

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 collapsed and there was a cholera outbreak that killed around 4000 people. But in 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 and the people happier.

There remain, of course, more than enough reasons for the world's media to focus on the fall of Zimbabwe (not least of all the government). However, tourists will experience something worlds apart from outside perceptions. From the absolute wilderness of Mana Pools National Park, the five-star and adrenalin options at Victoria Falls and the mountains looking over Mozambique, to the serenity of the capital, Zimbabwe is an extraordinary place to visit. It remains one of southern Africa's most beautiful and – right now – untouristed countries. It is the path less travelled and history in the making.

Zimbabwe is no longer as dirt cheap as it once was, but it's not expensive either and its recording-breaking inflation stories are consigned to history. Whether you overland, arrange it all through a tour operator or figure it out for yourself, a country of charm, beauty and intrigue awaits.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 390,580 sq km (slightly larger than Germany)
- **ATMs** Currently not used
- **Borders** South Africa, Botswana, Zambia, Mozambique
- **Budget** US\$150+ per day, more if on safari
- **Capital** Harare
- **Languages** English, Shona, Ndebele
- **Money** The US dollar is now used legally throughout Zimbabwe
- **Population** 13 million (official, though up to three million Zimbabweans are thought to have emigrated since 2001)
- **Seasons** Cool and dry (May to October), warm and wet (November to April)
- **Telephone** Country code ☎ 263; international access code ☎ 00
- **Time** GMC/UTC +2
- **Visa** 90 days (US\$30 for most nationalities), issued at point of entry



HOW MUCH?

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

LONELY PLANET INDEX

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

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Victoria Falls** (p1124) Literally dive into Africa: adrenalin sports, stunning nature and five-star African dining and accommodation.
- **Mana Pools National Park** (p1119) Visit Africa's only national park that allows unguided walking safaris (with lions); canoe the Zambezi – as far as Mozambique if you like; or volunteer for the Mana Game Count – first full moon in September.
- **Harare** (p1110) Check out the not-to-be-missed HIFA (Harare International Festival of the Arts), held annually in the last week of April.
- **Hwange National Park** (p1124) See the Big Five by horseback in Hwange National Park, which has Africa's greatest concentration of elephants.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Zimbabwe enjoys a wonderfully temperate climate year-round. The cool, dry months (May 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 experience warm temperatures year-round.

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-highest incidence of lightning strikes in the world, so do be careful.

Winter, consisting of several dry months, is the best time for wildlife viewing because animals tend to congregate at the diminishing waterholes, making the creatures easier to find.

ITINERARIES

- **One to Two Weeks** Base yourself in one or two places – eg Victoria Falls (p1124) for falls, river and bush, and then Hwange National Park (p1124) and Bulawayo (p1121) for Matobo National Park. Or take in Harare (p1110) before wandering through the Eastern Highlands (p1119).
- **Three Weeks** Spend longer at (and around) the places mentioned above, and add in Nyanga National Park (p1119), Kariba (p1118) or Mana Pools National Park (p1119).
- **One Month** Fly from Johannesburg, South Africa, to Victoria Falls for a few days, then on to Hwange National Park for a safari far from the madding crowds. Then fly to Harare and take a road trip to the Bvumba Mountains (p1119) overlooking Mozambique.

HISTORY

For general information on African history, see p.27.

Beginnings of Nationalism

Conflicts between black and white in Zimbabwe came into sharp focus after the 1922 referendum in which the whites chose to become a self-governing colony rather than join the Union of South Africa. In 1930 white supremacy was legislated in the form of the Land Apportionment Act.

Poor wages and conditions eventually led to a rebellion, and by the time Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland were federated, in 1953, mining and industrial concerns favoured a more racially mixed middle class as a counterweight to the radical elements in the labour force.

Two African parties soon emerged – the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) under Joshua Nkomo, and the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU).

Ian Smith & the War for Independence

In 1964 Ian Smith took over the Rhodesian presidency and began pressing for independence. The British prime minister, Harold