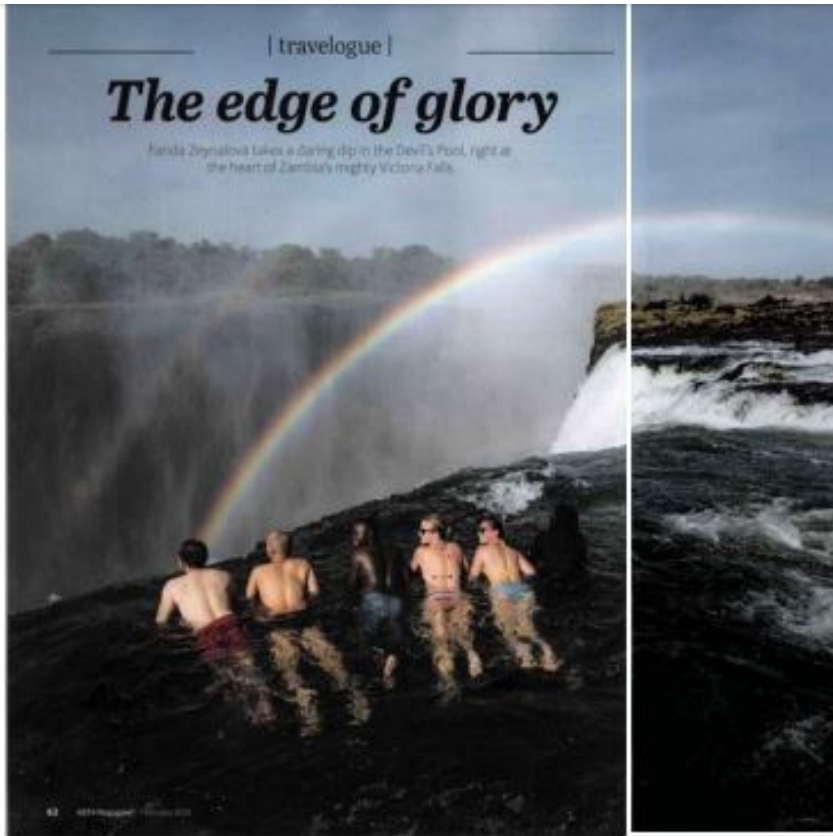


| travelogue |

## The edge of glory

Karisa Zyzanski takes a daring dip in the Devil's Pool, right at the heart of Zambia's mighty Victoria Falls.



**“Y**ou probably won't die,” says my guide. He's *probably* right, but the mass of gushing water is repeatedly smacking against me. I squeal, waggle my limbs like a frantic octopus and try to hold on to the slippery rock. My heart is thwacking against my chest. I can't breathe. I can't decide if this is dread or adrenaline. Maybe both. I lean an inch closer to the edge, where the water is hurtling down the 100-metre drop at full speed. At the bottom, where it joins the Zambezi river, it's formed what looks like a swirling, smoking mass of cotton balls — I can see why the locals call Victoria Falls 'The Smoke That Thunders'. The water is crashing so loudly that I can barely hear my guide's instructions, but it turns

out they were a menacing 'just hold on'. Oh, God. But then, a moment of respite. I look straight ahead. A colossal rainbow towers above the gorge that cuts through the border of Zambia and Zimbabwe, and for a fleeting moment, the beauty before me washes away all my fears.

I'm swimming in Devil's Pool, a small natural rock pool on Livingstone Island, just a five-minute boat ride from Royal Livingstone Hotel in southwestern Zambia. This unique island, at the very heart of the thumping Victoria Falls, or Mosi-oa-Tunya, was opened to tourists in 1992, and is where David Livingstone first laid eyes on the mesmerising natural wonder of the Falls. The Scottish missionary and explorer described it as, 'So lovely, it must have been gazed upon by angels in ►

their flight.' Every effort is being made to preserve the island — by only allowing a maximum of 16 visitors at a time, the natural habitat, home to hippos and crocodiles, remains unruffled. Due to rising water levels, it's only safe to swim in the pool during certain times of the year, between mid August and mid January. I'm here on a balmy August morning, in optimum conditions, yet absolutely nothing about this looks safe to me. So far, I've slipped twice, shed a little tear and incessantly quizzed my guide on death rates.

Before I can get to Devil's Pool, I must first tackle the short, up-current swim leading towards it. I dip my toe into the water, which is shallow with a bed of large, slippery rocks, and there are little tributaries and sprouting plants dotted around. The water feels soothing against my skin, and is so clear that I can see my quaking legs below trying to find balance. There's a rope for guidance, so I grip it like my life depends on it — which it might. Then, something nibbles at my feet, causing me to squawk, flap and let go of the rope. I suddenly find myself in a tricky treadmill situation — for every metre I trudge, the water drags me back three. I start paddling and scurry towards the bed of rocks where the others are resting, right before they enter the pool. Here, I have about 30 seconds of serenity before I slide in and tempt fate.

The view is sensational. The Batoka Gorge, formed from gargantuan, basalt rock, is hugging the Zambezi below as it makes its way to the Indian Ocean. Travelling through six countries from its source in northwestern Zambia, it snakes through unique wetlands, habitats, wildlife, savannahs and ecosystems, but this is its most famous destination. In the early 1990s, the Zambian and Zimbabwean governments proposed the Batoka Gorge Dam project, which would see the construction of two large dams on the river's main stream. Not only would this endanger the river's natural habitat (Birdlife International has labelled the Gorge an 'Important Bird Area'), but also the livelihood of local workers who rely on tourist activities such as white water rafting. Plans for the dams are still being considered, but, for now, the view in front of me remains beautifully unblemished. Still perched on the rock, nervously awaiting my turn to enter the pool, I look over to the Zimbabwean side, home to Victoria Falls National Park, but my view is blocked by sheets of mist as the water wallops the river.

Splash! My fearless guide leaps into the water behind me, head first, inches away from the natural rock wall stopping him from tumbling over the mammoth drop. I snap out of my moment of calm, and slither in. "I can't, I can't, I can't," I mutter. The others are already planking on the rock wall, swallowing any fear for the perfect Instagram shot. I plop into the water, and, after a few moments doing what I do best — flapping uncontrollably — the force of the water swooshes me towards the wall. I look to my guide for reassurance. He turns his head, smirks, and utters the most un-reassuring words. "You probably won't die." I probably won't. But the adrenaline is worth it. [tongobezi.com](http://tongobezi.com) □



Up to bat: Guide jumping into Devil's Pool, Livingstone Island



## SAMPLE

### HAYES & JARVIS

offers a nine-night Splendours of Zambia tour, including a visit to Victoria Falls.

Prices start from £4,249 per person and includes accommodation at Royal Livingstone Hotel by [Anantara](#), transfers and return flights. Based on departures 13 May 2018.

### MORE INFO:

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