

Wildlife and wild views in a Unesco-approved African reserve

The Royal Livingstone Victoria Falls by Anantara Zambia

The welcome

There are a couple of different ways to get to the Zambian resort from Livingstone's Harry Mwanga Nkumbula International Airport – by road, river or air. My mode of transport on this occasion is via a safari boat, which involves a leisurely cross of the Zambezi River, capturing glimpses of the spray from the famous Victoria Falls in the distance. After about 20 minutes, the boat pulls up at back of the five-star property, where I'm met and guided through the expansive grounds to the reception area. I sip on a juice during check-in, and before too long, it's off to the room in a buggy, with a dedicated butler taking care of the bags and the room introduction.

The neighbourhood

Positively African. It's not uncommon to find zebras grazing near your front porch or giraffes munching away during your walk to breakfast. The Royal Livingstone sits within the 46-hectare Unesco World Heritage-listed Mosi-Oa-Tunya National Wildlife Park, which fringes the Zambezi River. The 173-room hotel is a short walk from the entrance to Victoria Falls, and offers views of the river and the most expansive curtain of water in the world. Access to the falls is free for guests of the Royal Livingstone and the neighbouring Avani property. Livingstone town is 15 minutes away.

The room

This colonial-style resort offers guests a choice of four

room categories. I stay in a deluxe room on ground level, the standard. It's compact yet cosy, and has a private terrace that offers views of the river (or in some cases garden views). The room has a king bed, a single sofa and a well-appointed bathroom, with tub and walk-in shower with marble bench. The toiletries on offer are limited, but mosquito repellent is supplied, which is appreciated, given the environment here. A word of warning: don't leave the terrace doors open for long, because the monkeys are enterprising.

The service

Interactions with staff typically involve big smiles, and no request is a problem. Each room has its own assigned butler who is on hand 24/7. Dining staff across the property are attentive without being overbearing, but there are quite a few food items unavailable during my stay (such as gluten-free flour and salmon), which is disappointing given the location and having alerted the property to my gluten-free dietary requirements well in advance.

The scene

Family-friendly and relaxed. First-time visitors to Africa will find this an eye-opening introduction. After all, who doesn't want to share their surrounds with some of the country's most popular four-legged residents. There are some great spots across the property to watch the river gush past, while the best place to enjoy a sundowner is The Sundeck, right on the banks of the Zambezi (prices start from 121 Zambian kwacha [Dh43]). There is plenty of space for children to run around and guests are able to access the Avani kids' club.

The food

Between The Royal Livingstone and the adjoining Avani property, there are plenty of options for keeping your meal experiences interesting. The Mikuni Boma village experience is one not to be missed, but it's only on Friday evenings. Here,

everyone dines together, fireside, feasting on Zambian buffet fare (grilled meats and spiced dishes), entertained by traditional dancers, at a cost of 360 kwacha (Dh130) per person. The Royal Livingstone Dining Room is the property's a la carte restaurant, open all day for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Breakfast is a comprehensive affair, with plenty of the usual hot and cold offerings found at most resorts. For me, the fruit selection, the lack of key ingredients and the temperature of the coffee served could have been better. For a special occasion, book yourself a table on the Royal Livingstone Express (1,929 kwacha [Dh697]) – the hotel's restored steam locomotive that accepts guests on Mondays, Wednesdays and Sundays, but book well in advance because it sells out quickly. Dining by Design is a more romantic experience, with a choice of four spots across the property, from 1,287 kwacha (Dh465) per person.

Loved

Being able to access Victoria Falls as many times as I want between 6am and 6pm daily, and that the riverside spa tent had a mirror under the bed, so while lying face down during the treatment, I could still enjoy the river views.

Hated

A persistently rickety toilet seat in my room. I did report it, but to no avail.

The verdict

A well-positioned resort suitable for couples and families that offers African safari vibes with Unesco World Heritage appeal.

The bottom line

Rooms at The Royal Livingstone Victoria Falls by Anantara (www.anantara.com) cost from 6,635 kwacha (Dh2,398) per night, including breakfast, taxes and Wi-Fi. Water arrivals cost from 587 kwacha (Dh212) per person.

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