



DREAM CATCHERS

Our accommodation guide to help you find the pick of the pillows in one of Africa's most remarkable wildlife regions: the Lower Zambezi Valley

AWAKENINGS

Sunrise in the Lower Zambezi Valley and the low light pours across the floodplains, igniting the tops of the winterthorn glades where elephants are feeding on fallen seedpods. No matter where you stay – luxury lodge, no-frills bushcamp or star bed sleep-out – wild Africa is all around you. The night air echoes to the rumble of lions. You fall asleep to the honking of hippos and awake to the yelping cries of fish eagles. Through it all runs the mighty **Zambezi**, Africa's fourth longest river, its mile-wide waters forming a natural barrier between Zimbabwe and Zambia who together share its natural wonders. On the Zimbabwean side is **Mana Pools National Park**, a stunning UNESCO World Heritage Site half the size of Surrey. On the opposite bank lies Zambia's **Lower Zambezi National Park**, a pristine wilderness lying at the foot of the Zambezi escarpment. Together they are a perfect hunting ground for lions, leopards and wild dogs; but above all this timeless valley is a land of giants, of towering winterthorns and the elephant herds that find sanctuary beneath their dappled shade. →

WORDS: BRIAN JACKMAN

Dawn chorus: Rukomechi Camp, situated on the Mana Pools floodplains, with views over the river to the Zambian escarpment beyond

WILDERNESS SAFARIS



DICK PITMAN

Mana Pools

ZIMBABWEAN SIDE

Understanding the geography of the park will explain the structure of the accommodation available

WORDS: **DICK PITMAN**

The ‘Middle Zambezi Valley Wildlife Complex’ extends along 160 miles of the Zambezi River between the Kariba and Cabora Bassa reservoirs, where the Zambezi Valley itself is defined by its twin escarpments, rising some 2000ft above the Valley lowlands. The northern escarpment lies close to the Zambian shore; on the Zimbabwean side, it lies up to 50km south of the Zambezi itself.

The entire complex covers about 14,000sq km. So why is so much of the wildlife tourism to this magnificent area confined to the (very roughly) 40sq km pocket-handkerchief-sized area beside the Zambezi and known locally – but not entirely correctly – as the ‘Mana Pools floodplains’?

Tourism tends to focus on spectacular gatherings of wildlife; and the Mana floodplains are one of very few – and

certainly the largest – spectacular dry-season ‘concentration areas’ for wildlife in the entire valley. The remainder of the area is of great interest to biologists and conservationists, and essential to the survival of Zambezi Valley wildlife, but less immediately attractive for tourists. Much of it consists of rather featureless mopane and other woodland, the main exception being the ‘dry forest’ known to locals as ‘jesse bush’.

Visitors by road will pass through these forests shortly before reaching the floodplain. They contain trees that are found nowhere else in the world; and you may see the relatively uncommon crested guineafowl, or glimpse the shy nyala antelope which you won’t see elsewhere in the Zambezi Valley. However, the forests are so dense that visibility is restricted to a few metres and it is positively dangerous to enter them on foot,

unless accompanied by a very experienced Mana guide.

All these areas are of critical importance to wildlife, because there’s no way that 40sq km of Mana floodplain could support even a fraction of the Park’s wildlife year-round.

This has to do with the availability of water and forage. Many wildlife species disperse throughout the Park during the rains, when natural – but temporary – water is abundant, and forage plentiful. At this time, the floodplains can be almost deserted, except for the resident impala and an occasional elephant bull.

From around June onwards, though, these back-country pans dry out and the forage diminishes. A slow wave of wildlife begins to move back to the Zambezi, and the Mana floodplains in particular.

This is because, firstly, there is water. Secondly because, in contrast to the sands of the hinterland, the Mana floodplains (more correctly called ‘alluvial terraces’) consist of fertile silts that support lush grazing that has been largely untouched during the rainy months. Thirdly, the winterthorn (*Faidherbia albida*) woodlands that have developed on these silts have a so-called ‘reverse foliage cycle’: they shed their leaves in summer and grow them again as winter approaches. So they represent an irresistible supply of dry-season browsing and develop an abundance of highly nutritious pods beloved by elephants in particular. This is why

one of the archetypal Mana Pools photos is of an elephant bull reaching up to pull down a leaf-and pod-laden winterthorn branch.

By the time most visitors arrive – during the dry season – most of the ‘understorey’ of grasses and shrubs has gone, providing long vistas in which other species – notably impala, zebra, kudu, eland and indeed lions and wild dogs – are easily spotted.

The floodplains offer a unique combination of woodland, water and spectacular scenery. One of the ‘tricks’ of visiting Mana is to select a camp that has a good view of the Zambezi and the escarpment beyond. Given the right spot, you hardly need stir from your chair to witness the incredible mingling of wildlife and majestic scenery.

Inevitably, the Middle Zambezi complex has become a magnet for tourism and its accompanying development, ranging from relatively simple fishing camps – mostly lying in the so-called ‘safari areas’ that flank the Mana Pools National Park itself – to upmarket safari camps, the latter being largely concentrated along the river frontage of the floodplains.

This is understandable, but has brought problems of its own. Competition among safari operators for the much-coveted riverfront sites is fierce. Meanwhile, a cash-strapped Zimbabwe National Parks Authority (ZimParks) can find it difficult to resist the low-hanging fruit represented by selling

additional concessions along the floodplain frontage. Some public camp sites have recently been appropriated for this purpose, and no substitutes have been designated.

To its credit, ZimParks has hitherto managed to maintain a reasonable space between such concessions. The ‘Sapi Safari Area’ (formerly used for hunting) on its eastern boundary has recently become a photographic safari concession (see box,

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page 67); and ZimParks has also made considerable efforts to make tourism concessions available to operators further within the Mana Pools National Park. But viable sites in these hinterland areas are few and far between, and even those operators who have taken them up often find it necessary to extend their activities into the floodplain frontage in order to maintain their own competitive positions.

The risk does therefore exist that the Mana floodplain will become a victim of its own

popularity, particularly during the peak tourism dry-season months from August through to the onset of the rains in November.

Notwithstanding this concern, the Mana floodplains offer some of the finest wildlife experiences available in southern Africa – and unique advantages as well, because of their open nature and superb visibility.

Provided you pay for a day’s licence and exercise caution and common sense, self-drive

visitors to the ZimParks camps are allowed to get out of their cars and walk in the floodplain woodlands without a guide. This is a priceless privilege, possibly unique among Africa’s wildlife Parks. Nevertheless, it’s well worth staying at one of the established tourist camps. Several of Zimbabwe’s top walking guides operate here, and they will give you a real insight to the beauty of nature’s workings, enhance your enjoyment, and encourage you to learn more about Mana’s place in the greater scheme of things. →



WHERE TO STAY

The accommodation options within the Mana Pools National Park and adjacent Sapi wilderness area vary in size and design, but all are subject to strict environmental impact criteria which demand preservation of the area's unique wilderness values. Most of the camps are seasonal (closed during the rainy season months – usually December to March – because access is very limited). During the safari season (April–October), access is either by air charter, 4WD road transfer or self-drive. A standard fare of activities, with game drives and walks the principle, are offered at most camps. It is likely they will operate or be able to organise canoeing trips on the Zambezi with a specialist professional guide.

WORDS: SALLY WYNN

RIVERFRONT LODGES/CAMPS

The largest facilities, situated in their own, exclusive-use concession areas. The biggest accommodates 32 guests.

1 Ruckomechi Camp and Little Ruckomechi (Wilderness Safaris)

A permanent camp on a private concession in woodland near the confluence of the Zambezi and Ruckomechi Rivers. It has 10 spacious en suite tented units built on wooden platforms and an expansive wooden-decked central living area, with dining-sitting-bar area, pool, and a star-gazing deck. Within the concession is Little Ruckomechi tented camp, which is available for exclusive use by groups of up to six people.

2 Vundu Camp (Bushlife Safaris)

This camp has seven spacious tent-under-thatch en suite chalets and a family unit. Its large, double-storey, wooden central living area is set under shady trees overlooking the river. The main camp is complemented by Little Vundu, a smaller five-tent bush camp 3km upstream. This can be booked for exclusive use and is designed for those who prefer a more traditional tented camp safari experience. Vundu Camp is renowned for its successful anti-poaching efforts.

Bushlife Safaris also offer Ruwezi Canoe Trails – mobile canoeing safaris along the Zambezi – and a mobile tented camp at Chitake Springs in the south of Mana Pools.



5 WILDERNESS SAFARIS

3 Mana Pools Safari Lodge (Zambezi Cruise & Safaris)

This extensive lodge is located at the western end of the Mana Pools floodplain area. Set into thick natural woodland of riverine figs, African mango and Apple-ring albidia trees, it consists of 12 thatched and decked chalets and a vast main decked living area, with a covered swimming pool.

4 Nyamatusi Camp and Nyamatusi Mahogany (African Bush Camps)

Nyamatusi Camp consists of six luxury tented suites set in a remote part of Mana Pools, downstream from the main floodplain. The camp is spread out widely along the banks of the Zambezi, overlooking the river and the hills of the Zambian escarpment beyond. Its smaller family camp, Nyamatusi Mahogany, consists of two luxury tented suites and two family suites.

5 Chikwenya Camp (Wilderness Safaris)

Chikwenya Camp is situated on a private concession at the eastern boundary of Mana Pools overlooking the confluence of the Sapi and Zambezi Rivers, with a backdrop of the Zambezi escarpment mountains. The camp has seven luxury tents, including two family units. All stand on low wooden decks with pine walkways linking them to the raised main area.

6 Sapi Explorers Camp (Great Plains Conservation)

The 120,000-hectare private Sapi concession adjacent to and downstream of Mana Pools was awarded to operators Great Plains Conservation in 2016 and converted to a private photographic reserve (see 'Mana from heaven', p67). Sapi Explorers Camp, situated on the river front, was the first development to be built on the new concession, with five en suite Explorers-

style tents. At Sapi Springs Camp, located inland on the Sapi River, a small group of guests have the opportunity to overnight in the open-air, on a raised platform, under a canopy of indigenous trees. This camp will be rebuilt, and new camps developed, in the coming years.

INLAND LODGES/CAMPS

These are slightly smaller (maximum 14 guests), but also on private concession areas. A further three or four are being developed, including one at Ingwe Pan by Machaba Safaris.

7 Kavinga Safari Camp

This camp is located just off the main Mana Pools access road in the southern part of the National Park, 9km from Chitake Spring. It has seven raised platform chalets and a central living/dining area which are set on the edge of a steep cliff overlooking the expansive bed of the upper Ruckomechi River, where a spring attracts wildlife all year round. The camp faces the sunrise over the magnificent backdrop of the Zambezi escarpment, and is becoming renowned for close-up photographic opportunities from a purpose-built hide next to the waterhole below the camp.

8 Kanga Camp (African Bush Camps)

This attractive 12-bedded tented camp is delicately built on decking around the edge of the Kanga Pan. Two of the luxury tents are honeymoon suites or family units, with private dining and seating areas. A lounge area under the shade of large trees overlooks the splash pool and pan, creating a perfect setting for an 'armchair safari' (as described in issue 87), especially during the driest months (July – November).



1 WILDERNESS SAFARIS



4 AFRICAN BUSH CAMPS



3 ZAMBEZI CRUISE & SAFARIS



6 GREAT PLAINS CONSERVATION



8 AFRICAN BUSH CAMPS



7 KAVINGA SAFARI CAMP



SEASONAL TENTED CAMPS

Privately-run camps spaced out along the Zambezi River frontage. They accommodate a maximum of 12 guests, and operate for only half the year, being removed during the rainy season (around December–March).

9 Camp Mana (Sunpath Safaris) This simple camp has a magnificent location overlooking the floodplains. Each tent has its own en suite bathroom, with a flush toilet and shower. An expansive Bedouin-style tented area provides a shaded central living/dining area. Sunpath Safaris also offer canoeing, and a mobile tented camp at Chitake Springs in the south of the Park.

10 Zambezi Expeditions (African Bush Camps) An exclusive-use camp for private safaris, including walking and canoeing activities. A safari with Zambezi Expeditions can be combined with a stay at the company's Kanga or Nyamatusi camps.

11 Mwinilunga Safaris With a warm family atmosphere of home-away-from-home and a reputation for wholesome cuisine, Mwinilunga consists of six twin tents and a central living/dining area nestled under some enormous mahogany trees. The tents have individual flush toilets en suite but showers are communal. Mwinilunga Safaris also offer a mobile safari option to Chitake Springs.

ROBIN POPE SAFARIS



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AFRICAN BUSH CAMPS



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ZOE MULHOLLAND

12 Goliath Camp (Stretch Ferreira Safaris) Stretch Ferreira is one of Mana's most renowned professional guides. Reminiscent of an *Out of Africa* era, this re-designed camp consists of seven East African-style tents, blending seamlessly into the bush.

13 John's Camp (Robin Pope Safaris) A traditional, colonial-style 10-bed tented camp with a modern touch,

overlooking a vast area of open floodplain. The management team is a family affair, led by John Stevens, one of Africa's most experienced guides and a co-founder of the Zambezi Elephant Fund which successfully raises funds worldwide for conservation activities in Zimbabwe's Zambezi Valley.

MOBILE TENTED CAMPS Temporary camps, taking a maximum of eight guests, erected at various sites along the Zambezi River or inland at Chitake Springs in the southern section of the Park.

14 Natureways Safaris The core product of this long-established safari company is mobile canoeing safaris, individually suited for small groups of six-to-eight people. However, in Mana Pools Natureways also offers static tented camps and guided walking safaris.

14 James Varden Safaris James Varden is recognised as one of Africa's top professional walking guides, with more than 25 years of experience. In combination with Natureways and his horse-riding safari company, Ride Zimbabwe, he offers a variety of activities from his mobile tented camp. →



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GREAT PLAINS CONSERVATION



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WILDZAMBEZI.COM (2)



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WILDZAMBEZI.COM

ZIMPARKS ACCOMMODATION The Zimbabwe National Parks Authority (ZimParks) offers a variety of budget accommodation near their Nyamepi office and at Chitake Springs.

15 Lodges and cottages There are two self-catering eight-bed double-storey lodges and three four-bed cottages located upstream from the ZimParks office at Nyamepi. These are equipped with furniture and bedding, basic kitchen facilities, gas stove, fridge and bathrooms with flush toilets, hot showers and/or baths. The facilities are serviced.

15 Tented Camp and campsite Just upstream from the ZimParks lodges, at Gwaya Camp, are five self-catering, en suite tents overlooking the river. These each accommodate two people and

are fully-equipped with a barbeque stand and a separate kitchenette adjacent to the tent. The tented camp is serviced. Nyamepi campsite. This consists of about 30 camping sites, with four basic ablution blocks which have flush toilets, showers and hot and cold running water. Water is available from several taps in the campsite, and firewood can be purchased at the Parks office. The camp is not fenced, so it is necessary to exercise caution as wild animals can wander through.

15 Exclusive use campsites These remote camping sites have no facilities at all except for a long-drop toilet each. They are available to groups of 6-12 visitors and are located at various places along the Zambezi River (New Ndungu, Mucheni 2 & 3) and at Chitake Spring in the extreme south of the Park.

MANA FROM HEAVEN

Recognising the importance of the 120,000-hectare Sapi wilderness area, adjacent to Mana Pools National Parks, ZimParks awarded the concession to Great Plains Conservation in 2016, who have transformed it into a private photographic reserve and conservation area.

For decades Sapi had been used for hunting by previous concessionaires. Not only it hoped that this change of use will allow wildlife to flourish, but also that the expansion of protected wilderness around Mana Pools will go some way to relieving the pressure of overpopulation (of camps and animals) in the National Park itself.

To aid the area's recovery, Great Plains has adopted an approach designed, it says, to "encourage wildlife back into the reserve". Having stopped the hunting, the team conducted a survey of what species they had, and brought in scientists and ex-hunters who knew the area to assist with the rehabilitation project – a move that has seen "elephant and buffalo herds beginning to trust this part of the land as well as the continuous movement of human kind within their environment".

With just two camps in the concession – the five-tent, 10-guest Explorers Camp and the smaller Sapi Springs, which is to be rebuilt – Sapi is yours to explore exclusively, although that exclusivity, naturally, comes at a price. However, with around 80 per cent of the area only accessible by foot, this is prime walking and canoeing country.

Renowned filmmaker and CEO of Great Plains Dereck Joubert explains the concept behind the camps: "I think you miss out on so much if you arrive by air, get on a vehicle, go to the camp, drive, have lunch, dinner, drive and fly out. That isn't Africa. Not my Africa anyway.

"You can expect walking safaris from the edge of Mana Pools down the Zambezi through great elephant and lion country, into the interior to giant baobabs. We want to transport you into the safari of Hemingway's days or Selous or Burton and Speke... without the constant barrage of gunfire they used to annihilate the big game."

PHIL CLISBY →



Private space:
The Safari Suite at Chiawa Camp, freshly built in 2017

CHIAWA CAMP / SCOTT RAMSAY / LOVEWILDAFRICA.COM

Lower Zambezi Valley

ZAMBIAN SIDE

By extending the amount of land under protection, there's more space for lodges to spread out along the bank of the Zambezi.

WORDS: SARAH KINGDOM

The 4,092sq km Lower Zambezi National Park hugs the northern bank of the Zambezi River. Until 1983, when the area was declared a National Park, it was the private game reserve of Zambia's president. This protected it from the ravages of mass tourism, leaving it a relatively pristine wilderness.

The Park itself is surrounded by a much

larger Game Management Area (GMA), but there are no fences between the two and animals are free to roam throughout the area. The GMA acts as a buffer zone between the National Park and areas of human settlement, to reduce human/wildlife conflict and to stop human encroachment. Whilst some GMAs permit hunting, the Lower Zambezi National Park (LZNP) is unique in that the Chiawa

GMA on its western boundary is a no-hunting zone, enabling photographic safari camps to be sited here.

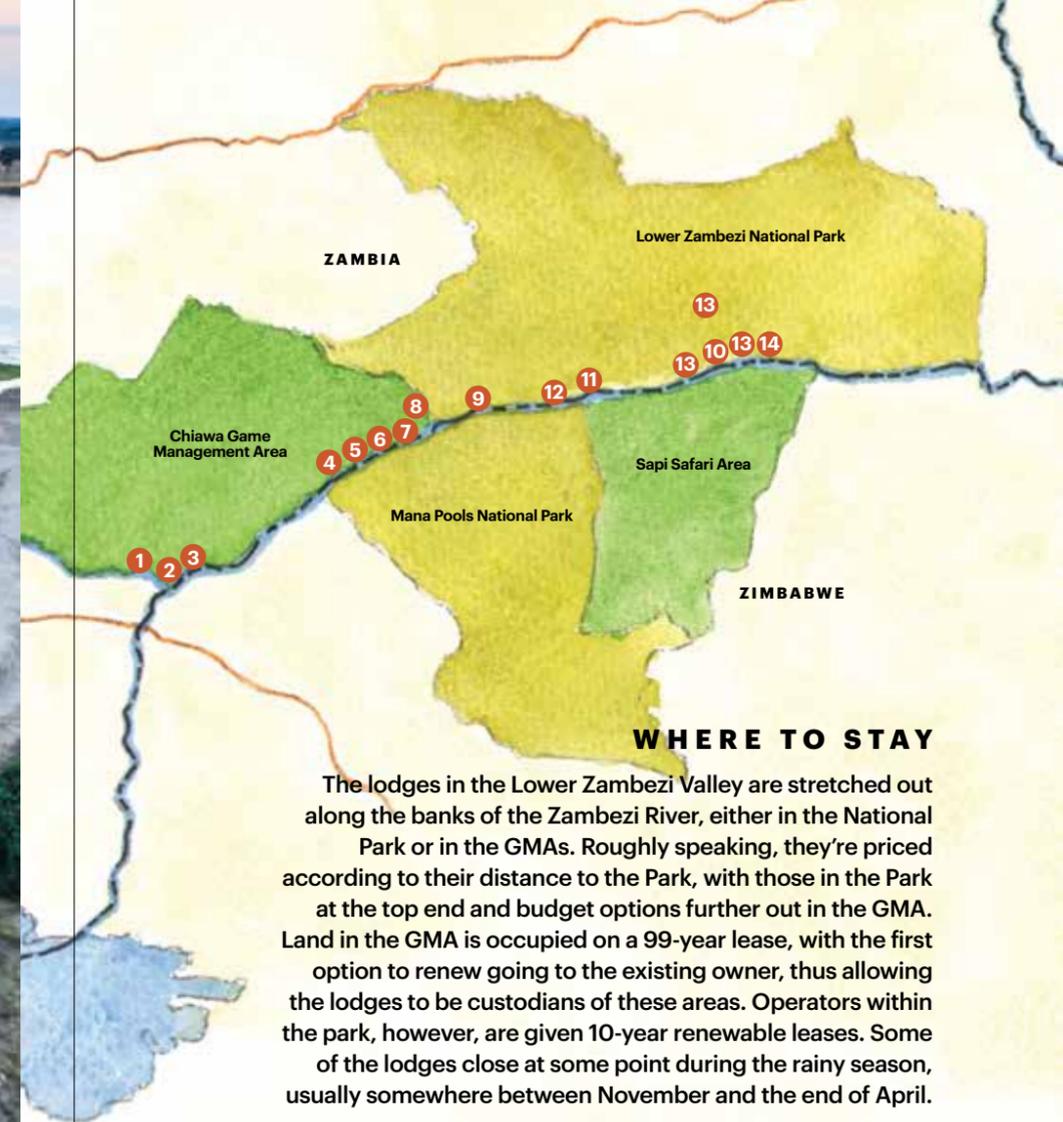
Together these encompass 20,000sq km. In fact, Zambia has the second largest proportion of land under protected status in southern Africa: approximately 225,000sq km or 30 per cent of the total land cover. Of this, 8 per cent are national parks and 22 per cent are Game Management Areas.

Along the northern boundary the Zambezi escarpment acts as a physical barrier, and the bulk of the park consists of hilly ground. As a result, most of the wildlife is concentrated on the valley floor, in the flat alluvial plains beside the river, and it is primarily for this reason that all the lodges are found here.

The Lower Zambezi is relatively undeveloped, its appeal lying in its very wildness. Opportunities to get up close to

wildlife abound, from herds of elephant to leopards to fish eagles and everything in between. This is a picturesque riverine landscape of ebony, leadwood, acacia and fig trees. Natal mahoganies, Ilala palms, winterthorns and battle-scared baobabs stand tall. Oxbow lakes abound, many glowing luminously green with water hyacinth. And with the glorious Zambezi centre-stage, there are few parks in Africa that can offer the diversity of activities available here, with boat rides, canoeing trips and fishing supplementing game drives and walking safaris.

Most visitors arrive by light aircraft, transferring to camp by boat or road. Tourist numbers are limited by the park's relative inaccessibility, though if you have some off-road driving experience and come at the right time of year, a road trip is feasible.



WHERE TO STAY

The lodges in the Lower Zambezi Valley are stretched out along the banks of the Zambezi River, either in the National Park or in the GMAs. Roughly speaking, they're priced according to their distance to the Park, with those in the Park at the top end and budget options further out in the GMA. Land in the GMA is occupied on a 99-year lease, with the first option to renew going to the existing owner, thus allowing the lodges to be custodians of these areas. Operators within the park, however, are given 10-year renewable leases. Some of the lodges close at some point during the rainy season, usually somewhere between November and the end of April.

WORDS: SARAH KINGDOM

INSIDE THE CHIAWA GMA

1 Gwabi River Lodge
This was one of the first lodges to be established in the Lower Zambezi Valley. Situated on banks of the Kafue River, 6km from the Zambezi and only 145km from Lusaka, Gwabi is easily accessible throughout the year. Accommodation ranges from chalets to camping for all budgets.

2 Kiambi Safaris
Situated high up on the banks of

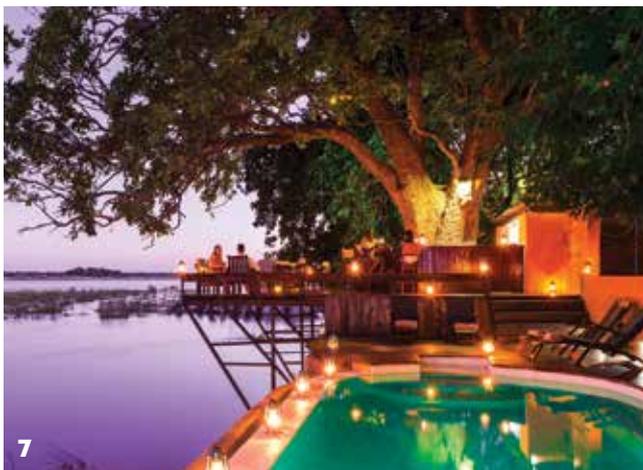


2 KIAMBI SAFARIS

the Zambezi, near the confluence with the Kafue River, Kaimbi offers a variety of accommodation styles and budgets, from air-conditioned chalets to self-catering and camping. The Lower Zambezi NP is 65km downriver.

3 Kanyemba Lodge and Kanyemba Island Bush Camp
Only two and a half hours from Lusaka, Kanyemba is a popular family getaway, accommodating up to 20 people. The spacious restaurant and bar overlook the river, and dinner is regularly served under the branches of a giant wild mango tree.

4 Mvuu Lodge
With cottages, luxury tents, self-catering cottages or tents and camping sites, Mvuu has accommodation for all budgets. Situated along a stretch of the Zambezi River overlooking Zimbabwe's Mana Pools, the area is great for wildlife and birdlife. →



ROYAL ZAMBEZI

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ZAMBEZI GRANDE

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5 Baines River Camp

Named after Thomas Baines, the 19th-century artist and explorer, this lodge captures the feel of a bygone era with its classic colonial-style buildings and casual elegance. The camp also offers specialised photographic workshops and fly-fishing clinics.

6 Zambezi Grande

A luxury retreat only a few minutes from the National Park, with superior suites and luxury rooms tucked among the trees, overlooking the Zambezi. When not on an activity or cultural visit, an inviting infinity pool is the ideal spot to just relax and watch the river flow by. No children under twelve.

7 Royal Zambezi

A picturesque thatched lodge situated on one of the broadest stretches of the Zambezi, minutes by boat or vehicle to the Lower Zambezi NP. A timber deck that extends over the river floodplain is ideal for relaxing and watching birdlife and wildlife. Additional

activities include cultural village visits, a spa, yoga and a cooking experience.

8 Chongwe River Camp and Chongwe River House (Time + Tide)

Nestled among the winterthorn trees at the confluence of the Zambezi and Chongwe Rivers, Chongwe River Camp is one of the most well-established Lower Zambezi camps. It offers nine classic tents under thatch, a spacious dining area, a campfire next to the river and a swimming pool. For a bit more privacy, Chongwe Suites offer three double or twin rooms with butler service, plunge pools and private dining options.

Nearby, Chongwe River House is available for exclusive use by groups of up to eight people. On the banks of the Chongwe River, a quiet tributary of the Zambezi that borders the Lower Zambezi National Park, this is a unique, two-storey private home which has won plaudits for its unusual architecture. Both properties are closed from January to mid-April.



TIME + TIDE

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SELF-CATERING IN THE GMA

There are various options in relative proximity to the National Park, including **Self Catering Cottage, Lower Zambezi, a six-sleeper facility with two twin bedrooms and a loft room. Guests can dine at nearby Kiambi Lodge. Other options include Safari House (five bedrooms), The Lodge on the Lower Zambezi (chalets on the river bank), Wildtracks (about 40 minutes from the Park) and Winterthorns (on the confluence of the Kafue and Zambezi rivers).**

INSIDE THE PARK

9 Chiawa Camp (Chiawa Safaris)

Located inside the National Park under a grove of mahogany and acacia trees, Chiawa Camp offers nine tented rooms, raised on wooden decks, each with private verandahs. In the main camp area there is an elevated observation deck above the lounge, a swimming pool that's large enough for laps, and a gym. Chiawa is closed from January to the end of April. →



CHIAWA CAMP

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13

TUSK & MANE

10 Old Mondoro (Chiawa Safaris)

About an hour downstream from Chiawa, in a grove of Winterthorn trees, Old Mondoro is an intimate, simple safari camp overlooking a maze of hippo-inhabited channels. The area is characterised by a vast floodplain and open woodland making it ideal for walking and game viewing. The unfenced camp has four reed chalets with canvas roofs, giving it a 'back to the bush' atmosphere. The camp is closed from January to the end of April.

11 Mwambashi River Lodge

Catering for up to 22 guests in 10 suites with differing characteristics. The Zambezi Suite, with its open sides, is a particular favourite. Includes a gym. Open from April to November.

12 Sausage Tree Camp and Potato Bush Camp A private camp at the heart of the park, where every tent has a dedicated butler. The epitome of bush



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OLD MONDORO

CARBON NEUTRALITY

In 2016 Lower Zambezi was proclaimed the world's first Carbon-Neutral National Park. To achieve this recognition tour operators reduced their carbon emissions and those emissions which were unavoidable were offset by investment in Rufunsa GMA forests to the northeast of the Park. The scheme, known as the Lower Zambezi REDD+ Project, protects a 40,126 hectare section of miombo forest in the Lower Zambezi escarpment which, in turn, provides a 60km buffer along the threatened boundary in the hills directly north of the LZNP. It partners with over 5000 people in Rufunsa District to conserve the forest through livelihood and community development initiatives. The first lodges in LZNP to sign up to the initiative were Chiawa Camp and Old Mondoro, and they say by offsetting 1200 tonnes of carbon emissions, they personally are protecting an estimated 403 hectares of Zambian forest (approximately 3228 trees), and removing enough CO2 from the atmosphere to be equivalent of taking 215 cars off the road for a year.

chic, Sausage Tree Camp has eight, slightly raised, reed, wood and canvas tents, each with a private pool and expansive deck. In addition there is a two-bedroom house, perfect for family or a small groups. It's sister camp, Potato Bush, is located nearby. Each of its three tents has a large deck and plunge pool, indoor/outdoor showers and hammocks. There is a fourth family tent. Both Sausage Tree and Potato Bush are closed from January till the end of March.

13 Tusk & Mane The relative new boys to the Valley, Tusk & Mane offer something a little different: safaris between three eight-bed fly camps that are moved between very different sites on islands in the river and, soon, a site in the Rufunsa Valley, at the foot of the escarpment, thus allowing visitors to experience the river and hills. The camps offer old-style safari camping,

with bucket showers but still with ice cold drinks and comfy beds, and sitting under the stars around a campfire. Best suited to those who are looking to immerse themselves in the wilderness without too much paraphernalia.

14 Anabezi and Amanzi Anabezi is located in the remote eastern end of the Park, in an area that used to be the governor's retreat, where the Zambezi River and the Mushika floodplain meet. The camp is perched on the riverbank, with raised timber decks and wooden walkways. Eleven luxurious tents each have views over the river and private plunge pools.

Amanzi is Anabezi's rustic sister camp, sited 3km downstream. It offers only three tents (one of which is a family unit) built on raised decks. Both camps are closed from January till the end of April. 🐾