

## 9 Victoria Falls

A visit to the world's largest waterfall doesn't have to mean just admiring it from afar — tackle its challenging rapids on a wild whitewater trip across the Zambezi

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I lose my balance and squawk, falling into the inflatable boat like a distressed manatee. Composing my flailing limbs, I look up at the waves ahead: they resemble a giant washing machine, swishing and swashing on a fast cycle. I turn to Boyd for reassurance, but don't find any.

"Your life is right here," he says to me, pointing to the palm of his hand, with a grin that lingers long after his menacing words. My Livingstone-born-and-bred guide is obviously joking as he briefs us on river decorum, but I'm nervous — this is my first time whitewater rafting. We're bobbing

on the Zambezi, tucked deep in the vast Batoka Gorge. Up ahead are 10 rapids along a six-mile stretch, each more perilous than the last.

So far, I've taken twice as long as everyone else to shimmy down the steep Bolling Pot Trail (mostly on my bottom) to the river, almost impaled a passer-by with my oar and anxiously quizzed Boyd on rafting death rates. Just over 300ft above our heads is Victoria Falls and its eponymous bridge. The view is incredible, and my attention is divided between the staggering surroundings and Boyd's potentially life-saving words.



IMAGE: GETTY

## VICTORIA FALLS

### FIVE WAYS TO TAKE IN THE FALLS

#### ✈️ HELICOPTER

Take off from Boobeb Ridge and fly above Victoria Falls at 1,500ft — look for elephants or giraffes on Long Island and Mosi-oa-Tunya National Park. **HOW:** Flights range from £116 to £261. [uacem.com](http://uacem.com)

#### 🏊 SWIM

From August to January, water levels drop enough for you to swim to the edge of the falls on Livingstone Island and marvel at the 320ft drop. **HOW:** A trip to Devil's Pool and Livingstone Island starts from £73. [tongobez.com](http://tongobez.com)

#### 🚂 STEAM TRAIN

Take the Royal Livingstone Express to Victoria Falls Bridge to witness the sunset on the border of Zambia and Zimbabwe. **HOW:** The train starts from £130, including transfers, drinks and dinner. [bukhtreelocalzambia.com](http://bukhtreelocalzambia.com)

#### 🌍 CROSS BORDERS

For a head-on view, cross the bridge to Zimbabwe, where the Victoria Falls National Park is home to many species of wildlife. **HOW:** Factor in a 30-minute walk to get to Zimbabwe, where you can purchase a visa on the spot.

#### 🪂 BUNGEE JUMP

From Victoria Falls Bridge, plummet 360ft into total nothingness for four seconds of pure adrenaline-pumping fun. **HOW:** Shearwater Bungee has jumps from £115 per person. [shearwaterbungee.com](http://shearwaterbungee.com)



Boyd guides the team through the Zambezi's churning waters **PREVIOUS PAGE:** Victoria Falls

"This is called the 'Oh shit' line, and it's your friend," Boyd explains, tugging on the rope attached to the side of the boat. "When I tell you, hold on to it for dear life." The team ahead of us have flipped and submerged at the first rapid of the day — The Wall. I wait for the bright yellow helmets to re-emerge from the water like marshmallows floating in a mug of hot cocoa. One by one, they climb back onto the boat. The waves ahead of us are churning so loudly that Boyd is forced to raise his voice to continue prepping us, and before I know it, arms start rowing and the boat begins to move.

We sweep through the water, edging closer towards The Wall. Thanks to Boyd's instructions — he called them instructions, I call it incessant yelling — we survive. The next few waves are a breeze, instilling a dangerous level of confidence. My arms hurt already, so I spend the next five minutes pretending to row and let my fellow rafters move the boat along. Next up is Between Two Worlds, which takes us under the Victoria Falls Bridge — a structure that marks the boundary between Zambia and Zimbabwe. We smash it. "Yeah! Team Boyd!" we cheer, smacking our oars together. However, our collective glee is short lived because Gulliver's Travels — one of the most technically challenging rapids — is brewing in the near distance.

"And drop!" shrieks Boyd a few seconds later. As one, we hastily reach for the 'Oh shit' line and

duck down. It's all a bit military. A towering wall of cold, thrashing water engulfs us. We're jouncing on the river with the boat almost sideways and I'm struggling to breathe as the water repeatedly thwacks me in the face. I can't see, and for a nanosecond we're completely submerged. The river is desperately trying to flip us. When I regain my vision, I turn to look at Boyd — his grin almost reaches his helmet buckle. This is a man who's been dodging the perils of this river for years.

We reach an unruffled stretch of the Zambezi, where I clock a crocodile sunbathing on a giant basalt boulder. Kayakers are up ahead preparing for another set of rapids, and a helicopter swoops down towards us, dangerously close. I've never felt adrenaline like it. I stand up to wave to those inside the aircraft, and promptly fall straight back into the boat, legs akimbo. There really isn't time for tomfoolery. The next rapid, The Midnight Diner, with its humongous wave, is fast approaching. I can see it in the distance. It's another washing machine, and I feel like that rogue sock, destined never to see the light of day again. [safpar.com](http://safpar.com) 📍

#### MORE INFO

Double rooms at the Royal Livingstone Hotel by Anantara from £360 per room per night on a B&B basis. [royal-livingstone.anantara.com](http://royal-livingstone.anantara.com)  
Double rooms at the AVANI Victoria Falls Resort from \$377 (£267) per room per night, B&B. [miharihotels.com](http://miharihotels.com)