



Great scenery: A pontoon crosses the river near Chief Kakumbi's palace

GAME DRIVES IN VARIOUS REGIONS

MFUWE AREA

The wider area of Mfuwe with its main access into the park is the biggest visitor attraction in the Luangwa Valley. Its magnificent impressions must be shared with others, but nowhere else are the animals so used to the presence of tourists and vehicles and nowhere else are they so protected. Their great tolerance of visitors makes it possible to get closer to the animals. The winding road network is extensive, and so the many safari vehicles can spread out quickly.

The little green house at the park entrance stands directly in front of the Luangwa Bridge under a few monkey pod trees (*Senna petersiana*). In April/May this ornamental tree produces delicate yellow blossoms, not to be confused with the similarly attractive African weeping wattle (*Peltophorum africanum*).

On the Luangwa Bridge, it is a good idea to stop, get out and enjoy the scenery up and down the river: the quiet dugout canoes in the lazy river where fishermen cast their nets, the palm leaves rustling in the wind, the broad hippo tracks on the steep sandbanks. Skeletons of trees protrude from the river, their bare branches serving as perches for herons and kingfishers. If you stand on the bridge early in the morning, you can see numerous hippos at sunrise, hurrying back to the water from their pastures. In the distance, elephants quickly cross the riverbed, returning to the park from their nightly excursions to the Lupande GMA. At this early hour, you can also see crocodiles drifting silently along with the gentle current. Just a few hours later, in the heat of the day, they are lazing on the banks and sandbanks of the Luangwa.

Behind the bridge, the Riverside Drive leading upstream and the smaller Elephant Loop branch off along the Mfuwe Lagoon, past the Norman Carr Memorial with its grove of



Majestic: elephants pass through the Luangwa silently

beautiful ebony trees. Otherwise, the river bank is dominated by thickets of Combretum, in which you can mainly find elephants, baboons and bushbucks. Meyer's parrots and pretty little lovebirds also like to flutter around.

If you stay on the main path, you will eventually end up at the Mfuwe Lodge, embedded in the lagoon of the same name. Huge crocodiles, a few lazy hippos, nimble Nile monitor lizards and turtles are spread out across the long lagoon. African jacanas strut around on the leaves of the water hyacinths, while saddle-billed storks and sacred ibises walk along the bank and catch prey.

Our personal recommendation: in the morning, take the long stretches to Katete Bridge and then to Chichele Lodge; In the afternoon, when the sun is shining on your back, a shorter trip to the Luangwa Wafwa Lagoon and the Chipela Chandombo Lagoon.

As its name suggests, the Riverside Drive runs constantly close to the river bank, where

the hippos frolic in the Luangwa during the day. There are over 50 hippos living here per kilometer of river, and they always have to stay close together during the dry season. The narrow sand track leads along the Wamilombe Drive to the Katete Bridge. In this semi-open habitat there are impressive kigelia, fig and marula trees and the chances of spotting giraffes and zebras are particularly good.

Where the road leads directly to the Luangwa, you should look out for nests of the magnificently colored carmine beetle, which dig their hollow nests in a different place in the steep bank every year. Lions and hyenas like to rest during the day in the dense, shady bushes and under the beautiful Natal mahogany trees on both sides of the Katete River. Grysbok can also occasionally be spotted in the protective thicket. The all-weather track then leads over the landmark "Twin Baobab" to the junction of the Twin Baobab Loop, which turns back towards Luangwa and runs across a wild, dusty plain.



Male lion siblings often stay together for years

In the dry season, large herds of buffalo migrate to a shallow watering hole in the Luangwa, whose droppings are visible from afar. Giraffes, puku and warthogs are also numerous in this area. At the level of Chichele Lodge, an area rich in lions near Kapiri Nkonde Hill, the loop joins the all-weather track that takes you back to Mfuwe. This is an opportunity to follow the game trails around the Kakumbi airstrip on the Mushilashi River and visit the Big Baobab, both typical lion areas. The massive bird nests on the thick branches of the Big Baobab do not belong to eagles, but are communal nests of small White-billed buffalo weavers (*Bubalornis albirostris*).

The game drive upstream follows the course of the picturesque, kidney-shaped Luangwa Wafwa Lagoon. The name of this famous oxbow actually just means "Dead Luangwa". In the background behind the lagoon stretches a wooded savannah with a black cotton soil. There are many attractive ancient trees here, along with some African

ebony trees. Zebras are often seen there, as well as numerous puku and impalas. The lagoon itself attracts birds such as the rare skimmers, pelicans, marabous and yellow-billed storks. A few hippos and crocodiles also live in the stagnant oxbow water, and beautiful African fish eagles occasionally sit on the particularly tall trees along the banks, looking out for prey.

Between the Luangwa Wafwa and the adjacent Chipela Chandombo Lagoon, the narrow Owani Drive runs parallel to the Luangwa, sometimes right on the edge of the steep river bank. Hundreds of puku graze on the adjacent meadows on the fertile grassland and show little fear of people. Baboons and vervet monkeys jump around between the antelopes. The scenery appears like a blissful park landscape. Impalas, kudus, bushbucks and elephants roam the shady forest savannahs beyond the grasslands. Ground Hornbills and Smith's bush squirrels are native to the mopane forest areas.



Trusting look of a baby baboon
Beautiful common waterbucks

Wildlife is also omnipresent outside the national park. The Lupande GMA is directly opposite the South Luangwa National Park. In the late dry season, the elephant herds wade through the Luangwa at sunset to spend the night in search of food in the GMA, as the park's vegetation is already severely decimated by this time. At sunrise, the herds return to the park almost silently.

On the way to Kafunta River Lodge, a side road branches off towards the mountains, which leads to the little-known Kakumbi salt pan. Here, off the usual game drives, you can often come across puku and buffaloes, but also discover many birds, especially crowned cranes.





Remote Baobab forest is a seldom visited atmospheric place



Cookson's wildebeests drink at the waterhole close to Mwamba Bush Camp

Magnificent Ebony grove near Kaingo Camp

LION PLAIN AND BAOBAB FOREST AREA

To get to this extremely attractive area, you follow the track beyond the Luangwa Wafwa Lagoon and the Chipela Chandombo Lagoon to the Luwi Sand River, cross its sandy riverbed and after another 10 km you reach the equally dry Chambowa Sand River. Usually only guests of the Lion Camp and the two Shenton Camps, – Kaingo and Mwamba Bush Camp – can get this far into the park, around 30 km from the park entrance.

But the area has a few very special natural treasures: the largest forest of African ebony trees right next to the Kaingo Camp, a baobab forest a little further away in the north and countless lagoons and oxbows of the Luangwa, which forms particularly wide loops and bends here. Fish Eagle Lagoon, Pelican Lagoon, Tsetse Lagoon and many others have all been created by changes in the course of the river as the meandering Luangwa sought new paths.

However, the Kapanda Lagoon was not created by a dried-up loop of the Luangwa; it is far too far away. Even in the late dry season, it almost always has water and is therefore a valuable watering hole for wild animals in the hinterland such as wildebeest, kudu and roan antelope. To get there and to the baobab forest further north, you have to cross the Numbu Plain beyond the Lion Plain and the Mwamba Bush Camp. Unfortunately, the drivable public road network ends here. The historic Big Lagoon Camp and the Zebra Flats are no longer drivable; the tracks have long since become overgrown.

The vegetation in this region is dominated by ebony and kigelia trees, winter thorn, wild jasmine and white-flowering gardenias. While there are more elephants and giraffes around Mfuwe, there are significantly more wildebeest and huge herds of buffaloes here. Several prides of lion roam between the Lion Plains and the Nsefu sector east of the Luangwa. Sightings of leopards, hyenas and porcupines are common on night game drives in this area.

