

Wild Zambia



Heather Tyrrell, Audley's African Safari programme manager, introduces this unique and untamed country.

One of my greatest loves in Africa is getting far from the beaten track and into the wildest areas possible. Whilst I recognise that this is not everyone's cup of tea, for my own personal trips it is usually my sole aim. I set off for the smallest camps I can find, in areas with few or no roads and where wild animals are frequent visitors in camp during the day and night.

It is perhaps for this reason that I was so well suited to Zambia. On my first night in Zambia seven years ago I was woken at 3am. Monkeys were on the roof of my hut throwing monkey oranges and sticks, and chattering loudly. I got up to see why they were making such a racket and saw, in the light of the moon, a breeding herd of elephant feeding on the trees beside my rondaval. From this point on I realised that wild animals are a part of Zambian camps. Hippos frequently grazed the lawns at night, antelope during the day, while tiny tree-frogs were common visitors in the open-air bathrooms, sitting happily in the basin watching me clean my teeth.

Deep in the heart of Zambia's South Luangwa Park, there are four sister camps

that, whilst comfortable, are in very wild areas. Not for everyone, Kuyenda, Chamilandu, Bilimungwe and Chendeni (operated by the Bushcamp Company) are for those seeking to get really into the wild and see nobody else. All the camps are small, none are fenced and at night the sounds of the wild really surround you. Kuyenda is situated just above a winding sand river where antelope tentatively come to

*All the camps are small,
none are fenced, and at
night the sounds of the
wild really surround you.*

graze. Chamilandu and Bilimungwe are both right beside the South Luangwa River. There are the constant grunts of hippos, cries of fish eagles and in the shimmering heat of the day you often see elephant and buffalo descending the sandy banks to drink. Finally, Chendeni is one of my favourites. It overlooks a beautiful dambo, covered in emerald Nile cabbage.

Sitting in front of your tent you can enjoy the spoonbills, yellowbills, egrets and pelicans. The ears of the hippos flicker as they lie submerged and occasionally a troop of baboons comes to pick over the vegetation at the waters edge.

Days start early at the bushcamps. Waking before sunrise you gather around the fire, a tin mug of tea in your hands. As the sun starts to come up you set out on either a drive or a walking safari. With some of Africa's best guides, walks are fascinating and you learn about everything from sausage trees to seed pods and always stop under a shady tree to enjoy the view. Returning to camp you can have a snooze, watch the game and adapt to Africa's slow pace. Then, after tea at four a game drive leads into a night drive. Night drives in Zambia are magical and without a doubt far better than anywhere else in Africa. With a dim spotlight Africa's nocturnal world opens up to you. You see porcupines, genets, bushbabies, honeybadgers and leopard – one evening a relaxed female allowed us to gently follow her into some long grass where a three month old cub was waiting for her. Returning to camp, dinner is lit by candles and a night of deep sleep awaits, only interrupted by the calls of hyenas, hippos on the lawns and elephants scratching themselves on the roof of your tent.