

By Jennie Spence

# An African Adventure our Holiday in Zambia



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Finally, our journey from Aberdeen was almost over; it's funny how time goes so much slower when you're looking forward to arriving somewhere. As the plane made its descent into what appeared to be the middle of nowhere, Mandy and I could only gasp as we were treated to one of the most breathtaking views that we had ever seen - the Victoria Falls. We couldn't really ask for a better way to start our holiday. We were greeted warmly in arrivals by Astrida, Laika and Hector McKilligan, some of the friendly staff of Green Tree Lodge and our hosts for the next three weeks. As you can probably guess, McKilligan isn't a typically Zambian name; Hector is in fact a proud Aberdonian. He has been living in Africa for over 40 years and now lives in Livingstone, the tourist capital of Zambia, where he enjoys running Green Tree Lodge.

With the lodge only a ten minute journey from the airport, we were given our first glimpse of Zambia. Travelling along the bumpy road our eyes feasted on our new surroundings; lively children playing outside their schools, ladies elegantly and effortlessly balancing baskets on their heads as they walked and exotic flora and fauna that we had never seen before. As we drove into the garden we soon saw why the lodge was given its name; before us opened up a lush green oasis of beautiful and mature fruit trees and plants, nestled over a rich carpet of springy emerald green grass. The whole garden felt very secluded, with guinea fowl wandering freely - it had such a relaxing feel. We really liked the location of Green Tree Lodge, situated in the suburbs of Livingstone. Although it's only a ten minute taxi ride into the bustling city centre, it is far enough away to maintain a very peaceful atmosphere. Behind the property was the dambo (wetland), which I had a great time exploring; teeming with birds, it was a great place to go for a walk.

At \$50 dollars per person per night for bed and breakfast, we thought Green Tree Lodge was great value for money. The spacious and cool chalets were all en-suite, with Sky television, tea and coffee making facilities, although the television wasn't used much - other than to check on the horrible Scottish weather that we had escaped. The garden was great and we were especially drawn to the immersed seating area at the end of the pool which was the perfect place to cool off with a refreshing drink and a Sudoku puzzle. Peter the gardener explained to us that even in the dry season when everything else becomes dry and brown, with plenty of water and hard work the garden remains as a lush green oasis. As well as providing welcoming shade, most of the trees were fruit trees and it was great being able to help ourselves to the deliciously ripe guavas and oranges, not that I was hungry for long due to the choice of meals.

We were very intrigued when Astrida and Laika offered to make us nshima, the traditional food of Zambia, for our dinner, and jumped at the chance to accompany them to the main market in Livingstone to see where they bought their fresh ingredients for cooking. The market was like nothing we had ever seen before. To us it seemed like a complete maze of stalls and people, so we were glad to be with the girls as they navigated it with ease, moving from stall to stall to find what they needed. The market was a hive of activity, and we wandered happily, soaking in the different sights, sounds and smells. It seemed that you could get almost anything you wanted in this market... as long as you knew where to look! You can imagine our horror when the girls told us that they were going to buy some chihuahua for dinner.

Thankfully we soon found out that chiwawa was actually their name for pumpkin leaves, a delicious accompaniment for dinner and not a small yappy dog – phew!

When we did venture out for dinner, we found that Livingstone has a great choice of places to eat out. We were almost tempted to splash out had a five course meal on a steam train through the bush to the Falls and back, for \$180 per person. Although expensive, it is probably a once in a lifetime experience and there aren't many restaurants where you get a view like that. If you fancy a lively night out with great Zambian food then we would strongly recommend Ngoma Zanga. Owned by a very talented lady, you will be treated to an unforgettable night of traditional music and dance, performed as you eat and drink. We went for the buffet option as it gave us the chance to try several of their great dishes. Catering mainly for tourists, with face painting and dancing encouraged, Ngoma Zanga is great for families and groups.

Driving through Livingstone there were signs everywhere for extreme sports, so it must be heaven for adrenaline junkies, with everything from gorge swinging and bungee jumping to white water rafting and quad bikes, all within a fifteen minute taxi ride. Not quite our style, we opted for a something slightly more serene the crocodile farm, which was worth it just to gawp at the blatant lack of health and safety. The keepers were more than willing to hop in beside these dangerous reptiles. Even better, they were more than happy for us to go in and join them for that more unusual holiday snap! (No pun intended). Funnily enough, we decided to stay on our own side of the fence - however we didn't completely wimp out and actually enjoyed holding baby crocodiles, which were really almost cute. The crocodile farm also had a collection of snakes native to Zambia, including the famous and deadly black mamba. Hector assured us though, that he can count on his two hands the amount of wild snakes that he had seen since living in Africa.

As one of the wonders of the natural world the Victoria Falls are completely breathtaking and were definitely the most memorable part of our holiday. Greeted in the car park by vervet monkeys, we resisted the urge to shop for some souvenirs and headed for some photos by the David Livingstone statue. Livingstone is the only settlement in Zambia which has been allowed to retain its British name, not a bad compliment for the Scottish adventurer. To view the Falls we had to decide whether or not to hire waterproof ponchos - they are a good idea to protect anything electrical but be warned, even with ponchos everyone still seemed to end up saturated. The views of Victoria Falls from the paths were absolutely amazing, if a little frighteningly close to the edge at times. Due to the moisture filled air, the 'rainforest' surrounding the falls had its own unique ecosystem with certain plants found there and nowhere else, and winding through this interesting environment we explored several paths which lead out to a different but equally stunning view of the Falls.

Whilst visiting Victoria Falls the girls took us to the Melting Pot, definitely somewhere not to miss – in spite of the fact that the next day we felt like we had been up all night dancing! The well-made but steep path took us down past lush undergrowth, through fast flowing streams and over large rocks, so we were glad to have on a good pair of walking shoes. On reaching the bottom we were treated to an awesome view of the swirling force of water which occurs at the bottom of the Falls. For those who don't fancy the downhill walk, the view from the bridge between Zambia and Zimbabwe is worth a visit on its own. This is where they have a bungee jumping platform, and no, we didn't take part, but we did have a lot of fun watching those who did. From the bridge we did get great views of the Great Zambezi and could still feel the spray from the Falls, not dissimilar to our beloved Scottish drizzle. We had to be on our guard here as the local baboons are very used to humans and wouldn't think twice about snatching something from you if it took their fancy.

We jumped at the chance when Hector offered to take us to the Mosi-oa-tunya Zoological Park. As it was the rainy season the park was abundant with rich vegetation, great for the animals but not easy for us trying to spot them. It was so exciting not knowing what was round the corner and even better knowing that the animals were wild and had the freedom of the park. We were enchanted by the comical warthogs that pranced with the spring of a pedigree at Crufts, but definitely did not have the looks. The beautiful impalas, on the other hand, oozed grace and style as they leaped elegantly from our view. Thanks to their enormous height, the giraffes were easier to spot. It was not until we saw them with my own eyes that we truly appreciated their size - it is hard to believe that they have the same amount of bones in their necks as humans. The zebras too were truly magnificent - Mother Nature really did well with their stylish coats. I suppose it all balances out though, as after that we came across a group of gnus, maybe not as petty as the zebras but definitely well built for their purpose and remarkable to watch.

With all these things and more, our holiday in Livingstone, was just amazing. We couldn't have asked more from the staff of Green Tree Lodge and are already planning our trip for next year. Zambia has it all, go with a sense of adventure and be prepared to be amazed and excited by this simply unique country.



Green Tree Lodge



Vervet Monkey



Victoria Falls



Wendy - Mandy - Jennie