

## MOBILE WALKING SAFARI with ROBIN POPE SAFARIS *Luangwa Valley, Zambia (7 or 9 nights)*



*Crossing the Mupamadzi River, South Luangwa (photo: Angus Maclaren, Walks in Africa)*

This expeditionary-style safari is a true one-off, and, as far as we know, is un-replicated in Southern Africa in terms of safari type, length, remoteness, quality and authenticity all rolled into one. It offers you a chance to experience a truly wild region on foot, supported by a fully mobile tented camp set-up. It takes place in a scenically beautiful corner of the South Luangwa National Park that's un-visited by others and where animals behave as they might have done before man intruded – walking up here, along the Mupamadzi river, particularly at the start of each mobile season, you'll notice that animals are more skittish and unaccustomed to human activity; you enter a wild eco-system and become part of it, treading carefully and quietly and reading signs in order to get close to wildlife. The safari is a fully immersive experience, with time to really delve deeply into nature and switch off from the modern world, in the company of an excellent guide and camp support team. RPS mobiles book up a long way in advance, so don't think too long about it!

### **Highlights:**

- Walk in remote wilderness free of man-made infrastructure and vehicle tracks
- Exemplary guiding and hosting
- A true mobile bush camp, but with the right comforts and attention to detail
- Only 6 in a group
- Long-established, well-respected safari operator, who do things well
- The Mupamadzi river is a draw to excellent wildlife
- "Time" to truly immerse yourself in the bush and to delve deeply into nature subjects with your guide
- No mobile reception - no humans!
- Fixed departures between mid-June and late September

### **The Mupamadzi River environment:**

Other than being completely wild, the area around the Mupamadzi River is particularly beautiful and wonderful to walk through. As you move downstream over the course of the safari, you'll walk through groves of majestic, riverine trees, cross sections of open plain, explore outlying lagoons marking old river courses (which dry out in the walking season), stomp up to outlying ridges marking the edge of the elevated Chipungwe Plain, and criss-cross the shallow river in bare feet. The upper reaches of the river environment are more wooded, intimate and undulating, but as you move downstream the terrain opens out into an open floodplain, which is punctuated by groves of trees and lagoons, particularly around the final camp. All on the sundowner spots enjoy magical views across the meandering river, with the Muchinga escarpment rising in the distance.

### **The Mobile Camp Set-up**

All camping positions on this safari are in wonderful wild locations, in shaded positions close to the river. This is a traditional tented bush camp set-up, using large, walk-in tents with mesh windows and doors to aid air circulation. Emphasis is placed on essential comforts and thoughtful touches: framed beds with a proper mattress, bedside table, luggage rack, reed mats, pressed *koi-koi*, basin on a stand with mirror, wooden loos over a long-drop with a bucket of sand and a shovel, and hot-bucket showers.

The camp team ensures that tents are serviced, laundry is done on days when camp is not being moved, and hot water is provided (as a matter of routine in your basin at *reveille* and in the bucket showers before dinner, or at any time on request). The food produced from the bush kitchen is exemplary – including, it must be mentioned, delicious fresh sponges that are produced from the ground oven!

Evenings are lit by oil lamps, the glow of the campfire, and of course the moon and stars, all of which contribute to the magical, authentic atmosphere of camping deep in the African bush.



*Camp 1, beneath the Winterthorn trees (photo: Angus Maclaren, Walks in Africa)*

### **Safari Sequence**

Having spent the first night at Nkwali Camp on the Luangwa River, you will be transferred by Landcruiser to the north side of the South Luangwa National Park, an interesting journey in its own right (there's a petrified forest to look at), where you'll explore the Mupamadzi River valley over the mobile camping phase of your safari. You'll spend 5 nights or 7 nights camping depending upon whether you are following the 7-night or the 9-night safari. One night only is

spent at Camp 1 (it's a beautiful site situated beneath giant Winterthorn trees, reminiscent of East Africa, but there is slightly less game up here owing to terrain constraints), then two nights at each of the downstream camping positions (you'll visit three camps on the 5-night safari and four on the 7-night safari). At the end of the mobile camping phase, you'll return to the Luangwa River for a final night in one of Robin Pope's two permanent camps in the less developed Nsefu Sector of the park - Nsefu Camp or Tena Tena Camp.

### Typical days

Walking safaris commence at dawn with hot drinks, rusks, toast and porridge around the campfire before setting out on foot. Exploring the bush at this productive time of the day in the company of a knowledgeable and personable guide is a true delight. As you actively seek out game and follow spoor, your guide will help you unravel the less obvious jewels of the wild as you proceed, the things you barely notice when in a vehicle – you'll find that smaller fauna, even insects become interesting and important to you, as do birdlife and flora and the extraordinary spread of majestic, African trees. Unravelling the micro-ecosystems and interconnectivity of life cycles at every level in the bush is a constant source of wonder and out here, and you have the time to delve and indulge. And, as no doubt you will, encountering larger animals in this wild corner of the park, or successfully tracking them (there is a resident pride of Lion you'll very likely hear and have a good chance of finding), is a highly rewarding experience.



*Breakfast at sunrise at Camp 2 (photo: Angus Maclaren at Walks in Africa)*

You'll cover ground slowly and interpretively, rather than "hiking", although overall you should expect to cover a good 10kms or more in the course of each day, depending upon heat. Morning walks usually last until lunchtime in the cooler months, with a stop for tea in a shady grove accompanied by something tasty from the camp kitchen to keep you going, but in August and September you'll likely return to camp in the mid-late morning on account of the heat. A shorter walk takes place after a siesta and tea, usually ending at an idyllic sundowner spot on the riverbank, where you'll often drift into an extended stargazing session – there's really no need to hurry back! Return to camp by vehicle (there's a narrow camp service track that's graded each season, as it grows over), a short but often revealing night-drive, for a hot-bucket shower before dinner beneath the stars.



### **Fixed date departures for small groups**

Owing to the complicated logistics in running this safari, it runs on a set departure basis only between mid-late June and the end of September. The safari is limited to 6 guests on each departure, ensuring intimacy and personal service in the company of RPS' top guides and scouts, aided by attendant camp staff, cooks and the very important tea-bearer!

## **Itinerary**

### **Day 1 – Travel to the Luangwa Valley in Zambia**

Arrive at Lusaka Airport and check-in for your regional flight from Lusaka to Mfuwe. There are either two or three flights to Mfuwe each day, depending on the day or the week.

On arrival at Mfuwe Airport you will be met by a guide from Robin Pope Safaris. The drive to Nkwali Camp takes around 40 minutes, and you'll pass through colourful local scenes of villages, agriculture and bush. Depending upon flight times, you should expect to arrive in camp in time for lunch, or in time for afternoon tea. Having met your guide and taken tea, head out on a late afternoon game drive, returning to camp after sunset for dinner.

*Overnight at Nkwali Camp*

### **Nkwali Camp**

This traditional and stylish camp is located on Robin Pope Safaris' private land in the Lupande Game Management Area, overlooking the central section of the South Luangwa National Park across the wide Luangwa River. It's the main base for RPS's operations and this is where many visitors start their safari before going on to other camps, or mobile walking or fly-camping safaris in remoter parts of the park. The camp accommodates up to 14 guests in very comfortable open-fronted thatched-roofed chalets which face the river directly and feature spacious *en suite* bathrooms which are open to the air. The area offers superb game viewing and encompasses some lovely stands of acacia and ebony trees – in fact, the camp's wonderful bar has been built around one of the latter. Elephants often cross the Luangwa directly in front of the camp, or come to drink at the waterhole located very close to the thatched dining room at the back of the camp – the area is known for leopard, which sometimes roam along the river bank and can be spotted from the camp. The camp has direct access to the park throughout the year, either by boat or across the Nkwali pontoon, which is conveniently situated nearby. During the green season, when water levels are high and dambos and lagoons fill up, forays can be made deep into the park by boat, making Nkwali a fascinating destination all year round.

### **Essentials:**

- open all year
- 6 rooms, max 14 guests, minimum age 7 years
- family room – sleeps 4 in 2 bedrooms (both *en suite*)
- honeymoon suite with separate sitting room (converted family room)
- *en suite* semi open air bathrooms with flush loo, doubles with double shower and basins
- walking, drives, night drives, visit to Kawaza Village and school, and local market
- swimming pool
- transfer time from Mfuwe Airport 40 mins
- on mains – battery charging possible
- fully inclusive (imported wines and spirits included)



*Nkwali deck (photo: Angus Maclaren at Walks in Africa)*

## **Day 2 - Commence Mobile Walking Safari**

The guide for your mobile safari will join you at breakfast, after which you will head north in a Landcruiser to start your mobile walking safari along the Mupamadzi River. The drive to your starting point takes you through the heart of the South Luangwa National Park, following bush tracks for around 90 kilometres – the journey is deliberately not rushed, as there is plenty to see on the way and the aim is to cross the Mfuwe bridge, the main access into the park, after the early morning gate rush. After you leave the river and the area close to the main gate, it's surprising how quickly other safari vehicles dissolve and you begin to feel you have the park to yourself. Away from the Luangwa river belt the bush has a different feel, with different flora and you'll likely encounter a few species of antelope not typically found close to the Luangwa River. En route to your first camp you'll stop for a picnic lunch in the bush and make a stop to explore a section of petrified forest. Camp will have been set up in advance of your arrival, on a beautiful, spacious site positioned beneath two massive Winterthorn Trees (also known as Apple Peel Acacia, or Ana Tree). Having settled into camp, enjoy refreshments, possibly a siesta is there's time and you are inclined, before going out for your first walk in this corner of the park. You'll end at a beautiful sundowner spot on the river, looking towards the Muchinga escarpment. Return to camp in the landcruiser (you cannot walk in the dark!) using the camp service track. Enjoy dinner beneath the stars in the clearing between the Winterthorn.

*Overnight in walk-in tents*

## **Day 3 to 6 (\*) – Mobile Walking Safari**

The next four full days follow a similar pattern, commencing with a morning walk straight after breakfast, which is taken round the campfire just before sunrise. Watching the sun rise over the river as you sip tea or coffee and eat porridge from the *poitjie* pot or toast from the grill, all cooked over the Mopane wood fire, is a moment to treasure. The early morning is usually the best time to see game and these walks out from camp typically last between 3 and 6 hours, depending upon heat and the group's inclination, with a break for tea, coffee, cake or

biscuits in a shady spot. On days when camp is being moved, you'll walk between camps (camp is moved whilst you are out – all extremely efficient!); when returning to the same camp, the guide may opt to follow a loop walk, or arrange for the Landcruiser to pick you up at a designated point along the camps service road. The guide will have a route he'll propose to follow, although very often the course of a walk changes in response to what you might encounter. On all walks there will be an armed Zambia National Parks scout who will always be positioned in the front, followed by the guide and group members. Bringing up the rear will be a tea-bearer, who is usually also a guide in training who will also contribute to the observations made by the guide and assist with spotting. During a bush walk there will always be much to observe, as well as to respond to. You'll quickly learn that you become part of the ecosystem – the behaviour of animals will be in part driven by you and how you as interlopers behave; the direction you take in relation to their position and in the context of other perceived other perceived threats, the level of noise you make etc. You'll quickly start tuning in to the signals animals make and the clues they give (what are they looking at?... if not you, then something they are more afraid of? .... Warning calls - for your approach or something else?). Tracking will inevitably become a feature of a walk at some point (much of the terrain is sandy) and having the opportunity to creep up on the resident pride of lion is an exhilarating experience. Even if you don't find them, following calls, tracks and other signs, such as circling vultures, is riveting. Observing Elephant or a large herd of Buffalo that have come to the river to drink, whilst crouching or lying on a vantage point close-by is similarly exciting.



*Giraffe encounter on the plains beyond Camp 4 (photo: Angus Maclaren at Walks in Africa)*

Lunch is always taken back in camp followed by a well-earned siesta, although its easy to get wrapped up in discourse and find that lunch drifts into tea and the opportunity for siesta has disappeared! Time really has little meaning up here. Enjoy an afternoon walk to another glorious sundowner spot and linger to take in the spread of stars before heading back to camp, a hot bucket shower and dinner ..... and so the cycle continues.

*Overnight in walk-in tents*

**(\*) day 3 to 8 on the 9-night safari**



### **Day 7 (\*) - Transfer to either Nsefu Camp or Tena Tena Camp**

After an early breakfast you'll leave the Mupamadzi river in the Landcruiser, and transfer to the Luangwa River crossing point. This is a 4 to 5-hour drive. A few stops are made *en route*, the first being to quite the biggest Baobab tree you'll likely ever set eyes upon, located on the Lundu Plain; further on, in the forest zone, a secluded *dambo* provides a good spot to take tea; you may be lucky and spot wildlife here (a *dambo* is a natural depression that holds water) and it is also a draw to birds. Enjoy a final picnic lunch with you guide on the bank of the Luangwa before you are taken to a designated crossing point where a boat will be waiting for you to ferry you across to the Nsefu sector of the park. Bid farewell to your guide! Once across the Luangwa you'll be driven the short distance to either Nsefu or Tena Tena Camp – most mobiles end with a night at Nsefu. You have the option of enjoying an afternoon game drive here, although many will relish the chance to simply relax in camp, enjoy a hot shower, downtime, a siesta and very relaxed sundowners. Over dinner it will all feel rather strange meeting new people for the first time in a week, in an unfamiliar camp setting!

*Overnight at Nsefu/Tena Tena Camp*

### **(\*) day 9 on the 9-night safari**

#### **Nsefu Camp**

Nsefu Camp is situated on a sweeping bend of the river, in the game-rich Nsefu sector of the South Luangwa National Park. Nsefu was the first game camp in Zambia, dating back to the early fifties, when it was opened by Norman Carr. The camp was taken over in 1998 by Robin Pope, who gave it a thorough makeover before re-opening it in July 1999. However, the camp retains much of its original traditional style, and sense of history – the Rondavels have been retained, but each has had a spacious *en suite* loo and shower room added, complete with old-fashioned taps, and has been fully refurbished to a very high standard inside. Silver service and a wind-up gramophone harp back to the style of the 1950's. Each room has a clear view of the river, through large windows and from newly erected wooden verandas. The view of the river is superb and the camp includes a terraced area where game grazes during the day. The bar, tucked in beside a huge dormant termite mound, overlooks a waterhole that is very productive for game, especially leopard at night.

#### **Essentials:**

- open between 22<sup>nd</sup> January and 31<sup>st</sup> March, and 22<sup>nd</sup> May and 20<sup>th</sup> November
- 12 guests
- traditional rondavels
- *en suite* semi-open air bathrooms with basin and shower
- minimum age 12 years
- walking, drives, night drives, visit to Kawaza Village and school, and local market
- transfer time from Mfuwe Airport 1hr 30 mins mostly game driving
- on generator – battery charging possible
- fully inclusive (imported wines and spirits included)



*Nsefu Camp (photo: Angus Maclaren at Walks in Africa)*

## **Tena Tena**

Tena Tena is situated at the southern end of the Nsefu sector of the South Luangwa National Park, overlooking a lovely section of the Luangwa River. It's one of only two camps located in this sector, the other being Nsefu Camp, and both are operated by RPS. The Nsefu sector was first pronounced a game area in 1966 some five years before the South Luangwa was even declared and has always been recognised as an outstanding game-viewing area. RPS has long term connections with Tena Tena, as it was the first camp that Robin Pope opened and ran, before he purchased Nsefu camp in the late 1990s.

The camp is small and exclusive, accommodating just 10 guests in spacious, luxury tents set within a grove of magnificent Natal mahogany trees. The tents are protected by wooden frames and canvas canopies and are sited on wide glazed concrete platforms which extend to open-air bathrooms and external tiered seating areas. The bedrooms feature sweeping hanging ceilings which have a Bedouin feel, and the eastern influence is further enhanced by richly coloured cushions and Indian cotton bedspreads which off-set the more muted traditional bush-camp colours.

There's a thatched dining room and bar from which one can gaze over the wide Luangwa river, catching sightings of game as they move across the river or come down to drink. Daily guided drives and walks are on offer here.

### **Essentials:**

- open between 22<sup>nd</sup> May and 31<sup>st</sup> October
- 10 guests
- minimum age 12 years
- *en suite* semi open air bathrooms with flush loo, double basins and one shower
- walking, drives, night drives, visit to local village, and local market



- transfer time from Mfuwe Airport 1hour 15 mins
- solar power and generator
- fully inclusive (imported wines and spirits included)



*Tena Tena Camp*

### **Day 8 (\*) – Departure**

Depart from Nsefu/Tena Tena Camp and continue your journey. Depending upon where you are heading to next and timings, your transfer can be a “game drive”. Walks in Africa can arrange onward travel to other destinations in Zambia (eg. Victoria Falls, Lower Zambezi National Park), or neighbouring countries (South Africa, Malawi, Botswana and Namibia). Note that a nice option is to at a night or two at either Nsefu or Tena Tena, enjoying game drives as a counterpoint to your week of walking.

**(\*) day 10 on the 9-night safari**

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