

FALLING FOR ZAMBIA



The Royal Livingstone Hotel by Anantara on the edge of the Victoria Falls made falling in love easier than ever before.

Following in the footsteps of legendary pioneer Sir David Livingstone, the Royal Livingstone Victoria Falls hotel by Anantara takes you back in time to a world of luxury, rich colonial history and a vibrant culture of people who will have you missing Zambia before you have even left. From the moment you arrive (a mere 1hr and 30 minutes flight on British Airways from Johannesburg) you feel as if you're miles away from the troubles of the world.

The falls known to locals as "Mosi-oa-Tunya" – "The Smoke that Thunders" throws a cloud-like spray across the bush and sends rainbows soaring hundreds of feet into the air. This bucket-list wonder (which is far more breath-taking from the Zambian side) is a short 10 minutes' walk from the hotel. The magic of the falls never gets old for visitors, who are able to appreciate it's beauty with each visit (The Royal Livingstone Hotel by Anantara offers their guests complimentary access, and we took full advantage of early morning and late afternoon visits to one of the world's Seven Natural Wonders!)

With so much to do in Zambia and at the Royal Livingstone our trip was interspersed with luxury and adventure, a vacation unparalleled to anything we've ever experienced in Europe or the States (It's no wonder so many tourists flock to Zambia each year, as if they are more aware than us South African's of this wonder on our doorstep).

Everything about our stay in Zambia was magical, including our transfer to the hotel. A boat trip by Livingstone Adventures takes guests speeding across the Zambezi. This unique transfer allows visitors to explore the heart of the river while giving them the chance to spot free-roaming animals on the riverbanks (we also spotted a few hippo's lazily taking in the winter sun). Reminiscent of the adventures we have read about in Rudyard Kipling novels since our childhood, a river transfer is the only way we recommend arriving at The Royal Livingstone. For those who wish to explore the Zambezi further, wildlife river safaris combine exclusivity and adventure with excellent game and bird viewing, and the promise of exceptional photographic opportunities.

After arriving at the Royal Livingstone, we meandered to the hotel's large deck overlooking the river before it was time for perhaps one of the most incredible experiences we have had on any of our travels – the chance to dine in the past... aboard the Royal Livingstone Express Train. Trundling through the picturesque Zambezi Valley, guests relive a bygone era as they relax in lovingly restored Pullman-style coaches. Crossing the Victoria Falls Bridge, sunset beside the world's largest waterfall is toasted with sparkling wine or a cocktail, followed by a gourmet dinner. It is without a doubt a must for guests travelling to Zambia, who can enjoy an informative history lesson aboard the train pre-dinner.

Returning to the hotel with full tummies and happy hearts it was time for an evening drink at Zambia's most famous bar situated in the Royal Livingstone Hotel. The Travelers Bar exudes old world charm. Sophisticated evenings flow over a gin and tonic, old and new world wines, along with fine whisky and gin selections, as a pianist tinkles the ivories.

The next morning started pre-sunrise with a two-hour horse ride safari (another activity offered by Livingstone Adventures). The perfect early morning ride included giraffe and zebra viewing amidst the beautiful Zambian landscape. After our fresh start, it was time to follow in the footsteps of Livingstone himself and travel by boat to Livingstone Island, which offers the closest views of the falls. Adventurous travelers can enjoy a swim in the devil's pool at the edge of the falls, followed by a breakfast on this heritage island. No visit to the Vic Falls is complete without a visit to Livingstone Island, as its views of The Falls are a spiritual experience.

Amidst all the adventure, we made time for luxury with a massage overlooking the Zambezi River in a private gazebo on the hotel's grounds. Our one hour body massage was the perfect way to unwind after our early morning start, while birds chirped in the trees above our heads and Hippo's played within sight. The Spa which offers an array of treatments is world class in every respect.

After we had freshened up it was time to dine by design under 'The Monkey Tree' in the garden of the hotel. Our candle lit table, surrounded by lanterns, offered the most romantic private dinner under ancient trees on the riverside lawn.

Our second morning called for another early morning as we viewed The Falls from a different angle – the sky. Helicopter flips offered by Livingstone Adventures was the perfect way to complete our stay in paradise. Such a high vantage point offers guests the chance to see game running through the plains of Africa from above, while the Zambezi River snakes on the one side of the helicopter and The Falls magically enchants on the other.

After our action packed morning it was with heavy hearts that we packed our bags and bid farewell to the place we had come to call home for the last two days. The hospitality of the Zambian people coupled with the beauty of the country is the reason why we have voted The Royal Livingstone as our must-visit destination of 2017. As we took our luxury shuttle to the airport (Offered by Bush tracks Africa – The only transport company to use in Zambia) we longingly waved goodbye to a country that has found a place deep within our hearts. In those last moments of our trip, hurdling over Livingstone's gravel roads, we vowed to every star in the universe that we would be back, time and time again.

The Royal Livingstone Hotel: www.royal-livingstone.anantara.com

Bushtracks Africa Transfers: www.bushtracks.com

Livingstone's Adventures : <http://www.seasonsinafrica.com/adventure-activities-zambia/victoria-falls-activities/livingstones-adventure/>

Livingstone Island: <https://tongabezi.com/experience/livingstone-island>