

There's a Waterfall on my stoep

The Victoria Falls, one of the Seven Wonders of the World, may be an iconic, indelible miracle of Mother Nature, but it is the Falls' whimsy that mesmerises most visitors and makes each viewing unique. It is unsurprising that David Livingstone famously said, 'scenes so lovely must have been gazed upon by angels in their flight.'

*Words and photographs by Kathy Malherbe
Some photographs supplied*





Before sunrise, the Falls takes on a mystical look but as the pink light dances off the cascading curtain of water, it starts to sparkle in the morning light. The waterfall's misty spray which gave rise to the name 'the smoke that thunders,' can be seen up to 40km away and close up it falls exactly like rain. The omnipresent rainbow over the falls spawns a mirror image - softer and smudged so that the two kaleidoscopes arc over the cliffs. It is hard to describe what happens when the 2,574 km's of the Zambezi river confluences to form the largest body of falling water on the planets.

As the evening approaches and the sun drops off the horizon, the last of the burnt-orange frames one of the Seven Wonders of the World - Mother Nature's masterpiece is breath-taking. During the night the moonlight bounces off the spray giving rise to a 'moonbow' one of the most distinctive and striking secrets of Africa.

The Falls also change according to the season - during the rainy season, the water flows fast and seems to be a racing to the edge of 100 metre drop. Every minute, over 5 million cubic metres of water pours over the falls and the rising mist is so thick, the Falls are effectively in a white out.

One visit is never enough. Which is why staying at the Royal Livingstone Hotel by Anantara in Zambia, a ten minute walk to the Falls, makes a perfect and ultra-luxurious base for multiple visits. The route is like a mini walking safari as you pass giraffes, zebras, impala and troops of monkeys on your meander to the entrance. For those who can't make the walk, there is a buggy always available to trundle you through the beautiful grounds. Guests at the Royal Livingstone Hotel by Anantara have unlimited, private access to the Falls.

It's not just the proximity to the Falls that sets the Royal Livingstone Hotel by Anantara apart. It is the graciousness of the building, and warm, convivial staff. While sipping an ice cold drink, you are treated to a hand massage by the local masseuse under the large wooden ceiling fans, while being given an introduction to the hotel. The rolling green lawns lead down to the Zambezi River and the 'smoke that thunders' is visible from anywhere in the grounds. Zebras wander around the ground unperturbed, cropping the lawn and one prances playfully in and out of the sprinkler. They are deceptively like cuddly ponies in striped pyjamas but signs around the hotel warn guests they have a kick and bite like a mule.)

On the way to your room you may need to step gingerly around an elegant giraffe standing across the pathway to your room or expertly eating from the thorny acacia trees and vervet monkeys doing gymnastics between the trees.

The Royal Livingstone Hotel by Anantara is a destination in itself but it's hard to resist the plethora of activities offered in the area. Which is why boarding the 'Royal Livingstone Express' steam locomotive to view the sunset from the bridge over the Falls is a must. Built by Cecil John Rhodes, an ambitious project to take the railway from Cape to Cairo, the bridge connects Zimbabwe and Zambia. After stopping at the bridge to watch the sunset over the Falls from yet another perspective, the train puffs back to the town of Livingstone, while guests enjoy a five course meal. The journey is one of platinum service, pampering, excellent food and wine as you surrender to the pace of a bygone era.

After the mellowness of the of the train journey, the adrenaline-seekers can enjoy a microlight flight over the Falls. At first sight, the aircraft looks unnervingly like a lawnmower engine with fixed wings. In technical terms it is called flying in an ultralight 1 or 2 seat fixed wing aircraft. Whatever the name, the experience is just as incredible. Your birds' eye view of the Falls includes the meandering gorge where the Falls has slowly whittled the sandstone away to expose the hard basalt, then descend so that you can see the bloats of hippo in the water and perhaps a herd of elephant swimming across the river to a small island with its extra sweet vegetation.

A gentle landing on the grass runway signals the end of a once in a lifetime experience indelibly printed in your mind, while

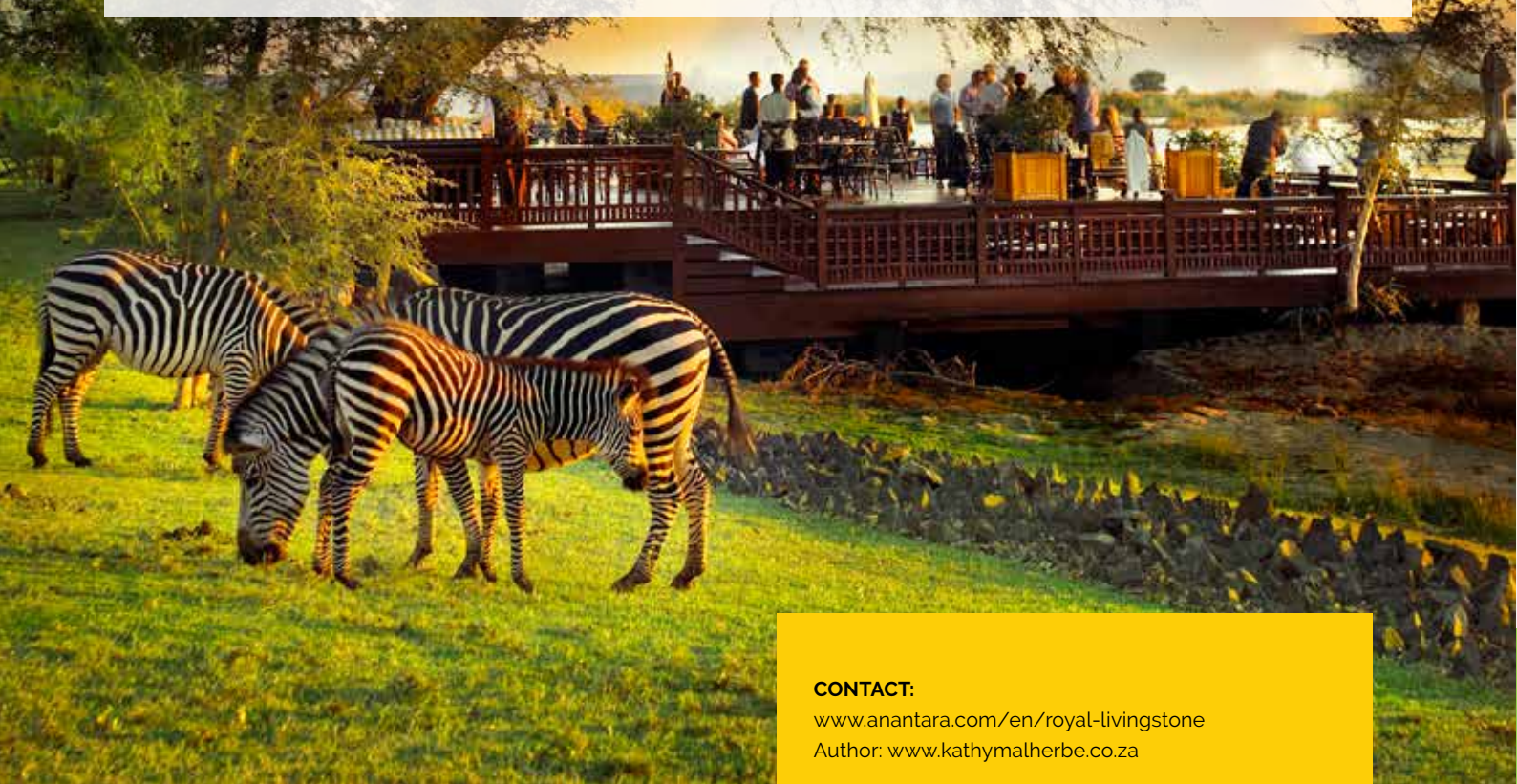
a go pro fixed to the wing ensures that you have the proof in images.

In the unlikely event that you need something to help you relax, a massage in the Gazebo on the edge of the Zambezi River does just that. Apart from the pampering of the masseuse, there is a magical touch to the experience. Mirrors are strategically placed at an angle on the floor so that as you lie face down you have a view of the Falls, while you submit to the expert hands on your muscles. It is a unique and sublime experience.

So is the sunset cruise. With the Zambezi River on your doorstep, exploring the river is a must. Within minutes of leaving the river bank, drinks are served and the spotter alerts us to crocodiles, hippos and elephants at the edge of the water. As the boat gently approaches a river bank, a tiny crocodile – about 20cm in length suns itself on a branch. Apparently around three weeks old, the mother abandons them to fend for themselves. Only 4% of the hatchlings survive so it's hardly surprising the ones that do, grow up aggressive and bit unpredictable.

After a stop for snacks on a tiny island, the boat picks up speed so you are treated to the magnificent and quite different perspective of watching the sun set from behind the Falls.

Apart from the experiences outside of the Royal Livingstone Hotel by Anantara while you are there, the staff ensure that you want for nothing. The excellent service is ubiquitous and combined with five star cuisine, while the capricious moods of the Falls are always visible from your stoep. ■



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