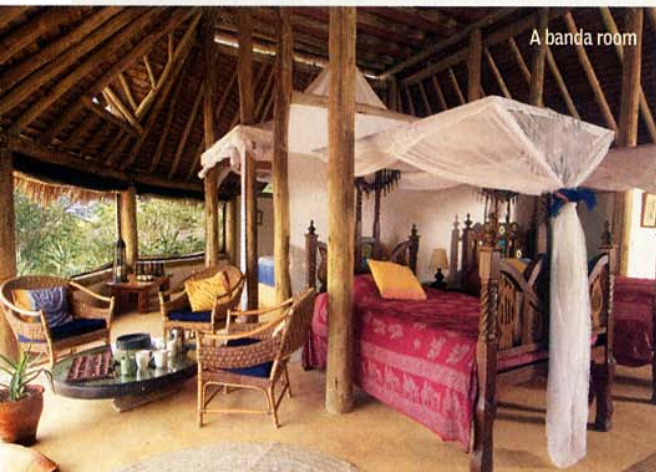
ROOMS Five thatched cottages offer wide-angle

views of the lake and its birdlife. In case of rain, built-in blinds can be unwound to shut out the elements. The family suite boasts an open-air top deck for stargazing, post-colonial style, with a G&T.

ACTIVITIES Guests can enjoy boat rides to feed the fish eagles and gaze at the hippos, crocodiles and over 450 species of birds.

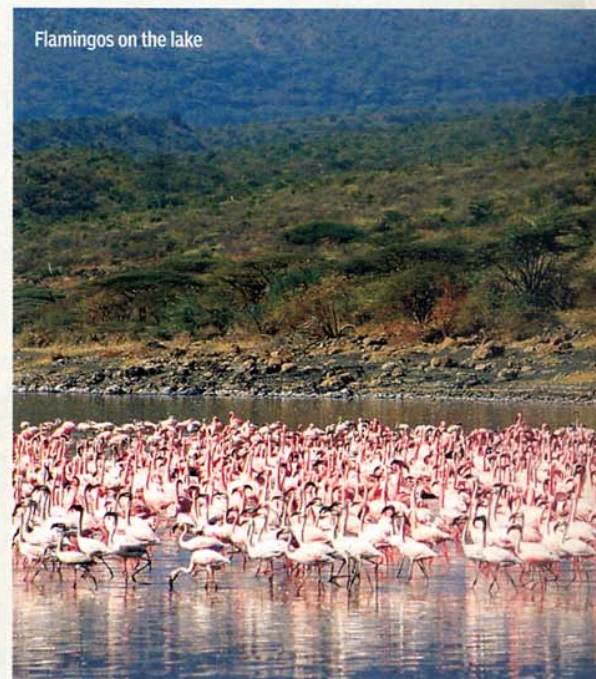
EXTRAS No order is too tall for Kenya-born owner Ross Withey, who has scaled Kilimanjaro over 20 times. He and his wife Caro took over the camp in 2000 and offer a full-board or self-catered option. The dining area, next to the large infinity pool, has a panoramic view of the lake and the rugged frontier district to the north.

TARIFF To do your bit for the community around Samatian, call Tusk on 01747 831 005 or visit www.tusk.org and click on Travel Partners. You will be in good company, joining Prince William, Tusk's patron, in supporting the charity's conservation work. Expect to pay around £250 per person per night for a thatched banda, all meals, drinks and activities.



A banda room

Flamingos on the lake



A HAZE OF PINK SOFTENS THE HORIZON AS FLAMINGOS GATHER TO FEED