

September/October 2017

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THE NEW SPIRIT OF AFRICA

# Selamta


THE IN-FLIGHT MAGAZINE

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# SPOTLIGHT

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24 Hours

## 24 HOURS IN VICTORIA FALLS

Named after the area's awe-inspiring waterfalls, of course, Victoria Falls presents countless opportunities for outdoor adventure and wildlife enjoyment wrapped up in a package of bygone glamour. The Victoria Falls Hotel shown here, for example, dates back to 1904 and offers more than its share of colonial-era charm as well as dramatic views of the surrounding gorges. For more about the falls themselves and our recommended itinerary for a short stay in the town, turn to p. 58.



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# 24 Hours in Victoria Falls

Finding adventure and culture in the heart of Zimbabwe. | BY SAHAR KHAN

Victoria Falls is one of the Seven Natural Wonders of the World. Its namesake town, which grew out of a trading post on diamond king Cecil Rhodes' ill-fated Cape-to-Cairo railway, caters to adventure seekers and wildlife enthusiasts, offering everything from bungee-jumping and gorge-swinging to elephant rides and lion walks. But beyond the adrenaline-inducing activities lies an area steeped in culture and history. Colonial-era hotels and steam trains with white-glove service evoke the romance of Edwardian explorers while heritage centers explain the havoc those explorers left in their wake. The apparatus of tourism, however, takes a back seat to the main attraction: the falls themselves.

**8 a.m.** Built in 1904, the **Victoria Falls Hotel** — the oldest in town — lives up to the colonial grandeur of the bygone empire. Think sitting rooms with mahogany furniture and whirling ceiling fans, passageways studded with animal heads, and airy verandas, where scrumptious high tea is served overlooking manicured lawns. Breakfast at the open-air Jungle Junction is a continental affair. Fill up on fluffy omelets, fresh-baked breads, every manner of sweet pastries, and even sweeter fruits as vervet monkeys swing from branch to branch and warthogs meander past.

**9 a.m.** From the hotel, take the five-minute drive to **Victoria Falls**, a UNESCO World Heritage site. In 1855, Scottish missionary David Livingstone (of “Dr. Livingstone, I presume?” fame) became the first European to behold the waterfalls, after which he christened them in honor of the British monarch. There are 15 viewing points along the gorge’s edge through the rainforest, each revealing a different vantage of the gushing waters that stretch nearly 105 meters high and more than 1,700 meters wide, making it the largest waterfall in the world. (For those wishing to visit the four additional points in Zambia, which borders the falls, make sure to get a Kaza visa at the airport, allowing multiple entries



between the two countries.) The best-known point is **Devil’s Cataract**, where the flow of the falls is the greatest — creating a cascading spume seething over the cliff edge into the Zambezi River. Locals refer to the falls as *Mosi-oo-Tunya*, or “The Smoke that Thunders,” an apt description: Their roar can be heard from up to 40 kilometers away, and during the high-water season from February to June, the mist can rise nearly 400 meters. Although not one to give way to lyricism, Livingstone was so

moved by the falls he wrote, “On sights as beautiful as this Angels in their flight must have gazed.”

**11 a.m.** After your trek, put your feet up — way up — with a helicopter ride over the falls and their surrounding landscape, including six basalt gorges.

If you prefer a more active itinerary, the town, often dubbed the “adventure capital of Africa,” offers any number of blood-pumping activities: whitewater rafting, abseiling and zip-lining, to

(Below) The Victoria Falls Hotel represents a stunning example of early 20th-century colonial architecture and sits only a 10-minute walk from the falls.





name a few. Bungee-jumping off **No Man's Land** — the bridge that connects Zimbabwe and Zambia — is a particular favorite, while wildlife enthusiasts can dive with crocodiles (albeit while in a cage) or walk with trained field guides looking for lions in the bush. If elephant-back rides is more your speed, hop aboard and fall into a hypnotic state as the pachyderms slowly saunter through thickets buzzing with birdsong.

**1 p.m.** Having worked up an appetite by now, fill up on fresh local fare during lunch at **Lookout Café**. Perched more than 120 meters above the river, the open-air eatery overlooks No Man's Land and the falls beyond. Gasp at heart-stopping sightings of fearless spirits rappelling down the rock face as you savor tempura shrimp salad or crocodile kebabs and drink in the primordial landscape, along with a cocktail or two.

**2 p.m.** Shop for curios, jewelry, books, and original artworks at **Elephant's Walk**, a semi-alfresco thatched-roof

market in the center of town. Drop in at Ndau Collection, where gorgeous baubles like crocodile skin cuffs and 18th-century trade beads studded into silver earrings artfully populate the shelves. (You can even commission Ndau's artisans to create a bespoke piece especially for you.)

As you continue throughout the market, stop by artists' studios and watch as they make sculptures out of wire and wood; paint ethereal landscapes; and design ornaments with Rasta beading and leatherwork. For a lesson on the region's history, be sure to visit the Jafuta Heritage Center, where you can even get your fortune read by a *nyanga* (witchdoctor).

**3:30 p.m.** Dip into the **MatsiMela Spa**, also located at Elephant's Walk, for an afternoon massage to ease any soreness caused by the day's activities. Treatments take place under a tent in a fragrant garden and incorporate products by MatsiMela, a Zimbabwean skincare line made with local ingredients such as the marula nut, the baobab seed, and rooibos

From bungee jumping to helicopter tours, the 105-meter-high falls offer adrenaline-inducing activities of every sort.

tea and honey. Once refreshed, enjoy a snack under swaying palm tree fronds at the adjacent Africa Café.

**4:30 p.m.** Board the **Bushtracks Express Steam Train** at Victoria Falls Train Station to experience a bygone era of luxury travel, dusted with a sense of adventure. The 1952 locomotive was refurbished by Rovos Rail to reflect Edwardian extravagance — think wood-lined compartments and tufted leather sofas. The five-hour ride winds through Zambezi National Park with a pit stop on No Man's Land. Jump out for a postcard-worthy photo op of the falls silhouetted against the setting sun. Back on board, sip a cocktail in the



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**TOTAL, MY CHOICE**  
Haile Gebresellasie

observation carriage as you spot red-bottomed baboons scampering up trees and rhinos chomping on leaves. Feast on a three-course dinner served by staff in crisp whites as the train chugs deep into the bush, soothed by the wheels' rhythmic motion and the engine's throaty whistle.

(Caveat: The train only runs on Tuesdays and Fridays; if you happen to be in Victoria Falls any other day, swap the train with a sunset river cruise on the Zambezi and follow it with dinner at the Ilala Lodge's Palm Restaurant, serving not only delectable cuisine but also stunning views across the water.)

**9:30 p.m.** Back in town, disembark and make your way to **Three Monkeys** for a nightcap. The new bar and restaurant across from the train station is housed under a white tent, which pumps out live African beats throughout the evening. When you're ready to call it a night, head back to the hotel and let the roar of the falls lull you to sleep. ■



A lazy crocodile wades in the Zambezi River below the falls.

**Sahar Khan** is a New York-based journalist who covers travel, fashion and art. She fell in love with Victoria Falls when she visited it this year with her father, who had dreamed of seeing the waterfalls since he was a child.