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# WALK THIS WAY

BY LISA LOVERRO

Elephants in front of Robin Pope's Luangwa Safari House



A few months ago, while researching Safari options in Africa, I came across a unique concept that peaked my interest...walking safaris in Zambia. Unlike conventional safaris where one rides in a jeep feverishly tracking that elusive leopard, these safaris are on foot. I was so intrigued by the concept that I needed to check it out for myself.

The trip took me deep into the country of Zambia, which in itself was an adventure. I had visited the continent of Africa before during a trip to South Africa and although that country is magical and beautiful with pristine cities like Cape Town, Zambia seemed more remote, more like the “real” Africa. Finally, after the long

flight over from New York on South African Airways ([www.flysaa.com](http://www.flysaa.com)) into Johannesburg, I caught a flight to Lusaka, the capital of Zambia. From there I jumped on Zambia’s finest airline, Proflight ([www.proflight-zambia.com](http://www.proflight-zambia.com)). The one-hour flight in their gold-colored, twin-engine aircraft flew me over lush mountains and valleys before finally touching down into the town of Mfuwe, nearby to South Luangwa National Park and my final destination.

The South Luangwa National Park is one of Zambia’s premier wildlife reserves, if not one of the finest in all of Africa. This is not a stocked game reserve you may find in other parts of Africa, but a natural, unspoiled lush park with one of Africa’s major river systems, the Lu-

angwa River, running through it. It’s also home to the largest concentration of hippos in the world, over 5,000 of them. In fact, the park itself is the playground for over 60 different animals species, including lion, leopard and elephant as well as 450 different types of birds; needless to say, the wildlife here is abundant.

## ROUGHING IT?

Traveling alone can be a bit daunting, especially when venturing into such a remote area of the world, so I was happy to see upon my arrival, a sign bearing my name held by a gentlemen with a friendly smile. This gentle soul’s name was Abraham and he was to be my guide for the next few days; I was immediately put at ease.

My first few nights were spent at the classic Norman Carr Safari Lodge ([www.normancarrsafaris.com](http://www.normancarrsafaris.com)). It seems Norman Carr, himself, was the first to introduce the idea of walking safaris over fifty years ago and the company, now run by his son, is one of the original Safari organizations in Zambia.

There's no roughing it here! Their main lodge, Kapani, is a luxury facility accommodating up to twenty guests consisting of eight standard suites and two larger, more spacious suites. Offering rustic style accommodations, there's even a pool, library and gift shop. Dependent on weather, meals can be enjoyed al fresco on the terrace along the banks of the lagoon on which it sits. Additionally, there are four individually designed "bush" camps, operational in the dry season. The bush camps, not opened during my visit, are even more remote than the main lodge, deep in the heart of the park.

The hospitality and warmth exuded by my guide Abraham was carried over to the rest of the staff and I was feeling quite comfortable for my first night in Zambia. Later that evening, as I settled into my mosquito net-draped bed, I anxiously awaited the 5:00am alarm sound (a gentle knock on my door) to get up and get going

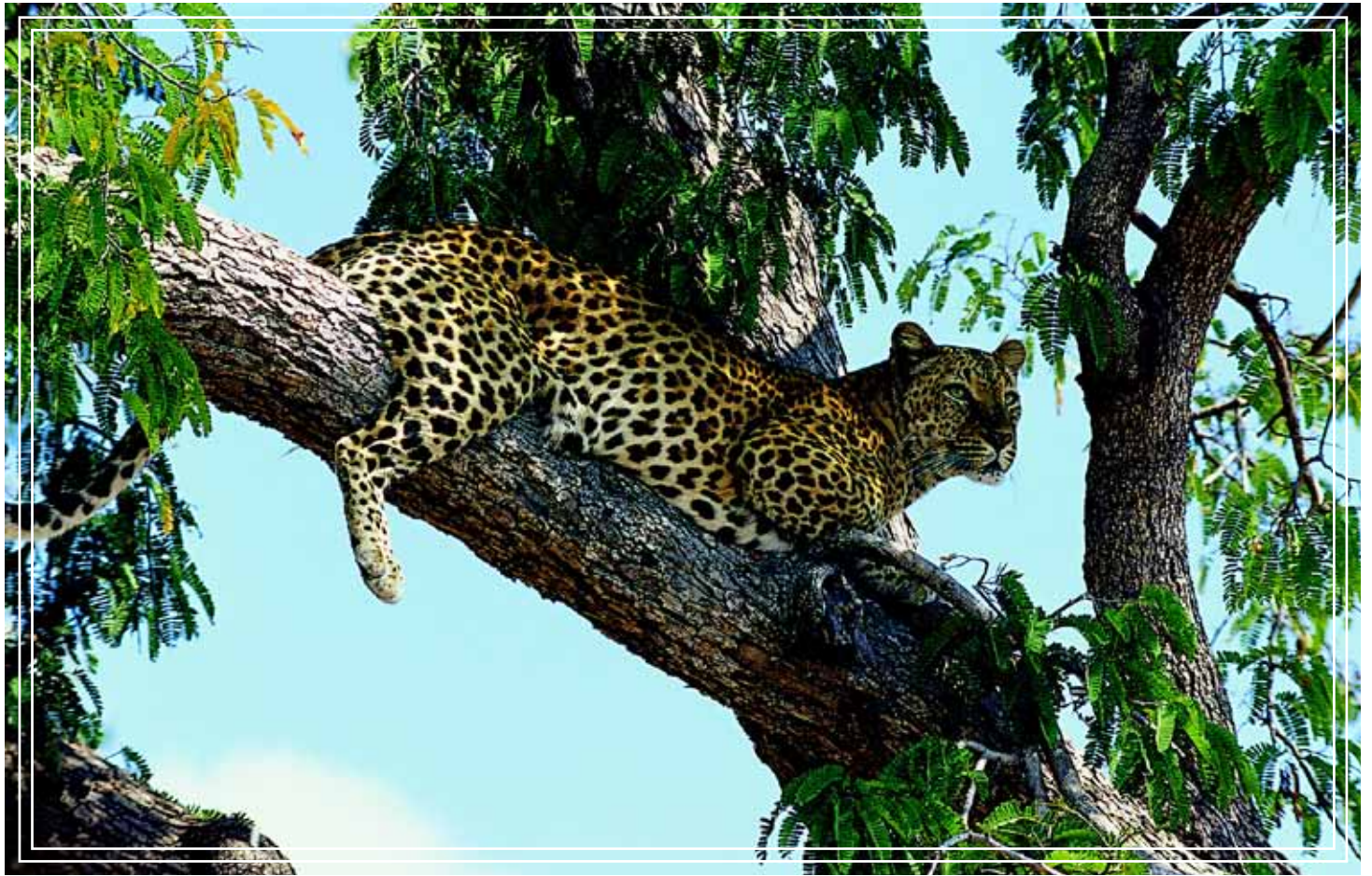
on my first walking safari. There's no sleeping in while on Safari!

#### **WATCH YOUR STEP!**

"Who's the guy accompanying us with the .375 caliber rifle," I whispered to Abraham as we started off down the trail. He smiled and replied "oh he comes along with us just in case." Hmm, "just in case?" I guess this was supposed to make me feel somewhat safe and secure, which in fact, it did.

While walking, the footing is difficult as the elephant's footprints leave gaping holes in the ground making for uneven terrain; something I never really thought about while in a jeep. Also, seeing the animals at eye level as opposed to in a jeep makes you feel one with them; you get a real feel for their "home" in the bush. Within fifteen minutes we had our first encounter with a herd of Zebra, which I came to find out were harmless for the most part. I was able to get very close to them without any problem and sensed they were as curious about me as I was about them. Next up, a herd of elephant, a bit trickier to deal, with and we needed to keep our distance. These massive animals can sense intruders by smell so depending on how the wind is blowing, you may or may not be detected. »





Luckily, the wind was in our favor and we were able to spend quite some time observing the entire herd, from babies to adults. That night, during the conventional jeep drives we tracked leopards and lions and stopped for the traditional sunset cocktails or “sundowners” as they are commonly called. What can I say about the African sunsets? There are no words to describe its beauty as the light sweeps across the sky... nature’s most beautiful paintings coming to life in the African savannah.

During the day I explored the nearby village, learning about life in Zambia and visiting local communities. A trip to the Yosefe Day School offered a glimpse into the day-to-day life of the school children. Norman Carr Safaris is very active in supporting this school ([www.kapanischool-project.com](http://www.kapanischool-project.com)); its just one of many ways we can all help to make a difference.

After two magical days walking at Norman Carr Safaris with Abraham (who, by the way was voted Best Guide in Zambia in 2009), it was off to experience another lodge in the area, Robin Pope Safaris ([www.robinpopesafaris.net](http://www.robinpopesafaris.net)).

#### TAKE ME TO THE RIVER

In contrast to Norman Carr Safari Lodge based in the Park, Robin Pope’s Nkwali Lodge sits just outside the Park, ideally located directly on the banks of the Luangwa River. With open-air, high-end accommodations, my spacious room was in clear view of hundreds of hippos wading in the river located directly in front of my bed. In addition to the Nkwali camp, Robin Pope also has a number of other unique accommodations. One of them, the Luangwa Safari House, has won The Good Safari Guide’s “Best Safari House in Africa” award for the second time. A uniquely designed home suitable for up to



Open-air accommodations at Robin Pope’s Nkwali Lodge

eight guests and perfect for families, they offer a private chef and house manager. They also offer a mobile camps experience (offered mid-June to early October); movable camps heading deeper and deeper into the bush while guests walk from one to the other each day.

My first day at Robin Pope Safaris began with a quick boat ride across the river to access the park and, after easily dodging those pesky hippos, we made it across within five minutes. The sun was bright and my senses alert, as we started on our way in search of the Thornicroft giraffe, a specific type of giraffe exclusive to the country of Zambia and the Luangwa Valley. Within twenty minutes we came up close and personal with not one, but four of these majestic creatures, at times able to come within 10-15 feet of them!

The evening drives allowed for incredible game viewing as well, including five different leopard sightings on just one drive alone! Lion, Buffalo and various antelope were all easily spotted here. It is truly a haven for wildlife and there’s nothing like finding those big cats!



**SLEEPLESS IN ZAMBIA**

After another gourmet dinner, I retired to my “chalet.” The first night at Robin Pope was a bit frightful for this city girl as I listened to the snorting of hippos and roaring of lions into the early morning hours. There was a whistle next to my bed “just in case.” Hmm, there’s that phrase again. Some may have been lulled to sleep by these sounds of nature but I, on the other hand, found them a bit disturbing. That being said, once I began to settle into my surroundings I couldn’t wait to “hit the hay” to hear what nature’s orchestra had in store for me each night. No need for an alarm clock, as the hippos are sure to wake even the heaviest of sleepers! I was completely out of my element but slowly getting used to the sounds of the jungle.

**GIVING BACK**

Jo Pope of Robin Pope has been instrumental in the development of the Kawaza Village School ([www.kawaza.org](http://www.kawaza.org)) in the nearby local community. Pope states, “When I first saw the Kawaza primary school there were three teachers and 400 kids. The roof leaked and bats were everywhere. The conditions were appalling,” Now, through guest donations and funding she has not only improved the facility but pays the salary for eight of the twelve teachers.

When it came time for me to say goodbye to my new friends in Zambia, I left with memories lasting a lifetime. From the walking safaris and jeep drives to a scrumptious breakfast in the bush and a surprise sundowner cocktail party along the Wamilombe lagoon, the “real” Africa was shown to me in all its glory. My time with Norman Carr and Robin Pope Safaris was short but the experience is one I’ll never forget. I would highly suggest a visit to Zambia for a real walk on the wild side!

**THINGS TO KNOW:**

- All visitors are required to purchase a tourist visa. Visa can be obtained once you have arrived at the airport for a cost of \$50.00 USD.
- Malaria is prevalent in the region and medication should be taken (consult your doctor).
- Due to flight schedules, you may need to overnight in Zambia’s capital city of Lusaka. -The Eight Reedbuck Hotel ([www.tribehotels.co.zm](http://www.tribehotels.co.zm)) provides a clean, boutique accommodation with an excellent restaurant.



Standard suite at Norman Carr's Kapani Lodge

