

KIPLINGS

Through the thin shield of scratched perspex, the cool blue dome of a cloudless sky stretched to infinity, roofing the broad surface of azure water below etched by the thin white wakes of meandering pleasure craft. This was the mighty Lake Kariba, the man-made Riviera of Zimbabwe, overlooked by the ancient Matusadona Mountains whose purple hue of tortured creases and folds majestically dominate the southern shores under the ever reproving gaze of the mystical spirit, the Nyamiyami.

The light aircraft passed over the unusual conical thatched roofs of a luxury safari lodge throwing its reflections on the lake before beginning its descent to the well prepared dirt strip where we were soon bumping its surface to alight and meet the friendly faces of the welcoming party.

After a pleasant twenty minute trip from Kariba airport we had arrived at Kipling's.

Kipling's Lodge was opened in 1996 and sits comfortably on the southern shores of Lake Kariba on the western bank of the broad Ume River bordering the Matusadona National Park. Our grand entrance was made by pontoon across the small tranquil surface of an inlet under the stare of goliath herons and marabou storks to the attractively laid out lodge and chalets blending unobtrusively among terminalia and established plantings along a narrow peninsular into the lake.

Accommodation is in ten thatched chalets each with twin beds and en suite facilities. Five of the spacious chalets have the option of a double bed and for the young at heart there is a honeymoon suite with a large bath.

For Margie and myself, Africa has no bounds and a two day stay was hardly time enough to experience all that Kipling's has to offer. A visit to the nearby and immaculately laid out Ume crocodile farm, the largest in Africa, was a fascinating opportunity to see the commercial breeding of 39,000 crocs! After a sumptuous lunch and a short siesta we left by power boat to explore the Kariba shoreline of rivers, bays and secluded inlets where wildlife including elephant, buffalo and sometimes lion can be observed in close proximity in a setting equal to none. Sunset on the lake with a gin and tonic in the hand to silently witness the African sun dance its waning colours on the water's surface is a memorable part of your stay at Kipling's.

All meals are served in an open semi-circular dining room cleverly designed to incorporate fully the spectacular panorama of the lake and close by islands. The lodge's maximum compliment of twenty guests encourages an intimate and friendly atmosphere around the dinner table under the care of hosts Fiona and Amon Johnson. Our first candlelit and delectable four course dinner was complimented with local and South African wines and its African style presentation made the occasion special.

The guest chalets are strategically placed for privacy and each with its open front and balcony has a broad view out over the picturesque waters of the lake. Those who have the privilege to awaken early at Kipling's to the cooing of African doves and hear the soft 'plop' of plump bream feeding almost at the foot of your bed, will marvel at the sunrise over the Matusadona Mountains.

For us it was a pre-dawn wake up call with coffee brought to our room before setting off in soft light on the pontoon across the placid Ume River to the Matusadona National Park opposite. Upon landing we patiently waited while Chris our guide checked his rifle and instructed us on safety procedure should we encounter a wild rhino or other dangerous game in our path. The short walk to the rhino sanctuary and boma was over the animal printed soils of mopane bushland, home of kudu and many impala that gazed shyly at our approach. We were in time to witness the release of seven rhino's into the bush from overnight holding

pens. They would never leave the sight of armed and vigilant keepers who would follow at a discreet distance to loyally protect them against lion and poachers while they grazed and wandered at will during the day. For us it was a marvellous opportunity to stalk on foot and film this endangered species in perfect safety as they fed undistracted in natural surroundings.

The waters around Kipling's offer some of the finest bream fishing on Kariba and a morning or afternoon angling with Sasha in the peaceful inlet within a stones throw of the residential hippo pod is a stimulating challenge. While Margie reeled in the fat bream with monotonous regularity, I filmed the overhead antics of fish eagles disputing their territory and the squabbles of the macabre marabou storks strutting about the recumbent hippo's on the grassy shore.

Other activities include canoe trips, pontoon cruises, visit to an African village; and when the present high lake level returns to normal, game drives along the now inundated and extensive grass flats.

The Nyamiyami had been kind to us and to paraphrase the thoughts of Rudyard Kipling the lodge's namesake, we had fallen to the magical spell of a place whose 'colour, light, peoples and wildlife were destined to bind a chain round our hearts for years to come.'

Kipling's is an upmarket lodge managed by Safari Lodges of Africa and all meals, beverages, laundry and activities are inclusive. Transfer is by light aircraft from Kariba.

THE END