Zimbabwe Safari: Victoria Falls & Undiscovered National Parks

Tour-Only Itinerary



Whether tracking elephant on foot through pristine grassland or paddling a canoe on the Zambezi River, Zimbabwe offers memorable adventures to last a lifetime. Explore Hwange National Park via 4×4 vehicle, spotting cheetah, hippo, elephant, impala, zebra, and much more as you go. Experience the thrill of walking through the bush with experienced guides, learning to read animal tracks in the dirt and sense changes in wind direction. Ride a section of the historic Cape-to-Cairo Railway through miles of backcountry, watching giraffe and lion cross in front of you from your open railcar. Relax on the Zambezi River—paddling a canoe out to the uninhabited Siansimba Islands or sipping sundowners aboard a speedboat. Stay in perfectly situated camps and lodges, with views of plunging gorges and watering holes from your beautifully appointed rooms. From beginning to end, savor an active and experiential journey into one of Africa's lesser-known regions.

Create lasting memories as you travel through the wilds of Africa, with exciting animal encounters, idyllic canoe excursions, and everything in between. Wander lush forests bathed in the mist of thundering Victoria Falls, and listen for bird calls as your canoe drifts along the Zambezi River. Follow expert guides on thrilling walking tours of Zimbabwe's oldest and largest national park, sighting majestic elephants, energetic zebras, and graceful cheetahs. On the

historic Cape-to-Cairo Railway, watch for lions and giraffes emerging from the vast wilderness. Take in sweeping views from your deluxe bush camp accommodations, enjoying a sumptuous dinner each night before falling asleep under a sky of infinite stars. This memorable journey showcases the sights and sounds underlying the allure of untamed Africa.

Highlights

Track wildlife on foot on exciting bush walks and explore the trails along the rim of thundering Victoria Falls, with expert guides.
Get closer to wild elephants than you ever dreamed, looking up from inside an innovative underground blind, half-buried beside a watering hole.
Walk through conserved farmland into a remote village, where you are likely to be joined by local children on their way to school.
Discover the fascinating history of Africa's Cape-to-Cairo Railway, marveling at breathtaking views of Hwange's vast backcountry from your open rail car.



DAY 1

Join your *Zimbabwe Safari: Victoria Falls & Undiscovered National Parks* tour

Your Country Walkers guide meets you at the Victoria Falls Airport upon your arrival and shuttles you to your first hotel on tour.

Touch down at Victoria Falls Airport and begin your Zimbabwean adventure. A shuttle meets you and whisks you to Gorges Lodge, nestled in a garden setting and perched on the edge of the Batoka Gorge,

200 yards above the mighty Zambezi River. Spend the afternoon relaxing in the tranquil beauty of the lodge. Unwind by the pool, sipping a fresh-squeezed juice and taking in the stunning view.

Late afternoon, stretch your legs and join your guide on a walk through the lodge's gardens – boasting 90 percent indigenous plants – leading to a striking outlook along the gorge. This is the ideal place to savor a glass of cold sauvignon blanc and slice of *bobotie* (curried meat) quiche, while watching the lodge's resident pair of black eagles soar within feet of you. African black eagles (also known as Verreaux's eagles) are a highly specialized bird of prey, who almost exclusively hunt rock hyrax—a small, rodent-like relative of the elephant. Black eagles pair for life, building nests and hunting together. Other large birds you may be lucky to view include the peregrine and taita falcons, lizard and jackal buzzards, harrier hawks, and the occasional fish eagle.

Following sundowners with the eagles, stroll back to the main lodge where you are entertained by their energetic team of talented traditional dancers—you might even get pulled in to join them! Then enjoy a tasty three-course dinner—such as butternut squash soup, beef stroganoff, and peach crisp—in the main lodge area, overlooking the gorge, before retiring to your chalet and falling asleep to the sound of the river rushing below you.

Accommodation: Gorges Lodge, Victoria Falls

DAY 2

Victoria Falls: Rim walk

2 hours of walking, easy. Free afternoon or optional visit to Chisuma village

Wake up to the sound of the rushing river below and enjoy your morning tea or coffee out on your private veranda overlooking the gorge, followed by your choice of a continental or full-cooked breakfast in the main lodge dining area. Then head out for a walking tour of Victoria Falls – Zimbabwe's prime attraction. No description, no matter how vivid, can prepare you for the reality of the falls, which remain one of the most spectacular natural wonders in the world. Natives call it "the smoke that thunders." Geologists call it "the greatest known curtain of falling water," and "Seventh Wonder of the Natural World." The majestic Zambezi River sends more than 560,000 cubic meters of water per minute plummeting over the edge of this massive gorge, with a width of one-and-a-quarter miles and a depth of more than 330 feet. The falls

transform the placid Zambezi River into a ferocious torrent exploding into clouds of spray seen from miles away. Yet thanks to its remote location, the surrounding wilderness is peaceful and pristine. Walk along paths that meander through the rainforest – leading you from one awe-inspiring viewpoint to another. There will also be an opportunity to visit a local craft village to buy hand-carved souvenirs, for those interested.

After working up an appetite, you are treated to a picnic lunch on the banks of the Zambezi River or at a local café. Upon return to the lodge, you have the opportunity to visit the nearby Chisuma village, where you meet villagers and participate in some of their daily activities, such as crushing grain into meal, ploughing the fields, and brewing beer. For those looking for a little rest, you may opt to settle in on your deck with a good book.

In the evening, enjoy an alfresco dinner in the lush garden under the stars.

Accommodation: Gorges Lodge, Victoria Falls

DAY 3

Transfer to Hwange National Park with game drive

After breakfast, set off on a full-day road transfer to Nehimba Lodge in the northwest of Hwange National Park (formerly Wankie Game Reserve), famed for its large elephant herds and diversity of wildlife. (Total transfer time is five to six hours inclusive of plenty of rest stops and some game viewing.) Just before entering the park, the road leads unexpectedly through an open coal mine. It's a strong contrast to the glorious, preserved wilderness of Hwange, and underscores just how important your tourism is to supporting the national park and its wilderness. Founded in 1929 and named for a local Nhanzwa chief, Hwange National Park is Zimbabwe's biggest and oldest game reserve. Hwange is home to over 100 mammal species—one of the largest array of mammals in any national park in the world. Here lions, cheetah, and endangered African wild dogs pursue wildebeest and zebra. As you drive to Nehimba Lodge, you'll pass through Sinamatella, giving you an opportunity to view game before you even go on an official game drive. A packed lunch enjoyed at a picnic shelter overlooking waterholes popular with pods of hippo will sustain you en route. The northwest part of the park is famous for its woodlands dominated by the mopane tree—also known as the butterfly tree—a species that grows only in the hot, arid, low-lying sections of Africa. Basalt lava flows and grayish-white dolomite hills dot the landscape, as well.

Upon arriving at Nehimba, settle in and start to unwind as you explore your home for the next two nights. Time permitting, join your guide on a late afternoon bush walk to a nearby waterhole, where you are apt to see hippos, elephants, impalas, and zebras. Following sundowners, you return to camp with the aid of a spotlight – keeping an eye out for nocturnal animals. Upon your return, a delectable three-course dinner awaits under the African sky. Dinner might include spinach and tomato parcels baked with garlic sauce and cheese, mint-crusted lamb cutlets, and berry *panna cotta.*.

Accommodation: Nehimba Lodge, Hwange National Park

DAY 4

Hwange National Park: Tracking elephants on foot

1-2 hours of walking, easy

Prepare your day packs and set off with your guide for a full morning of tracking elephant herds on a walking tour of Zimbabwe's Hwange National Park. Hwange is home to Africa's largest herd of elephant during the dry season (July to October). By walking to find these beautiful beasts, you have up-close encounters that are truly exhilarating! Punctuating the flat grasslands are kopjes—large, ancient rock formations, whose nooks and crannies provide a refuge for small animals, including insects, lizards, snakes, and rock hyraxes (the favored prey of the African black eagle). Kopjes offer oases in the middle of the plains resulting in an array of rich vegetation and predators often use them to scan the plains for prey.

Enjoy lunch back at the camp and a chance to relax by the lodge's freshwater swimming pool—a favorite destination for Hwange's thirsty herds during the dry season.

In the evening sip sundowners and savor canapés in front of a nearby pan. Then immerse yourself in the cuisine of Zimbabwe by helping the chef prepare a traditional Zimbabwean braai (a cookout) for dinner.

Accommodation: Nehimba Lodge, Hwange

DAY 5

Hwange National Park: Nehimba Concession, Cape-to-Cairo Railway

1 hour of walking, easy

Savor early morning tea or coffee on your private deck, followed by breakfast in the main lodge, and then head out for one last morning walk through the Nehimba Concession. On returning to camp, pack your bags and head by 4x4 to Impofu Siding, near Hwange Main Camp (two hours). Here, you set off on a unique railroad adventure.

At Dete you board the Elephant Express for a leisurely and picturesque ride down the railway line. Cruising along in this comfortable train car is a marvelous way to view game. The rails runs straight as a ruler for miles and miles, and you may see wildlife (often big cats!) sitting on the tracks, while elephants and giraffes cross in front of you. The train tracks are part of the historic Cape-to-Cairo Railway—a breathing remnant of colonial history. The unfinished railway was the late 19th-century vision of Cecil John Rhodes, the founder of Rhodesia (current day Zambia and Zimbabwe), and funder of the eponymous Rhodes Scholarship. He wanted to construct a railway bridging the 4,500 miles separating Cape Town and Cairo in an almost-straight line, thus joining the two British possessions in Africa and forming a continuous “red line” of British dominion from north to south. A railway was a critical element in this scheme to unify the possessions, facilitate governance, allow the military to move quickly to hot spots or conduct war, help settlement, and enable intra- and extra-continental goods trade. Of note is the famous Victoria Falls Bridge, which crosses over the Zambezi River, catching the spray of Victoria Falls. For over 50 years, it was a critical route for passengers and freight to cross between Northern and Southern Rhodesia.

You travel in a converted rail car that’s been fitted with a Land Rover engine, gears, clutch, brakes, and specially adapted wheels. Your train is operated by two expert engineers who have spent their life’s work with the national railway – happy to tell you that driving this hybrid railcar is their dream retirement. The southern section of the line was completed during British rule before the First World War and forms part of an interconnecting system of national railways using the Cape gauge of 1,067 millimeters (three feet, six inches). The length of line that borders the edge of Hwange National Park is the longest straight stretch of railway line at 114 kilometers (71 miles). Traveling along this historic rail line in a refurbished train car is a spectacular treat for the train buff. Packed snacks and lunch will be served on board during the two-hour trip. *This railway tour is dependent on permission from the National Railway Line, which has been operating regularly to date.

Upon arrival, you check in to your home for the next three nights, Bomani. Settle into your tented camp and then head off for a late afternoon game drive and walk into Hwange National Park (time permitting). You arrive at a picturesque pan for sundowners and canapés. The flat terrain of the Ngamo Plains in this part of Hwange offers incredible, endless vistas and is an exquisite place to watch the sunset and hear the sounds of night falling upon the plains, as nocturnal critters begin their day.

Head back to the lodge for a delectable three-course dinner under the stars, then retire to the campfire for coffee, hot chocolate or a night cap, and stories into the evening.

Accommodation: Bomani Tented Lodge, Hwange

DAY 6

Hwange National Park: Ngamo Plains

2 hours of walking, easy

Wake up early beneath the acacia canopy, sipping coffee or tea while listening to the plethora of birdlife that live around the lodge. After breakfast, head off for a game drive and walk. Today you learn the secrets of the expert “Zim pro guides,” as they lead you on a walking safari to find elephants. You pay attention to which way the wind is blowing, the alert of monkeys, and other on-the-ground tips provided by your guide. You walk noiselessly through acacia forests, and you might even sneak up on a grazing zebra. It’s a thrilling experience, but in the presence of these expert guides, you are sure to feel safe, as well as awed.

A casual lunch (a well-deserved cold beer and cheeseburger, perhaps) will be served in our exclusive ‘look up’ blind in front of Stoffie’s Pan. The blind is an old shipping container that’s been camouflaged as a termite heap and buried in the ground under an ancient Motswiri tree. It’s an incredible opportunity to get close to the elephants. For elephant lovers, it doesn’t get better than this.

While this is truly a day for the elephants, you also find that big cats, myriad plains game, smaller critters, and birds aplenty are there for the sighting. This national park also has a series of pumps, which provide a lifeline for wildlife and the travelers who venture here to experience it. Several boreholes were dug and water pumping stations built by park rangers in the 1950s, during a time of drought. One of the generator-charged pumps is located at Stoffie’s Pan. These man-made pans have ensured water for wildlife for

years, reducing the need for wildlife to migrate outside of park boundaries during the dry season—which has proven especially dangerous as there are hunting grounds on their migration routes. Boreholes have also been created for the neighboring communities that have formed and now thrive on the edge of the park.

Take a leisurely drive back to the lodge and enjoy a few hours bird watching around the camp or taking a siesta before your late-afternoon game drive in the park. Stop at a watering hole to watch the sun go down, while sipping aperitifs, before heading back to the lodge to freshen up for dinner in the main lodge dining area.

Accommodation: Bomani Tented Lodge, Hwange

DAY 7

Ngamo Plains – Hwange National Park: Village visit and walk

2 hours of walking, easy

This morning sees an early start, with breakfast in the dining room followed by a short drive to nearby Ngunyana Village. From here, you start walking down a series of dirt paths, where your arrival may coincide with local schoolchildren on their two- to three-mile morning journey from the village to nearby Ngamo School. At the school, you have the opportunity to meet the staff, tour the classrooms, and (time permitting) share stories with the students. Then continue walking through the village to see what is happening in local life that day. Depending on the season, you are sure to gain insight into the day-to-day life of a rural Zimbabwean: if you're there in May, you learn about tilling crops; September means thatching roofs. This warm and welcoming community offer glimpses into their lives. You are welcomed into the home of the headman of the village—an eloquent speaker who is as likely to pose questions as he is to answer them. It's an excellent opportunity to see firsthand how community and conservation work closely together. Following this visit, you end your walk under the shade of nearby trees to enjoy a lovely picnic lunch. Then it's back to the lodge for a few hours of quiet time or game viewing from your tent's verandah.

As the African sun starts to cool, climb aboard your four-by-four vehicle packed with cold refreshments and snacks and drive along the Ngamo Plains one last time. Stop at a watering hole to watch the sun sink beneath the horizon before heading back to the lodge to freshen up for another delicious dinner.

Accommodation: Bomani Tented Lodge, Hwange

DAY 8

Transfer to Zambezi River: Sunset boat excursion

After breakfast (and perhaps one more early morning bush walk), you bid your lovely hosts farewell and join your guide on an hour-long charter flight over Hwange National Park to Victoria Falls and your last camp on the banks of the Zambezi River. During your stay you see massive hippos and stealthy crocodiles, and experience the water by boat and kayak.

Settle into your luxury tent and then enjoy a tasty late lunch (curried chicken and pineapple salad with tomato-mozzarella pinwheels, perhaps) on the main lodge deck while the mighty Zambezi flows past. This afternoon set off on an exploratory boat ride, stopping at a scenic spot to watch the sun set. The thrill of recreational fishing for tigerfish is included for guests who are interested (they are highly regarded as being the best freshwater game fish in Africa).

Accommodation: Zambezi Sands River Camp, Zambezi

DAY 9

Zambezi River: Free day to relax, canoe, or join a guided walk and game drive

Today is a day at your leisure. Enjoy early morning tea or coffee on your private deck overlooking the river and enjoy a number of activities: you might choose to paddle in a canoe exploring the Siansimba Islands or take a final Zimbabwe walking tour incorporating buffalo tracking. Or, perhaps you want to take the morning off and relax on your own—simply enjoying your surroundings. Following any activity, you enjoy a sumptuous bush brunch on the river's edge before returning to the lodge for a siesta (or a spot of fishing!). In the afternoon head off for a game drive, returning to camp in the evening for a sunset 'drift' on the water with refreshments and snacks.

This evening you celebrate the adventures you've had in the company of newfound friends during your farewell dinner on the main lodge deck.

Accommodation: Zambezi Sands River Camp, Zambezi

DAY 10

Your *Zimbabwe Safari: Victoria Falls & Undiscovered National Parks* tour concludes

A transfer will be provided to the Victoria Falls airport, where you make onward travel connections.

Rise early with the sun to soak up your last moments in this special place. Enjoy your coffee or tea and witness the mist rising on the Zambezi River. Following a final al fresco breakfast, bid your hosts farewell, and transfer by road to the Victoria Falls Airport for onward travels.

What's Included

	Tour Only
Exceptional boutique accommodations	✓
All on-tour meals	✓
Local guides with you throughout tour	✓
Local wine and/or beer with dinner	✓
Entrance fees and special events as noted in the itinerary	✓
Emergency travel assistance hotline available 24/7	✓