



SWIMMING WITH THE DEVIL

“We have lost only one man,” said Alpha Omega, our Devil’s Pool guide, a tall stick of a man, “and that was because he saved a guest who chose not to take his advice.” All the guides standing at the edge of the briefing room/cafeteria, considered this statement solemnly, their heads bowed. “We also lost a bull elephant. He was swept away by the strong current,” our guide continued. “This is why you must do exactly what I say. This is not playtime. We do not want you to feed the crocodiles waiting at the bottom of the Victoria Falls.” The other guides, nudged each other, grinning hugely.





The world famous Victoria Falls is a natural wonder that defies description as its turbulent waters gush over a 110-metre high gorge. The surrounding lush rainforest is teeming with wildlife, prevalent especially at dawn, so be prepared to get soaked in 'the smoke that thunders'. With the worlds wildest white-water rafting, a heady 111m high bungee jump off the Victoria bridge and a heart-stopping zip line across the gaping gorge, this is every adrenaline junkie's paradise.

An early morning speedboat heading to Livingstone and its 'Morning Breezer' experience is as exhilarating as it gets. Us wannabe heroes, bound for the Devils Pool, are collected from the jetty of the Royal Livingstone Hotel; here the guide gives us a brief safety talk and introduction of what to expect.

From the hotel's jetty we bump against the strong current and across the river in what feels to be a hopelessly underpowered speedboat, twisting and turning as the skipper navigates his way through the rocky channels, heading towards the rising column of spray from the Victoria Falls. At this point it needs to be said: water terrifies me and heights. A few months ago, sitting at home in England with a glass of whisky and a book of maps, my editor decided this was a capital idea. But now I reached the conclusion that this was going to be the way in which I would die and spent the ten minutes it took to cross the Zambezi river thinking about the terms of my will, contemplating my familiar possessions with

the eye of one who was planning their testamentary disposal.

Now safely on the rocky Livingstone island (this is the island from which Dr David Livingstone first witnessed the Victoria Falls in 1855. From here he lowered a length of calico with a bullet attached, acting as a weight, to measure the depth of the Falls), traditional Maheu energy drinks, made from maize meal and sorghum, were handed around. Alpha Omega hurries through the safety procedures of visiting the very edge of Victoria Falls, which is on the east of the island overlooking Horseshoe and Rainbow Falls.



"You can only visit this area when the water levels are low," he said. "Usually this is between July and March and sometimes, to get to Devils Pool, it is an even shorter period as the water level need to be really low for safe swimming, otherwise you'll do what the elephant did."

Soon Alpha Omega had us wading through, then swimming into the current, leading us to the west of the island overlooking the main Falls and the magnificent main torrent of water gushing over the basalt precipice. With its numerous rainbows floating through the spray, it's jaw dropping beauty is like nowhere else on earth. On the other side of the first pool we climbed over jagged rocks (be sure to wear trainers).

"We're almost there," said Alpha Omega leading us and explaining the route. "Now," he says, "you jump into the Devils Pool." Of course this is not obligatory and is only if you feel comfortable but there was no way I could back out of this now. So, cupcake that I am, I jumped, with the certainty that I would die.

"I am the daughter of the soil," I gasped when spluttering to the surface. "This is not my milieu." Being a non-swimmer I was momentarily placated when I found safety ropes in place. The Devils Pool itself is a deep natural pool that nature had eroded and creased into a unique rock ledge on the lip of the Falls, where the water's just a few inches deep. This natural barrier is what allows you to jump into the deep pool but not get swept over the edge.

I lay on this rock lip at the edge of the Devils Pool

and looked right into the devil's mouth – the 110m chasm of the Falls, with huge torrents of water gushing over the edge just meters away. The location gave rise to numerous 'selfie' opps; our guide and his sidekick preferred taking photos and video of us with our cameras. My cameraman, in his wisdom, was on dry land, photographing us die-hards.

Now, comfortably certain that I was not going to die, I asked Alpha Omega to hold my ankles so I could hang my head and shoulders over the edge (spurred by the morbid curiosity of perhaps spotting the skeletal remains of the elephant). The Devils Pool has a real adrenaline kick to it; I loved the experience and wanted to stay longer but was led away by the promise of Tonga Eggs Benedict with creamed spinach, Hollandaise sauce and crispy bacon.

Followed by possibly the best tasting coffee of Zambia, fellow Devils Pool survivors decided this experience should be at the top of everyone's African bucket list. There must be some truth to that as I'd adopted a bit of a swagger which is what happens when one comes face to face with your biggest fears. I gazed off to the horizon and gave a slow macho sniff, "Yeah, I've swam with the devil and shouted down his throat."

For the Victoria Falls 'Morning Breezer' experience see www.victoriafallszambia.travel ^{AC}

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Written and photographed Cindy-Lou Dale

