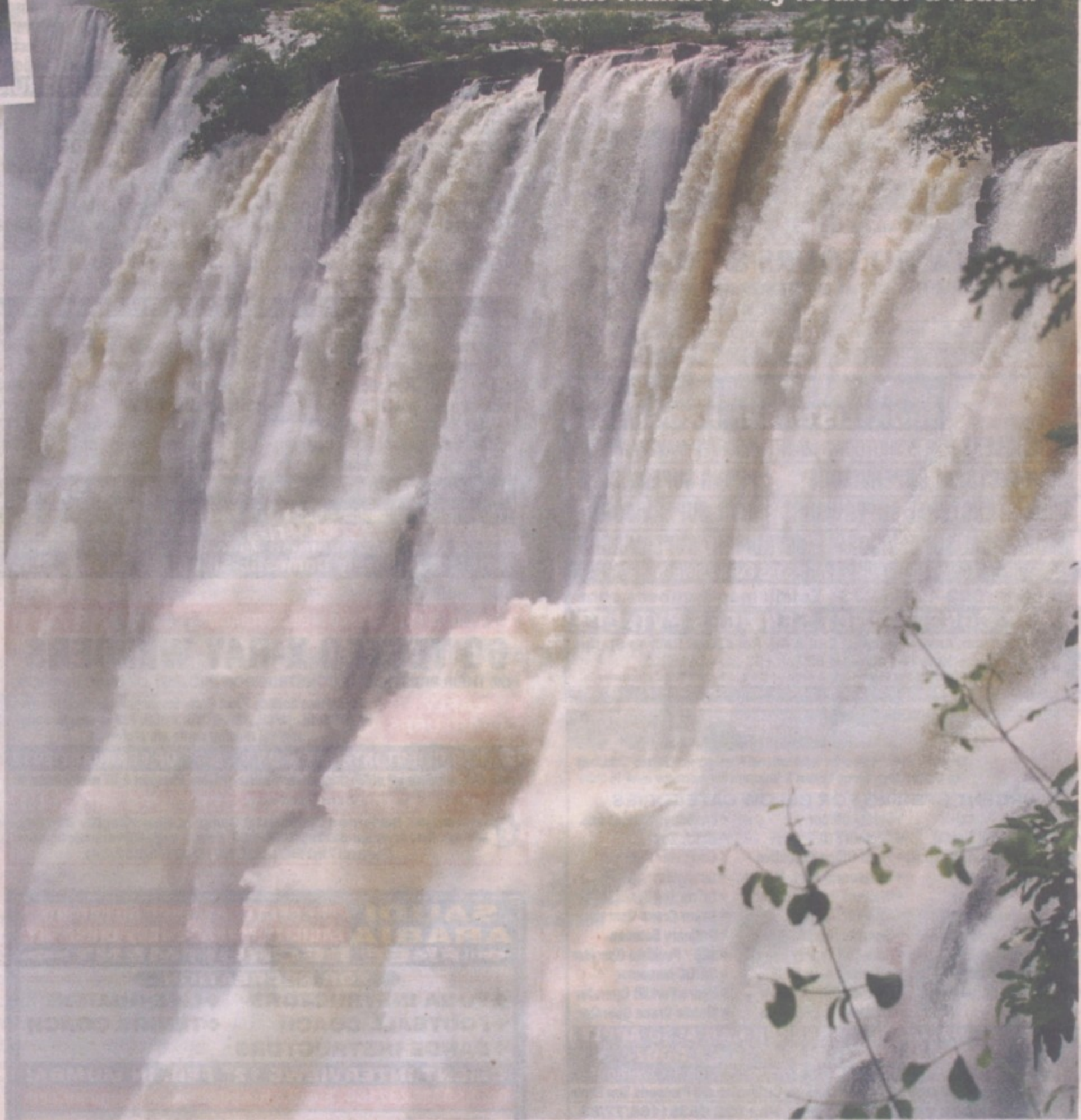


Falling in Love

Victoria Falls is called "The Smoke That Thunders" by locals for a reason



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Zambia is the undiscovered treasure trove of Africa. It shelters extraordinary natural beauty and is one of the most pristine and unspoiled wilderness areas on the continent. It is easy to see why Zambia boasts one of the largest areas of land under protection as a national park in Africa. But it is the thundering miracle of the Victoria Falls that draws most visitors to this gentle and peaceful country. Less frequented than Zimbabwe, many travellers prefer to see the falls from the Zambian side and some claim the views are even more spectacular.

Seen here, in all its crowning glory, is the mesmerising Victoria Falls, one of the seven natural wonders of the world.

Locals refer to it as 'Mosi-oa-Tunya' (the Smoke that Thunders) as it tumbles into its basalt gorge with an awe-inspiring din. Our guide explains patiently that the 'smoke' refers to the effect that occurs as the water impacts

over a hundred metres below and kicks up in a fine mist spreading an incandescent rainbow across the surrounding valley. This twin effect of smoke and thunder makes the Victoria Falls quite simply one of the most spectacular experiences in the world. It's only recently that tourists have begun to visit Zambia for a glimpse of the falls. Earlier everyone saw them from the Zimbabwean side, but after the political unrest there, Zambia has become the 'vantage point' for fall-viewing.

The perfect place to admire the beauty of these falls is The Royal Livingstone Hotel, located literally a minute away, bang in the middle of a national park. I sipped an iced tea on the hotel deck overlooking the mighty Zambezi River whilst a zebra sauntered past me in style. The hotel itself resembles a country club with its

Scenes so lovely must have been gazed upon by angels in their flight, said Scottish explorer David Livingstone

colonial style architecture and afternoon high tea ritual. Residents at the hotel include a zebra, giraffe and some cheeky monkeys who snatched a few peanuts from my bowl as I admired the African sunset one evening.

So mighty is its spray that this curtain of mist can be seen from 40 miles away. Our mandatory raincoats are drenched with water as we walk precariously down a bridge that passes almost 60 meters from the edge of the cascade. Giggling like school kids, my travel buddies and I tossed our wet hair and tried to chat, but the thunderous roar ensured our silence. Scottish explorer David Livingstone discovered the falls in 1855 and named them after his then reigning monarch, Queen Victoria. He was moved to remark, "No one can imagine the beauty of the view from anything witnessed in England. It had never been seen before by European eyes, but scenes so lovely must have been gazed upon by angels in their flight." I tend to agree.

Our columnist Suhel Seth is on a break. He will return shortly.