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. 

A trip 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). After a long flight and refreshingsale 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 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 African Safaris (www.a2asafaris.com), booked us on a small Cessna aircraft to access remote areas via laterite airstrips.

A trip to Harare to Manu Pools, then to Hwange, and finally, Victoria Falls before flying onto Kasane on a commercial flight for the return sector on 6 minutes. On one flight, we were the only passengers and were 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.africambushcamps.com).

TRAVEL
The cheetah is the fastest animal on the parched plains of Zimbabwe. Cheetahs are apex predators that rely on their speed and agility to catch prey. They are found in various habitats across the African continent, including grasslands, savannas, and semi-arid regions. These majestic creatures are known for their distinctive black and white body markings and long legs, which allow them to sprint at speeds of up to 110 km/h.

Hwange National Park is the largest national park in Zimbabwe, covering an area of over 15,000 km². It is home to a diverse range of wildlife, including lions, elephants, buffalo, giraffes, and various species of antelope. The park offers excellent opportunities for wildlife viewing and photography, with guided safaris and self-drive options available.

Victoria Falls, located on the border between Zimbabwe and Zambia, is one of the world's most famous waterfalls. It is known for its stunning beauty and the incredible amount of water that flows over its 100 m high cliff. The falls are a popular destination for tourists, offering a variety of activities such as bungee jumping, white water rafting, and helicopter flights.

Emirates 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 Safari (www.azsafaris.com) for details on specialised tours throughout Zimbabwe and several other African nations. 

**WONDROUS HWANGE**
The recent shooting of Cecil the Lion (Zimbabwe) 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. Somalis 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‘), 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 "marrying 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 Swaz 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 30-minute helicopter flight with "Flight of the Angels" (www.zambezhelicopters.com) being expensive but memorable.

Guests at Victoria Falls Safari Lodge (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) to admire its century-old Edwardian ambience while sipping chilled Zambian beer on Stanley's Terrace.

**GETTING THERE**
Emirates (www.emirates.com) flies to Harare via Dubai and Lusaka.