

Making memories on sojourn in Africa

Itinerary involving multiple lodges in Zambia brings variety



IMAGE 4 OF 9

Nosia Sibiya, a shaman in Hamilton Village, rolls the knucklebones for visitors seeking answers. Near Sabi Sabi Private Game Reserve, South Africa. (Steve Haggerty/TNS)

Alex Stewart, waiting on the steps of Bilimungwe Lodge, deep in the Zambian bush, likes nothing better than surprising first-time visitors to this wilderness outpost with an introduction to the next-door neighbors.

"Come in, come in, you're just in time," she urges, a twinkle in her eye, leading me to the rear deck of the lodge, one of six Bushcamp Company lodges in the South Luangwa National Park. When she points to the backyard waterhole, I get it.

There they are, two female elephants and a baby, splashing each other, cooling off on this hot October day.

After 26 hours and three flights from California to Zambia, in southern Africa, with a three-hour drive to Bilimungwe, I was dragging. But not for long.

Steve, my husband, were to spend 16 days spread across five game-lodge destinations. Bilimungwe and Chamilandu are in the wilderness and off the grid. With rustic cabins, six to eight guests, friendly staff, first-class guides and a dedication to wildlife preservation, they sounded perfect.

The advertisement features a large, detailed image of a burger on the left, topped with arugula, tomatoes, onions, and a dark patty. Above it is the Sweet Earth logo with the text 'AWESOME BURGER*'. To the right, a smaller image shows a similar burger against a starry night sky background, with a play button icon overlaid. The headline reads '* PLANT-BASED GOODNESS, MAN'. A red 'LEARN MORE' button is at the bottom right. The ad is marked 'AD' in the top left and 'POWERED BY CONCERT' and 'FEEDBACK' at the bottom.

Bilimungwe looked over a waterhole; Chamilandu had a river view and a "hide" above an elephant path. Chamilandu's dinners were served by the river; at Bilimungwe we ate on the deck by candlelight, sharing wine and hashing over the day's surprises, like the lions that killed and ate the buffalo and the bush babies in the Mahogany tree

Steve picked the next destination, the Islands of Siankaba, on an island in the mighty Zambezi. Spectacular views from the lodge take it all in, from the trees in the foreground to Zimbabwe, on the river's far side.

The patio, with tables and chairs, flower beds and a fountain, was the gathering place. Our bedroom, one of seven tented cabins connected by swinging bridges, clung to the bank above the high water mark.

Sleeping late we relaxed, swam in the pool, took a sunset cruise, joined an off-island picnic and got into a mokoro (canoe) for a guided ride, launched from the dock. Dinner times were especially busy; the restaurant has a local following.

We spent our last week in South Africa at two very different safari lodges, the starkly minimalist Earth Lodge and its partner, Bush Camp, a family-friendly resort, both in the Sabi Sabi Private Game Reserve.

Despite a day lost to rain, we didn't miss a drive, bouncing over the hills in comfortable vehicles, with rain gear on board and miles of new territory to explore.

More Information

The nitty gritty

Planning: Tent camping and 35-person tours, favored by students and young couples, are cheap and fun. High-priced lodges cost more because they offer more, from personal airport transfers to private cabins, comfortable beds, meals, beverages, game drives, offsite tours and even laundry service.

Getting there: For South African Airways' routes, flight times and special offers see www.flysaa.com. Visas to enter Zambia are sold at the Lusaka Airport; the \$50 visa is slightly

more expensive but provides multiple entries.

Staying: See the Bushcamp Company at bushcampcompany.com; the Sabi Sabi Bush Lodge at sabisabi.com; and the Islands of Siankaba at siankaba.net. These and similar safari lodge websites provide photos, maps and descriptions of lodging, meals, wildlife, game drives and climate. All-inclusive safari lodge rates per person, per night, range from \$570 to \$1,000 or more.

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