



AFRICA MIDDLE EAST

Wildlife and beyond with Robin Pope

By Judy Koutsky | Feb 12, 2015

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Robin Pope Safaris' Luangwa Safari House in Zambia. Photo Credit: Judy Koutsky



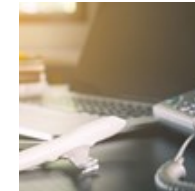
Robin Pope Safaris, which specializes in safari experiences in Malawi and Zambia, offers two African experiences in one trip, with packages that showcase animal interactions as well as cultural experiences.



In Zambia, the operator's Luangwa Safari House is a must. I was awakened my first morning there by an elephant standing on its hind legs, pulling off leaves from the acacia tree in front of the lodge. From my balcony on the second floor, I could watch the elephant, which was soon joined by half a dozen others, without being noticed.



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In the distance, eight giraffes were walking slowly toward the watering hole, while a warthog and her three babies trotted across the savanna. What makes the Luangwa Safari House, and all Robin Pope accommodations, such an intimate safari experience is the size; it's perfect for couples, families or small groups of friends traveling together. It has just four rooms, so meals, game drives and sundowners (cocktails in the bush) are intimate affairs. Also, the sheer number of wildlife that appears outside the lodge is pretty amazing. Sure, we saw great game in the park, including three leopards, but my favorite animal viewing was still from my balcony: impalas munching on the grass, baboons grooming each other, and even the elusive wild dogs.

In Malawi, Mkulumadzi is a modern, eight-chalet lodge nestled along the banks of the Shire River. Here, they offer river safaris (where we saw a herd of 20 elephants taking a bath as we drank our sundowners) as well as night safaris (where we came upon a pride of five lions in the dark). Plus, the food is some of the best I've had on any safari.

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After being depleted of wildlife due to poaching, Majete Wildlife Reserve, where the lodge is based, has been flourishing under conservation programs and restocking efforts done in part by Robin Pope and the African Parks Network. The area is now Malawi's only Big Five Park.

The 10-villa Pumulani Lodge, located on the banks of the Unesco World Heritage site of Lake Malawi, does not have game drives and animal viewing but instead offers a variety of watersports, including kayaking and snorkeling. One of my favorite excursions, though, was a cultural tour to a nearby village, where we visited a school and interacted with children and talked with women about their daily lives. That experience was just as magical as seeing the elephants on my first day.



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