

Project Luangwa

A Volunteer's Guide

Travelling to a new country, even as part of a group, can be a daunting experience. Travelling there to work as a volunteer and not knowing what to expect can be even worse.

Project Luangwa has put together some information to help you arrive fully prepared and make sure you pack everything you need.

There is one important item that should not be forgotten—bring an open mind and you will return home having had an enriching experience that may well change your life.





Conversation

Most people in Zambia speak English as it is the national language and taught in schools. However in the rural areas villagers tend to use their own local language, Chinyanja or Nyanja, when speaking to each other.

If you do nothing else try to learn a few words of greeting. It will be greatly appreciated, especially amongst the older generations. The stress in a word is usually placed on the second to last syllable.

Whether meeting a friend or buying a bar of soap, and speaking in English or Nyanja, the conversation always start with traditional pleasantries.

"Hello, how are you". (*"Muli bwanji?"*)
 And the answer,
 "I'm fine, how are you". (*"Ndili bwino. Kaya inu?"*)

Only then may you get down to business.



Useful Words and Phases	
<i>Nyanja is pronounced as it is written</i>	
Hello	Bwanji
How are you?	Muli Bwanji?
I'm fine, and you?	Ndili bwino. Kaya inu?
Fine, thank you.	Ndilli bwino, zikomo
Goodbye	Pitani bwino/salani bwino
Yes	Inde
No	Ai / iyai
Thank you	Zikomo
Sorry	Pepani
Do you speak English?	Mukamba Chizungu?
Sorry, I don't understand	Pepani, sindimvera
What is this?	Nichiani ichi?
Friend	M'mzanga
White person	Mzungu
Now	Tsopano
Later	Patsogolo pache
I like	Ndikonda
I don't like	Sindikonda
I want	Ndifuna
I don't want	Sindifuna
How much is it?	Dzingati?
My name is . . .	Dzina langa ndine . . .
Where?	Kuti?
I am from . . .	Ndine wa ku . . .

Sources: *The Zambian Phrasebook*, Elizabeth K Publications ISBN: 9982 84500 4
Webster's Nyanja-English Dictionary.



Out and about in the villages

Please dress modestly when you visit the remoter villages around South Luangwa. It is acceptable for men to wear shorts but ladies need to cover most of their legs. A long skirt, dress or trousers are suitable or, if not too short, calf length trousers. Or you could try a *chitenge*, a long, colourful wrap-around skirt rather like a sarong. As these are made of cotton they are cool to wear in Zambia's hot climate and can be bought very cheaply all over Zambia including the market stalls in Mfuwe.

Displays of affection can embarrass the villagers as it is not their custom to be passionate in public.

Always ask permission before taking photographs or video filming. Most people will happily agree and you may have a hard time if you don't want lots of children in front of your camera. However if anyone objects please respect their wishes. Please do not say you will send them a copy of the picture unless you intend to actually do so.

Offering money or gifts to villagers only serves to instil a begging mentality. Please ask Project Luangwa for advice should you wish to make a contribution to the community. Giving sweets to children also sets a precedent that means they will expect the same from every visitor. And don't forget most do not have access to tooth brushes.



Food and Eating Etiquette

The staple food in Zambia is Nshima made from mealie-meal (ground maize). It is a little like stiff mashed potato and is eaten with your hands.

Zambians always wash their hands before eating and consider it unhygienic and rude not to do so. Custom dictates that guests, elders, adults and then children wash their hands in strict order before sitting in a circle around the communal pot of nshima.

When eating, only one hand is used, either the right or the left. Take a good size lump of nshima and slowly roll it into a smooth ball using the palm and fingers of one hand. Then dip the nshima into the second dish, the relish. This accompanying dish is usually made from vegetables, beans, chicken or fish depending on the families wealth. The oldest person should always be the first to stop eating and wash their hands.

In the poorer rural areas it is unlikely that you will be offered food as many families are struggling to feed themselves, but if you are offered anything it is considered rude to decline. Guests who refuse to eat are often expected to leave as it puts the host in a difficult position. If you are staying for conversation it is considered courteous that they offer you something.

Shopping

In spite of the many shops in Mfuwe certain food and other items can be rather limited. You can easily survive on what is available but if you want specific items then it is best to stock up before coming down to the Valley.

Most shops close for lunch between 12 and 2pm.

The nearest supermarket is at Chipata 120km away. It is not the best of roads and may take anything between 2 and 4 hours to drive. Lusaka remains the best place to stock up on those hard-to-get items.



What's available where

Banks and ATM	Barclays and Zanaco have branches at the airport. Both have an ATM there and Zanaco also one at the BP filling station.
Phone	Local Sim cards are available at the airport and many small shops sell top-up cards.
Tea	From most shops: Quick Brew
Coffee	Only Ricoffee, a chicory/coffee mix
Bread	Fresh bread is usually available
Meat, bacon	A good selection of frozen meat is usually available from Mayana at the BP fuel station.
Beer	The local beer is Mosi. It is available from the bars and liquor stores
Soft Drinks	Available at Kalawani and a few other shops.
Breakfast Cereal	Kellogg's Cornflakes and Rice Crispies available at Uncle Petty's and Kalawani.
Eggs	Some shops and the market
Milk	Full fat Long Life only, most shops
Fuel	BP situated towards the Park entrance is the only place that fuel is available.
Fruit and vegetables	A limited choice from the market or road side stalls.
Washing powder	Available in most shops
Toiletries	Soap and toothpaste are available at some stores. Tampons are not available in Mfuwe.
Biscuits	Available at most shops.
Beans	Dried beans at many stalls and Heinz Baked Beans at one or two shops.
Butter and spread	Butter is only available at Mayana and a couple of other shops. Most shops have a margarine type spread.
Crafts and gifts	Tribal Textiles (near the airport) sells good quality textiles (wall hangings, cushion covers etc) and has a craft market in its grounds.

Climate

Zambia has three seasons:

From April to July the days are warm and dry but the evenings and early mornings can be cold.

By August the days are getting hotter and temperatures increase as the rainy season approaches in November.

November to March is hot with some spectacular thunderstorms and rain.

Currency

The unit of currency in Zambia is the Zambian kwacha. Bank notes currently available are in denominations of K50,000; K10,000; K5,000; K1,000; K500; K100 and K50. Inflation has rendered any note below K500 all but worthless—a K100 is worth about 13 pence. As a rough guide there are K7,000 to £1 and K5000 to US\$1.

US\$ are accepted at many safari Lodges and camp sites but usually only kwacha is accepted in the local shops. Make sure you bring only the newer US dollar notes showing the large depiction of the President's head. The old notes (small head) are not accepted anywhere in Zambia.

Electricity

The Zambian power grid uses 220/240 volts AC 50 Hertz and the wall sockets are square 3 pin. However, as a volunteer, you may be staying in one of the villages and this is most likely to mean that you will have no access to electricity. Some of the better off villagers may have solar power units but these will be very small.

Communication

We suggest that at least one of your party carries a mobile phone with a local sim card. This will enable you to get help in case of an emergency and to contact us at Project Luangwa. Local sim cards are cheap (about K5,000) and Top-up cards can be bought everywhere even in the rural villages.

Flatdogs Camp, near the main entrance to South Luangwa National Park, has an internet cafe open from 08:00 to 21:00. They are also able to copy your photos onto disc to save space on your memory card for \$5 per disc.

What to Bring

For you:

- Casual comfortable wash and wear clothing. In the hotter months from September to April loose cotton clothes are best.
If you are coming between April and July you may need a warm sweater or fleece for the evenings and early mornings.
It can be difficult to dry washing during the wet season so bring clothes made of light, easy dry fabric.
- A good insect repellent.
- Any medicines you may need.
- Ziplock plastic bags are useful for keeping belongings either dry or dust free.
- A good strong torch.

Gifts for the community and schools:

Often gifts can disappear for "safe keeping" and never reach their intended recipient. Please ask Project Luangwa about where and with whom to leave your gifts.

- Educational posters—for all ages
- Maps of the world and Africa
- Inflatable globes
- Early learning puzzles
- Crayons, felt pens, pens, pencils etc.
- Solar calculators, not scientific
- Maths sets (for Secondary School kids)
- Games
- Deflated footballs and netballs with a pump and spare valve if possible.
- Bring a few pictures of your family—people can be as curious about you as you are of them.

Inevitably, you will receive polite requests for sponsorship but please do not agree to give or send money to individuals. If you would like to sponsor a child through school please consider doing so through Project Luangwa so we can make sure that the money is used as you intended and that you are kept informed of the child's progress.

Dos and don'ts

This is a remote area and full of wild animals and hidden dangers. By taking a few precautions and remaining aware you will stay safe and enjoy your time whilst here.

Do not approach any wild animals. There is an abundance of wildlife in the area and some of it can be dangerous.

Do keep well clear of elephants and if you come across one back away quietly and slowly. If it does happen to charge run to the most solid looking place and make a lot of noise.

Do not feed animals, especially baboons, or leave food unattended. It will soon disappear and habituates these animals unnecessarily.

Do use an insect repellent in the evenings and cover up as much bare skin as possible.

Do not get close to rivers or other water sources. Every year many local people are taken by crocodiles.

Do be wary of walking in long grass or leaf litter. Some snakes are dangerous, difficult to see and object to being trodden on.

Do be aware of certain creepy crawlies. Most are harmless but one or two can give a painful sting.

Do not walk about at night without a torch, even for a short distance. Shine your torch around to look for large wildlife, as well as at your feet.

Do shake out and check your shoes before putting them on—you never know what may be hiding in them. Make a habit of shaking and checking your clothes before dressing too. Some things are small and can hide in the folds and don't forget to do the same with towels.

Do use a bright torch if you have to visit the toilet at night.

Medical Matters

Please make sure that you have adequate travel insurance which covers you for all the activities and work you intend to do whilst visiting South Luangwa. If unsure it is better to phone your insurance company them and ask if they cover you for voluntary work rather than risk a huge medical evacuation bill that could run into hundreds of thousands of pounds.

As South Luangwa is a remote area medical facilities are limited and the facilities at the nearest hospital, over an hour and a half away are very basic. However the South Luangwa Safari Association sponsors a qualified doctor to attend Lodge/Camp guests. A donation of \$160 will be asked for to help meet their costs should you call out the doctor. This can be reclaimed against your travel insurance.

For more serious emergencies medical evacuation is available to Lusaka and if necessary to Johannesburg in South Africa. We cannot recommend strongly enough that you check that your insurance is adequate to cover these cost should the need arise.

If you develop a fever or flu-like symptoms you must call Project Luangwa or the local doctor immediately.

Vaccinations and Prophylaxis

Consult your doctor or medical centre at least 8 weeks before coming to Zambia. As a rough guide you should have up to date vaccinations for: Diphtheria, Tetanus, Hepatitis A, Polio, and Typhoid.

Mfuwe is a malarial area and drug prophylaxis is recommended.

Avoid being bitten by wearing long trousers and long sleeved shirts in the evening as well as using an insect repellent spray. Always sleep under a mosquito net or in a mosquito proof tent but remember not to leave the tent flaps open after dusk.

Whilst Project Luangwa will do its best to help you during your stay in South Luangwa it cannot be held responsible for your safety and welfare. Project Luangwa simply puts you in touch the communities that need your help. Please ensure that you take great care at all times and act sensibly.