

## Why Zimbabwe? Why Now?

### The best guides in Africa

The Zimbabwe Professional Guides have long been considered the best trained in Africa. The criteria and system for licensing is the most intensive program on the continent and requires a minimum of 4 years but usually more like 6 or 7. It involves the following:

1. Two different series of written examinations that cover a large spectrum of subjects
2. A comprehensive Advanced First Aid course and practical examination
3. A tough practical shooting and firearms handling exam
4. A requirement to conduct problem animal control work with National Parks teams to ensure they are capable of handling dangerous game incidents
5. An oral exam in front of experienced Pro Guides covering a wide range of wildlife identification, scenarios, guest service, etc
6. Finally, if the candidates pass all of the above, they have a 7 day practical exam in the field with experienced Pro Guides and National Parks officers as examiners

One of the most important components is the peer review - no Learner Guide can go forward to the final exams without being signed off by his tutor Pro Guide. And what happens is that Pro Guides are hesitant to put their name to a candidate they consider unworthy, for obvious reasons!

Due to the quality of their guides, exploring the African bush by foot on a walking safari is a must-do while on safari in Zimbabwe. There is nothing like departing camp in the early morning, the sweet pungent smell of the damp savannah being warmed by the rising sun. On a walking safari, all your senses are heightened and you can see, hear, smell and feel the bush. You begin to understand the interconnectedness of the flora and the fauna, how each small part plays an important role in the greater ecosystem. Small mysteries of the bush are unlocked and explored; tracks are investigated; and the wide variety of animal poop becomes an unexpected and fascinating learning experience! And while generally speaking, walks are more focused on the little things in the bush, tracking big game on foot is not uncommon and an always thrilling experience!

### The wildlife in Hwange National Park is as good as it's ever been!

Mark Butcher, Managing Director of Imvelo Safari Lodges, came to Hwange as a young Ranger in 1980 and can attest to the fact that not only is the wildlife still present in large numbers in Hwange but it's as good as ever. Hwange National Park boasts an estimated 44,000+ elephants (Source: [The Great Elephant Census](#)), one of the largest populations in Africa. (seeing 500-750 elephants per day in the late dry season August – October is common). The park has over 450 lions (Source: [Hwange Lion Research](#)), more than at any point in the park's history. The Ngamo plains in southern Hwange currently boast the strongest population of cheetah in Zimbabwe, with estimates of 20-25 this year and 42 in the whole of Hwange (Source: [Cheetah Conservation Project Zimbabwe](#)). Hwange National Park also has a healthy number of African Wild Dogs, estimates put the number in excess of 120 (Source: [Painted Dog Conservation](#)). Leopards are present in Hwange and Zambezi National Park but elusive as elsewhere in Africa. Matobo Hills National Park boasts one of the highest concentrations of leopard anywhere in

Africa, thanks to its rocky and forested landscapes, perfect habitat for these shy cats. Matopos is also one of the last bastions of both black and white rhino in Africa and guests can track these endangered creatures by vehicle and on foot.

### **Visiting Zimbabwe provides vital jobs, economic assistance and social services for local Zimbabweans**

The central government in Zimbabwe provides very little in the way of economic assistance or social services to local communities in Zimbabwe, especially those rural villages bordering Hwange National Park. It is those responsible tourism operators like Imvelo Safari Lodges who provide much needed jobs in a country with 90% unemployment and as well as provide many social services including medical/dental care, school supplies, facility upgrades and improvements and water wells (Imvelo Safari Lodges alone has sourced and provided over \$1.5 million dollars to communities bordering Hwange National Park and outside Victoria Falls for water supplies, health care and education). In addition, two of Imvelo's lodges (Camelthorn and Gorges) are built on communal land bordering National Parks. As a result, all the royalties and concession fees are paid to the local district councils (not to central government) and by law, 85% of these funds have to be dispersed to the villages within the district for local use. The remaining 15% is used at the district council level for their administration. Beyond the entry visa fees and the 16% tourism VAT, little to no money from tourism ends up funding central government. Watch our video, [The Tourism Factor](#), to learn more about the critical role that tourism plays in the livelihood of local Zimbabwean communities.

### **Fewer travelers means exclusivity**

In the 1980's and 1990's, Zimbabwe was the place to visit for an African safari. But Zimbabwe has endured a decade or more as an outlier on the African safari circuit. This means that this incredible, high quality safari circuit sees fewer visitors than other top safari destinations in Africa like Tanzania, Kenya and South Africa. As such, it's rare to see more than a handful of other vehicles while on safari in Hwange National Park, especially in the far south of the park where there is no public access.

### **No small aircraft flights required for exceptional game viewing**

Usually this kind of exclusivity requires expensive charter flights. But not in Zimbabwe! Victoria Falls, Hwange National Park, Zambezi National Park and Matopos National Park – four of Zimbabwe's premiere attractions are easily connected by vehicle, no expensive small plane flights required! The gateway to the Zimbabwe safari circuit is Victoria Falls International Airport (VFA) which offers multiple daily connections from Johannesburg, South Africa (long-haul international flights will soon fly direct to Vic Falls once the major airport renovations are complete in the summer of 2015). From VFA, guests can be on safari in Zambezi National Park within 30 minutes or Hwange National Park within 2 to 3 hours.

### **Newly refurbished or recently built safari lodges and camps**

With investment returning to the tourism sector, Zimbabwe's safari industry in Victoria Falls and Hwange is embarking major refurbishments of existing lodges and building new properties. Bomani Tented Lodge was refurbished and expanded in 2012. Imvelo's newly built lodges Camelthorn and Zambezi Sands stand up in style, comfort and luxury to up market lodges anywhere in Africa. Imvelo has also refurbished all guest accommodations at Gorges Lodge while expanding its capacity with a 10-

bedded luxury tented camp “Little Gorges” which opened in January 2016.

**Incredible safari value**

Zimbabwe offers a high level of exclusivity, the best guides in Africa, exceptional game viewing, newly built and recently renovated safari lodges/camps and no charter flights are required. In addition, nightly rack rates at most 4-5 star lodges/camps are generally between \$300 - \$600pp all-inclusive, which is compared to nightly rates in excess of \$600-\$800pp on average in Zambia and well over \$1000pp in Botswana. This is safari value that is impossible to beat.