



bowls that pockmark the landscape, further motivation for wildlife to move closer to the river. You will find magnificent giant ancient baobabs, some as old as 2 000 years. We'd flown into Chikwenya and had had site of the vast, dry land beneath us that was more mauve-brown than green and seemed incapable of sustaining any life form. But, so large were some of the baobabs that they could be seen from high above in our tiny little 5-seater plane.

Fortunately the 2km deep band of *faydherbia albida* woodland, commonly known as winter thorn, near the river, produces a highly nutritious seed during Zimbabwe's winter months of June through November and acts like a magnet for wildlife. The non-vegetarians, like lion and wild dog follow the vegans, mainly impala, but will consider buffalo too. Eland wander through the forests, and as a KwaZulu-Natalian who has only seen them in the higher reaches of the Drakensberg, they seemed comically out of place.

Chikwenya Lodge

Guests to Chikwenya are drawn to the spectacular wildlife and to the world class tiger fishing. The lodge enjoys an exclusive 7000-acre lease of pristine lower Zambezi floodplain and some 5km of river frontage. It's one of the most luxurious lodges to be found in the region and is comprised of nine double suites and one presidential suite, all built on raised teak platforms. Each suite is separate but interlinked by raised wooden walkways, and all are beautifully appointed, air-conditioned and have a gorgeous outdoor ball and claw bath. They all have private decks with views into the bush and onto the floodplain.

Deck Game Viewing

The central area is comprised of a sprawling deck with cinematic views of the open grassland floodplain and river. There is also a pool, indoor and outdoor dining areas, and bar. The deck hugs the edge of the floodplain and a superb activity is lazing in the rim flow pool watching the daily rituals of the animals.

First up in the late afternoon baboons saunter down to the water's edge, followed by a steady stream of buck - sometimes skittish signalling the presence of lion. Warthog dart around with uncertainty. Elephant swagger across the plain and baboons give way albeit reluctantly. The buffalo don't fit into any timeless tradition, but parade stubbornly across the plain whenever they feel like it. Sometimes they stomp right up into the lodge grounds, metres from the central area, or even alongside rooms at night, particularly if there are lion in the area as the lodge provides shelter.

The lion slink down to the river in late afternoon, but frustratingly they kept slipping down minutes after that

From top: A sub adult male lion within meters of the lodge, eland in the forest, the lodge, views onto the open plains and river from the rim flow pool. The area is rich in bird life as well as having an abundance of game.