



NACSO PICTURE STORIES

WHAT NATURE GIVES US

JOINT VENTURE LODGES BRING JOBS TO CONSERVANCIES

It was the tourist who spotted them first. “Lions,” cried Hendrik Hiller. Guide Dereck Mwilima hit the brakes and then reversed. Sure enough, there were four lions lying almost hidden in the tall, yellow grass in Nkasa Rupara National Park.



The Zambezi park takes its name from two islands – Nkasa and Rupara – higher ground in an area often flooded by the Linyanti River that borders Botswana to the south. Mwilima had told the Hiller family that the park currently holds 20 lions: a very high density. There are three prides; two of them on Rupara island where the sundowner safari was taking place.



On the lookout for lions in
Nkasa Rupara Park in
Namibia's Zambezi Region



The drive had begun with a high chance of failure. Rain clouds were sweeping towards the park. After asking whether the family was game to get wet, and getting the go ahead, Mwilima announced “Let’s see what mother nature gives us!”

Guiding is about balance. A guide has to be professional when approaching guests: polite, but firm. “You are in charge and have to control the situation,” says Mwilima. As a guide he is quiet and unassuming, but he knows his animals and understands their behaviour.

The lions had been lying in the grass cooling off in the rain. They scarcely lifted their heads when the Landrover stopped about 10 metres from them, allowing the Hiller family one of those magic African moments.

It was a special day. Mwilima started up the Landrover and, as it moved away, a young male lion got up and trotted along behind. Mwilima kept a careful watch in the mirror, considering a quick getaway.



Mother nature kicked off with zebras and followed up with lions



Then the lion sat down for another photo shoot. As the cameras clicked, the lion rolled in the sand to dry off from the rain, and then licked its paws; just like kitty cat at home.



But: “You have to respect wildlife,” says Mwilima. “It can change its mind at any time.” This time, everybody is happy. The Hillers have seen something “amazing” and Mwilima has another guiding success behind him. That’s why he loves guiding, and also the opportunity in life that tourism has given him. Tourism has put him on a new path, and he thinks it will provide a career, perhaps doing overland tours in the future.

