

Travels

Safari Nights

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ON the final leg of the trip, we set off for Liwande National Park, where we had a booking at Mvuu Camp. I was very excited, since this was to be my first safari experience (and the achievement of a long held fantasy). We passed fresh elephant droppings within the first five minutes of entering the park, and waited by the car park, for a boat to the Camp. As we crossed the river, the guide pointed out various birds, and suddenly said, "There is a hippo". I turned just in time to see the ridiculously small, round ears of not one, but two hippos; they were submerging in response to our presence. After arriving at the camp, we checked in and were taken to our "tents", which were actually beautifully appointed cabins, with netting, thatched roofs, low walls and attached bathrooms at the back. Flowers on the pillows, with a welcome message, completed an inviting picture.

After unpacking, I was lured outside by the sounds of loud splashing coming from the river. Our cabin had a lawn out front, and was one cabin away from the river. The river was around nine feet below the edge of the lawn, and I was soon to be very grateful for this! The splashing turned out to be two crocodiles, one a very large, mean looking male, and I quickly understood the emphasis placed in the introductory folder on NOT swimming in the river. It was very exciting to see those animals so close though, bringing home to me that this was indeed a "real" safari experience, however luxurious. Indeed, the Camp brochure emphasised the need to be alert at all times, since there were no boundaries between the cabins in the Camp, and the National Park itself, so that animals might wander in accidentally at any time.

In the late afternoon, we set out on a driving safari, with a total of nine people sitting in the three rows of seats in each vehicle, with the last row being the highest. The driver sat in the front, and to his left, in a raised chair outside the actual car, sat the guide. The vehicle was an open jeep and I wondered how they ensured safety from lions and elephants. It soon became apparent that safety was totally dependent on the expertise of our driver and guide, since neither even carried a gun.

As we set out, we soon passed a herd of the graceful Impala. These golden deer travel in packs with one dominant male, and are easily identified by the distinctive black stripes on their backsides. We were not overly

impressed with our driver's rather sexist (not to mention inaccurate!) comment that the Impala family reflects the human family (with one dominant male in charge of the household of females and offspring), but were consoled to hear that the male impala rarely remains dominant for more than a couple of years, and is kept very busy fighting off new challengers. We saw this, because the male Impala repeatedly gave a loud barking cough to scare off any intrusive males. He wasn't too happy about our jeep either... Shortly afterwards, we came across some waterbuck, who can be easily recognised by the round white ring they have on their backsides, reminiscent as one wit pointed out, of someone who has accidentally sat down on a newly painted toilet seat!

