

Trunk routes

Bouncing baboons and 'Ferrari safaris'? Tamara Hinson takes a whirlwind tour of Zambia and Zimbabwe

There's a downside to a safari, and that's the inevitable moment when your life back home suddenly seems rather bland.

I ponder this as Stanley, the wonderful barman at Shumba Camp in Zambia's Kafue National Park, is crouched at my feet, after offering to tie up my shoelaces. My excuse? It's the last day of my tour of Wilderness Safaris camps in Zimbabwe and Zambia, so I'm making the most of safari life and all that it entails: the five-star service, the thrill of being woken by a family of baboons using your tent as a bouncy castle, and the daily sundowners enjoyed in remote corners of the bush.

I've also come to the conclusion that even the most expensive safaris generally offer great value for money. Bear with me here. For many people, a safari isn't an annual holiday but a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Almost everything is included, so while the initial cost might make you wince, there's simply so much packed in that

you're unlikely to come away feeling short-changed. With the delicious breakfasts, the daily game drives, the services of some of Africa's top wildlife guides, the mid-morning brunches, lunches and sumptuous afternoon teas, the daily sundowners and delicious dinners – what's not to love?

▶ **LITTLE RUCKOMECHI, MANA POOLS NATIONAL PARK, ZIMBABWE**

With its plunge pool and spacious dining and living room tents, Little Ruckomechi feels intimate and homely, and would be ideal for small groups of friends or family. This four-tent camp opened last summer – a fact that didn't deter the curious elephant that stuck his tusks through the canvas roof of the dining tent on my first day.

Little Ruckomechi is on the banks of the Zambezi River, and throughout the night I could hear the local hippo family's honks and snorts. This camp is also where I saw my first kill, an incident that started when our guide, [▶](#)



ASK THE EXPERTS



Rose Hipwood, founder, The Luxury Safari Company
Combining Zambia and Zimbabwe in one safari is simple, and doing so has many advantages. Zambia has a huge number of camps, in fact, 30% of the country's land is allocated to national parks; while Zimbabwe is still the jewel of Africa, with very few people and abundant game.

Dean Morton, Zambezi operations manager, Wilderness Safaris
Zambia and Zimbabwe offer unforgettable ecotourism opportunities that can be tailor-made to suit guests' needs. First-time safari-goers may relish the big game-filled plains of Zimbabwe's Hwange National Park, while regular Africa enthusiasts may want to travel to remote wilderness regions such as the Busanga Plains in Zambia's Kafue National Park.

Honest Siyawareva, announced that it was time for a 'Ferrari safari'.

Nearby, a wildebeest was being attacked by four lions, and we launched down the dirt track. One mile later, we discovered a peeved-looking wildebeest somehow still managing to walk around, even while three lions were chewing ferociously at his behind, with four tiny cubs, faces drenched in blood, looking on.

It certainly felt surreal to be back at the camp 20 minutes later, relaxing by the pool and devouring the world's fluffiest profiteroles, enjoying the upside of a luxury safari after seeing nature's savage side.

Book it: From £843 per person, per night, based on two people sharing.

▶ TOKA LEYA CAMP, MOSI-OA-TUNYA NATIONAL PARK, ZAMBIA

Toka Leya felt less remote than the other sites we visited, and is easily accessible by road from nearby Livingstone, although guests are still ferried to the camp by boat.

There are 12 tents, including three designed for families. Its position on the river makes it an ideal spot from which to observe



We saw a wildebeest still managing to walk around even while three lions chewed at his behind

BELOW: Toka Leya Camp, Zambia

crocodiles, hippos and rare birds.

There's a recently refurbished two-room spa, and spacious, book-filled public areas. It's the kind of place that would suit those not quite ready to brave the remotest of camps, and would also work well for families with young children or as a final stop on a multi-camp trip.

I particularly loved my tent at Toka Leya, which had an open-air bath on the patio (other tents, although incredibly spacious, only had showers).

Victoria Falls is just a short drive away, as is the recently expanded Victoria Falls airport, making camps in both Zambia and Zimbabwe easily accessible. **Book it:** From £488 per night, based on two people sharing.

▶ SHUMBA CAMP, KAFUE NATIONAL PARK, ZAMBIA

When the rain falls, this six-tent camp turns into an island, which is why it's open only between the start of June and end of October.

Shumba means lion, and it's the ideal base for fans of big cats – although given the high cost of internal air transfers, it's worth bearing in mind that this is one of Zambia's more remote camps, a



ABOVE: Shumba Camp game drive, Zambia

LEFT: Little Ruckomechi tent interior, Zimbabwe

90-minute flight from Lusaka.

Lions are regularly spotted basking on the decking areas, and a kill had taken place in front of the camp days before our arrival. In reality, these lions aren't remotely interested in devouring guests, but the raised boardwalk on which the luxurious tents sit provides a measure of reassurance for those of a nervous disposition.

My favourite bit was the enormous communal terrace, which looks out over Busanga Plains. After dinner we'd gather around the fire pit for fireside beers with our guides, who'd regale us with fantastic stories, like the one about the guest who

deafened a super-sized bug by blasting it with what she assumed was bug spray, only to discover it was the air-horn given to all guests for use in an emergency.

And if you're wondering if I ever used my own air horn, the answer's no, although I did come close. One morning I was awoken by an ear-splitting screeching. My entire tent was shaking violently. But when I saw a furry lump drop down onto the patio and scamper away, I realised it was simply a family of baboons using my tent as a trampoline. Just another day in the bush.

Book it: From £886 per night, based on two people sharing. wilderness-safaris.com



RIGHT: Standard tent, Shumba Camp, Zambia

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