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## VICTORIA FALLS GUIDE

wordtravels



Victoria Falls is one of nature's greatest spectacles, and one of the few attractions that exceeds even the wildest expectations of its visitors. The town itself, referred to locally simply as 'Vic Falls', straddles the banks of the Zambezi River, in Zimbabwe's Matabeleland North province. It is a pleasant place to base oneself, home to a number of hotels and lodges, a couple of good restaurants, and some great bars to enjoy.

Known as both an adventure centre and romantic getaway, there is an excellent selection of things to see and do in Victoria Falls, from a mist-soaked stroll to the viewpoints that run the length of the falls to adrenaline-packed activities like whitewater rafting and bungee jumping. There are canoe trips, river cruises, safaris and fishing trips available in Vic Falls, as well as first-rate national parks to visit nearby. A day-trip across the border into Zambia is also well worth doing. Young children might enjoy the restored colonial-era steam train, which offers scenic day-tours around the Vic Falls area, including a two-hour stop over the Victoria Falls bridge for breakfast. An elephant-back safari or 'elephant encounter' is a once-in-a-lifetime experience for little ones and adults alike.

There are busses, trains and airlines that travel to Vic Falls and, once there, the town is easily walkable but also has plenty of minibusses and regular taxis available for visitors to use. A popular holiday destination since the 1930s, Vic Falls is a must on any African travel itinerary.

### THE BASICS

#### TIME

GMT +2

#### ELECTRICITY

Electrical current is 220-240 volts, 50Hz. Three-pin rectangular blade plugs are common.

#### LANGUAGE

English is the official language in Zimbabwe, although it is only spoken as a first language by a tiny percentage of the population. Several indigenous languages are spoken including Shona and Ndebele.

#### TRAVEL HEALTH

Travellers to Zimbabwe who are coming from infected countries require a yellow fever vaccination certificate. Vaccinations against hepatitis A, hepatitis B, and typhoid are recommended. A high prevalence of AIDS/HIV exists in Zimbabwe. There is a risk of malaria all year in most of the country, particularly in the Zambezi Valley, Victoria Falls, Hwange National Park and in the Eastern Highlands; the risk is very small in Harare and Bulawayo. Mosquitoes are chloroquine resistant. Precautions against mosquito bites should be taken to avoid any number of mosquito-borne diseases. Cholera outbreaks occur usually during the rainy season when flooding and contamination of water sources takes place. Rapidly declining health standards are also responsible for Zimbabwe having one of the lowest life expectancies in the world, according to the World Health Organization. Visitors are advised to take food and hygiene precautions. The standard of tap water in urban areas is considered low, and bottled water is available. The current economic instability has led to shortages of medication in public hospitals, and striking is common; it is advisable to bring a supply of personal medication. Medical insurance is essential. Private clinics expect cash payment and medical costs can be high.

#### TIPPING

A service charge is usually included in the bill in Zimbabwe, otherwise a 10 percent tip is customary for staff in restaurants, hotels and taxis. In general, tipping for good service is discretionary. Some tour guides and game rangers depend largely on tips for their income.

#### SAFETY INFORMATION

Zimbabwe has a less-than-glowing safety report according to most governments. Continued political unrest and vigilante action by members of the National War Veterans' Association have left most farm and rural areas unsafe for travel due to the high chance of crime.

Most recently, protests erupted in Zimbabwe on 6 July 2016. Thousands of Zimbabweans protested government repression, poor public services, high unemployment, widespread corruption and delays in civil servants receiving their salaries. A national strike, named "stay-away day", began on the same day in Harare. It is advised that visitors should avoid areas where demonstrations may be held, or where there are large gatherings of people; if a demonstration or disturbance is taking place, leave quickly.

The government is widely acknowledged to be dysfunctional. Although Zimbabwe is unstable, there have been no reports of violence targeted at foreign tourists; nonetheless it is wise to use taxis and hire cars to avoid walking the city streets alone at night.

While there are travel advisories in place for much of the country, Victoria Falls is considered safe and well-policed and the majority of visits are hassle-free. The resort areas around Lake Kariba are also considered to be safe, especially on guided tours and package holidays.

Note: Zimbabwe underwent a military coup in November 2017, and while the situation is not necessarily more dangerous travellers are advised to keep abreast of developments.

## LOCAL CUSTOMS

In Zimbabwe it is against the law to take photographs of public buildings or government institutions, and it is not advisable to take photographs anywhere in the vicinity of such buildings, or any roadblocks and illegally occupied farms, as this could lead to arrest. It is also illegal to take photographs of police and military personnel, as well as of demonstrations. It is a criminal offence to make insulting comments about President Mugabe and his government. It is also an offence to continue driving when the President's motorcade goes past, no matter which side of the road you are on. Visitors should be aware that an open hand is the political symbol of the main opposition political party, the Movement for Democratic Change, and a friendly wave may therefore be misinterpreted as a provocative gesture. Homosexuality is illegal. Civilians are not permitted to wear camouflage clothing.

## BUSINESS

Business in Zimbabwe is conducted in English, and is fairly informal, with drinking and socialising very much part of the business scene. Dress is fairly conservative, but lightweight suits or casual jackets are more suited to the hot climate than formal business wear. It is customary to shake hands with men and women at the beginning and end of a meeting. Business hours are generally Monday to Friday, 8am to 4.30pm, although hours vary considerably depending on the establishment; some businesses close at 11am on Wednesdays, and some are open on Saturday mornings.

## COMMUNICATIONS

The international dialling code for Zimbabwe is +263. Local mobile phone operators provide network coverage in most cities, towns, and tourist areas throughout the country. Internet facilities are available in most towns and cities, but internet cafes are often crowded.

## DUTY FREE

Travellers to Zimbabwe do not have to pay duty on items to the value of US\$200 provided this allowance is not claimed more than once in a 30-day period. These include goods for personal consumption, including tobacco, and alcohol up to 5 litres with no more than 2 litres of this being spirits. Prohibited items include narcotic and amphetamine drugs, indecent or obscene reading material, toy firearms, and blade knives.

## CLIMATE

Victoria Falls experiences hot summers from September through to April, and mild winters from May through to August. The summer rainy season in Vic Falls lasts from November to March, and the rain usually comes in the form of afternoon thundershowers. The weather can be unpredictable. Visitors should note that there is a considerable difference in the flow of water over the Victoria Falls from the rainy to the dry season when planning their holiday. The Falls look their best between February and May when the highest volume of water thunders down into the gorge.

## ENTRY REQUIREMENTS FOR SOUTH AFRICANS

South Africans must have a passport valid for at least the period of stay in the country. A visa is not required for stays of less than 90 days.

## PASSPORT/VISA

All visitors require travel itineraries, tickets and documents for return or onward journeys, as well as sufficient funds for the duration of their stay. Visa fees, where applicable, are payable in US dollars. Fees vary depending on nationality and type of visa. It is highly recommended that passports have at least six months validity remaining after your intended date of departure from your travel destination. Immigration officials often apply different rules to those stated by travel agents and official sources. If travelling on business, you'll also need multiple copies of a letter from your company and an invitation letter from a Zimbabwean company, both on company stationery.

## MONEY

The de facto official currency is the US Dollar (USD). The Zimbabwe Dollar (ZWD) was effectively abandoned as the official currency in early 2009 after runaway inflation. The South African Rand (ZAR) and British Pound (GBP) are also sometimes accepted. Major international credit cards are accepted in most of the larger hotels, restaurants and shops. Many smaller establishments still do not have credit card facilities. Diners Club and American Express are often not accepted. ATM facilities, dispensing USD, are available in the cities, although in smaller towns and rural areas you'll need to bring cash.

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## TRANSPORT

Victoria Falls town is quite small and most places of interest (except the airport) are within easy walking distance of Livingstone Way and Park Way. You can also hire mountain bikes or scooters, or call a taxi to get around.

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## ATTRACTIONS

Tourist activities naturally revolve around the majestic Victoria Falls and many hours can be spent exploring the pathways through the rainforest below the falls, where various lookout platforms beg for endless photographs. The Zambezi River is also a well-deserving playground for travellers: for active, adventurous types there is extreme whitewater rafting, river boarding, bungee jumping, gorge swinging and the thrilling Devil's Pool; and for the peace-loving there are languid sunset cruises, relaxed canoeing opportunities, and breathtaking helicopter rides. National Parks in the region promise good game viewing and a genuine African safari experience. There are even elephant-back safaris available!

The area is extremely well-developed in terms of tourist amenities, with many different tours of the region on offer and plentiful restaurants and bars to keep visitors entertained. There are wonderful curio markets and artisan stalls dotted about the town. Travellers will be able to pick up some gorgeous locally-made souvenirs to take home with them, however some hard-bargaining is recommended as foreigners do tend to get overcharged for these pretty collectables!

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### DEVIL'S POOL

A popular but somewhat risky Vic Falls attraction is Devil's Pool, a naturally formed swimming spot *right* on the edge of the falls. The pool is only 'safe' to swim in between September and December (and not always, even in these months), when the river flow is at the right level, but even then this is quite a daring adventure - not for the faint hearted! Aside from the thrill of swimming on the edge of the falls, Devil's Pool is also a great spot for those once-in-a-lifetime holiday photos. Ferries from Livingstone Island take visitors to this exciting attraction whenever the water levels are deemed safe enough, however this activity is predominantly accessible only from the Zambian

side of the Falls.



### NATIONAL PARKS

There are three primary national parks to explore while on holiday in Vic Falls - the Victoria Falls National Park, the Mosi-oo-Tunya National Park on the Zambian side of the falls and, about 120 miles (193km) further south, the Hwange National Park. These parks feature a vast selection of wildlife including elephant, buffalo, giraffe, zebra and various antelope; there are also occasional sightings of lion and leopard. There are a number of operators in Vic Falls town offering safaris to these national parks, as well as elephant-back safaris on Nakavango Estate and the 'walking with lions' experience at Masuwe Estate.

The Victoria Falls National Park incorporates the iconic falls - a UNESCO World Heritage Site - and is therefore an absolute must for travellers in the region. Apart from the falls, and the gorgeous rainforest beneath, the national park includes varied landscapes populated by diverse game, including the Big Five: elephant, lion, buffalo, leopard and rhino.

The Mosi-oo-Tunya National Park is situated along the upper Zambezi River, on the Zambian side, and also incorporates part of Victoria Falls. Travellers will find that crossing the border between Zimbabwe and Zambia at Victoria Falls is generally very pain-free as border officials are totally accustomed to people popping over for a few hours to view both sides of the falls. Naturally both countries want to encourage tourism.

The largest game reserve in Zimbabwe, Hwange National Park, covers more than 5,637 square miles (14,600 sq km) of land in the western tip of Zimbabwe, near the Kalahari Desert. The park contains large numbers of gemsbok, hyena, African wild dogs, and elephants, and safari lodges within Hwange offer a range of safaris either on foot, by 4x4, or on horseback.



### VICTORIA FALLS

The majestic Victoria Falls, or Mosi-oo-Tunya (the Smoke that Thunders), is located on the Zambezi River, between Zambia and Zimbabwe. Explorer David Livingstone named the falls after Queen Victoria when he first saw them in 1855. One of the seven natural wonders of the world, the falls have been attracting travellers and adventure-seekers for decades, its pounding waters creating a mist that can be seen for miles and the sound of the falls, especially in the rainy season (November to April) making it difficult to hear anything else. There is a trail that runs along the cliff adjacent to the waterfall which visitors can use to reach the scenic viewpoints, and

the Flight of Angels helicopter tour is a phenomenal way to see the falls from above. Guided tours are also available, which include collection and drop off from your hotel. It is impossible to visit the falls without being blown away by the beauty and power of this natural feature, and both Zimbabwe and Zambia are justifiably proud of this great wonder.

**Website:** [victoriafallstourism.org/](http://victoriafallstourism.org/);

## EVENTS

## AIRPORTS

### VICTORIA FALLS AIRPORT (VFA)

#### LOCATION

The airport is situated 13 miles (22km) south of Victoria Falls town.

#### GETTING TO THE CITY

There is no public transport from the airport to the nearest town. Visitors are advised to book a driver or hotel transfer prior to landing, or one can hail a taxi or hire a car on arrival.

#### TIME

Local time is GMT +2.

#### CONTACTS

Tel: +263 (0)13 44428, +263 (0)13 44255, +263 (0)13 41576

#### CAR RENTAL

Europcar and Budget offer car hiring services at the airport.

#### FACILITIES

Facilities include banks, bureau de change, restaurants, bars, VIP Lounge, duty free shop, Tourist Help Desk and first aid.

#### DEPARTURE TAX

#### WEBSITE

[www.caaaz.co.zw](http://www.caaaz.co.zw)

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