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March 11, 2014

Adventures in Chobe National Park

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With ears projecting like flags and trunk raised, the massive bull elephant stomped toward us, halting only when he reached the 20-foot expanse of river that separated our little safari boat from the shore. For a tense moment, we feared he might keep on coming through the shallow water. Our boat's pilot shifted the motor into reverse, just in case a hasty retreat was needed.

The elephant stared at us menacingly for a minute or two, the only sound the chatter of a dozen or so digital camera shutters. Then, with what looked like the equivalent of a shrug, he turned and swaggered away toward a herd of female elephants in the distance. A collective sigh went out from our group, part relief and part in awe of what we had just witnessed.

We'd been promised wild animal sightings on this river cruise through Botswana's Chobe National Park, and the experience far exceeded our expectations. On this three-day cruise aboard the Zambezi Queen we'd seen not only elephants, but also hippos, crocodiles, zebras, giraffe, lions, hyenas, antelope, impala and buffalo along with bird species too numerous to count.

Each day we set out in a small tender boat, sailing away from our floating hotel in search of animals. The guides know the best places to seek them out—the hippos' favorite wading hole, the shoreline where impala come to drink, the grove of trees where lions like to nap. At night, back on board the Zambezi Queen, dinner conversation flows between the day's sightings and praise of the superb cuisine.

The Chobe River flows south from Angola, where for about 150 miles it forms a border between Botswana and Namibia's Caprivi Strip, before joining the mighty Zambezi River in its plunge over Victoria Falls. This tranquil section of the Chobe snakes through open plains and swampland, creating a rich wildlife habitat.

Chobe National Park was the country's first, created in 1967; however,



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the desire to preserve this land was discussed as early as 1931. It protects one of the largest and most diverse concentrations of wildlife in Africa. And, we lucky few had the opportunity to view this bounty up-close-and-personal during our water-based transit.



This park is home to the largest elephant population in Africa, estimated at more than 100,000 individuals. These Kalahari elephants that live on the open savannahs are much larger than their forest-dwelling African cousins, or the species native to Asia and India. They are the largest living land animals, measuring from 9 to 13 feet in height and weighing up to 12,000 pounds. They are long-lived – up to 70 years in the wild – and have an intelligence level comparative with primates. It is thrilling to see so many of these impressive creatures at once.

On this journey we had the best of both worlds: an unparalleled opportunity to see African wildlife in safari-like proximity, while enjoying the comfort of 5-star accommodations on board the [Zambezi Queen](#). The décor and service aboard this luxury houseboat feels like the finest boutique hotel. You can take in the view at any time from air-conditioned indoor spaces framed by large picture windows, or relax outdoors on the pool deck. And with only 14 cabins, you get plenty of pampering from the staff.

This intimate three-day experience with nature in Chobe National Park is only part of Tom Harper's incredible 12-day [Extraordinary Africa](#) journey, which also includes South Africa's Cape Town and environs, unforgettable Victoria Falls, and a safari camp at the Okovango Delta and Moremi Reserve. Come on along...you know you want to go!

2 Comments

Melissa Hirsch

May 28, 2014

Any more trips added for May 2015?

Robert Bingaman

March 27, 2014

Looking at Africa in 2015.

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