

# Travel

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ZAMBIA

## Falling for Livingstone

By Mark Sissons

As infinity pools go, this one might be a little too literal for comfort.

Pressing my back against a rocky ledge just beneath the surface, I glance over my shoulder into the abyss — towering plumes billowing from the immense cauldron of Batoka Gorge 300 feet below. Just a few inches of granite prevents me from being swept by the current over the edge of the world's largest waterfall.

I'm in Devil's Pool, a natural formation on the Zambian lip of Victoria Falls. During the dry season, from September to December, a rock barrier forms an eddy, allowing

*Zambia continues on P4*



Mark Sissons / Special to The Chronicle

Victoria Falls, on the border between Zambia and Zimbabwe, is more than 5,000 feet wide and 300 feet tall, making it the world's greatest sheet of falling water.



## FROM THE COVER



Photos by Mark Sissons / Special to The Chronicle

In Devil's Pool, adventurous travelers can safely swim to the edge of Victoria Falls, above where the water plungers more than 300 feet.

# Zambezi as 'God's Highway'

*Zambia from page P1*

adventurous tourists to safely swim right up to where the Zambezi becomes a chasm twice the height of Niagara Falls.

It's about as close as you can get to this Natural Wonder of the World and live to talk about it.

In 1855, after pitching camp on the tiny island on the edge of a different falls that still bears his name, Scottish explorer Dr. David Livingstone first approached Mosi-oa-Tunya, the "Smoke that Thunders" — the local term for Victoria Falls — by dugout canoe.

Today's travelers take flight over Victoria Falls in fixed-wing planes and helicopters. They kayak, raft and use personal

stops on the river Livingstone himself affectionately called "God's Highway."

### In Livingstone's words

Livingstone, who opened Central Africa to other missionaries, hunters and traders in the hope that "Christian commerce" would hasten the end of the slave trade, was the first European to write about Victoria Falls.

"Creeping with awe to the verge, I peered down into a large rent which had been made from bank to bank of the broad Zambezi ... the most wonderful sight I had witnessed in Africa," he recounted in his book, "Missionary Travels and Researches in South



**Rooms at the Royal Chundu eco-lodge, on the Zambezi River 30 minutes from Livingstone by car, offer luxury with colonial touches.**

share a stretch of pristine riverside with luxury eco-lodge Royal Chundu.

Eyes twinkling with quiet pride, village elder Edith Mushekwa shows me around her lush vegetable garden on the banks of the Zambezi: neat rows of red onions, spinach, cabbages, maize, carrots, eggplants and tomatoes. It's a half-acre of organically grown goodness destined for the dinner table just a couple of miles upriver at Royal Chundu, which means the "meeting place of the chief."

The lodge has committed to helping meet the needs of local communities by, among other initiatives, offering free seeds to Mushekwa villagers such as Edith to grow, and then sell back to it, fresh produce. Fishermen from neighboring Muluka supply Royal Chundu with bream and other fresh river fish.

Edith, a widow, grandmother, community leader and caregiver to AIDS orphans, has no doubts about the impact that Royal Chundu's initiatives have had on her people.

"By giving us seeds, employing our children,





Photos by Mark Sissons / Special to The Chronicle

Guests at the Royal Chundu Lodge participate in the traditional Tokaleya tribal dances performed by residents of nearby villages.

#### Zambia from page P4

village chicken, kudu lollipops and pap, the starchy ground maize staple of much of sub-Saharan Africa.

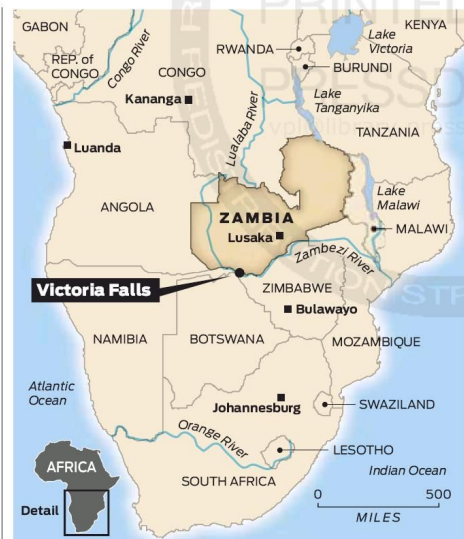
"We're trying to be the pioneers of Zambian culinary arts, using the standard cooking methods from the French and incorporating the raw ingredients of Zambian food," he says, adding that he plans to soon publish a cookbook.

"It celebrates what we are and is a true representation of Zambian culture."

#### By the riverside

At dusk, southern Africa's most majestic river turns the color of blood, its placid waters mirroring the burnt orange and scarlet streaked skies of a classic African sunset.

The only sounds come from the whoosh of egrets flying in formation, while a lone Bateleur eagle glides high above. The Zambezi teems with more than 350 species of endemic birdlife, many



John Blanchard / The Chronicle

#### If you go

##### GETTING THERE

**South African Airways** ([www.flysaa.com](http://www.flysaa.com)) offers daily flights to Livingstone from Johannesburg (90 minutes). Recently renovated Livingstone Airport is 3 miles north-west of town and is easily accessible by taxi.

**Visa requirements:** U.S. citizens require visas to enter Zambia, which can be purchased at the airport or border in U.S. dollars (cash). To cross from Zambia to Zimbabwe costs \$30 for a Zimbabwe single-entry visa. To return to the Zambian side costs an extra \$20 for a mul-



Mokoro fishermen from the surrounding villages seek a catch of bream and other river fish. They supply fresh fish to the Royal Chundu Lodge.

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with colorful names like emerald cuckoo, black-cheeked lovebird, orange breasted bush strike and white fronted bee eater.

Along the river's sandy banks, crocodiles crouch motionless, half submerged, patiently waiting for something or someone to make the fatal mistake of stumbling upon them.

A local mokoro fisherman paddles past looking for a spot to cast his nocturnal net. I wish him better luck than I had enjoyed while unsuccessfully angling for notoriously feisty tiger fish the day before.

Further upstream lurk monstrous hippos, half submerged beneath the shimmering surface. Their grotesquely huge jaws are capable of biting a canoe or kayak in half.

A pod of these bulbous brutes snorts and fusses as our aluminum pontoon boat cruises past. My skipper, Vasco, who traded a dead-end construction job in Livingstone for the opportunity to pilot tours along this stretch of the Zambezi he has navigated all his life, smiles at my nervousness.

"Don't worry, they won't attack us to drive us out of their territory," he says. "We're too big and scary looking, even for them."

Briefly reassured, I scan the Zimbabwean side of the river for signs of wildlife as the crimson sun finally sinks from sight. Unlike the heavily

multiple-entry Zambian visa.

## OUTFITTERS

**Extraordinary Journeys** (800-403-6012, [www.ejafri.ca.com](http://www.ejafri.ca.com)) and **Absolute Travel** (212-627-1950, [www.abolutetravel.com](http://www.abolutetravel.com)) arrange customized itineraries that include Livingstone, Victoria Falls and a range of Zambezi riverside lodging and activities.

## WHERE TO STAY

On the Zambezi: **Royal Chundu Lodge** ([www.royalchundu.com](http://www.royalchundu.com)) is 30 minutes by car from Livingstone along the banks of the Zambezi River. Luxury bungalows or riverfront suites. Staff can arrange tours and excursions. Rates: \$390-\$695 per night. A mid-range option is **Waterberry Lodge** ([www.waterberrylodge.com](http://www.waterberrylodge.com)), featuring a cluster of thatched cottages around lawns leading to the Zambezi riverbank. Rates: \$270 per person per night (half price for children 12 and under and adults sharing a room).

In Livingstone: **Royal Livingstone Hotel** ([www.suninternational.com](http://www.suninternational.com)), on the banks of the Zambezi a stone's throw from Victoria Falls, is the colonial grand dame of Zambian hotels. Rates start at \$540 per night. Another option is to stay on the Zimbabwean side of the river near Victoria Falls; **Gorges Lodge** ([www.gorges-lodge.com](http://www.gorges-lodge.com)) and **Ilala Lodge** ([www.ilalalodge.com](http://www.ilalalodge.com)) offer stunning views of the falls.

## STAYING HEALTHY

**Malaria:** The best precaution is not to be bitten — wear long trousers and long-sleeved shirts in the early morning and evening and wear repellent. Yellow-fever vaccinations are required if arriving from an endemic area or if traveling onward to South Africa; 24-hour clinics are available in the center of town.

populated Zambian side, this is a nature reserve where elephants, buffalo and antelope come to drink when their forest water holes dry up.

But on this evening, no creatures are stirring except for a troop of baboons, canapés for crocs. Its members gingerly make their way down from the trees to the water's edge.

Soaking in an outdoor tub later that night at the

lodge, under a canopy of southern constellations, I listen to the buzz of cicadas and think of Victoria Falls, Livingstone and, especially, the dizzying Devil's Pool.

A lot less devil, a little more infinity. Presumably, Dr. Livingstone would approve.

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