



*“The 16 pounder was the start of an epic three days of fishing. Between the two of us we managed to **catch and release** over 300 pounds of tiger fish with the average weighing in at 7.6 pounds. ”*

Fortunately Chikwenya Lodge is a well known fishing destination which caters well for their fishing guests. There are four pontoon fishing boats all geared with rods, reels and necessary tackle. We had decided to take our own tiger traces, which is advisable.

Each boat is skippered by an experienced fishing guide, who apart from fulfilling his regular fishing duties, also acts as good motivators by continuously reminding you that “You have to be in it to win it”. We were fortunate in that not only is Willard a passionate fisherman but an avid and knowledgeable birder and tree fundi extraordinaire. So whilst drifting down the river he would point out the common name and Latin name of animals, trees and birds.

Our strategy was to start our little competition by fishing with bait, progress to spoons and then to finish off with a spot of fly fishing (yes, we’re an ambitious lot). For bait fishing cheza is the bait of choice which meant a short stopover at the ‘House of Cheza’ as Willard calls it, to stock up. Catching bait is usually a pain in the butt, but to us it was great fun with the cheza taking the worm with almost every cast, plus putting up a very spirited fight. I guess it was a sign of things to come when we lost a few hooks to some cheeky little tigers.

From the ‘House of Cheza’ it was off to find a good spot to

start our drift which in our case was a drop off where the river eddies after flowing over a sandbank, just down river from the lodge. This stretch of the Zambizi River is teeming with wildlife; I mean there are hippos, crocodiles, elephants, buffalo, antelope, and birds wherever you look. This is an experience on its own, but to catch it at sunrise with the blood red sun creating a liquid gold reflection off the river and fish eagles crying in the background is something very special. I was just thinking how fortunate I am to live in Africa when Willard’s excited voice brought me out of my melancholy state.

“You have an enquiry” he said, which is fishing-speak for a tiger showing an interest in your bait, and it had me up on my feet, rod in hand waiting for the right moment to strike. Tiger fishing is not easy; these fish have exceptionally hard palates, a set of teeth that will make jaws nervous, plus a healthy aversion to being caught. You strike too soon and the hook won’t set, strike too late and the bait is gone, strike in between and you may have a chance.

My strategy was to wait until it jumped before striking, which proved the right one because a few moments later a monster of a fish jumped about 40 yards from the boat. After a long seven minute fight we had a 16 pound tiger “in dee boat”. This was beyond my wildest expectations and after a quick weigh-in and