



The Zambezi River cascades 75m down the Victoria Falls, which lies on the Zimbabwe border with Zambia

TRAVEL

# Wild about Zimbabwe

Few travel experiences are as exhilarating as spotting animals in the wild, and, no, Taman Negara and Singapore Zoo don't come close. Join us as we get up, close and personal to the "big five"

**IF MOST TRAVELLERS DREAM OF** an African safari, then land-locked Zimbabwe provides a wealth of opportunities in remote and wild settings. This once-in-a-lifetime travel experience also offers one of nature's greatest wonders: the mighty Victoria Falls. *MH* travelled to Zimbabwe to experience what's known as the "big five" – rhino, elephant, lion, leopard and water buffalo – while glamping it up in some truly amazing bush camps.



#### GETTING ABOUT

Flying into the Zimbabwe capital of Harare at 5pm meant an overnight stay in the grand Meikles Hotel ([www.meikles.com](http://www.meikles.com)). After a long flight and refreshing ale in The Explorer's Club – where you almost expect to be greeted by Dr. Livingstone – an early night was essential for our wildlife safari. Zimbabwe has several spectacular wildlife reserves and



It's called an "armchair safari" at Somalisa Lodge – sitting back with a chilled Zambezi beer while the animals come to you

exclusive game lodges, with two of the most rewarding locations being Kanga Camp in Mana Pools National Park and Somalisa in Hwange National Park. Covering almost 400,000 sq km (larger than Malaysia), travelling around Zimbabwe isn't easy, and our travel agent, Asia to Africa Safaris ([www.a2asafaris.com](http://www.a2asafaris.com)), booked us on a small Cessna aircraft to access remote areas via laterite airstrips. *MH* flew from Harare to Manu Pools, then to Hwange and, finally, Victoria

Falls before flying onto Lusaka on a commercial flight for the return sector on Emirates. On one flight, we were the only passenger and was enthralled by the spectacular landscape while flying at low altitudes.



#### MAGICAL MANU POOLS

Accommodation at Kanga Camp could be misunderstood: although the tent camps operated by African Bush Camps ([www.africanbushcamps.com](http://www.africanbushcamps.com)).



Bathe in the outdoors at Kanga Camp while overlooking a waterhole, where the animals do the same



The cheetah is the fastest animal on the parched plains of Zimbabwe

com) are under canvas, they have luxuriously appointed interiors. The real bonus is that the accommodation and the restaurant overlook a waterhole (or pan) where animals come to drink, and where guests can safely dine and sleep close to them. Guests can sit back on an "armchair safari" with a cold drink while admiring the wildlife.

More extensive jeep safaris open up Manu Pools National Park to a wider range of wildlife, with wildebeest, lions, leopards, cheetahs, African painted dogs, and an amazing array of birdlife along the floodplains. Lodge guides skilfully manoeuvre covered safari vehicles close to wild animals that are very nonchalant to humans. The photography is amazing, with a long lens (300mm) being recommended. Our highlights were seeing a pride of lions that had just killed a zebra and a hunting pack of rare and endangered African painted dogs.



#### WONDROUS HWANGE

The recent shooting of Cecil the Lion

put Hwange National Park in the spotlight for all the wrong reasons and, though tragic, there are still many lions to admire in this vast national park. Somalisa was our camp of choice as it provides a level of luxury quite unexpected in the wilds of Zimbabwe. Chairs surround an open fireplace on an elevated platform above a waterhole to offer another amazing armchair safari opportunity.

MH enjoyed pre-dinner drinks around the open fireplace, while elephants drank from the waterhole just metres away. On a safari drive, we witnessed a solitary cheetah, a jackal scavenging on a carcass, a dozen or so lions, giraffes, and the ever-playful impalas. Our guides easily identified where animals were and how best to safely approach them so as not to endanger them or us. Game drives are typically done at sunrise and sunset with the middle of the day devoted to eating, drinking (all-inclusive tariffs include meals and alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages), resting, and swapping travel tales with fellow adventurers.



#### THE MIGHTY VICTORIA FALLS

The Zambezi River cascading 100m over the Victoria Falls into the Zambezi Gorge creates what's known as the "roaring thunder". Victoria Falls delineates the border between Zimbabwe and Zambia, with links via rail, road and pedestrian bridge. It's possible to walk the 2km between countries or ride on the nostalgic

#### Victoria Falls Steam Train.

Victoria Falls is Africa's water and air sports capital, with bungee jumping (from the bridge), white water rafting, helicopter flights, canoeing and kayaking offered. The best ground view of the falls is from within Victoria Falls Park and Rainforest Reserve. An aerial view is even better, with a 13-minute helicopter flight with "Flight of the Angels" ([www.zambezihelicopters.com](http://www.zambezihelicopters.com)) being expensive but memorable.

Guests at Victoria Falls Safari Lodge ([www.victoria-falls-safari-lodge.com](http://www.victoria-falls-safari-lodge.com)) can relax in luxury while admiring wildlife congregating around a waterhole. Heritage hotel devotees must visit the Victoria Falls Hotel ([www.victoriafallshotel.com](http://www.victoriafallshotel.com)) to admire its century-old Edwardian ambiance while sipping chilled Zambezi beer on Stanley's Terrace.



#### GETTING THERE

Emirates ([www.emirates.com](http://www.emirates.com)) flies to Harare via Dubai and Lusaka

(Zambia). There's no shortcut to the 21-hour flight, though the airline's superb in-flight entertainment, food and service make up for the time you're in the air.



#### CASH FLOW

There's no longer a local currency as it was suspended when inflation had it at trillions of dollars. Now, the US dollar is king, and it's best to arrive with wads of small notes because tipping is appreciated by the locals, many of whom currently endure economic hardship. ATMs cannot be relied upon and a surcharge will be added for credit card usage.



#### CONTACT

For more information regarding encounters with Zimbabwe's wildlife contact Asia to Africa Safaris ([www.a2asafaris.com](http://www.a2asafaris.com)) for details on specialised tours throughout Zimbabwe and several other African nations. **MSA**

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