

# BIG FIVE

TOURS & EXPEDITIONS



## VICTORIA FALLS

### Travel Supplement

*The following general outline offers practical information, suggestions and answers to some frequently asked questions. It is not intended to be the definitive guide for your trip.*

"The first impression was unmistakable; immense power, the raw energy unleashed when the entire Zambezi leaps wildly into a black two kilometer wide abyss. The scale is massive, the spectacle spellbinding and perpetually changing. The falls hiss and roar as if possessed, they rumble and crash like thunder. Vast clouds spew and billow out from the seething cauldron of its dark impenetrable depths. The moving water creates a magnetism that sucks you closer, so that you recoil in horror to quench a subliminal sacrificial urge."

-- Jumbo Williams, *Zambezi, River of Africa*. 1988

## GETTING THERE

Victoria Falls can be easily reached by air from both Zimbabwe and Zambia. There are frequent services between Johannesburg, South Africa.

Popular land borders include the Victoria Falls / Kazungula crossing between Zimbabwe and Botswana (from where you can continue through Chobe National Park to Namibia); the Victoria Falls / Livingstone crossing to Zambia; and the road and rail links to South Africa via Beitbridge.

## PASSPORTS / VISAS

*Passport valid for 6 months from the date of entry required .*

**From Zimbabwe:** Canadian residents do not require visas. US nationals do require visas, but they can be obtained on arrival in Zimbabwe, provided travelers are holding tickets and documents for return or onward travel and sufficient funds for their stay.

**From Zambia:** US visitors require a visa but Canadians do not. Tourists will be issued visas at ports of entry in Zambia or at a Zambian Mission Abroad. Day-tripper visas shall be issued at ports of entry to tourists visiting Zambia for a period of less than twenty-four (24) hours. Note that tourists traveling in organized tour groups pre-arranged through tour operators in conjunction with registered local Zambian tour operators are exempt from the visa requirement.

## CUSTOMS

**Zimbabwe:** Personal possessions not intended for disposal or consumption in Zimbabwe are allowed entry duty-free. In addition, other consumable goods not imported for trade purposes may be imported up to a value of Z\$1000.00 per person. Alcoholic beverages may be included within this allowance by persons over the age of 18 years, subject to a limit per person of 5 liters, of which not more than 2 liters may be spirits. Members of a family traveling together may aggregate their allowances.

**Zambia:** Travelers may, for their own consumption, import 400 cigarettes or 500g of cigars or 500g of tobacco; 2.5 liter of wine; 1.5 liters of spirits and 2.5 liters of beer; 1oz of perfume; other goods up to the value of US\$150.

**Note:** Souvenirs may be exported without restriction but game trophies such as tooth, bone, horn, shell, claw, skin, hair, feather or other durable items are subject to export permits.

## HEALTH

**Zambia:** Requires an International Health Certificate showing proof of a yellow fever vaccination within the past 10 years for those coming from infected areas. Health risks in Zambia are cholera, malaria, polio, typhoid, yellow fever.

**Zimbabwe:** A Yellow Fever Vaccination is only required for travelers coming from infected areas as designated by World Health Organization as of 1993, which includes Zambia.

**Water:** It is very important that you drink plenty of water especially during the warmer months. It is generally recommended that one drink at least 2 to 3 liters of water per day to limit the effects of dehydration. This excludes tea, coffee and alcoholic beverages, which act as diuretics and can actually contribute to dehydration. The water in Victoria Falls is generally safe too, but it may be safer to drink bottled water there.

## MALARIA PRECAUTIONS

Malaria prophylactic is recommended for travelers to most areas in southern Africa. It is important to bear in mind that malaria may be contracted despite taking tablets, especially in areas where chloroquine resistance has been reported. Please remember that the best insurance against contracting malaria is to try to prevent being bitten, so use mosquito repellents liberally.

Wear long-sleeved shirts and trousers or slacks in the evenings. You should spray your room prior going to dinner with an insecticide that will kill any mosquitoes. Mosquito coils are also effective. If you become ill on your return, while still on prophylactics or even once you have stopped, make sure that your doctor does everything necessary to establish that your illness is not malaria. Malaria is not a serious problem if people are sensible and take basic precautions.

## WEATHER

Annual rainfall amount to between 23 to more than 27 inches, but the spray thrown up by the falls is partly responsible for sustaining the 'rainforest' opposite the falls. Below are the average temperatures in Fahrenheit for each month.

Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June
63-90	63-86	64-88	57-84	50-84	45-77
July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
43-77	46-82	57-91	64-93	64-88	63-88

## WHEN TO GO

The best time to see the falls is during July or August, midway between the end of the rainy season and the end of the dry season. From March to May, after the rains end, the volume of water is at its peak, but this is a poor time to go because the force of the falling water at the base sends mist shooting up to a height of more than 500 feet, obscuring the views. At its driest around the end of October, water flows at only about a third of its crest, and it is just not as impressive as it is in July or August. But even during the dry season, you get wet from the mist, which remains strong enough to support a lush forest of ebony and mahogany on the opposite side of the gorge, even when the rest of the countryside is parched.

## OVERVIEW

Englishman Dr. David Livingstone named his 1855 discovery of the falls after Queen Victoria. The Zambezi River forms the headwaters of the falls, which are actually comprised of five separate falls. Twice as high and one-and-a-half times as wide as Niagara Falls, Victoria Falls is truly one of the most spectacular natural wonders of the world. Here you will see rainforests fed by the towering spray of silvery mists that earned the falls its Zambian name: Mosi Oa Tunya, (Smoke that Thunders). The placid Zambezi River, which is a mile and a half wide, turns into a ferocious torrent of water that cuts through a series of dramatic gorges as it plunges more than 328 feet into a sheer chasm separating Zimbabwe and Zambia. At the height of the flood season, these columns of mist can be seen from as much as 20 miles away as 546 million cubic meters of water per minute plummet over the edge of a basalt cliff.

In 1900, Cecil John Rhodes commissioned the Victoria Falls Bridge. He never visited the falls and died before construction began, however, he expressed his wish that the "railway should cross the Zambezi just below the Victoria Falls. I should like to have the spray of the falls over the carriages."

The Edwardian bridge was completed in 1905. Today, it affords breathtaking, 360-degree views both down the gorge on one side and through to the falls on the other. From this perspective, visitors can fully appreciate the immense depth of the gorge, the shiny black-rock cliff face, the sea-green river below, and lush green foliage that surrounds it all.

A path along the edge of the forest opposite the falls provides the visitor, who is prepared to brave the tremendous spray, with an unparalleled series of views of Victoria Falls. One special vantage point is across the Knife Edge Bridge, where visitors can have the finest view of Eastern Cataract and Main Falls. Here they also witness Boiling Pot, where the river turns and heads down into Batoka Gorge. Lookout Tree offers a panoramic view across the main falls.

During the dry season, visitors may be able to walk along the lip of the falls. Sometimes the water is low enough to walk all the way across to Livingstone Island, the place where Livingstone had his first glimpse of the falls, one of the most magnificent views in the area.

**Aerial view of the Falls:** To fully appreciate the incredible size of the Falls and the awesome power of the water as it charges into the gorges for nearly five miles, one must see it from the air. Micro-light and fixed-wing flights are available. The breathtaking sight of this magnificent natural wonder is unforgettable.

For the daring visitors other views can be arranged such as parachuting, white-water rafting, and making the world's longest bungee-jump – 111m (364ft) - from the Victoria Falls Bridge

## MOSI O TUNYA NATIONAL PARK

While it is only about 41 square miles, Victoria Falls / Mosi-oa-Tunya National Park includes Zambian side of the astonishing Victoria Falls, the mightiest cataracts in the world. The park is located on the southernmost edge of Zambia bordering Zimbabwe along the Zambezi River. The park is bounded by the river, Dambwa Forest Reserve to the north, the municipal area of Livingstone to the east, and trust land to the south.

The park, including the falls, stretches from and includes the falls for almost five miles up river. It is home to numerous antelope species, zebra, giraffe, and the recently acquired white rhinos. These are the only rhinos to be seen in Zambia because its previously large population has been completely eliminated by poachers.

Nearby Livingstone, 'Tourist Capital of Zambia', has luxury hotels, a casino, a railroad museum, and national museum that houses memorabilia and anthropological exhibits.

The town dates from just after the turn of the century, springing up when the Zambezi Gorge was first bridged in 1904. Tourists were among the first to cross the bridge, and Livingstone remained the area's tourism hub for the next 70 years.

The town of Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe eclipsed Livingstone for tourism in the 1970s, but Livingstone has been battling back ever since.

## ZAMBEZI NATIONAL PARK

In Zimbabwe, Zambezi National Park preserves 56,000 acres along the river. Fishing camps along the shore take angler out after tiger fish. Wildlife can be viewed in cruises along the river and explorations into the park's interior.

Downstream from the falls, the river offers spectacular white-water rafting. Adventures range from a day or two to a spectacular week of rafting all the way to Lake Kariba. This huge inland sea is adorned with submarine forests, open skies and spectacular sunsets.

## FALLS FLORA & FAUNA

When the Zambezi River is in full flood (usually February or March) they form the largest curtain of falling water in the world. During these months, more than 500 million liters of water plummet over the falls per minute! During November when the river is at its lowest, the flow may be reduced to around 10 million liters per minute.

**Altitude:** 2,733 feet approximately (833m) to about 3002 feet (915m) at the top of the falls.

**Vegetation:** The predominant vegetation is mopane Colophospermum mopane forest with small areas of teak and miombo woodland, and a narrow band of riverine forest along the Zambezi. The riverine 'rainforest' within the waterfall splash zone is of particular interest, a fragile ecosystem of discontinuous forest on sandy alluvium, dependent upon maintenance of abundant water and high humidity resulting from the spray plume. Tree species within this forest include acacia, ebony, ivory palm, muchiningi, African olive, date palm, waterbroom, and Cape and strangler figs.

**Fauna:** Several herds of elephant occur in Zambezi National Park, occasionally crossing to the islands and Zambian mainland during the dry season when water levels are low. Small herds of buffalo and wildebeest as well as zebra, warthog, giraffe, and bush pig live in the area as do schools of hippos that frequent the river above the falls. Klipspringer can be seen in the gorges below the falls. Vervet monkeys and chacma baboon are common while lion and leopard are occasionally seen. Falcon, black stork, black eagle, peregrine falcon, and augur buzzard are all known to breed in the gorges. In the water below the falls, 39 species of fish have been recorded while 84 species have been found in waters above the falls.

## **CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Stone artifacts of *Homo habilis* from 3 million years ago have been found near the falls. Stone tools indicate prolonged occupation of the area in the Middle Stone Age (50,000 years ago). Weapons, adornments, and digging tools found point to the presence of hunter-gathering communities in the Late Stone Age (from 10,000 to 2,000 years ago). They were displaced by farmers using iron tools, kept livestock, and lived in villages.

Ethnic composition of the people living in the falls area outside the parks is a mixture of recent immigrants and long-term occupants. The Tonga people have been living in the area for at least seven centuries, latterly with Subiya, Leya, Toka and Totela (and with smaller numbers of Nanzwa, Yeyi and Mbukushu). More recent immigrants included Lozi, Kololo, Ndebele, and English language speakers.

## **SHOPPING**

Souvenir hunters can raid the line of curio stalls near the falls, where there's an excellent selection of crafts. Sellers on both sides of the falls are keen to barter for things like T-shirts, batteries, shoes, or anything else that is hard to come by.

In Zimbabwe, a sales tax of 10-22% is added to all purchases, the higher rate being on luxury items, except those that are to be exported. Special purchases are copper, wooden and soapstone carvings, game-skin and leather products, pottery, and basketwork.

In Zambia, you'll find intricate animal carvings in stone, wood, and beautiful green malachite as well as masks, drums, marimbas, spoons, book ends, walking sticks, jewelry, and much more. Everywhere, vendors can be assertive, however, yelling for your attention from all sides, so be firm. Look at everything before buying as some offer better quality than others.

**Shopping hours:** 0800-1700 Monday to Friday and 0800-1300 Saturday.

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## **NOTES:**