

LIVINGSTONE WILDLIFE & ECOLOGY

At 1708 metres (5 603 ft.) wide, Victoria Falls is the most expansive curtain of water in the world and drops more than 100 metres (328 ft.) into the sheer Zambezi Gorge. Located in the south-west corner of Zambia, these Falls and the Zambezi River are the central points in an area of spectacular scenic beauty: from the Falls themselves to the broad, picturesque course of the Zambezi River upstream, the rainforest adjacent and the stark jagged gorge downstream, the power and timelessness of nature's forces are evident throughout..

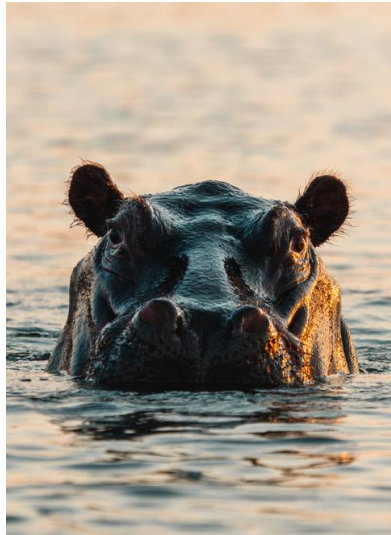
CAMPS

- Toka Leya



The Tonga and Makalolo peoples lived here for centuries before the Falls were 'discovered' by David Livingstone in 1855. He gave it the highest honour he could think of: naming it after his Queen. Its local name, Mosi-oa-Tunya – "the Smoke that Thunders" – more accurately defines the essence of the place: the rising, shining spray that can be seen from 30 km (18 miles) away. This vapour has the effect of adding moisture in the form of humidity to the air in the "splash zone", so that a small yet unique rainforest ecosystem clings to the edge of the Falls, providing a toehold for no less than 70 shrub and 150 herbaceous species, as well as trees such as pod and Natal mahogany, ebony, Cape and strangler fig and red milkwood. Further away from the constant spray, the surrounding area comprises mopane and teak woodlands with luxuriant riverine forest along the banks of the Zambezi River.

The presence of several protected areas in the vicinity, from the Zambezi National Park in Zimbabwe to Mosi-oa-Tunya National Park in Zambia, means that herds of big game such as elephant and buffalo as well as smaller species and even predators like lion persist in the area. There is also a small, growing, and highly prized, population of white rhino in Mosi-oa-Tunya National Park, which are also part of a rhino breeding project. The Zambia Wildlife Authority embarked on a wildlife reintroduction programme (of species that naturally used to roam the area) in the Mosi-oa-Tunya National Park in 2013. Interesting game species relocated here include Lichtenstein's hartebeest, sable and puku, while species already occurring in the Park were bolstered too, such as zebra, wildebeest, warthog, impala, southern giraffe and greater kudu.



Aside from the mesmerising Falls – both in sight and sound – the paths through the rainforest at their edge allow one to catch a glimpse of some of the mammals that live here: bushbuck gaze shyly from behind a bush, banded mongoose scurry through the undergrowth, and vervet monkey and chacma baboon flit through the trees; wailing trumpeter hornbills sail past in their characteristically undulating flight and the crimson-blazoned wings of the Schalow's turaco can be seen by patient birders together with the likes of rock pratincole (seasonal visitor), African finfoot and even Pel's fishing-owl on occasion.

Interestingly, there is a distinct difference in the fish species above and below the Falls, which clearly form a comprehensive barrier to fish movements upstream: 39 species are recorded from below and 84 above the Falls. Nile crocodile and hippo are common above the Falls.

Vic Falls, as it is affectionately known, straddles the border between Zimbabwe and Zambia, and both countries share its World Heritage Site status.