

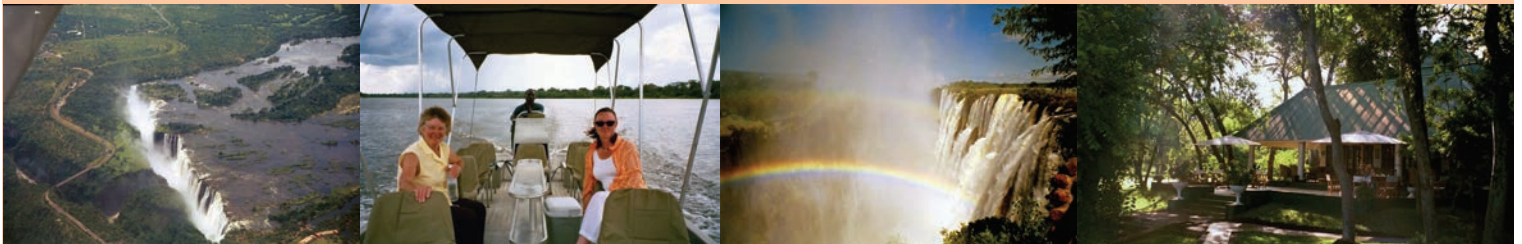
## The River Club

My first view of The River Club was from the Zambezi River. We rounded a bend and saw a row of open-fronted huts raised high on stilts on the Zambian side of the river. Our chalet felt like a private, well-appointed tree house. Sleeping in the high, mosquito net-enclosed bed and waking to the trumpeting of elephants on the opposite bank and the splash of hippos hitting the water is a potent reminder that we are in Africa. Downstairs, the bathroom is also open to the river, making a sunset bubble bath in the claw-footed tub a mesmerising experience.

The property does have road access, but the river approach is far more spectacular and the river is what the Club is all about, so guests are collected from the small outpost of Livingstone airport, bundled into an air-conditioned van and whisked off to a nearby jetty where banana boat, cool towels and drinks await and motored down river past herds of elephants splashing on the Zimbabwean banks and pods of hippos with only their eyes above water, sheltering from the midday sun.

road, white columns of 'smoke' can be seen billowing high into the air from miles away. Arriving at the Falls it becomes apparent that the 'smoke' is in fact the spray of the water rushing over the falls and being blown back up. In 1855, David Livingstone was the first European to see Mosi-oa-Tunya, 'the smoke that thunders'. Landing on what came to be known as Livingstone Island on the very precipice of the Falls, saved him from being washed over the edge. For guests wanting a close-up look at the Falls, The River Club arranges morning tea or lunch on Livingstone Island (which isn't just near the edge of the falls, it forms part of the rim!).

Flights over the Falls are also available, and seeing them from the air is the only way to truly appreciate their amazing geology. Occurring on a fault line, the face of the Falls has been worn away seven times in its history leaving a zigzag gorge of previous faces in front of it. Tours of Livingstone's town centre



The River Club experience has a feel of colonial grandeur, from the croquet lawn beside the main house to the port served after dinner (and always passed to the left). Although built in 1998, the main house resembles a grand Edwardian home, with a library, guest lounge and extensive views over the Zambezi from the wide, covered veranda where guests tend to congregate.

Tales of crocodiles in the water hazards of the golf course as told by owner Peter Jones, a second-generation Zambian, add to the frontier flavour. Educated in Zimbabwe (then Rhodesia) and England, he joined the British Army and fought in the Falklands before returning to Zambia. He claims his current lifestyle at The River Club is largely modelled on the life of an officer in the Royal British Army (where do I sign up?). With only ten chalets, guests have a real sense of being guests in Jones' home; nothing runs to a tight schedule (a welcome relief for many guests who make this their final stop after a week of jam-packed safari schedules). Old-fashioned afternoon tea is served in the shade of the wide veranda around 4.30pm—rich chocolate cakes, bite-sized pancakes and light scones with jam and cream appear beside fine porcelain teacups and dainty linen napkins.

Most guests come to this part of Africa to visit Victoria Falls and, despite the postcard shots and reputation as a honeymoon destination, it is still an awe-inspiring site. Whether you approach by air, boat or

and nearby Simonga village (which is sponsored by The River Club) can also be arranged, but after the Falls, the highlight for many visitors is an hour-long elephant safari.

Swaying along on the elephant's back with an armed guide walking in front gives a taste of safaris from an earlier time; and, although a touch touristy, the chance to pat and feed the elephants after the safari, including a 3-month-old baby, provides the photo-opportunity of the trip. Nightly sunset drinks served cruising up the river is another chance to view the wildlife up-close—hippopotamus, impala, elephants and an array of local bird life add to the beauty of an African sunset.

If I was feeling more adventurous I could go white water rafting, bungee jumping, abseiling, parachuting or gorge swinging, but I can't be stirred from my peaceful languor curled up in a deep wicker chair on the veranda, staring past the white planters of blood red roses to the mesmerising Zambezi wending its way around the islands, except to order another gin and tonic please!

The River Club has a honeymoon suite and can arrange weddings on the island opposite the Club. A family room, exercise room, tennis court and poolroom are all in the process of being added. Bookings through The Classic Safari Company +61 2 9327-0666, [www.classicsafaricompany.com.au](http://www.classicsafaricompany.com.au). South African Airways flies to Johannesburg daily and on to Livingstone three times a week (Monday, Thursday, Saturday), Nationwide Airlines has daily flights from Johannesburg to Livingstone.