

TRAVEL

YOUR NORTH SHORE GUIDE *to* THE WORLD OUTSIDE

Built in the early 1990s, the Zambezi Queen was created to carry its guests on an extended journey from Katima Mulilo down the Chobe and Zambezi Rivers and back. In 2009 the 14-suite deluxe riverboat was returned to its former glory with a complete overhaul. PHOTOS SUPPLIED **ZAMBEZI QUEEN**

The Zambezi Queen covers the waterfront

Riverboat safari

A river runs through it

Chobe National Park, in northern Botswana, has one of the largest concentrations of game in Africa. By size, it is the third largest park in the country, after the Central Kalahari Game Reserve and the Gemsbok National Park, and is the most diverse. The Chobe, which flows along the northeast border of the park, is a major watering spot, especially in the dry season (May through October) for large breeding herds of elephants, as well as families of giraffe, sable and cape buffalo.

—Wikipedia

More online at
nsnews.com/entertainment

twitter.com/NSNPulse

JANICE AND GEORGE MUCALOV

Contributing Writers

The baby elephant is clearly having fun, rolling around in the mud on the riverbank.

Other elephants scoop out big soccer balls of goopy mud with their tusks, which they fling under their bellies and over their backs. “Nature’s sunscreen,” explains our guide Gilbert, as we watch the herd just four metres away from a small aluminum boat. “And when the mud dries, they’ll rub against trees to get rid of skin parasites.”

The elephants are a highlight of our three-night river safari on the Zambezi Queen. The 28-passenger river boat cruises the waters of the Chobe River between Botswana and Namibia. And its small boat excursions deliver awesome up-close views of the prolific wildlife along the river. We feel like



Chobe National Park boasts one of the densest elephant populations on the African continent — with estimates of approximately 120,000 kalahari elephants currently in the region..

we’re part of a National Geographic documentary — except it’s all happening live around us.

An estimated 120,000 elephants live in Chobe National Park on the Botswana side of the river. We see countless large

herds drinking by the river, feeding on grassy islands and, of course, wallowing in the mud. One mother, watching over her baby, even sprays us with water from her trunk (sorry camera) when we get too close.

As well as elephants, we also gawk at hippos sunning in the muddy shallows, Cape buffalo, impala, large man-eating Nile crocodiles and birds galore, from colorful kingfishers to yellow-billed storks, grey herons and

Egyptian geese.

We don’t even have to venture from the Zambezi Queen to take in the wildlife shows.

The boat’s top deck lounge and dining room has floor-to-ceiling screens that open completely around — so while sipping Stellenbosch sauvignon blanc at sunset, enjoying the breezes from a comfy leather sofa with zebra-striped cushions, we’re entertained by a moving pachyderm tableau. The low-to-the-water cabins also have full sliding glass doors that let the outside in. We can see elephants and grunting hippos while lying in our king-size bed.

Launched in 2009, the Zambezi Queen offers one of Africa’s most unique safari experiences. Instead of the usual safarion land, where you stay in a tent or lodge, you’re based on the water — and soak up the life of the floodplain.

See Zambezi page **33**

Zambezi Queen offers unique access

From page 32

The deluxe river boat is owned by the Mantis Group, which has a collection of five-star hotels and eco-lodges worldwide. And she's an elegant little vessel from which to explore this corner of the African continent.

Her 12 cabins on two lower decks are spacious, light and bright, with white walls decorated with black-and-white photos of African wildlife. Bathrooms have faux wood floors and glass showers.

Fans keep us cool at night. (But we hear the Zambezi Queen is installing air-conditioning in all cabins for extra comfort.)

The only thing you have to be careful about is closing your balcony doors and outside metal shutters when it gets dark. (After leaving the doors open and lights on one evening, we return to find a bug party in our cabin — hey, this is Africa. But the staff kindly clean our room all over again.) At 10 pm, the main lights are turned off, and the boat's power is switched to back-up.

Unlike other river cruises, the Zambezi Queen doesn't do much actual sailing. She's really a floating boutique inn that potters along a 25-kilometre wilderness stretch of the Chobe River between two mid-river moorings. But that's fine, because you're kept busy with different forays off the boat. If anything, we wish we could spend more time simply relaxing on the boat on a lounge chair by the whirlpool, quietly soaking up the river scenery — grasslands, the wide limpid river, cloudless blue sky, swooping birds and nary a sign of human civilization.

Two-, three- and four-night cruises are offered. Along with the river experience, each cruise includes a full morning's game drive in Chobe National Park.

Getting to Chobe is an adventure itself. You take a small aluminum boat to the Namibia side of the Chobe River, traipse through the desert sand to a tiny Namibia immigration shack, get your passport stamped (after your guide hunts down the customs official sleeping in the

bush) and then clamber back in the small boat to cross the river to the Botswana side, where you go through Botswana immigration for another passport stamp.

But once in Botswana, you're soon seated in an open-sided Land Cruiser (with shade roof), bouncing along sand tracks in the famous wildlife park, scanning the ochre bushland for the heads of giraffes popping up above acacia trees and, if you're lucky, lions. We don't see any of the kingly beasts (they usually sleep during the day and hunt at night). But plenty of impala (those lovely antelope with lyre-shaped horns) bound across in front of our vehicle. And by the river, we come upon a large troop of baboons; we can't stop laughing over the antics of the babies chasing each other and being carried on their mothers' backs. Cape buffalo, kudu

and comical-looking warthogs round out our game viewing in the park.

When the heat begins to sap your energy, you're brought back to the boat for a late lunch — perhaps smoked trout, cheese-and-broccoli quiche and salad. Just save room for dessert, as the kitchen serves the most scrumptious, still-warm-from-the-oven, lemon meringue pie.

Refueled, you have the option to visit the rural village from which the Namibian staff are hired. The villagers show you how they live on a day-to-day basis without electricity. The village is also a good place to buy souvenirs, such as hand-made beaded jewellery and wooden carvings.

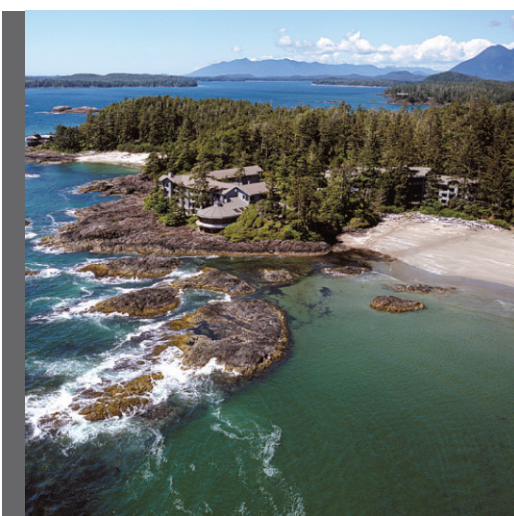
Evenings onboard the Zambezi Queen always start in the lounge. The boat pours a lovely selection of South African Chardonnay, Pinotage and other wines (always

three whites and three reds to choose from). The wine flows freely and everyone mingles, sharing safari tales. One evening, we even toast the surprise engagement of a happy couple. A few hours earlier, the manager had whisked them by speedboat — along with a bucket of chilled champagne — to a tiny river island so the groom-to-be could propose.

The last dinner is a special buffet of local foods. Mathilda the cook, wearing a pumpkin orange turban, explains each dish in charmingly broken English. There's pap (a white cornmeal paste), spicy lamb stew, creamed spinach in peanut sauce and oxtail. After, the staff, dressed in grass skirts, entice us to join them in traditional dancing and singing. We sway and dip and try to smile, but we already miss the elephants and our front-row viewing seats.



The Zambezi Queen explores a 25-kilometre wilderness stretch of the Chobe River.
PHOTO SUPPLIED ZAMBEZI QUEEN



ENDLESS SUMMER IN TOFINO

September is the perfect time to experience the rustic elegance of the Wickaninnish Inn. Take advantage of our special late summer rates and enjoy the quiet calm of Tofino's endless coastline.

For current specials, visit www.wickinn.com/promotions

The
WICKANINNISH INN
Tofino, Canada

tel 1.800.333.4604



www.wickinn.com

If you go:

Rates for independent travellers start at \$930 per person (for two nights) and include meals, wine and beer, excursions (including game viewing in Chobe National Park) and transfers from Kasane, Botswana (zambeziqueen.com).

The Zambezi Queen is also sold as part of Africa tour packages. Ask your travel agent.

The best time to go

is during the cooler, dry season from May to November.

Take anti-malarial precautions, as the Zambezi Queen is in a malaria area.

Be sure to also visit nearby Victoria Falls, one of the world's seven natural wonders. The top-rated Royal Livingstone Hotel is just a 10-minute walk from the thundering waterfalls (livingstone-hotel.com).

GREAT WATERWAYS OF THE WORLD PRESENTATION



Featuring Europe,
with the Rhine,
Danube and Rhone
Rivers plus the exotic
Mekong

UNIWORLD
BOUTIQUE RIVER CRUISE COLLECTION™

PLEASE JOIN
Roseway & Uniworld River Cruises
September 10, 6:30pm
West Vancouver Library
1950 Marine Drive

Learn all about these exciting destinations!
RSVP to ROSEWAY TRAVEL
604-926-4344 info@rosewaytravel.com

Roseway Travel 2458 Haywood Avenue, West Vancouver

REGISTER NOW:
WWW.NORTHSHOREKIDNEYRUN.CA

CONTACT:
1.800.567.8112 EXT 228
NORTHSHOREWALK@KIDNEY.BC.CA

The Kidney Run
IN THE NORTH SHORE
RECYCLE FOR LIFE

**SUN SEPT 21ST 2014
AT AMBLESIDE PARK**

2.5K WALK, 5K FUN RUN

**REGISTRATION: 8AM
START: 9AM**

1 IN 10
CANADIANS
HAS KIDNEY
DISEASE.

BE THE MOVEMENT

50th ANNIVERSARY
1964 2014

The foundation of kidney care.