

CLOSE Encounters

A safari in Zambia is not for the faint-hearted, but certainly has its rewards. Ruth Milligan explains.



Kuyenda Camp



Hippo pod, ox-bow lagoon, South Luangwa

FACT FILE

A ten night Zambia itinerary including a seven night safari in the South Luangwa with the Bushcamp Company and three nights at Victoria Falls would cost from £2,500 per person. For further details please contact Zambia specialists Cate and Matt on 01993 838 500.



Not long after I joined Audley I was lucky enough to be sent out to Zambia's game-rich South Luangwa National Park, a huge 9,051 square kilometre area of completely wild riverine forest, plains and miombo woodland renowned for its healthy game populations and for being the home of the walking safari. I stayed with the Bushcamp Company who run Mfuwe Lodge and its five satellite bushcamps. I have wonderful memories of that time and their camps have remained some of my firm favourites in Zambia ever since.

Mfuwe Lodge offers guests luxury safari accommodation. However you are still very aware that you are located in a national park and surrounded by wildlife. When walking to my room on my first afternoon I was surprised to find a large hippo emerging from the

water and heading across the path; I backed away as rapidly as I felt would be safe before we ended up in a head-on collision on the path. It was then that I discovered that the first rule of safari - "don't run!!" - is definitely easier said than done when faced by a ton of wild animal with large teeth. The following day I was beckoned over to the entrance area to see two female elephants who had casually strolled into reception, their huge grey bodies appearing incongruously large as they towered over the check-in desk on their way to feast on the fig trees in the lodge's gardens.

With these close encounters at Mfuwe Lodge under my belt I felt ready to experience a stay at the wild and remote bushcamps. Each of the Bushcamp Company's safari camps has a unique character and wonderful staff who look after your every need.

Kuyenda Camp has four thatch rondavels in a little grove of trees surrounded by open plains. Many are drawn to this camp by the host Phil Berry, who has been in the Luangwa for more than 30 years and knows absolutely everything about the wildlife and birdlife of the area. Further along is Bilimungwe Camp with a dining room that looks out over a waterhole. While eating dinner here one evening we heard quiet rustling in the undergrowth close to the water's edge; our safari guide's torchlight revealed a female leopard, just metres away, with head bent down to lap up the water.

Chamilandu is a favourite with both guests and guides because of its beautiful location overlooking the Luangwa River. The accommodation is in tree-houses and early in the morning you can lie in bed and watch the sun rising over the river. On a night drive from Chamilandu



Kapamba Camp



Elephant in the Luangwa

we saw a large pride of lions with their cubs out hunting. We were able to watch the delicate battle manoeuvres as the lionesses took up their positions to stalk the impala, our guide, Freya, dipping her spotting light up and down so as not to disturb the crucial hunt for food.

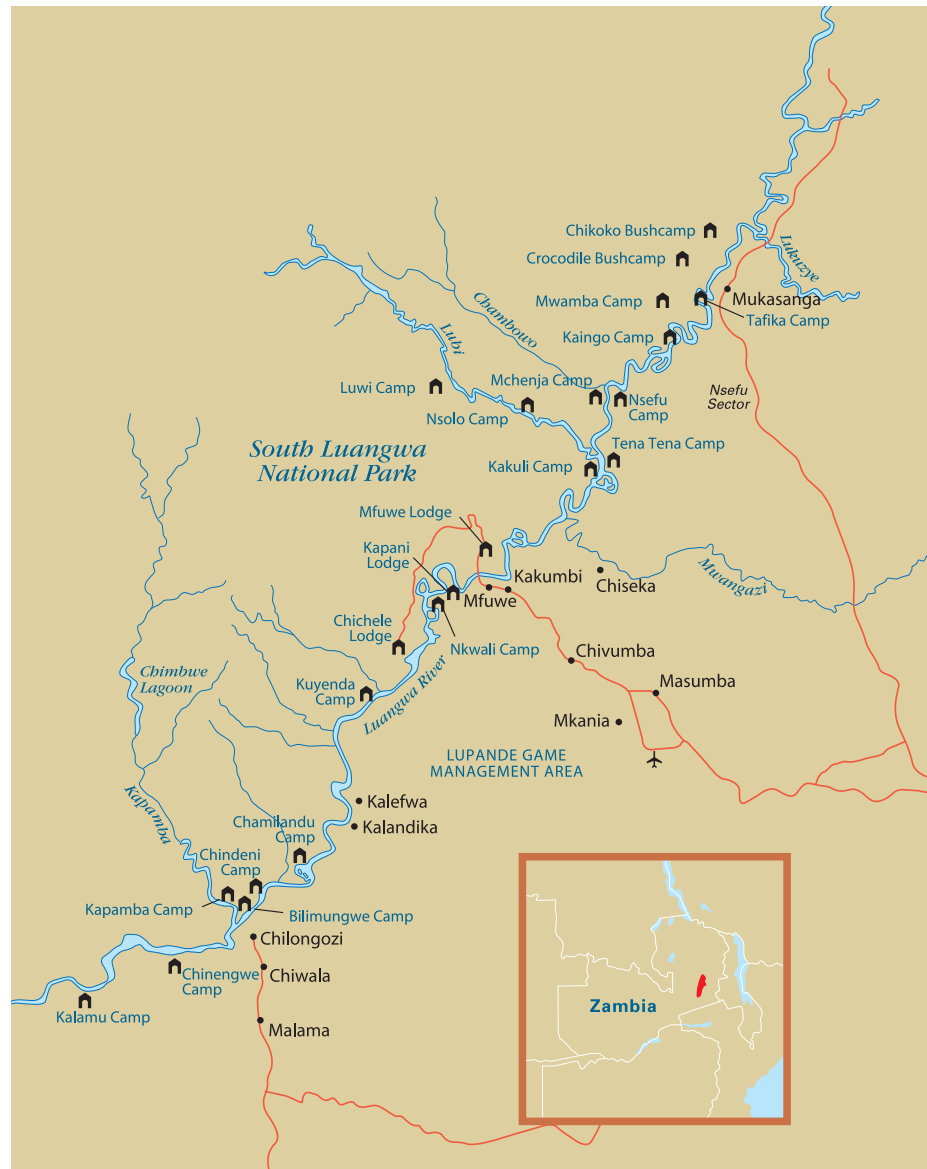
Chindeni camp overlooks an ox-bow lagoon and here the wonderful guide Pattson taught us about the smaller things, showing us the voracious Matabile ants attacking another ant colony and introducing us to the "Little Five" (insects) and the "Green Five" (plants).

Kapamba is the newest camp and perhaps the most luxurious with lovely open-fronted chalets overlooking the Kapamba River. During my stay I was very taken with the huge stone bathtubs where you can happily wallow in the hot afternoons while watching the wildlife outside. One afternoon I sat

in the bathtub quietly watching as a large herd of buffalo approached grazing their way along the riverbanks. As they got closer and closer I began to feel slightly unnerved about being in the bath with such a large number of wild animals close by so I stood up to grab my towel. Apparently the sight of this was a good deal more unnerving for the buffalo and there was a mass stampede as they ran off as quickly as possible in the other direction.

Staying with the Bushcamp Company you can therefore be sure that you are going to have some up-close and personal encounters with the wildlife! You will also get the most out of your safari because of the quality of the guides. If you are looking for a truly wild safari then I can heartily recommend looking no further than a stay in the South Luangwa.

Ruth Milligan
Regional Manager, Africa



Zebra foal, South Luangwa