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The Zambezi Queen

The Zambezi Queen provides possibly the best way to go on safari ever invented. She floats in a watery no man's land, with Namibia on one bank and Botswana's Chobe National Park on the other.

Only a determined entrepreneur like Brett McDonald would contemplate building a 3-story luxury floating hotel in the wilds of the Caprivi Strip, installing special jet engines from America, prism solar hot water systems from Austria, energy saving fixtures from Germany and accelerated bacterial septic tanks from Louisiana.

These environmentally-friendly considerations are some *"For an excursion with a difference into Chobe National Park, the Zambezi Queen offers a 4x4 game inspection with Chobe National Park's Honorary Wildlife Vet, Cray Wilson."*

of leopard and lion and several packs of wild dog, this really is game watching paradise.

The supply of water in the Chobe determines the activities of all life along the river, including that of the Zambezi Queen. The logistical problem of getting the newly built boat from her hard dock into the water seemed insurmountable, but Brett had the answer. He prayed for enough rain to sufficiently raise the water level so that she would simply float off. It's hard to deny Brett anything, seeing as how he is such an amenable fella, so the rain duly came and came and came. 2007 saw the highest flood in 20 years and then in 2009 it hit a 50 year record, and 2010 was not far behind. His boat floated, and the locals ask Brett to "please stop praying now."



of the many special features of the Zambezi Queen boutique hotel houseboat. The face that guests experience is the luxurious interior designed by Jenni Button, the array of fine food, and the decadence of floating aboard this intimate hotel moored in the middle of the Chobe River.

With an estimated 160,000 elephant in Chobe National Park (approximately half the world's population), plenty

Straining on her loose mooring on the Namibian side of the Chobe River, the current gently pushes the vessel from side to side and allows the breeze to flow easily through the ship. Drawing a draught of less than one metre, the Zambezi Queen can pretty much go where she pleases, including both the Namibia and Botswana riverbanks. Brett somehow managed to gain approval to take the ship and her boats across the invisible country border into Botswana territory. He dug up some old agreement to do with the contested Sedudo Island that lies in the river between the two countries, and is now able to take his guests right up to the Botswana riverbank for some of the best game viewing on earth. That's not always necessary though, as there are usually plenty of elephant and hippo within easy watching distance of the mother ship.

For an excursion with a difference into Chobe National Park, the Zambezi Queen offers a 4x4 game inspection with Chobe National Park's Honorary Wildlife Vet, Cray Wilson. This could involve any number of animal encounters, like darting an injured animal. As Cray carefully measured a dose of tranquilizer to immobilize an impala with a wire trap around its leg, he warned, "One drop of this stuff will kill you, so please don't touch it."

This is just one of several special activities available to the maximum 28 guests on the Zambezi Queen. But most are happy to go with the flow (so to speak) and tag along on game cruises or a visit to Kasemu Village on Impalila Island, known for its enormous baobabs. Villagers are used to receiving guests and keep their village spotlessly clean and lay out a circle of crafts including beautifully woven baskets. With river water so accessible it seems incongruous to find stand pipes in the village, but these were installed after crocodiles took one too many lives from this small community.

The Zambezi Queen is certainly the lap of luxury. The staff to guest ratio seemed to be about 2:1 and each individual is as delightful as the next. You cannot help but be seduced by a stay on the Zambezi Queen but just remember, there is so much more to her than just a pretty face.

From time to time Flame of Africa offers specials on the Zambezi Queen for SA Residents for a 3-night long weekend, with flights from Johannesburg to Kasane. To find out more, email: maxine@flameofafrica.com, Tel: 031 762 2424 and take a look at <http://www.zambeziqueen.com>



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