



It's easy to see why some people want the Victoria Falls to be one of the Seven Natural Wonders of the World. It also happens to be a stone's throw from two other world-class destinations – the Hwange National Park and Lake Kariba. In this second of eight instalments about their trip to the Serengeti, Villiers Steyn and J.I. de Wet finally see their first lions and hook a few tiger fish at Mlibizi.

After Villiers and J.I. left Pretoria on 20 January this year on an epic journey to the Serengeti they tackle the second shift through eastern Botswana and Zimbabwe. They would visit 12 major nature reserves and travel more than 15 000 km on the 70-day trip.

With 1 700 km behind them and a second border post ahead, it finally feels as if the Serengeti trip is in full swing. After not seeing much game on the Makgadikgadi Pans, they hope to rectify this in Hwange, where they plan to spend five nights. But first the passports have to be stamped... >

Thundering water. The Victoria Falls aren't the highest or widest in the world, but many say it's the largest if you compare its width and height with other big ones such as Niagara.

Catch a tiger or two – in Zim

PHOTOGRAPHS VILLIERS STEYN

Hwange, Mlibizi and Victoria Falls
(9 days, 1 497 km)

Day 4:
Across the border in a flash

Pandamatenga is about 100 km south of Kasane and is exactly the opposite of the Beit Bridge madhouse with which most people associate a Zimbabwean border post. On the Botswana side we get out at a tiny building decorated with the black, white and light blue of the national flag. Apart from three bored officials sitting in the shade of a tree on church-hall seats, we're the only people here.

In the vehicle register I see we're only the eighth vehicle that has passed through here in 23 days – seven Toyotas and one Land Rover. We're the first vehicle to pass through in three days.

On the Zimbabwean side everything goes without a hitch and two hours later we stop at Hwange's Robins Camp.

Day 5
'If you want to hunt a lion ...'

Just after six we hit the road, determined to tick off more game on our game-viewing list. However, our timing for spotting game is terrible, because it's summer, and the veld is lush.

But we quickly see five sets of fresh lion tracks running to and fro across the damp gravel road. We're hot on their heels.

At every river crossing where I have to walk in to check the depth of the stream, I quietly look around to see which way the cats went. Then we hit a drift that we can't cross. J.I. studies the signs like a detective on a crime scene: "They stopped here and went down this slope. After that they went this way. If we drive around quickly enough, we can catch them on the other side."

We turn around and take another route. But the lions stay one step ahead. Finally the tracks turn off on a jeep track that is closed to the public. We decide not to take a chance. You don't want to end up stuck surrounded by a pride of lions.

In the afternoon we drive out in search of game again, despite the soft rain that has been falling all day. The lions remain in hiding, but we do manage to see a few zebra, impala and a small herd of elephants, as well as two side-striped jackals, a new species on J.I.'s list.

After sunset the former camp manager, Rhinos Kunze, pops in at Robins. I have brought him a laptop computer that I'd promised him on a previous visit. We spend the night chatting like old friends.



Lessons from the second leg

Get going early. Give yourself enough time to drive from the one end of Hwange to the other. The bad road and good game viewing slow you down.

Is that all? Beware the hidden costs on Lake Kariba's fishing outings.

Steady, friend! Reduce speed immediately when you hit the 60km/h sign right outside Victoria Falls. The man with the camera stands right next to the sign.

Shut up. The annoying hawkers in Victoria Falls are like ticks – they are impossible to get rid of. Keep quiet, look ahead and keep walking. If you stop to chat they won't leave you alone.

Day 6 and 7
Game viewing from a hammock

If I were to choose a camp in Hwange, it would be Masuma. It has a hide and you pitch your tent in the veld next to a waterhole. But first we have to report at Sinamatella, one of the park's three main camps.

I remember Sinamatella as a first-class, bustling camp. As a child we spent hours on the stoep of the Dassie & Elephant while looking for elephants, giraffes and cheetahs on the plains below the camp. Today it's almost like a ghost town. But despite the tourist drought, the shop is still open. J.I. buys two Cokes.

At Masuma, the caretaker, Godfrey Khanye, tells us of the time a male lion came to sleep in the hide. "This guy was so lazy I had to chase him out with a broom," he brags.

This place clearly hasn't seen guests for a while, because Godfrey is taking great pleasure telling us what's been happening. He tells me of the twenty African wild dogs that killed a kudu by the waterhole and gobbled it up within five minutes and the clouds that are like politicians: "They bring promises, but rarely results." >



What goes there? A viewpoint at Sinamatella in the Hwange National Park in Zimbabwe. On a kopie, the camp overlooks a riverbed.



Wild campsite. Next to the Mandavu Dam in the west of Hwange, where you could camp as well.



So fresh it smells like lions. Fresh lion tracks outside Robins Camp in the Hwange National Park.

After the chat we put up our hammocks in the hide and spend the rest of the afternoon watching game like you would a cricket test on TV – you can close your eyes and have a nap without missing too much. Every once in a while a hippo grunts in the water or a ground hornbill grumbles in the distance. Impala, waterbuck and a pride of lions come for a drink, while tawny-flanked prinia and red-billed fire finch look for insects and seeds next to the hide. Surely things can't get much more blissful than this.

The next morning we stick pictures of our loved ones on the inside of the aluminium canopy's side hatches. It's supposed to keep our spirits up, but it ends up making us miss home even more.

After breakfast we head to Ngweshla in the east of the park. The road there is long, rutted and boring, but once we've finally reached Hwange's plains, we drive into a paradise. Zebra graze on the plains in their hundreds and giraffes drink on the road right in front of us. There's a southern carmine bee-eater posing on every second anthill and next to the streams we see one leadwood giant after another.

Ngweshla is one of eight so-called picnic campsites in the park, and after Masuma it's my favourite. You don't get a more unspoilt camp in Hwange. In the dry season, from June to October, animals crowd around in clumps. The shot camp wire probably wouldn't keep out an impala lamb, never mind a pride of hungry lions.

The caretaker, Binga Dube, ensures us the lions only pop in when there are no guests. We sleep well, but not too deeply.

**Day 8
Mr Mane...**

Just outside Ngweshla we find ourselves in the middle of a cloudburst. When will we ever see the sun again? We push on through the rain and mud.

At Main Camp we decide to spoil ourselves with a cheeseburger at the Waterbuck's Head restaurant.

Before taking our order, the waiter asks, "Did you see the lions?"

Lions! What lions?

After eight days of seeing no lions, we've given up hope long ago. In a blink we're in The Hyena, our bakkie, and head for a lion kill where a pride has apparently killed a giraffe.

And finally we see them: our first lions – seven of them!

We spend an hour watching five cubs climbing trees while two adults rest next



Fishing expedition. J.I. tries catching a tiger fish in Lake Kariba's murky water.

Hwange National Park

What are the roads like? You don't need a 4x4, but the old tar road that connects the east to the west is in a terrible condition. Don't tackle the Pandamatenga gravel road without a 4x4 in the rainy season.

When should I go? For game viewing – July to October, when the animals are at the waterholes. For the beautiful veld – in the rainy season, December to May, but then it's also very lush.

How long? Five nights

What can I experience? Palpitations when a herd of elephants come and drink right under your nose at Masuma

How far is it? From Pretoria via Grobler's Bridge, Nata and Pandamatenga to Robins

Camp it's 1115 km (that is if you don't take a detour).

Is there fuel? Not in the park, but you can either fill up at Pandamatenga (on the Botswana side), or at Crossroads 35 km outside Main Camp.

Sound like a boffin: At ± 14 600 km² – three-quarters the size of the Kruger National Park – Hwange is Zimbabwe's biggest national park. Since the park isn't fenced, animals migrate freely between Hwange and the neighbouring Chobe National Park in Botswana.

Drive Out says: Book to stay at Masuma during full moon.



In the sticks. Giraffes in a jeep track north of the Ngweshla camp, one of the most remote camps in Hwange.



Under threat. A well-fed lion cub. One of Africa's longest-running lion research projects has been running in Hwange since 1999. A small team of scientists in Main Camp collect and process information about the dwindling lion population.



Riding the adrenalin wave. On rapids such as *Commercial suicide* and *Terminator 1* you have your work cut out for you on the Zambezi.

Victoria Falls in a nutshell

Statistics: 1 708 m wide, 108 m high, average annual flow = 1 088 m³/s

Best time: February–May if you want to see the falls in all their glory. Remember your raincoat. From July to November it's less dramatic, but you can see more of the ravine and stay dry.

Price: \$20/R160 entry for SADC citizens. Remember your passport or ID.

Times: 06.00/06.30–18.00 (summer/winter)

Drive Out says: Put your cellphone and camera in a Ziploc bag if you come in the wet season and bring some Tabard.



to the carcass. It's as if our luck turns right there, because on our afternoon drive the sun shows its face for the first time in a week and we see a honey badger on the road.

Later that night J.I. unzips his fishing backpack. He's been looking forward to the next few days for months – the day after tomorrow we're going to catch tiger fish on Lake Kariba.

Day 9 and 10 Where's your daddy?

En route to Mlibizi I have to swerve for chameleons on the road quite frequently. Some of them are the length of my forearm. It makes sense to camouflage yourself when you want to surprise a fly, but turning grey on a tar road is looking for trouble, not so?

At one stage we cross the bubbling, coffee-coloured Gwayi River, which joins the Zambezi 70 km downstream, just above Mlibizi. "Oh dear. The murky water will make fishing difficult," J.I. sighs while we watch the noisy rapids from the bridge.

We pitch our tent at Mlibizi Zambezi Resort on the banks of Lake Kariba, and the next morning at eight we're on the river.

"Today I'll catch a 6 kg tiger fish," J.I. jokes without trying to hide his concern about the murky water.

In a jiffy our guide, Joshua Mudenda, pulls out a few chessa fish for bait. He uses earthworms to catch them. We put bits of fish on red-and-silver lures and use them as bait. But in two hours we don't even feel a tug.

While we push on from one spot to another, we float past pied kingfishers, African darters, reed cormorants and a few fish eagles. The crocodiles and hippos also watch us. It's like a game drive, just on a more comfortable chair and with a better view.

I expected a "Gotcha!" or "Bring the camera!", but when J.I. pulls out his first tiger fish just after 10 am, he goes dead quiet. "When I hook a tiger fish, I'm in the zone," he explains later.

It's a smallish tiger fish, but if baby fish lives here, daddy fish can't be far. An hour later it's Joshua's turn. He pulls out a beautiful 2.5 kg tiger fish with golden-yellow fins the length of its upper body. Encouraged by his success, J.I. puts everything that's shiny and brightly coloured at the end of his line in the next few hours. By sunset he had managed to reel in two tiger fish. Two more than me.

White-water rafting for dummies

Best time: From August to December when the rapids are at their roughest. In January and February the water level rises, the rapids shrink and you start further downstream, so you can only paddle for half a day instead of a full day. The white-water rafting is usually closed between March and June.

Price: \$120 (R800)/full day (±7–9 hours) and \$110 (R736) /half a day (±3 hours); \$30 for a DVD of the outing (it's worth the money)

Contact: Wild Horizons at info@wildhorizons.co.za; www.wildhorizons.co.za

Drive Out says: Eat something before you depart on the full-day tour – you only get a decent meal in the late afternoon.



Day 11 Africa talks the talk

Today we take it easy. Victoria Falls is only 260 km west of Mlibizi and en route we stop at the roadside, where a few young guys sell curios. But we're not here to buy giraffes or rhinos of stone – we're here to play soccer.

We have brought thirty soccer balls along on the trip to hand out along the way. We have given the first one to Binga's two little boys at Ngweshla and today we are inflating the second soccer ball.

Within minutes we have fifteen players. We play in the veld and kick the ball over ditches and among long grass and through thorn trees. Miraculously the ball doesn't burst.

Although they understand only a little English, we talk soccer for a whole hour. The amount of joy this simple, spherical object brings to people never ceases to amaze me.

After 45 exhausting minutes we hand the game ball to its new owner, Stanley Netha, and promise to post him the group photo.

Day 12 In a Zambezi washing machine

Like two schoolboys before a math exam, J.I. and I stand and wait for the Wild Horizons minibus outside the Victoria Falls Rest Camp, wondering what we've let ourselves in for...

On our way to the starting point I read the names of the rapids on the back of one of the guides' bright-blue T-shirt: The devil's toilet bowl, The washing machine, Commercial suicide and The overland-truck eater. Sounds hectic.

I'd rather hoped for Somewhat bumpy or perhaps even The rollercoaster, but clearly this is not child's play. We are warned to be particularly careful on Terminator 1 & 2 and Oblivion.

With the guidance of our guide, Colgate, we learn how to control our inflatable raft on a quieter section of the river. J.I. is in front on the right and across from me are Jana and Fanie Griesel from Springfontein. They were here five years ago, and apparently things are looking much better in Victoria Falls than back then. That's good news. "Hard left!" the order comes from the back. Now the fun starts.

The following two hours are more exciting than an IPL cricket final. Up and down, sideways and round and round we tackle The washing machine. It's been ages since I've had this much adrenalin in my blood. At the end, halfway through Double trouble, J.I. and I decide we have to return when the river is even wilder.

After our adventure we walk to the Victoria Falls. The 1.7 km ravine is mostly submerged, and you get soaked if you don't bring a raincoat or umbrella. As if we didn't get wet enough this morning.

Like a giant white curtain the Zambezi River tumbles over the edge of the cliff into the ravine – with such a deafening noise it's easy to understand why people around here speak of *Mosi-u-Tunya* – The smoke that thunders.

In the next issue: We dodge the potholes on Zambia's Great North Road, are blown away by the impressive Kaphishya Hot Springs and tackle Beit Bridge's East African brother, Tunduma.

Where we stayed

Hwange National Park
Robins Camp, the Masuma and Ngweshla picnic sites and Main Camp
Where? ± 190 km southeast of Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe

Cost? Entry: \$15 (R100) pp and \$5 (R33) per vehicle; Rondavel for two: \$35 (R234) per day; Camping in camps: \$12 (R80) pppd; Camping at picnic sites: \$20 (R134) pppd
Facilities: Robins Camp and Main Camp have tidy rondavels and campsites, but the ablutions are neglected. Main Camp has a restaurant and small shop.

The picnic sites Masuma and Ngweshla are both fenced and have flush toilets and showers, but only Masuma has hot water.
Contact: ☎ +263 470 6077/8; ✉ reservations@zimparcs.co.zw; www.zimparcs.org

Drive Out says: Book the picnic sites, because they're very popular. Pay your money into the Kingdom account and not the Barclays account, otherwise it might cause a double booking.

Mlibizi Zambezi Resort
Where? In the village Mlibizi on the west of Lake Kariba
Cost? R100 pppd (tent), R250 pp (chalet)
Facilities: 15 stands with electricity, braais and a tidy ablution block; many chalets; two pools; basic supermarket, liquor store
Contact: Call Theo or Marion on ☎ +263 713 065 198; ✉ galaxy@gatorzw.com

Drive Out says: There are the following hidden costs on the fishing outing: Boat rental is \$70 per day, but then there's fuel (± \$26), park fees (\$30 – river use and fishing for two people) as well as a tip for your guide. The day's fishing cost us about R980.

Victoria Falls Rest Camp
Where? At Victoria Falls, walking distance from the falls (1.3 km/15 min).
Coast? \$10 (R67) pppd camping; \$8 (R54) per vehicle pd
Facilities: A large, shady campsite; power points; braai facilities; tables; a variety of bungalows and safari tents; pool; restaurant with satellite TV and Wi-Fi (\$5/80MB)
Contact: ☎ 021 683 6444; ✉ info@vicfalls-accommodation.com; www.vicfallsrest-camp.com

Drive Out says: The camp is tidy and safe, but it's next to a pub that's noisy on weekends, including Sunday nights.

Gear: Electricity and cooling

On a long tour like this you can't camp without electricity. You have to charge batteries, freeze meat and keep drinks dry. I wouldn't tackle an African tour without the next five pieces of kit:



British influence: Adapter

In Zimbabwe, Zambia and Tanzania we could rarely use the South African-style three-pronged plugs with the round prongs, as the British-style plugs with smaller, rectangular holes are prevalent. You can plug our two-prong plugs in with a little difficulty, but to use your three-prong plug, you'll have to buy an adapter.

Drive Out says: If you plug something in and it doesn't start charging immediately, stay calm. Here's a tick list to solve the problem. Ask yourself:

- Is the power in the battery pack or building on?
- Are all the necessary switches on?
- Is the plug making contact with the power source and the charger/gear?
- Is the cable damaged?
- Am I not charging too many items?



More is more: Multiplug

When using an inverter with the battery pack, a multiplug with a long cord is very handy. You can then leave the battery pack in the vehicle, while various items charge simultaneously with two-point or three-point plugs somewhere else in the camp. Just don't plug in too many items simultaneously.



Charge where you want: Portable battery pack

The National Luna Portable Power Pack is a portable dual-battery system that you can charge with your vehicle battery as you drive.

You could use it as power point for your freezer to run throughout the night, and with an inverter to charge batteries for cameras and laptops. What's nice about it is that, although it's a very heavy piece of gear, you can take it out of your bakkie and place it in a strategic spot in the camp.

We use a 105Ah Delco deep-cycle battery with the battery pack.

✉ www.nationalluna.com/PPPack.htm



220V, please: Inverter

An inverter converts 12V power into 220V. We used the Waeco PerfectPower PP150 (150W) on the vehicle and the battery pack's cigarette-lighter plugs to charge a variety of batteries. It's tiny, but worth its weight in gold.
✉ <http://www.waeco.com.au/products4.asp?catId=77&subCatId=118>



Definitely bring a Buff

A Buff is a simple piece of polyester that keeps sweat out of your eyes, bugs out of your ears and dust out of your mouth and nostrils. It keeps your head warm while you sleep under the stars and keeps the rays of the sun off your neck when you go hiking, cycling or paddling. And when you wet it, it keeps you dry. And that's not all...

Price: R160 for a standard Buff at Cape Union Mart. (Also visit ✉ <http://planet-buff.com>)



Make it a triple: Three-point plug

We had more than nine items charging through the cigarette lighter socket. That's how we kept two cellphones, a satellite phone, some handheld radios, a laptop, an iPod, a tiny pair of speakers, a camp light and a GPS going. To simplify the process we bought a cigarette-lighter plug with three plug points.

Cold, colder, coldest

One of the sticky points on tour is that you want to freeze your chops, wows and chicken breasts, but not the milk and tomatoes. That's why we took a fridge and a freezer along.



A pleasant surprise:

45 litre Camp Master thermo-electric fridge
Our budget did not allow us to buy a second compressor fridge, and therefore we had to be satisfied with a cheaper Camp Master fridge that cools up to 19-23 °C below the ambient temperature.

Since only the Engel could run off the battery pack at night, we rotated the six blue ice bricks between the Engel and Camp Master in groups of three to stop our milk from going off. We were very impressed with this little guy.

Old faithful:

40 litre Engel fridge/freezer
We borrowed my dad's 2001-model 40 litre Engel to freeze meat and quickly cool down drinks. When you go touring in summer, make sure you charge your extra batteries, because it will drain the battery completely if you use it as a freezer.

Villiers and J.I.'s top tips for electricity and cooling:

A snug plug. Make sure you have cables for all your chargers and other electrical equipment before you leave, and plugs that fit.

Tie it up. Strap down your fridges securely, but always ensure the ventilation gaps are open.

Is it on? Make 100% sure the fridges are on before you start driving, and check them regularly.

Plan carefully. If you open and close your fridge as little as possible it'll stay cold.

Charged up. Charge your deep-cycle battery often when you're not on tour.

What is the damage?

Item	Price	Supplier
National Luna portable power pack (excluding installation)	R2675	Safari Centre
Delco 105Ah deep-cycle battery	R1589	Safari Centre
Waeco PerfectPower P152 inverter	R670	Outdoor Warehouse
Triple-plug cigarette-lighter divider	R65	Outdoor Warehouse
40 litre Engel fridge/freezer	R6995	Safari Centre
Camp Master thermo-electric cooler	R1099	Makro