

Overview of Zambia

The big, beautiful country of Zambia is situated in the heart of the African sub-continent, and is largely untainted by commercial tourist development. Nevertheless, it is well equipped to show visitors the warmth, excitement, challenges and adventures of Africa, and it offers an abundance of natural attractions and extreme sports, which has earned it the reputation of being the 'adventure centre' of the continent.

The destination's prime attraction is the spectacular, breathtaking Victoria Falls on the Zambezi River between Zambia and Zimbabwe. Not only do the falls provide unmatched scenery as the water plunges into the depths of the gorge, but they are also the setting for a multitude of adrenaline pumping activities, such as whitewater rafting, bungee jumping from the 364 foot (111m) high bridge, canoeing, abseiling, micro-lighting over the falls, elephant-back safaris, jet-boating through the rapids and much more.

If travellers prefer dry land, Zambia offers dozens of superb game parks stocked with a profusion of birds and wildlife. Chief among the parks is South Luangwa National Park. Centred on the most intact major river system in Africa, it hosts a huge concentration of game. The legendary 'Zambian walking safari' originated in this park and still offers one of the finest ways to experience the African wilderness.

Visitors to Zambia seldom linger in the towns, as they're generally bent on safaris or destined for game lodges and adventure camps. Those who choose to explore the somewhat dishevelled capital, Lusaka, will find it has an interesting charm. More than half of the inhabitants of this over-populated city are unemployed, yet the atmosphere is far from despondent, as the people hustle and bustle, determined to survive. Thousands of stalls line the streets offering a fascinating array of services and goods. Lovers of the outdoors cannot fail to find everything and more to satisfy them in the varied wilderness of Zambia.

Key Facts

Language:

There are many dialects spoken in Zambia, but the official language is English. Most business is conducted in English and most Zambians speak it fairly well.

Passport/Visa:

All travellers require a return ticket or proof of onward travel, documents for their next destination and proof of sufficient funds. Passport requirements around the necessary number of blank pages vary from country to country, and visas can be issued on arrival, though the conditions will vary according to nationality. It is also possible to obtain an e-visa online prior to departure for Zambia; passengers must have printed confirmation of the e-visa with them upon arrival. There is a special provision for day visitors coming across the border from Zimbabwe into Livingstone. It is highly recommended that travellers' passports have at least six months' validity remaining after the intended date of departure from their travel destination. Immigration officials often apply different rules to those stated by travel agents and official sources.

Currency:

The Zambian currency is the Kwacha (ZMW), and is divided into 100 ngwee. It is best to bring US Dollars or Pounds Sterling, which can be exchanged at the many bureaux de change found in the main towns; visitors should avoid exchanging money outside of banks or respected hotels. While most of the tourist hotels, restaurants, travel agents and larger shops, especially in Lusaka and Livingstone, accept credit cards, many outlets in the rural areas do not and deal only in local currency. ATMs are available in Lusaka and some of the major towns. Banking hours vary but are usually 8.30am to 3.30pm on weekdays and mornings on Saturdays.

Electricity:

Electrical current in Zambia is 230 volts, 50Hz. Square three-pin plugs, as well as two- and three-pin round plugs are in use.

Travel to Zambia

Overview

Zambia introduces foreigners to some of the best natural attractions and adventurous activities the continent has to offer. Tourism is concentrated around a few major sights, such as Lake Kariba, which is a hub for fishing, boating, wildlife safaris and watersports, and Livingstone, the gateway to the wonders of Victoria Falls and the mighty Zambezi River. Zambia also has some excellent wildlife reserves.

The country's poor roads make accessing certain areas difficult, though Livingstone and the capital city, Lusaka, are both fairly well developed. Lusaka is not a popular tourist destination in itself, but many travellers pass through the sprawling city and it is quite an experience. The markets and nightlife can be exciting and fun, and there are a number of small museums to visit. Zambia is accessible to both budget travellers and those in search of luxury, with Livingstone in particular boasting both great backpacker hostels and incredible luxury hotels.

Climate in Zambia

Zambia is warm all year round but has three distinct seasons. The weather is hot and wet between December and April, cooler and dry from May to August, and hot and dry between September and November. The rains come earlier and last longer the further north in Zambia travellers venture, and the east generally receives more rainfall than the western lowlands. The Zambian summer, between November and March, can get swelteringly hot, with the average temperatures ranging between 77F and 95F (25C and 35C), while in winter, between May and August, the temperature range becomes far greater, as temperatures can measure anywhere between 43F and 75F (6C and 24C). Autumn and spring are short in Zambia and aren't really distinct seasons. During the rainy season, roads often become impassable due to mud and potholes, and many attractions are unreachable, meaning many camps close. The best time to visit Zambia is between June and September, when the nights are cold but the days are usually sunny and pleasant, and game viewing is at its best.

Health Notes when travelling to Zambia

Typhoid, polio, rabies and hepatitis A vaccinations should be considered for travel to Zambia. Malaria is endemic in the country (prophylaxis is essential), and outbreaks of cholera are common, especially during the rainy season. There is low potential for yellow fever exposure, though proof of vaccination is required if travellers are coming from or have transited through an airport of a country where yellow fever occurs. Visitors to game parks are at risk of African trypanosomiasis (sleeping sickness), which is carried by tsetse flies; insect repellent is ineffective against tsetse flies.

Medical facilities in the country are under-developed and limited to the point that basic drugs and even clean needles are often not available. The small clinics in Lusaka are regarded as superior to the general hospitals, but clinics in rural areas are rarely stocked with anything more than aspirin or plasters. Full travel insurance, including cover for medical evacuation by air, is essential and it is vital to bring a good first-aid kit. Visitors should avoid food bought from local street vendors and ensure drinking water is filtered and boiled, or bought in sealed, branded bottles.

Safety Notes when travelling to Zambia

Package tours in Zambia are generally safe and most visits are trouble-free, but visitors should be aware that car hijackings and armed robberies are increasing. Mugging, bag snatching and theft from parked cars are common in urban areas, and travellers should avoid displaying valuables on their person. Travellers should also steer clear of political rallies, demonstrations, and large gatherings, as they have the potential to turn violent. Cross-border raids are frequent and landmines are a potential danger in the border areas where Zambia meets Angola and the DRC, so travellers should stay away. Many roads can become impassable in the rainy season (November to April), and roads are severely potholed in general. Poorly maintained vehicles, dangerous local driving habits and the presence of stray animals make driving even more risky.

Customs in Zambia

Zambia's culture is largely patriarchal; however, white visitors tend to be treated respectfully regardless of gender. Zambians are curious and visitors should not be offended by stares and questions. Women should refrain from wearing short skirts and low-cut tops, and beachwear should be worn only on the beach. Even when dressed conservatively, women may find the stares from locals disconcerting. The Western practice of 'getting to the point' is not practiced in Zambian culture, and it is polite to say hello and exchange pleasantries before asking a question or requesting assistance. Shaking hands is a common greeting, and many Zambians will continue to hold hands throughout the conversation. It is traditional to eat with the right hand, and utensils are not used in many areas.

Homosexuality is condemned by the general population and is considered illegal. Gay travellers should be discreet and avoid public displays of affection.

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Duty Free in Zambia

Travellers to Zambia over 18 years do not have to pay duty on the following items: 400 cigarettes or 500g tobacco or 500g of cigars; 1.5 litres of spirits, 2.5 litres of wine and 2.5 litres of beer, and goods to the value of USD 1,000.

Doing Business in Zambia

Although doing business in Zambia is less complicated than in many parts of Africa, it is still a very poor country where bribery, corruption and the lack of infrastructure present problems. Business meetings are formal but seldom punctual; a suit and tie are appropriate attire despite the heat. Office hours are 8am to 5pm Monday to Friday, with a one-hour lunch break between 1pm and 2pm. However, in practice workers often arrive late or leave early, so these office hours a mere guideline.

Communication in Zambia

The international dialling code for Zambia is +260. The outgoing code is 00 followed by the relevant country code (e.g. 0027 for South Africa). WiFi is limited to top hotels and restaurants, though it's best not to rely on it being offered at all; visitors can purchase local prepaid SIM cards for unlocked phones and rely on a big data bundle or unlimited data.

Tipping in Zambia

Tipping in Zambia is about 10 percent and a 10 percent service charge is usually included in bills.

Passport/Visa Note

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Entry Requirements

Entry requirements for Americans:

US passport holders must have a passport that is valid for at least six months beyond the date they expect to leave Zambia. A visa is required. A 90-day tourist visa or 30-day business visa can be obtained on arrival.

Entry requirements for Canadians:

Canadian passport holders must have a passport that is valid for at least six months beyond the date they expect to leave Zambia. A visa is required. A 90-day tourist visa or 30-day business visa can be obtained on arrival.

Entry requirements for UK nationals:

UK passport holders must have a passport that is valid for at least six months beyond the date they expect to leave Zambia. A visa is required. A 90-day tourist visa or 30-day business visa can be obtained on arrival.

Entry requirements for Australians:

Australian passport holders must have a passport that is valid for at least six months beyond the date they expect to leave Zambia. A visa is required. A 90-day tourist visa or 30-day business visa can be obtained on arrival.

Entry requirements for Irish nationals:

Irish passport holders must have a passport that is valid for at least six months beyond the date they expect to leave Zambia. A visa is required. A 90-day tourist visa or 30-day business visa can be obtained on arrival.

Entry requirements for New Zealanders:

New Zealand passport holders must have a passport that is valid for at least six months beyond the date they expect to leave Zambia. A visa is required. A 90-day tourist visa or 30-day business visa can be obtained on arrival.

Entry requirements for South Africans:

South African passport holders must have a passport that is valid for at least six months beyond the date they expect to leave Zambia. A visa is required. A 90-day tourist visa or 30-day business visa can be obtained on arrival.

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Tourist Offices

Zambia National Tourist Board, Lusaka: <http://www.zambiatourism.com>

Zambia Embassies

In the United States:

Zambian Embassy, Washington DC, United States: +1 202 234 4009.

In Canada:

Zambian High Commission, Ottawa, Canada: + 613 232 4400.

In the United Kingdom:

Zambian High Commission, London, United Kingdom (also responsible for Ireland): +44 207 589 6655.

In Australia:

High Commission of the Republic of Zambia, Canberra, Australia: +61 261 994 900.

In South Africa:

Zambian High Commission, Pretoria, South Africa: +27 12 326 1854.

Foreign Embassies in Zambia

American Embassy

United States Embassy, Lusaka: +260 211 357 000.

Canadian Embassy

Canadian High Commission, Lusaka: +260 1 250 833.

British Embassy

British High Commission, Lusaka: +260 211 423 200.

Australian Embassy

Australian Embassy, Harare, Zimbabwe (also responsible for Zambia): +263 242 853 235 55.

Irish Embassy

Irish Embassy, Lusaka: +260 211 290 650.

New Zealand Embassy

New Zealand Honorary Consulate, Lusaka, Zambia: (+260) 211 252 402 / 5 / 6.

South African Embassy

South African High Commission, Lusaka: +260 211 26 0497.

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Overview of the Attractions in Zambia

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Public Holidays in Zambia

	2023	2024
New Year's Day	Mon. January 1	Mon. January 1
Youth Day	Tue. March 12	Tue. March 12
Good Friday	Sun. April 7	Fri. March 29
Easter Monday	Wed. April 10	Mon. April 1
Labour Day	Wed. May 1	Wed. May 1
Africa Freedom Day	Sat. May 25	Sat. May 25
Unity Day	Thu. July 4	Tue. July 2
Heroes' Day	Sat. July 6	Fri. July 5
Farmers' Day	Wed. August 7	Mon. August 5
Independence Day	Thu. October 24	Thu. October 24
Christmas	Wed. December 25	Wed. December 25
Women's Day	Fri. March 8	Fri. March 8