

Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe continues to dip in and out of international headlines, often creating an unclear but daunting vibe for prospective visitors. In 2008 the economy finally collapsed and there was a cholera outbreak that killed around 4000 people. But in February 2009 many Zimbabweans dared to dream (again) when Robert Mugabe's 29-year-old regime formed a unity government with the opposition. Today, the cholera has abated, the economy has dollarised and, at least in the urban areas, things are easier.

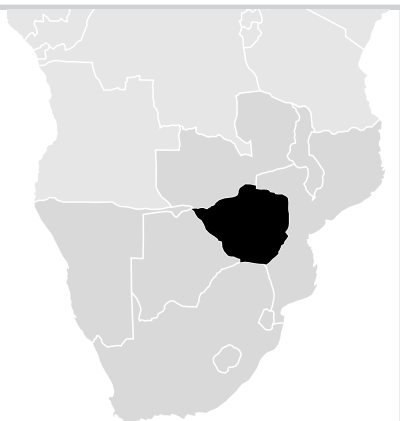
There remain, of course, plenty of reasons for the world's media to focus on Zimbabwe. However, tourists will experience something worlds apart from outside perceptions. From the absolute wilderness of Mana Pools National Park to the serene capital, Zimbabwe remains the one of Southern Africa's most beautiful and – right now – untouristed countries.

Having been forced to sacrifice so many things, Zimbabweans are resilient and down-to-earth. They have a community spirit that could teach the world a lesson, together with an extraordinary ability to make something stunning out of nothing: music, art, craft and luxury tented camps in the wilderness. With so few visiting the country, those who do can expect royal treatment. They need you.

Zimbabwe is no longer as dirt cheap as it once was, but it's not expensive either and, best of all, its record-breaking inflation stories are consigned to history. Whether you arrange everything through a tour operator or figure it out for yourself, a country of charm, beauty and intrigue awaits. Oh, and Zimbabwe's got one of the world's best climates...even the worst politicking can't destroy that.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 390,580 sq km (slightly larger than Germany)
- **Capital** Harare
- **Country code** ☎ 263
- **Famous for** Victoria Falls, Mana Pools, Hwange National Park, Zambezi River canoe safaris, Robert Mugabe
- **Languages** English, Shona, Ndebele
- **Money** The US dollar is now used legally throughout Zimbabwe
- **Phrases** *Siyabonga kakulu* (thank you; Ndebele); *tatenda* (thank you; Shona)
- **Population** 13 million (officially, though up to three million Zimbabweans are thought to have emigrated since 2001)



HOW MUCH?

- Wooden carving US\$1-100
- Soapstone sculpture US\$2-200
- Steak US\$7
- Sunscreen US\$7
- Safari US\$50-350

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- 1L of petrol US\$1.20
- 1L of bottled water US\$0.80
- Bottle of beer US\$3
- Souvenir T-shirt US\$20
- Plate of chips US\$1

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Lake Kariba and Matusadona National Park** (p706) See wildlife close up as you safari on boats and the Big Five drink, swim and live in the same water as you.
- **Mana Pools** (p707) Visit Africa's only national park (with lions) that allows unguided walking safaris, then canoe the Zambezi past hippos and crocs.
- **Harare** (p695) Shop for crafts and don't miss the incredible HIFA – Harare's International Festival of the Arts – in the last week of April.
- **Eastern Highlands** (p709) Fish, golf, gamble, or climb Zimbabwe's highest peaks and view Mozambique.
- **Hwange National Park** (p725) See the Big Five by horseback in the national park with the most elephants in Africa.
- **Matobo National Park** (p724) Find the spiritual heart of Zimbabwe, packed with balancing rocks and extraordinary bird life.

ITINERARIES

- **One to two weeks** If you have limited time, base yourself in one of two cities to explore the surrounding area: Victoria Falls (p604) – for the Falls and Hwange (p725) – then go to Matobo National Park (p724). Or else, go to Harare (p695), then head into the Eastern Highlands (p709) or Mavuradonha Mountains (p704).
- **Three weeks** Spend longer at (and around) the places mentioned above, and add in either Nyanga (p713), Lake Kariba

(p704) or Mana Pools National Park (p707). Alternatively, try a semicircular route: Victoria Falls (p604), Hwange National Park (p725), Bulawayo (p721), Gweru (p717), Masvingo (p718), Mutare (p709), the Eastern Highlands (p709), Harare (p695), Kariba (p704) and Mana Pools National Park (p707).

- **One month** One excellent route: fly Johannesburg to Victoria Falls (see p604), spend a few days there, then be driven to Hwange National Park (p725) for a stunning safari far from the madding crowds. Then fly to Harare (p695) and take a road trip to the Bvumba Mountains (p711) overlooking Mozambique. Another option: land in Harare, take a charter flight to Lake Kariba (p706) or Mana Pools (p707) on the banks of the Zambezi, safari, fish, then fly back to Harare and drive south for three hours to Masvingo (p718) and the Great Zimbabwe (p718) ruins.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Zimbabwe enjoys a wonderfully temperate climate all year round. The cool, dry months (April to October) have warm, sunny days and cold, clear nights. The low-lying areas of the south and the Zambezi Valley to the north and west enjoy warm temperatures all year.

The 'rainy season' lasts around three months, sometime between November and April. Afternoon electrical rainstorms are dramatic, and stunning to watch if you are safely indoors – Zimbabwe has the second-

SHOULD YOU GO?

If your only doubts about holidaying to Zimbabwe concern your dollars going to government cronies, then pack away your worries and get out your passport. Yes, the government has a stake in some hotels and the national airline, but other than that there are thousands of talented sculptors, guides, small businesses, waiters and artists who are all on the breadline because tourism has all but dried up in Zimbabwe. They need you in Zimbabwe, both for your business and your tips, but also so that the country and its people continue to get an outsider's perspective. There could be nothing worse for everyday Zimbabweans than a boycott from tourists.