

# TOP 10 LOCAL LEISURE DESTINATIONS IN ZAMBIA

STORY & IMAGES by Christopher Clarke

*Have a look through most reputable international travel guides and you'll find that the whole of Zambia is all too often reduced to little more than Victoria Falls. Spectacular as the falls are, this is a terrible injustice to the rest of this incredible and enigmatic country.*

*But don't despair. I'm just back in "the office" after a six week and 8,000km trip around Zambia with a team from Zambia Tourism and I've taken it upon myself to fill in some of the gaps. So from the best national parks to lakes as big as oceans, to towns and cities bursting with light and life and a whole lot more in-between, here's a rundown of my top ten leisure destinations in Zambia.*

## 1. South Luangwa National Park:

Although South Luangwa is only about half the size of other southern African heavyweights like Kruger in South Africa or Etosha in Namibia and not so well-known internationally, from my experience Zambia's finest comes out on top every time. Aptly nicknamed the Valley of the Leopard, if you go to South Luangwa and don't see leopard you need your eyes tested.

The incredibly diverse landscapes range from dense forests of mopane trees and the leopard's favourite sausage trees, to wide open savanna punctuated only by the occasional lonely baobab, all hugged by the wide and winding Luangwa River. Stay at the rustic Track and Trail River Camp just outside the park and enjoy their unique photographic game drives, or if it all gets a bit too much just relax and watch the hippos from the raised riverside rim-flow pool.

## 2. Lusaka:

Most visitors to Lusaka treat the capital as if it was essentially one big airport terminal. They might go to the foreign exchange to change

some currency, pick up a few last minute curios for the family if they are on their way back home, check their emails. That's about it. Then they will be off to other parts asap. But take a day or two to be a tourist in the city and you'll find it has plenty to offer. There are a number of bustling local markets, some good restaurants and nightlife hotspots, a growing number of plush shopping malls and a range of cultural events and festivals to enjoy throughout the year. Lusaka is one of Africa's fastest-growing cities and you can certainly feel it. To overlook Lusaka is to overlook modern Zambia and modern Zambians.

## 3. Lower Zambezi Basin:

Just a few hours drive from Lusaka (or a quick 30 minute chartered flight), this part of the mighty Zambezi River has become a particular favourite with fishing aficionados. Healthy tiger fish and bream catches are common. Fishing trips can be organized from a number of the lodges that are found along the lush green river banks within Lower Zambezi National Park, as can day long canoeing trips and even 3 – 5

day canoeing safaris. On these trips it's not uncommon to see herds of up to a hundred elephants "island hopping" across the river channels. Potato Bush Camp and Chiawa Camp are among the best for luxury and activities, whilst Mvuu Lodge just outside the park is a more simple and economical "bush" option.

## 4. Kapichya and Shiwa Ng'andu:

If you are in need of a healthy dose of colonial history and an unbeatable hot bath, then a stopover at Kapichya Hot Springs Lodge is an absolute must. The hot spring at Kapichya is like a secret tropical oasis, with a canopy of enormous palm leaves arching over the crystal clear water that bubbles up from the white sand below. Kapichya is just 19kms away from the spectacularly incongruous Shiwa Ng'andu, the former home of a young British colonial officer who felt a deep love for this area. The huge and elaborate manor house that stands today tells a number of fascinating stories about both the eccentricity and determination of its creator and the colonial heritage of Zambia in general.



## Local Destination

### 5. Liuwa Plains:

If remoteness is what you are looking for, then you'd do well to find anywhere better than Liuwa Plains National Park in Western Province. The wide open plains, marshes and pans stretch for mile upon mile in every direction and are home to a staggering array of birdlife as well as hyena, wild dog and the famous lioness Lady Liuwa (star of the documentary 'The Last Lioness') and her cubs. Liuwa also plays host to the second biggest migration of blue wildebeest in Africa, who arrive in their thousands from Angola with the onset of the rains in late October and early November each year. Western Province is also worth a visit in April to enjoy the Kuomboka Traditional Ceremony held each year by the Lozi to commemorate the end of the rainy season.

Liuwa Plains



Lusaka



### 6. Lake Kariba:

The increasingly fashionable Lake Kariba is the largest man-made dam in Africa and the closest thing in Zambia to the French Riviera. Great sunsets, spectacular views, ice cold sundowners, sunbathing, watersports, fishing, tasty local crayfish and general relaxation are generally the order of the day around here, and a houseboat holiday is a particularly great way to enjoy all of the above. Otherwise you can stay in one of the numerous reasonably-priced lodges, self-catering villas or campsites along the edge of the lake in and around the town of Siavonga, many of which in some way capture the strangely Mediterranean feel of this area. An increasing number of Zambia's wealthy elite own second or even third homes in Siavonga. The lake is an easy 200kms or so from Lusaka.



Lake Kariba



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**7. Kafue National Park:** Kafue is Zambia's oldest and largest national park, covering a massive 22,400km<sup>2</sup> (just a little bit smaller than Rwanda and twice the size of The Gambia), which also makes it one of the largest parks in Africa. Thanks to its size, variety of ecosystems and the sustenance provided by the beautiful Kafue River, this park has an unrivalled diversity of game, including one of Africa's largest populations of wild dog. From either Livingstone or Lusaka, you can get to the park in a few hours by car, yet much of the park remains relatively unexplored. Stay at the refined yet understated Kaing-U Camp right on the eastern fringes of the park and canoe or take a sunset boat cruise through the amazing granite boulders that characterize this particularly tranquil part of the river.



*Kafue National Park*



*Kapichya*

### 8. Chingola and the Copperbelt:

The small town of Chingola in the Copperbelt region might seem like a strange choice on this list, but it's a valid one in the name of a bit of diversity and showing a slightly different side of Zambia than just bodies of water and wildlife. Chingola is the prettiest of the Copperbelt towns with a profusion of trees and flowers throughout the town. Chingola is also home to the biggest open-cast mine in Africa (it's open to visitors) and one of the most beautiful and best-kept golf courses on the entire continent. Stay at the prestigious and popular Protea Hotel and, if you're missing the wildlife already, visit the nearby Chimfunshi Chimpanzee Sanctuary. Otherwise enjoy the good transport links with other hubs in the Copperbelt and get a sense of the beating heart of Zambia's industry.

### 9. Lake Tanganyika and the Northern Circuit:

For the most part, the further north you travel in Zambia the fewer the tourists. But in many ways that's precisely the main appeal of the Northern Circuit. The people you'll meet here will be amongst the



most welcoming of anywhere in Zambia. And that's saying something. The lake itself, one of Africa's Great Lakes, looks more like a vast ocean stretching across the horizon. It's another great spot for fishing, kayaking, exploring the local villages along the water's edge, or hiking into the forests that cover the surrounding hills. Stay at Ndole Bay Lodge for a particularly peaceful beach getaway and enjoy a sundowner on what must be one of the most picturesque pontoons in the whole of Africa. Getting to and from the lake you can visit a number of stunning waterfalls, some of which are only narrowly surpassed by Victoria Falls.

### 10. Livingstone and Victoria Falls:

Although I set out at the beginning of this feature to level the playing field somewhat and give some lesser known Zambian locations the spotlight they deserve, obviously I couldn't leave Victoria Falls out of this list altogether. Over the years this incredible natural wonder has exhausted all the superlatives in the dictionary in attempts to describe it, but none manage to do it justice. You have to see it for yourself. Once your jaw has returned to its usual position and your eyes have stopped popping out of your head, sign up for some of the unprecedented number of adrenaline activities on offer in and around the falls, and then enjoy a drink on the banks of the Zambezi at the Royal Livingstone or, if colonial nostalgia isn't your thing, catch some live music at the Zambezi Sun or enjoy the lively and unpretentious vibe at the Zambezi café in town. ✍️



Lake Tanganyika



Victoria Falls