

## **Zimbabwe overview:**

Zimbabwe is a landlocked country located in southern Africa, between the Zambezi and Limpopo Rivers, bordered by South Africa, Botswana, Zambia and Mozambique. The capital and largest city is Harare.

Most of the country is elevated, consisting of a central plateau (high veld) stretching from the southwest northwards with altitudes between 1,000 and 1,600 m. The country's extreme east is mountainous, this area being known as the Eastern Highlands, with Mount Nyangani being the highest point at 2,592 m. The highlands are known for their natural environment, with tourist destinations such as Nyanga, Troutbeck, Chimanimani, Vumba and Chirinda Forest at Mount Selinda. About 20% of the country consists of low-lying areas, (the low veld) under 900m. Victoria Falls, one of the world's biggest and most spectacular waterfalls, is located in the country's extreme northwest and is part of the Zambezi river. The country is mostly savannah, although the moist and mountainous eastern highlands support areas of tropical evergreen and hardwood forests.

Zimbabwe has a tropical climate with many local variations. The southern areas are known for their heat and aridity, parts of the central plateau receive frost in winter, the Zambezi valley is also known for its extreme heat and the Eastern Highlands usually experience cool temperatures and the highest rainfall in the country. The country's rainy season generally runs from late October to March and the hot climate is moderated by increasing altitude.

Zimbabwe has several major tourist attractions. Victoria Falls on the Zambezi, which are shared with Zambia, are located in the north west of Zimbabwe. Before the economic changes, much of the tourism for these locations came to the Zimbabwe side but now Zambia is the main beneficiary. The Victoria Falls National Park is also in this area and is one of the eight main national parks in Zimbabwe, the largest of which is Hwange National Park.

Zimbabwe is unusual in Africa in that there are a number of ancient ruined cities built in a unique dry stone style. Among the most famous of these are the Great Zimbabwe ruins in Masvingo. Other ruins include Khami Ruins, Zimbabwe, Dhlo-Dhlo and Naletale.

The Matobo Hills are an area of granite kopjes and wooded valleys commencing some 22 miles (35 km) south of Bulawayo in southern Zimbabwe. The Hills were formed over 2,000 million years ago with granite being forced to the surface, then being eroded to produce smooth "whaleback dwalas" and broken kopjes, strewn with boulders and interspersed with thickets of vegetation. Mzilikazi, founder of the Ndebele nation, gave the area its name, meaning 'Bald Heads'. They have become a tourist attraction due to their ancient shapes and local wildlife

Zimbabwe is a mecca for the outdoor-lover and adventure traveler. In the Victoria Falls area alone you can go white-water rafting, kayaking, micro lighting, parachuting, horse-riding, cycling and even do the world's highest bungi jump.

## **Hwange National Park**



Named after a local Nhanzwa chief, Hwange National Park is the largest Park in Zimbabwe and one of the 10 largest national parks in Africa occupying, roughly 14 650 square kilometers. It is located in the northwest corner of the country about one hour south of the Mighty Victoria Falls.

The Park boasts a tremendous selection of wildlife with 105 mammal species, including 19 large herbivores, 8 large carnivores and nearly 400 bird species recorded. The grasslands and mopane woods are home to large elephant herds, lions and African wild dogs. Hwange National Park is one of Africa's finest havens for wildlife and is home to vast herds of elephant, buffalo, zebra and has a very large concentration of giraffe. But the elephant is what really defines Hwange, being home to one of the world's largest populations of around 40,000 tuskiers.

In the northwest, animals gather at Mandavu and Masuma dams, where there are concealed lookouts. Bumbusi National Monument includes 18th-century ruins and pre-colonial rock carvings. In the southeast, waterholes include the Nyamandhlovu Pan, with its elevated viewing platform. The landscape includes desert sand to sparse woodland as well as grasslands and granite outcrops.

The best time for wildlife viewing is July to October, when animals congregate around the 60 water holes or 'pans' (most of which are artificially filled) and the forest is stripped of its greenery.

## **Mana Pools National Park**



Mana Pools National Park is in the far north of Zimbabwe. It includes the south bank and islands of the Zambezi River, which forms the border with Zambia.

The park is known for wildlife visibility beside the great Zambezi River and in the flood plains. Large populations of elephants, hippos and Nile crocodiles gather at sunrise in the Long Pool.

In the park's south, lions wait for prey around the waterhole at Chitake Spring.

There are several activities around the area, but the main draw is the literal 'pools' of water which are a refreshing break from Zimbabwe's sweltering summers.

The word 'Mana' means four, in reference to the four pools around the park headquarters: Main, Chine, Long and Chisambik.

The area has a parklike appearance. Massive acacia albida trees tower over what appears to be, from a distance at least, a carefully manicured lawn.

The park offers unique guided and self-guided walks amongst many wild animals, excellent canoeing and river fishing.

During the rains, most of the big game animals move away from the river and into the escarpment. They start returning to the riverine areas from around April, as the pans in the bush dry up. As the year progresses, increasingly large herds of elephants and buffalos are seen, as well as kudu, eland, waterbuck, zebra, impala and many other antelope. The game is very relaxed about people on foot, making Manapools one of Africa's best national parks for walking safaris.

## **Victoria Falls National Park**



Open to visitors throughout the year, the Victoria Falls National Park in north-western Zimbabwe protects the south and east bank of the Zambezi River in the area of the world-famous Victoria Falls.

Once famous for being discovered by the great David Livingstone, these billowing falls over 100 m high are a wonder to behold and provide some great photo opportunities.

Called the “smoke that thunders,” a wide range of activities can be organized in the area, including white water rafting and canoeing, but many people visit the falls just to take in the breath-taking views and get rained on by the refreshing spray. If you’re brave, bungee jumping over the falls is the experience of a lifetime.

The Victoria Falls constitutes one of the most spectacular natural wonders of the world. The Local people call it "Mosi-oa-Tunya", the smoke that thunders.

The Victoria falls is 1 708 meters wide, making it the largest curtain of water in the world. It drops between 90m and 107m into the Zambezi Gorge and an average of 550,000 cubic metres of water plummet over the edge every minute.

The falls and the surrounding area have been declared National Parks and a World Heritage Site, thus preserving the area from excessive commercialization. Victoria Falls is one of the Seven Natural Wonders of the World. Statistically speaking, it is the largest waterfall in the world. This recognition comes from combining the height and width together to create the largest single sheet of flowing water.

The river's annual flood season is February to May with a peak in April. The spray from the falls typically rises to a height of over 400 metres (1,300 ft), and sometimes even twice as high, and is visible from up to 50 km (30 miles) away.

During the flood season, however, it is impossible to see the foot of the falls and most of its face, and the walks along the cliff opposite it are in a constant shower and shrouded in mist.

Close to the edge of the cliff, spray shoots upward like inverted rain, especially at Zambia's Knife-Edge Bridge. As the dry season takes effect, the islets on the crest become wider and more numerous, and in September to January up to half of the rocky face of the falls may become dry and the bottom of the First Gorge can be seen along most of its length.

Open to visitors throughout the year, the Victoria Falls National Park in north-western Zimbabwe protects the south and east bank of the Zambezi River. It covers 23.4 km<sup>2</sup> extending from the larger Zambezi National Park about 6 km above the falls to about 12 km below the falls.

A notable feature of the park is the rainforest which grows in the spray of the falls, including ferns, palms, liana vines, and a number of trees such as mahogany not seen elsewhere in the region.

The national parks contain abundant wildlife including sizable populations of elephant, buffalo, giraffe, zebra, and a variety of antelope.

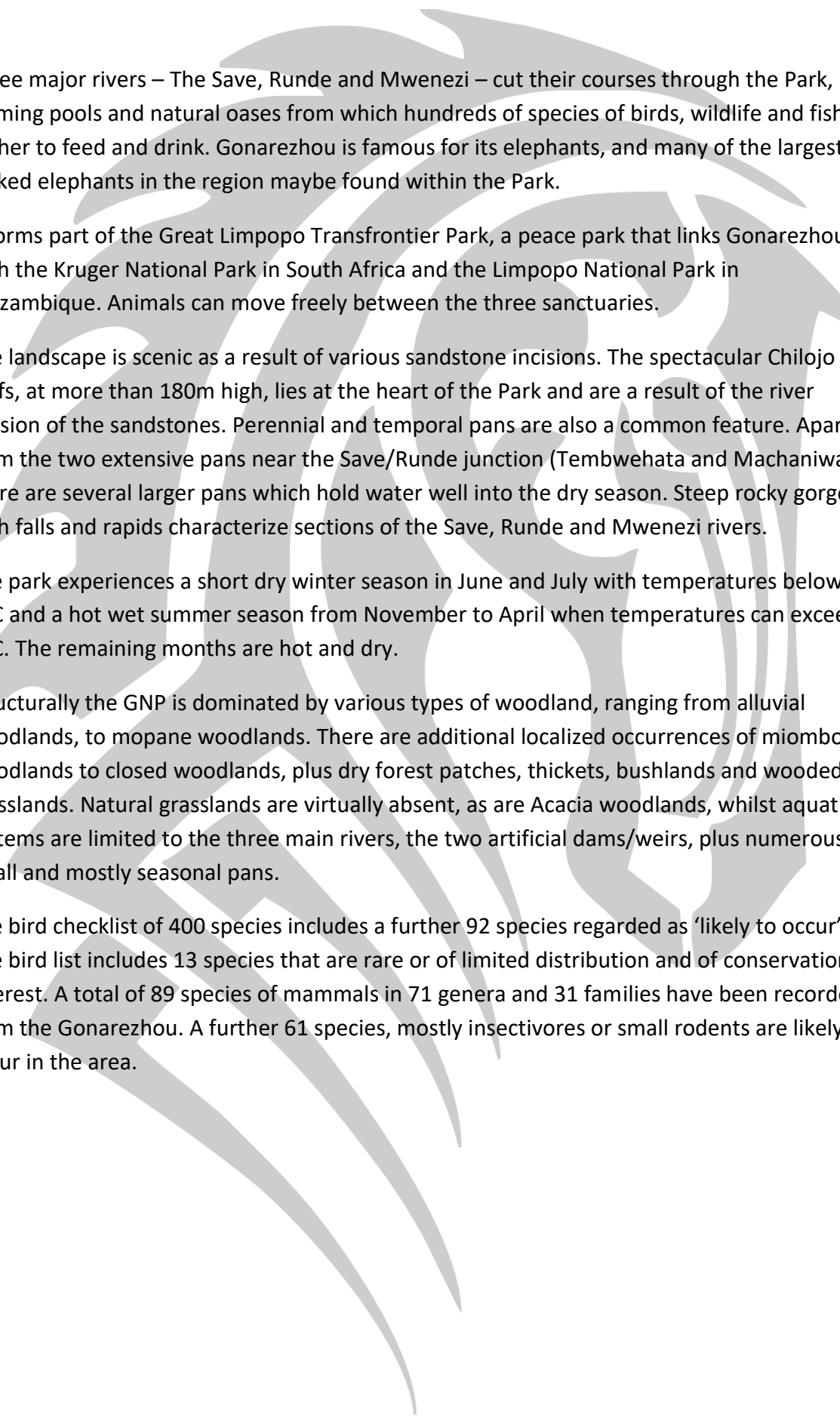
Several activities can be undertaken. The 'Flight of Angels' provides a fabulous vista of the falls, the upstream river and its many islands and for the more adventurous there is micro lighting with stunning views of the Fall.

Rafting the wild rapids below the Falls is a very popular adventure. Visitors can also kayak, canoe, fish, go on guided walking safaris, ride on horseback and lunch on Livingstone's Island. Game viewing per boat or open vehicles is a popular activity above the falls or in in Chobe in Botswana.

### **Gonarezhou National Park**



Gonarezhou National Park is a national park located in south-eastern Zimbabwe and covers an area in excess of 5 000 square kilometres. It is situated in a relatively remote corner of Masvingo Province, south of Chimanimani along the Mozambique border. "Gonarezhou" meaning "Place of many Elephants" is an extremely scenic Park full of rugged and beautiful landscapes. Gonarezhou is the country's second largest game reserve after Hwange National Park.



Three major rivers – The Save, Runde and Mwenezi – cut their courses through the Park, forming pools and natural oases from which hundreds of species of birds, wildlife and fish gather to feed and drink. Gonarezhou is famous for its elephants, and many of the largest-tusked elephants in the region maybe found within the Park.

It forms part of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park, a peace park that links Gonarezhou with the Kruger National Park in South Africa and the Limpopo National Park in Mozambique. Animals can move freely between the three sanctuaries.

The landscape is scenic as a result of various sandstone incisions. The spectacular Chilojo Cliffs, at more than 180m high, lies at the heart of the Park and are a result of the river incision of the sandstones. Perennial and temporal pans are also a common feature. Apart from the two extensive pans near the Save/Runde junction (Tembwehata and Machaniwa) there are several larger pans which hold water well into the dry season. Steep rocky gorges with falls and rapids characterize sections of the Save, Runde and Mwenezi rivers.

The park experiences a short dry winter season in June and July with temperatures below 30C and a hot wet summer season from November to April when temperatures can exceed 40C. The remaining months are hot and dry.

Structurally the GNP is dominated by various types of woodland, ranging from alluvial woodlands, to mopane woodlands. There are additional localized occurrences of miombo woodlands to closed woodlands, plus dry forest patches, thickets, bushlands and wooded grasslands. Natural grasslands are virtually absent, as are Acacia woodlands, whilst aquatic systems are limited to the three main rivers, the two artificial dams/weirs, plus numerous small and mostly seasonal pans.

The bird checklist of 400 species includes a further 92 species regarded as 'likely to occur'. The bird list includes 13 species that are rare or of limited distribution and of conservation interest. A total of 89 species of mammals in 71 genera and 31 families have been recorded from the Gonarezhou. A further 61 species, mostly insectivores or small rodents are likely to occur in the area.

## **Mutarazi Falls**



Mutarazi Falls, at 772 meters, is the highest in Zimbabwe, second highest in Africa and 6th highest in the World. Mutarazi Falls is located in the 2,495-hectare Mutarazi National Park.

The Falls occur at a point where the Mutarazi River flows over the edge of the eastern escarpment of Zimbabwe's highlands and are generally viewed by visitors from the top of the falls, as the river flows over the cliff face 762 metres (2,499 ft.) in two almost indistinguishable tiers into the Honde Valley. Greatest flows are after the rains between February and April. The top tier is almost hidden from view for visitors looking over the edge, making the bottom and longer tier the main focal point and long before the water reaches the bottom of the falls it has changed into mist and spray.

Almost surrounded in forest and with impressive views into the Honde Valley, the Mutarazi Falls is one of the highlights of Nyanga for visitors. The area is rich in animal life including bushbuck, klipspringers, the rarely seen blue duiker and leopard, samango monkeys and baboons.

## **Lake Kariba**



This is Africa's largest man made dam, 226km long and in places up to 40 km wide, it covers an area of nearly 6,000 square kilometers and is fed by the mighty Zambezi River. The sheer size of it makes one forget it's a dam and in certain places it almost feels like an ocean! This large expanse of water is often referred to as "Africa's Inland Sea".

It provides considerable electric power to both Zambia and Zimbabwe and supports a thriving commercial fishing industry. It offers spectacular views, stunning sunsets, great fishing, boating opportunities, water sports or wonderful relaxing holidays or weekends just soaking up the sunshine.

The weather here is mostly sunny and fine. It can get quite hot in mid-summer, but even mid-winter days are warm, and the nights are balmy.

The lake has several islands, including Maaze Island, Mashape Island, Chete Island, Sekula, Sampa Karuma, Fothergill, Spurwing, Snake Island, Antelope Island, Bed Island, and Chikanka.

Before Lake Kariba was filled, the existing vegetation was burned, creating a thick layer of fertile soil on land that would become the lake bed. As a result, the ecology of Lake Kariba is vibrant. A number of fish species have been introduced to the lake, notably the sardine-like kapenta (transported from Lake Tanganyika), which now supports a thriving commercial fishery. Other inhabitants of Lake Kariba include Nile crocodiles and hippopotami.

Gamefish, particularly tiger fish, which was among the indigenous species of the Zambezi river system, now thrive on the kapenta, which in turn encourages tourism. Both Zambia and Zimbabwe are now attempting to develop the tourism industry along their respective coasts of Lake Kariba.

Fish eagles, cormorants and other water birds patrol the shorelines, as do large numbers of elephants and other big game species including Lion, Cheetah, Leopard, Buffalo and a myriad of smaller plains game species.

### **The Great Zimbabwe ruins**



The Great Zimbabwe ruins are the largest collection of ruins in Africa south of the Sahara. A little less than 30 kilometres beyond the south-eastern town of Masvingo are to be found some of the most extraordinary manmade remains in Africa.

Great Zimbabwe is a city, now in ruins, in the south-eastern hills of Zimbabwe near Lake Mutirikwe and the town of Masvingo. It was the capital of the Kingdom of Zimbabwe during the country's Late Iron Age. Great Zimbabwe is believed to have served as a royal palace for the local monarch. As such, it would have been used as the seat of political power. Among the edifice's most prominent features were its walls, some of which were over five metres high. They are testament to a culture of great wealth and great architectural skill.

They were constructed without mortar (dry stone). Eventually, the city was abandoned and fell into ruin.

The ruins form three distinct architectural groups. They are known as the Hill Complex, the Valley Complex and the Great Enclosure. The Hill Complex is the oldest and was occupied from the ninth to thirteenth centuries. The Great Enclosure was occupied from the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, and the Valley Complex from the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries. Notable features of the *Hill Complex* include the Eastern Enclosure, in which it is thought the Zimbabwe Birds stood, a high balcony enclosure overlooking the Eastern Enclosure, and a huge boulder in a shape similar to that of the Zimbabwe Bird. The *Great Enclosure* is composed of an inner wall, encircling a series of structures and a younger outer wall. The Conical Tower, 5.5 m (18 ft) in diameter and 9 m (30 ft) high, was constructed between the two walls. The *Valley Complex* is divided into the Upper and Lower Valley Ruins, with different periods of occupation.

The ruins are the largest of their kind on the Zimbabwe Plateau, but they are by no means unique. At its peak it was the largest settlement in southern Africa, up to 20 000 people.

### **Chinhoyi Caves**



The Chinhoyi Caves are a group of limestone and dolomite caves in north central Zimbabwe. The Sleeping Pool is filled with water of an unbelievable blue and crystal clear. Incredibly, the water of the Pool defies meteorological logic, staying at a constant temperature of 22-degrees Celsius – every single day. the depth of the water in the Sleeping Pool varies between 80 metres and 91 metres. Legend has it that a visitor cannot successfully throw a stone across the Pool, as the sacred spirits who watch over the Pool will catch it and bestow a curse upon the person who threw it.

The Caves consist of a system of tunnels and caverns. This system is a dying one (in geological time spans), as they are slowly collapsing. These collapses can be noticed by the sink holes and depressions within the surrounding area. The Wonder Hole, which is the main feature of the Caves, is in fact a “swallow hole” or a large cavern with a collapsed roof.

The walls or sides of the Wonder Hole drop vertically down for 150 feet to the Sleeping Pool. The pool is unbelievably blue, and crystal clear which reflects great depth and non-flowing water.

Diving is possible in the caves all year round, with temperatures never beyond the 22 to 24 °C (72 to 75 °F) range with zero thermocline. Visibility is high, and 50 metres (160 ft) and above is not unusual.

The Caves are composed mainly of the sunlit “Sleeping Pool” and the artificially lit Dark Cave. The Sleeping Pool 46 metres below the ground level is accessible in two ways:

1. Through the main entrance with an inclined passage, where the view of the water has been compared to the famous Blue Grotto of Capri
2. Through the Dark Cave, which leads down steps and along a narrow passage to a point just above the water at the far side of the Sleeping Pool.

The exit from the Dark Cave is demanding, as the steps are very steep.