

INTO THE *wild*

In this landlocked African country, it's all about the water.
Ginny Cumming explores glorious Zambia.

When you think about Zambia... wait, hang on, have you *ever* thought about Zambia? It's one of those places that seems to slip under the radar, minding its own business and just getting on with things. But to ignore this butterfly-shaped patch of paradise in southern Africa would be a big mistake for anyone looking for a safe, stable and truly stunning safari destination.

Expect to see huge numbers of big-game favourites like elephants, hippos and buffalo, plus loads of crocs and antelope, giraffe, incredible birdlife and so much more. There's also a healthy population of magnificent predators including lions, leopards and Africa's famed wild dogs.

Spotting these magnificent creatures is what a safari holiday is all about. Going on early morning and late afternoon game drives is like being on a treasure hunt,

where the prize is sighting Mother Nature's finest, up close and in the wild.

But a safari in Zambia is not just about game drives. In this landlocked country, it's all about the water.

World-famous rivers offer sanctuary and sustenance for animals, and unforgettable experiences for humans. They're also the setting for extraordinary accommodation, often located right on the water's edge so you can watch animals without even having to step foot off the deck of your luxury lodge or rustic bush camp.

Of Zambia's 20 national parks, two of the most spectacular and safari-worthy are South Luangwa and Lower Zambezi. Wildlife viewing here is some of the best on the entire continent.

South Luangwa National Park is named after the Luangwa River, which is the lifeblood of the region. Some 400 different bird species and more than 60 species of



THIS PAGE: Enjoy breathtaking evenings under starry skies on the banks of the Luangwa River, at Time + Tide Chinzombo in Zambia. The crystal-clear skies and almost zero light pollution make stargazing here as captivating as spotting wildlife... almost!



ABOVE: The stunning Jackalberry Treehouse at Flatdogs Camp is rustic, romantic and *right* on the edge of a lagoon, offering a front-row seat to incredible wildlife from its beautiful deck. OPPOSITE [CLOCKWISE FROM TOP] The luxury safari tents at Time + Tide Chinzombo are located on the banks of the Luangwa River, where honking hippos provide the glorious soundtrack; Boating safaris let you view wildlife from a totally different perspective; Zambia is a paradise for birdwatchers.



Image: Time + Tide Chinzombo

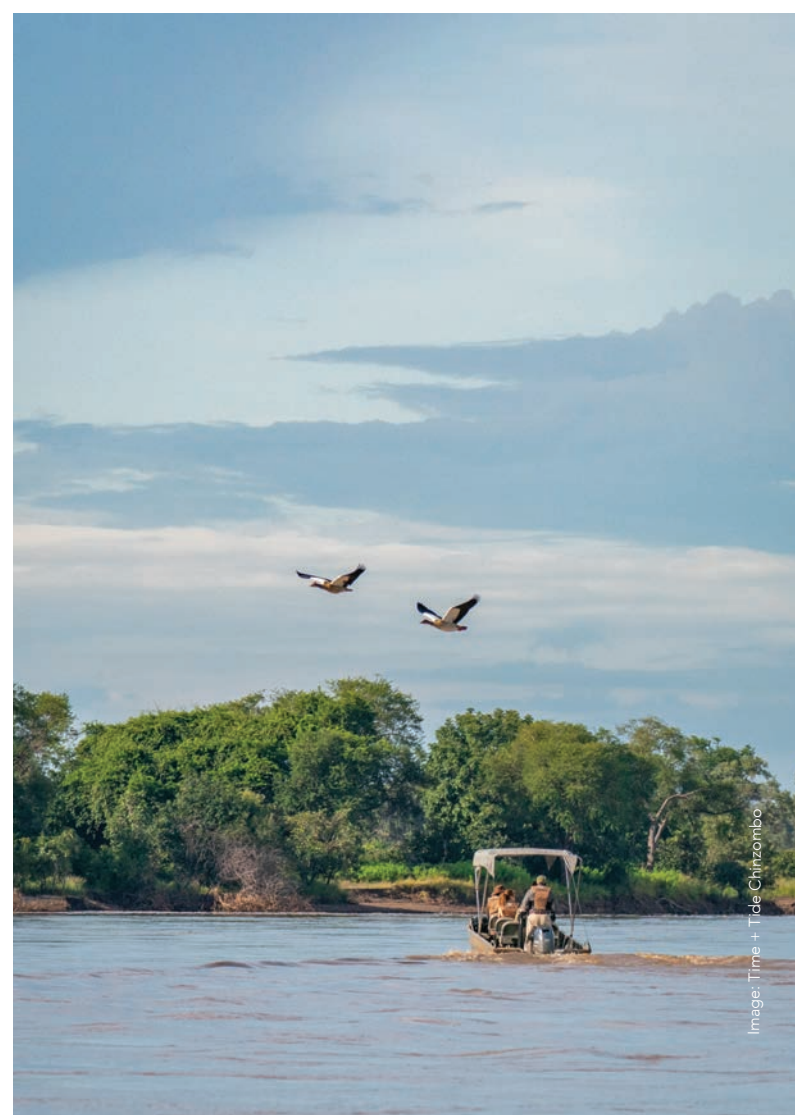


Image: Time + Tide Chinzombo

mammals call this 9,000-square-kilometre park home, located in the eastern part of Zambia. This is the birthplace of the walking safari: according to the pioneer of the concept, Norman Carr, “You do not know a place, until you have walked it”.

Lower Zambezi National Park, located in southeastern Zambia, is less than half the size of South Luangwa, but just as jaw-dropping. The magnificent Zambezi River, the fourth-longest river in Africa, is the defining feature here and you’ll definitely want to spend a lot of time on and near the water: fishing for the mighty tiger fish and getting a unique perspective on the wildlife and landscapes on a canoeing safari or boat cruise.

Both of these national parks combine effortlessly to create an unforgettable safari holiday, as we can attest after an incredible week in each. You can do an early morning walking safari in South Luangwa, and be enjoying a boating safari in Lower Zambezi by late afternoon on the very same day,

gliding downstream on a canoe while elephants look on from the riverbanks, hippos peek above the water to peer at you, and huge sunbathing crocs slide into the water as you pass by.

SOUTH LUANGWA NATIONAL PARK

First stop for us in South Luangwa was the relaxed, friendly and fantastic value-for-money, **Flatdogs Camp**. There are loads of brilliant accommodation options here, including our home for two nights: the delightful Jackalberry Tree House. Wrapped around enormous jackalberry trees, with sweeping wooden decks that sit about two metres off the ground, the entire front of the treehouse is open. You sleep, eat, shower and relax overlooking a private lagoon that attracts an endless procession of animals. Flatdogs’ communal area features a fab bar, restaurant and pool area, but we also took the opportunity to enjoy →



Image: Time + Tide Chinzombo

ABOVE: Walking safaris offer an intimate encounter with wildlife and the untamed African bush. They originated in Zambia's South Luangwa National Park, and no trip here is complete without heading out on foot. OPPOSITE [TOP] The luxury safari tents at Puku Ridge Camp feature a tower with star bed, so you can sleep under the vast African sky. [BOTTOM] At Puku Ridge there's an open-air lounge and dining area, campfire, and a viewing hide overlooking a waterhole that teems with wildlife, day and night.



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private dining on our enormous treehouse deck. It's the first time I've ever seen a table laid with condiments *and* a slingshot, but the baboons in Zambia are very cheeky! 'Flat dog' may be another name for a crocodile, but a hippo was actually our first wildlife encounter at this lovely spot. Later, elephants looked on as we took advantage of the beautiful outdoor showers. What a welcome to Zambia.

Our next port of call was the über-glam **Time + Tide Chinzombo**. After a morning game drive in the park we pulled up at the river, hopped on a boat and meandered across to this luxe retreat. Get ready to give your Insta account a workout, because this camp is bee-yoo-ti-ful. The fact it was designed by award-winning architects is not remotely surprising, and its peaceful, perfect location on the river's edge is breathtaking. There's a super-stylish lounge, dining, bar and fire pit area, and six truly beautiful – and massive – villas.

Highly romantic, they're the perfect blend of old-safari chic and contemporary cool, and watching hippos frolicking in the Luangwa River from the freestanding bath in your luxurious bathroom or your private plunge pool on the shady deck is a joyous pastime. We enjoyed incredible game drives, culminating in serene sundowners by the river, where the sunset jostled for attention with the rising moon.

For a final treat in this part of Zambia we headed to **Puku Ridge Camp**. This remote, semi-tented camp overlooks a game-rich floodplain that teems with wildlife day and night. Even if you don't feel like going out on a game drive (are you mad?), you can sit back and watch the wildlife from just about anywhere in camp. The lovely communal area features a first-class restaurant, fire pit and photographic hide, and there are just eight safari tents. Each features a private plunge pool on the lower deck and a roof tower with star bed ↗



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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: A massage at the open-air Royal Zambezi Bush Spa is an indulgence you'll dream about long after you return home; Zambia is wildlife-rich and less crowded than other destinations in Africa, and ideal for travellers seeking a prime safari experience. As well as lions, you've got a great chance of seeing leopards, wild dogs and so much more; You'll definitely see elephants in Lower Zambezi National Park – and very possibly in huge numbers when they congregate at the river during the dry season; Bath time at Chongwe House, the award-winning four-bedroom, four-bathroom private home that's part of Time + Tide Chongwe.

for romantic nights sleeping under African stars. Heading out for an evening game drive and the most surprising, beautiful sundowners (no more or I'll ruin the surprise for future guests), we came across a herd of more than 20 giraffe, while on the following morning's drive, our last in South Luangwa, we were farewelled by hundreds of buffalo.

LOWER ZAMBEZI NATIONAL PARK

Our first home in this part of Zambia was **Royal Zambezi Lodge**. After checking into our gorgeous room with private pool we hopped straight onto a boat for our inaugural journey down the mighty Zambezi – stopping for private drinks on a sand island, just the two of us and our brilliant guide, boat driver, barman, romantic lighting and lots of gin and tonic. Other highlights of our stay included a surprise lunch on a boat, a fun (and fruitless) fishing expedition, and epic game drives where lions, leopards and wild dogs

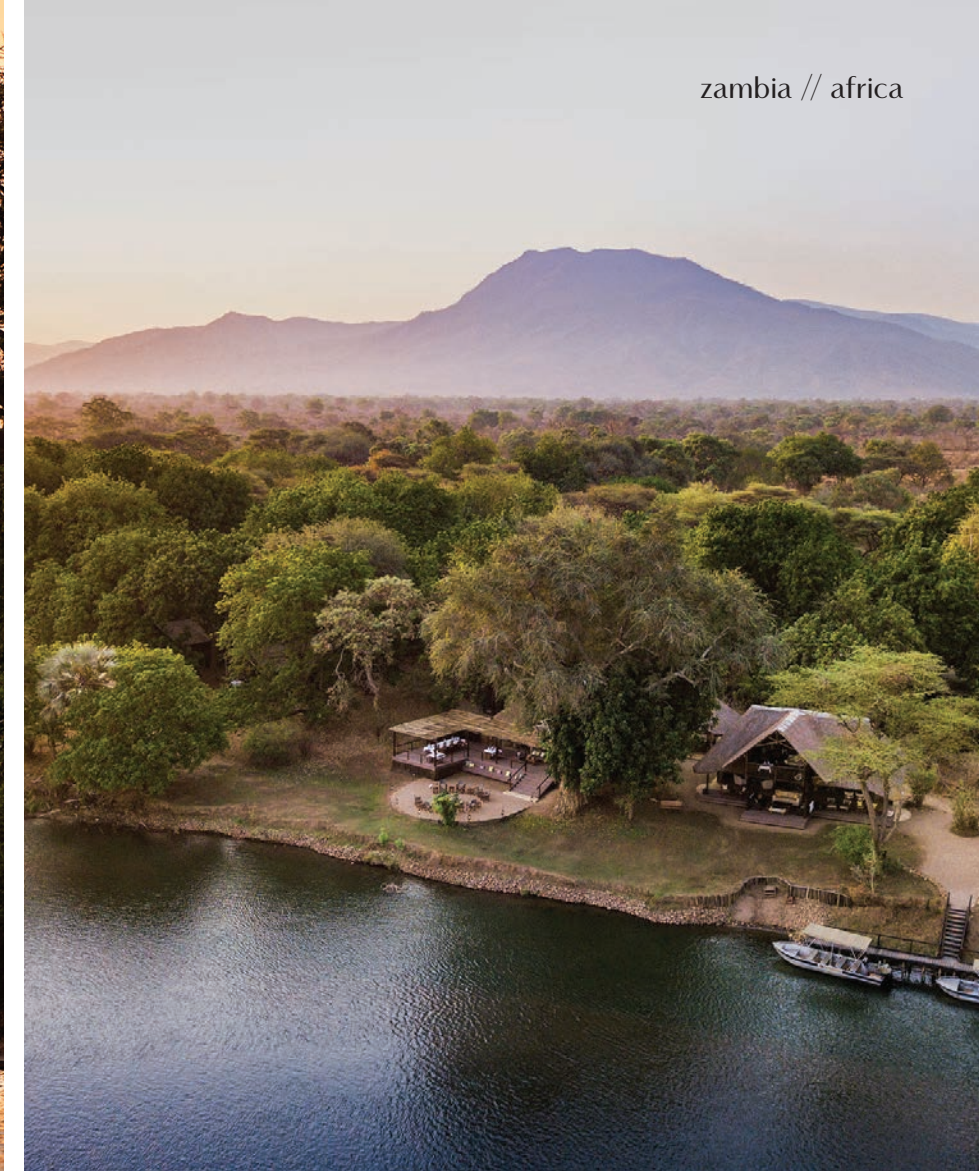
were just some of the wildlife we encountered. A glorious massage in the open-air Royal Zambezi Bush Spa may go down as my favourite hour in all of 2024.

A short drive took us to our next home: **Time + Tide Chongwe**, a tented camp with the most gorgeous location, right where the Zambezi and Chongwe Rivers meet. Lunch that day was enjoyed while floating down the Zambezi on a boat, while in the evening we dined beneath a canopy of winterthorn trees next to a sandy campfire and the river. The next morning, on the most fantastic game drive, we witnessed the birth of a water buck: a type of antelope that, when fully grown, features huge horns and an iconic white circle marking on its butt that looks just like a target. This rare privilege made us the envy of all the other guides, who had never seen such a sight in all their years of tracking these magnificent creatures.

Next up was the spectacular **Chiawa Camp**, where we passed the first afternoon on our private verandah in blissful ↪



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Chiawa Camp, one of the most luxurious and iconic camps in the Lower Zambezi, has a romantic new open-air bedroom called the Star Drift. After a private four-course dinner served on a boat while drifting down the Zambezi River at sunset you'll be dropped off at the four-metre-high star bed, where a bottle of bubbly and a hot bath will be waiting; An aerial view of Chiawa Camp, located right on the edge of the Zambezi River; At Chiawa's Star Drift you'll sleep in a queen-size, mosquito-netted fourposter bed, under the stars and with camp staff just a call away. In the morning, enjoy a continental breakfast and some time in the photographic hide on the ground floor, before returning to camp or heading out on a morning game drive; As well as the pool at Chiawa there's a gym, a large open bar and lounge overlooking the Zambezi River, an elevated observation deck with a telescope, a separate dining area, and an outdoor boma for starlit evenings.





There's a maximum of eight guests at the incredible Old Mondoro Bush Camp, but you'll always have plenty of local visitors as elephants roam freely here, providing endless entertainment.

relaxation, alternating between outdoor shower, plunge pool and hammock as a parade of passing animals provided the entertainment. Later, after high tea in the main camp area where sepia photographs document the fascinating history of this owner-run camp, we departed for a game drive where lions came so close they literally brushed up against our vehicle, and sundowners were dispensed from a mobile bush bar against the backdrop of the Zambezi and a heavenly sunset. Back at camp we marvelled at Chiawa's exquisite new four-metre-high Star Bed tower, before swapping stories with people from all over the world at a fantastic communal dinner.

About an hour downstream from Chiawa is its more rustic sister camp, **Old Mondoro Bush Camp**. Intimacy and simplicity define this little piece of heaven that houses just eight guests in the entire camp. Incredible game-viewing goes

without saying: we saw the Big Four twice a day every day (the rhino has sadly been poached to extinction in Zambia), marvelled at honey badgers and even spotted a two-metre-long black mamba. Back at camp, we dined on the deck of our chalet, where views are of the Zambezi and visitors are of the pachyderm variety. The elephants like to feast on the leaves of the camp's winter thorn trees, so they're a common sight around the camp. Watching them playing in the lagoon right in front of your chalet is an experience that can only be topped if you happen to be soaking in the outdoor bath at the same time.

These and many more unforgettable experiences await visitors to the wonderful Zambia. For an awe-inspiring adventure, contact Jono or Danica at Encompass Africa. www.encompassafrica.com.au 