

Beatrice
Aidin

Dinner is served under the stars at **Chikwenya Camp**, Zimbabwe



Paw patrol

Life, and luxury, among the animal kingdom's most majestic members

IT'S DUSK, and a five-ton bull elephant walks gracefully past our dinner table. The giant animal, 10-foot high, barely registers us as we watch in awe, from just 10 yards away. This kind of encounter comes with the territory at Chikwenya Camp, on the eastern boundary of Mana Pools National Park, the latest addition to Wilderness Safaris' luxury collection in Zimbabwe. Fence-free, wildlife can roam at will here, on pathways trodden by generations of animals.

Overlooking the Zambezi river, in a spot where hippos and elephants swim and wallow, and baboons chase each other, this must be one of the remotest places to go on safari in Africa. There is no Wi-Fi or mobile reception – there isn't even a landline – so a stay here is more rejuvenating than any spa.

The tents, **seven for couples and two for families**, are the work of South African interior designer Tanja Beyers. Permanent structures of canvas and reclaimed wood, they have huge beds, limestone baths, and indoor and outdoor showers. Each also has a terrace with a view of the floodplains and the river beyond. This is Claridge's, safari-style.

The camp has **four guides**, overseen by the renowned Foster Siyawareva, **the first black professionally licensed**

guide to qualify after Rhodesia became Zimbabwe in 1980. There is nothing Foster doesn't know; he effortlessly identifies each flower, bird, animal and dropping. Who knew elephants were such prolific seed distributors? We see vast herds of zebras and rhinos – and get a shock when a crocodile takes a sudden interest in our jeep.

Leaving the noisy jeep behind, an (armed) walking safari is a revelation, although I'm slightly alarmed when Foster explains that a sweet scent we

encounter is the aroma excreted by a python looking for a mate. On another occasion, we board an open-sided pontoon to view hippos and elephants from the Zambezi itself. At one point we clamber on to a private island for a spot of fishing (moderately successful) and lunch (much more so).

Evenings are spent drinking G&Ts and nibbling canapés around a campfire, before sitting down under the stars to succulent steaks, barbecued chicken and world-class South African wine. At bedtime, we're escorted back to our rooms by guards wielding shotguns, in case any lion, cheetah, hippo or crocodile should come prowling through the camp. Which, judging from the pawmarks Foster points out each morning, they often do.

THE DETAILS

Africa Travel can arrange a three-night stay at Chikwenya Camp including British Airways flights from Heathrow, domestic flights, accommodation, meals, local drinks, game drives, walks, boat trips and canoeing from £4,560 per person, based on two sharing (africatravel.com, 020-7843 3586)

