

Expat tales



(clockwise from top left) The beauty of an African sunset; Juliet enjoying camp life; falling for Derek was the last thing she expected when she arrived in Zambia; working in the camp ensures close contact with the surrounding wildlife, and Juliet says she's had a few close calls.

Name Juliet Wheeler, 30

Location Zambia, Africa

Job Safari marketing director

Facts Overseas for 6 months



Market researcher Juliet made a life-changing snap decision to take a role on a Zambian safari camp, finding love and a life lesson, too

How did you end up in Zambia? It was a spur of the moment decision, actually. I'd been travelling for 18 months and decided it was time to move on to the next exciting destination.

What does your job entail? I look after the marketing and PR activities for Kaingo Camp, which is a safari park, but I also play "hostess with the mostest", including teaching yoga, keeping an eye on catering and running the office.

How different is it from your former life in Australia? Three years ago, I had a well-paid, but dull, career in market research. Now I work for peanuts, and my high-heel shoe collection has been exchanged for an old pair of Birkenstocks. My laptop is perched on a desk with nothing but flywire separating me from the hippos and crocs lazing about in the river out front.

First impressions of Zambia? I felt as though I was caught somewhere between a wildlife documentary and a wonderland where the animals are your friends. It's not the most sensible impression to have when living in the middle of the African bush where the animals are most definitely not tame.

Have you had any scary encounters? I've been charged by elephants, eyed-up by lions and have nearly trodden on a puff adder. I've also been rushed by bull hippos in the river, and I stumbled across a leopard once, alone, at night. Just the other morning I found a highly venomous baboon

spider (about the size of a human hand) nesting between my laptop and my satellite phone.

Most unexpected event? Falling madly in love with Derek, who owns Kaingo, pretty much as soon as I arrived in Zambia. Our future plans are to spend the safari seasons here and the remainder of the year travelling or in Australia.

What's the vegemite of Zambia? If *nsima* is the toast, *kapenta* would have to be the vegemite. The former is a corn meal product that's cooked vigorously until it forms a sticky substance that looks like gluey mashed potato, and it's served with the latter, a small whitebait-size fish. Most Zambians eat this meal once a day.

The biggest problem facing Zambia? HIV. Approximately one in four Zambians has HIV, and since I've been working here, we've had one staff member and an estimated 15–20 relatives of other staff members die, but the cause of their death is never discussed. Addressing this social taboo will be key in the fight against HIV.

What do you miss most about Australia? The beaches and summer barbecues.

What have the Zambians taught you? To snatch moments of joy whenever they come your way. Zambians love music and they have a fabulous sense of humour. Joining in for an impromptu dance or a hearty laugh at any time of day or night is guaranteed to win you friends.

RACHEL SMITH