

## Elephants in the Lobby-Quite an event!

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Elephants march through hotel lobby after it was built on their migration trail!

The Mfuwe Lodge in Zambia happens to have been built next to a mango grove that one family of elephants have always visited when the fruit ripens. When they returned one year and found the luxury accommodation in the way, they simply walked through the lobby to reach their beloved grove of trees



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The animals come in two-by-two. Hotel staff and visitors have gotten used to the elephants' impromptu strolls through the lobby.. Now the family group, headed by matriarch Wonky Tusk, return every November and stay for four to six weeks to gorge on mangos - up to four times a day. Andy Hogg, 44, the lodge director, has lived in South Luangwa National Park since 1982. But in all his years of dealing with wild animals he has never seen such intimate interaction between humans and wild animals. "This is the only place in the world where elephants freely get so close to humans," says Andy. "The elephants start coming through base camp in late November each year to eat the ripe mangos from our trees."



Living in the 5,000 square mile national park, the ten-strong elephant herd is led to the lodge each day by Wonky Tusk. The hotel was built directly in the path of the elephants' route to one of their favorite foods .... Mangos..



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"The most interesting thing about these wild animals," explains Andy, "is that this is the only herd that comes through, and they come and go as they please."

Mfuwe Lodge consists of seven camps and the base camp where the elephants walk through. Employing 150 staff, the management of the lodge report that there have been no incidents involving the wild elephants to date. "The elephants get reasonably close to the staff, as you can see in the pictures of the elephants near the reception area," Andy explains. "But we do not allow the guests to get that close."



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"Guests can stand in the lounge but only as long as there is a barrier between the elephants and the guests," he added.

"The elephants are not aggressive but you wouldn't want to tempt them. It is the elephant's choice to be here and they have been coming here for the last ten years. There are other wild mango trees around, but they prefer ours. The lodge was unwittingly built upon their path," Andy says, "so we had no idea they would do this. It wasn't a design error, we just didn't know. The lodge was built and the elephants started walking through afterward."

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We keep people at a safe distance, but allow them close enough to see what is going on.. These are still wild and dangerous animals, so there must be enough time for people to get away." The hotel is set in an idyllic national parkland. Naturally, the lodge becomes busier for both elephants and guests during November. "We find that we get more people visiting us during the elephant migration because of the unique experience of being so close to wild animals in an unusual environment," says Andy. "But as I said this is a totally natural phenomenon, as the elephants come here of their own accord. It is certainly a rare but magnificent sight."