

Zimbabwe visit 2012 (part 2) – Trip to Victoria Falls

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After the successful ZAA conference in Harare, seven of the UK team stayed on in Zimbabwe for a further week during which we all eventually ended up in the Victoria Falls area after travelling there by bus, train or car. The journey on a *Pathfinder bus* (fig 18) which included a change of vehicle in Bulawayo took 12 hours.



Fig 18.
Pathfinder bus

The double decker vehicle had comfortable seats, particularly if one paid an extra \$10 on top of the \$70 one way price. These were booked by the very efficient Mavis of *Khanondo Travel* (reservations@khanondo-travel.com) based in Victoria Falls, who also organised accommodation and various day trips. Emma and I stayed at the Paradise Lodge Hotel, which was only \$60/night each for a single room. These had a comfy bed and plenty of hot water in the shower, but for the first night no mosquito nets. These were produced on request the next day in spite of the fact that the hotel manager did have some slightly bizarre idea that mosquito nets could spread infection from one customer to the next.

On the first evening we went on an evening cruise on the Zambezi river with Mavis (fig 19), experiencing a spectacular sunset (fig 20) and close encounters with a large crocodile (fig 21), some hippos and several elephants (fig 22) on an island, which caused some excitement.



Fig 19. *Mavis on the river*



Fig 20. *Sunset*



Fig 21. *Emma with croc in ear*



Fig 22. *Elephant*

Victoria Falls

The next day we went on a guided tour where we saw the Livingstone Memorial (fig 23) and then along a path with many different vantage points suitable for photographing these spectacular falls (fig 24, 25, 26) regarded as one of the 7 wonders of the World.



Fig 23. *Livingstone and me!*



Fig 24.

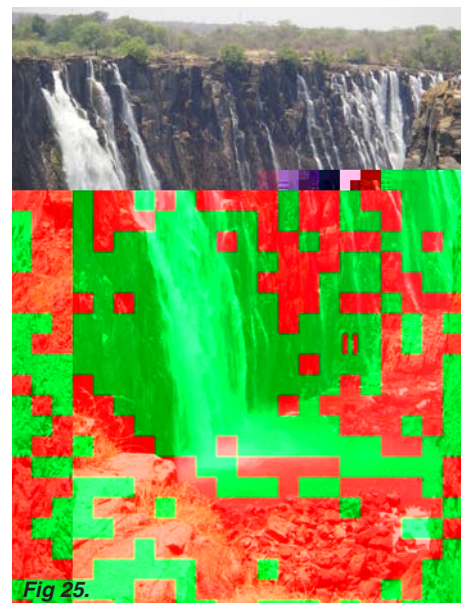


Fig 25.

We saw a group of people swimming in a pool just above the place where the water cascaded down 351ft to the valley below. The evening entertainment was provided by dinner at the

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Fig 26.



Boma Restaurant which was very welcoming and great fun. All guests on arrival had some African cloth draped round their shoulders, were then guided to a table, given drinks, and encouraged to go and help themselves to the interesting buffet which included excellent barbecued warthog fillet and kudu steak. Some of us tried the fried Mopani worms which tasted rather like pork scratchings, receiving a certificate after successful ingestion (fig 27).

Fig 27. Sophie likes worms



Later that evening we all participated in the drumming (fig 28) and dancing

Fig 28. Drum major Romilly



and were serenaded by a local group of singers.

It all proved to be great fun and reasonable value at US\$55 per head.

Day trip to Botswana

The following morning we set off with our guide from the No1 Lady Travel Agency (Fig 29) on an amazing all day trip to Chobe Game Reserve,



Fig 29. Would Alexander McCall Smith approve?

where we saw in excess of 2000 elephants. (figs 30-36).



Fig 30. Elephant entering river



Fig 31. Crossing the river



Fig 32. Arriving on the island

Most of these were seen during a boat trip round an island where they were congregating to eat the lush grass which was obviously preferable to the very arid and dried up



Fig 33. Back to back



Fig 34. Side by side



Fig 35. Synchrony



Fig 36. On the move

vegetation on the mainland. We also saw buffalo, kudu and impala (fig 37)



Fig 37. Impala

but for me the most interesting animals were a large crocodile (fig 38) and a monitor lizard (fig 39).

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Fig 38. Old croc



Fig 39. Monitor lizard

After an enjoyable buffet lunch at the impressive Chobe Safari Lodge in Kisani, we went on a game drive through the nearby reserve where the highlights were seeing a sleeping male lion (fig 40), a sable antelope and two doku.



Fig 40. Sleeping lion

Walking with lions

On the final day we visited a lion sanctuary, where after breakfast and signing the obligatory disclaimer, our nine strong group were allowed to walk in the bush initially with two small two lion cubs about six months old (fig 41) and then with another pair



Fig 41. Lion cubs

of much larger ones who were 14 months old. We were instructed to walk behind the animals (fig 42) and



Fig 42. Going for a walk

when they lay down to approach from behind and stroke their backs (fig 43),



Fig 43. A new friend

we were advised to keep away from their head. These lions were on stage 2 of a 5 stage programme to return them to the wild. Although quite expensive it was very unique experience being in such close proximity to the *king of the jungle*. The organisation offers package trips where individuals can come for several weeks and do self-funded charitable work in the area, including learning to look after the lions and helping at an orphanage.

(www.africanimpact.com)



Fig 44. Shoestrings

After returning to the hotel from the lion park, we walked to *Shoestrings* (fig 44), advertised as cheaper accommodation for backpackers, for a massage.

We were reminded of a lesson that in Africa one must negotiate in advance the price of anything that you do. We felt we were slightly ripped off as we had to pay about double what an Australian man on the lion trip had said it would cost.

Tea time in Africa

After lunch we walked into Victoria Falls and took some photographs of the local warthogs in the high street (fig 45).



Fig 45. Safari on Main Street in Vic Falls

A British man walked by and said a week ago he had spent the whole day in the Serengeti trying to see one! Then it was the Victoria Falls Hotel for tea with Romilly and Sophie who described their two recent near death experiences. The first a close encounter with a rather aggressive hippo while they were canoeing the previous evening and the second while white water rafting on the Zambezi earlier in the day – on more than one occasion one of the sisters lost the other and assumed they must have drowned.

Tea at the legendary *Vic Falls Hotel* can be highly recommended. A silver three tiered cake stand (fig 46) with wonderful sandwiches (minus crusts)



Fig 46. Cake stand

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on the bottom plate, then scones with cream and jam in the middle and finally a selection of cakes on the top layer. The supply of tea in a large silver teapot was unlimited and at US\$15 per head it was good value (fig 47).



Fig 47. Tea for four

Later on that day we returned to *Shoestrings* to watch the DVD of the white water rafting trip. At the end it was very touching when Sophie was asked how she had enjoyed her day and she replied *fantastic but I never knew I loved my sister quite so much*. On the way back to the Paradise Lodge our taxi ran out of fuel but the driver guided us safely there on foot in the dark so I paid him the agreed amount.

The following day was another 12 hour journey, this time in reverse, back to Harare via the spectacular *Hwange Safari Lodge* and the towns of *Bulawayo* and *Gweru*. The bus was fine except there were continuous 'B' movies on the video screens with no way of eliminating the sound.

The following morning Doreen Mashava joined us for breakfast at the Bronte and very kindly brought more presents (Fig. 48).



Fig 48. With Doreen at the Bronte Hotel

At 11.30am we left with our taxi driver Isaiah who had driven us from the bus station to the Bronte the previous night, for Harare Airport for our flight via Johannesburg to London. At Harare airport we met Rhi, Rhi and Anne, who had been travelling around the country in a hire car. We then spent time sharing our experiences. After a pleasant flight we landed at Johannesburg Airport which turned out to be fantastic for shopping. If you have a few hours to spare it is also well worth having a *Priority Pass card* to access a very comfortable lounge.

In summary

It had been a fantastic two weeks in what is a really beautiful country with such friendly people. Regarding Vic Falls one can only say what a brilliant place it is to visit, it should be on everyone's *bucket list*. The journey was made much easier for us by the efficiency of Mavis our Zimbabwe travel agent. Unfortunately it is not possible at present to fly from Harare to Vic Falls but there are regular flights on SAA from Johannesburg.

The general feeling is that the country seems to be getting back on its feet after some well publicised very difficult years. The supermarkets are all full of goods and currency is stable since the US dollar was introduced in 2008.



Fig 49. Worthless note

My one billion Zimbabwe dollar note (Fig. 49), purchased for 1 USD from a street salesman at Vic Falls is sadly worthless!