



The birdwatching can be excellent in Kafue – especially by boat!

About the same size as Wales, Kafue is Zambia's largest national park and protects a wide variety of different environments. On an undulating plateau, it's a mosaic of miombo and riverine woodlands dotted with occasional grassy pans (small depressions holding water, also known as 'dambos'). Veined by numerous rivers, it's perfect for a varied safari.

At its heart, the main Kafue River is wide, deep and slow, to the obvious pleasure of large numbers of hippo and crocodile. Tall, shady hardwood trees overhang its banks, whilst islands are favourite places for elephant and buffalo. Aside from the common species of impala, puku, zebra, blue wildebeest, red lechwe and kudu, Kafue's wildlife attractions include rarer antelope like roan, sable, eland, oribi and Defassa waterbuck. Lion, leopard and cheetah thrive, as do growing numbers of Africa's rarest large predators – wild dogs.

In the far north of Kafue, one area is beautiful and strikingly different: the Busanga Plains. These floodplains are dry for six months of the year – and then the game found here can be memorable.

NORTHERN KAFUE



Pink-throated longclaw

With few visitors and often spectacular game, northern Kafue has long been one of our favourite safari areas. When we started sending travellers here in 1996, few Zambian safari aficionados had ever seen it. This is no longer the case, as several new camps have opened in the past few years, and all the old ones have changed hands and been rebuilt.

Now is a great time to visit; as the new owners are building their reputation, and the Busanga Plains remain fairly quiet. There's a choice of camps for 2009 and several of the *Expert Africa* team have visited all of them in the last few years.

At the centre of northern Kafue, **Lufupa Tented Camp** overlooks the confluence of the Lufupa and Kafue rivers. This camp has new, en-suite, Meru-style tents, with huge gauze windows and verandas overlooking the river – simple, airy and very comfortable. There is also a small plunge pool. Lufupa's biggest attraction is likely to remain its exciting 4WD night drives, which have a terrific track record of excellent leopard sightings.

Beside the deep Lunga River on the northeast edge of Kafue, **Lunga River Lodge** has just six compact en-suite chalets. Lunga is a relaxing camp; its thatched dining room and bar are next to a lawn, and there's

a small pool and a sun-deck over the river – where boat trips are lovely.

Lufupa and Lunga are both close to airstrips, so trips will often start and end at these camps – visiting the more remote Busanga Plains in the middle of the trip. Activities at both include 4WD safaris, day and night, walking safaris and boat trips.

On the eastern edge of Kafue, **Hippo Lodge** is a small, independently run camp that's been quiet for years, but may be looking interesting for adventurous travellers in 2009; ask us for news on this.



Solitary pairs of oribi are commonly seen in the termitaria zone on the edge of the Busanga Plains

BUSANGA PLAINS

One of Kafue's main tributaries, the Lufupa, enters the north of Kafue via the Busanga Swamps. During the rains, it floods out over the adjacent Busanga Plains. When the waters recede, they leave behind lush vegetation. This is a magnificent wilderness: flat grasslands dotted with photogenic 'islands' of wild date palms, sausage trees and fig trees. It attracts huge herds of red lechwe and puku, as well as buffalo, zebra and wildebeest, followed by cheetah and lion (known here for their tree-climbing antics).

Set on an island of enormous fig trees in the heart of the Busanga Plains, **Shumba Camp** has been built in style. Six large, luxurious tented rooms are raised up on wooden decks, overlooking the plains – each with twin or double beds, an electric fan and an en-suite bathroom with indoor and outdoor showers.

Shumba is linear in layout; its open-plan bar, dining and lounge area is fronted with extensive glass doors overlooking a large wooden deck, a sunken lounge, a plunge pool and the plains beyond. It's dotted with African artefacts and cool aqua- and sand-coloured sofas make it a welcoming place to soak up the view with a gin and tonic.

In the far northwest of Busanga Plains, **Kapinga Camp** is built around huge fig and mahogany trees. Its spacious rooms and



One of Kafue's herds of buffalo on a misty morning



Cheetahs will often hunt during the day

facilities are built to exactly the same high quality as those at Shumba. In many ways its accommodation is virtually identical, although it's a smaller camp, taking six guests at most. Shaded by impressive, octagonal sunshades and with furnishings of rich red hues, Kapinga feels slightly funkier in design, more relaxed, a little more intimate and closer to the bush.

On the northwest side of Busanga Plains, **Busanga Bushcamp** stands on another tiny tree island. The top half of the walls in its pole-and-canvas chalets are made of insect-proof mesh – which makes them quite open and very airy. Each chalet has a solar-heated en-suite shower, a flush toilet and stable doors opening onto an unfenced private veranda. The central lounge and dining area is canvas on a wooden deck, and has comfortable sofas – whilst fireside dining is often under a rather marvellous storm-lantern chandelier!

Half an hour's game drive from the Busanga Plains, **Musanza Bush Camp** is a simple camp; its four khaki walk-in, zip-up tents are shaded on a 'tree island'. Each has comfortable twin beds, cotton duvets, a hanging wardrobe and a luggage rack – plus a flush toilet and a bucket shower (hot water is heated on request). Musanza has all the essential camp comforts, whilst keeping a sense of adventure in the wilderness – meals are often taken outside under the stars. Great value trips here are based on the *Puku safari* (see page 86), which has a set itinerary.

SOUTHERN KAFUE

Southern Kafue feels very separate from the north of the park, and doesn't have the same density of big game. However, camps here are starting slowly, so if you want to visit an area before anyone else, then this is a good place to come.

The lovely **Kaingu Lodge** has a traditional design which has been executed with tremendous attention to detail. It has four large bedrooms in spacious tents, raised on wooden decks. All have en-suite bathrooms with indoor and outdoor showers in stylish stone, while their large front verandas overlook the Kafue from thick riverside vegetation. For 2009, a large family house, **Finfoot Cottage**, will be available, comprising two bedrooms, a shared bathroom with an outside shower, a deck over the river and a small plunge pool.

Tom and Viviane Heineken built this lodge with great care and now run it with passion. There is game here: relaxed antelope are

seen on day and night drives, and leopards pass through camp regularly. However, that's not why we love the place. The primary attraction is the river, as here the mighty Kafue splits into shallows to flow around a myriad of small islands – each a jumble of sand, soil and huge, rounded granite boulders. Boat trips and walks explore these, with options for excellent fishing and birdwatching; it's really very beautiful.

Further south, **Nanzhila Plains Safari Camp** stands on the site of an old 1950s' restcamp. It has four thatched cottages, each of which has an en-suite hot shower and toilet. These are solidly built, with light coloured walls and fabrics. The central thatched dining area, bar and lounge stands on a raised platform under a huge ebony tree, near the open-air fireplace.

Activities include day and night game drives in open 4WD vehicles, guided walks and visits to Lake Itzhi-Tezhi, and the nearby Shezongo cultural village.



The terrace at Kapinga



Satellite maps online

Our website incorporates extensive satellite maps of Zambia, including Kafue. Just click under 'Google maps' on the left-side menu of www.expertafrika.com – you can see exactly where these camps are and then link to relevant trip ideas and information.