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Visting Zimbabwe

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Introduction

Zimbabwe, a landlocked country nestled in the heart of Southern Africa, is a treasure trove filled with unique attractions and unforgettable experiences for the intrepid traveler. This guide is crafted for tourists who wish to delve deep into the soul of this fascinating nation, exploring its unique offerings rather than typical tourist generalities. From the thunderous cascades of Victoria Falls to the silent resonance of ancient dynasties at Great Zimbabwe, the nation is a doorway to adventure, culture, and history.

One of the great draws of Zimbabwe is its immense natural beauty, characterized by vast savannas, lush woodlands, and sprawling national parks. These picturesque landscapes are mirrored in the serene waters of Lake Kariba and the rugged terrains of the Eastern Highlands. The geographical diversity beckons nature lovers and adrenaline seekers alike to venture into captivating safaris, electrifying adventures, and serene retreats amidst nature's own amphitheater. Zimbabwe's outdoor experiences promise a closeness to nature that few other destinations can offer.

Zimbabwe's rich biodiversity forms the backbone of its thriving tourism industry, home to a plethora of wildlife including the famed Big Five: elephant, lion, leopard, rhinoceros, and buffalo. Hwange and Mana Pools National Parks are world-renowned for spectacular wildlife encounters, where animals roam free across vast stretches of wilderness. The allure of witnessing these creatures in their natural habitat, set against the backdrop of unspoiled wilderness, is a profound experience that captivates the imagination.

Beyond its natural wonders, Zimbabwe is steeped in history, vividly etched into the monumental stone ruins of its past. The Great Zimbabwe National Monument, a UNESCO World Heritage site, serves as a testament to a once mighty empire that flourished between the 11th and 15th centuries. This profound historical depth is complemented by the thriving modern culture that celebrates traditional music, dance, and artistry, offering visitors a sense of continuity amidst change.

Culturally, Zimbabwe is a mosaic of languages and people, where hospitality and friendliness are cornerstones of daily life. The embrace of *Ubuntu*, a philosophy of communalism and respect, is reflected in the warmth that greets visitors at every turn. This guide will steer you towards experiencing the authentic local culture and traditions, offering insights into respectful and meaningful interactions with Zimbabwe's people.

Whether you aim to explore the enchantment of wilderness safaris, engage with the

vibrant local culture, or stand in awe of historical marvels, Zimbabwe invites you on a journey of discovery. As you embark on this adventure, armed with the practical advice and in-depth insights provided in this guide, you'll find that Zimbabwe is not just a destination, but a life-changing experience.

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CHAPTER ONE: Entry Requirements

Embarking on an adventure to Zimbabwe begins long before you hear the roar of Victoria Falls or spot your first elephant in Hwange. The very first step involves navigating the administrative landscape of entry requirements. While perhaps not the most thrilling aspect of travel planning, understanding Zimbabwe's specific rules regarding passports and visas is crucial for a smooth and hassle-free arrival. Getting these details right ensures your journey starts on a positive note, allowing you to focus on the incredible experiences that await. This chapter will guide you through the necessary paperwork, clarifying the procedures so you can approach the border with confidence.

Your passport is your primary key to unlocking international travel, and Zimbabwe, like most countries, has firm requirements regarding its validity. The cardinal rule is that your passport must remain valid for at least six months beyond the date you intend to *leave* Zimbabwe, not just arrive. This regulation provides a buffer, safeguarding against situations where your stay might be unexpectedly extended due to unforeseen circumstances, such as flight changes or personal emergencies. Immigration officials need assurance that your travel document won't expire while you are still within their borders, potentially complicating your legal status and departure.

Beyond the six-month validity period, pay close attention to the number of blank pages remaining in your passport. Zimbabwe requires at least two completely blank pages for entry and exit stamps. However, different sources, including airlines and neighbouring countries, might suggest having more. If your itinerary includes transiting through South Africa, for instance, be aware that they often demand two *consecutive* blank pages for each transit, doubling the requirement if you pass through both ways. To err on the side of caution, aiming for three or even four blank pages is wise. Running out of space can lead to denied boarding by your airline or refusal of entry upon arrival – a frustrating and entirely preventable travel mishap.

Ensure your passport is in good physical condition. While normal wear and tear is expected, significant damage, such as tears, water damage, unofficial markings, or a compromised data page, could render it invalid in the eyes of immigration officials. A damaged passport might raise concerns about its authenticity or your identity. If your passport looks worse for wear, particularly if the photo or machine-readable zone is affected, consider renewing it well before your trip to avoid potential complications at the border crossing. Officials have the discretion to refuse entry if they deem a passport unfit for travel.

For travellers holding dual nationality, it's important to use the same passport for

entering and exiting Zimbabwe. While Zimbabwean law has provisions regarding dual nationality for its citizens, foreign visitors should maintain consistency with their travel documents throughout their visit. Entering on one passport and attempting to leave on another can cause significant confusion and delays with immigration authorities. Always present the passport that contains your entry stamp or visa when departing the country to ensure a smooth exit process.

With your passport in order, the next hurdle is the visa. The good news is that Zimbabwe aims to facilitate tourism, but the specific requirements depend heavily on your nationality. Most foreign nationals do require a visa to enter Zimbabwe for tourism purposes. The country categorizes nationalities into three main groups: Category A (visa-exempt countries), Category B (countries whose nationals can obtain a visa on arrival or apply for an e-visa beforehand), and Category C (countries whose nationals must obtain an e-visa *before* travelling). It is absolutely essential to determine which category your passport falls into well in advance of your trip.

Nationals from countries in Category A enjoy the simplest entry process. They do not require a visa for stays typically up to 90 days for tourism purposes. These countries often include neighbouring SADC (Southern African Development Community) nations, though the list can change. Upon arrival at an airport or border post, Category A nationals proceed directly to the immigration counter, present their valid passport, and receive an entry stamp indicating their permitted length of stay. While straightforward, it's still prudent for even visa-exempt travellers to check the latest official regulations before departure, as policies can be updated.

The largest group of tourists typically falls into Category B. If your nationality is in this category, you have two options: obtain a visa upon arrival at your port of entry (like Harare, Victoria Falls, or Bulawayo airports, or major land borders such as Beitbridge or Kazungula) or apply for an e-visa online before you travel. The visa on arrival facility is convenient, involving filling out a short form, presenting your passport, and paying the required fee directly to the immigration officer. However, queues can sometimes be long, especially during peak arrival times, and payment facilities may be limited (more on that later).

The alternative for Category B nationals is the e-visa, applied for through Zimbabwe's official e-visa portal (www.evisa.gov.zw). This allows you to handle the formalities and payment online before your trip, potentially saving time upon arrival. You'll typically need to upload scanned copies of your passport data page, a passport-style photograph, and possibly proof of accommodation or flights. Once approved, you receive an e-visa approval letter via email, which you must print and present to immigration officials upon arrival. While convenient, allow sufficient processing time and be aware that technical glitches, though infrequent, can occur.

Nationals whose countries fall under Category C face the strictest requirement: they

must secure an e-visa *before* commencing their journey to Zimbabwe. Arriving without a pre-approved visa if you are a Category C national will almost certainly result in being denied entry and returned to your point of origin at your own expense. The application process is the same as for Category B e-visa applicants via the official portal, but it's non-negotiable – you cannot obtain a visa on arrival. Therefore, planning well ahead is paramount for Category C travellers to allow ample time for application submission, processing, and potential requests for additional information.

Let's delve deeper into the e-visa application process itself, relevant for both Category B applicants choosing this route and Category C applicants for whom it's mandatory. The official portal, www.evisa.gov.zw, is the sole legitimate platform for applications. Be wary of third-party websites that may charge additional fees or be fraudulent. The online form requires careful completion with accurate personal details, passport information, and specifics about your intended visit, such as purpose, duration, and address in Zimbabwe (your first hotel or lodge is usually sufficient).

Gathering the necessary supporting documents is key before starting the online application. You will typically need a clear, colour scan of your passport's data page, ensuring all details are legible and the scan adheres to any specified file size or format limits. A recent digital passport-style photograph meeting standard requirements (e.g., plain background, face clearly visible) is also usually mandatory. Depending on the application specifics, you might also be asked to upload proof of accommodation booking, flight itineraries, or even an invitation letter if visiting friends or family. Ensure all scanned documents are clear and meet the portal's specifications to avoid delays.

Once you've submitted your application and all supporting documents via the portal, you'll usually need to pay the visa fee online. The system typically accepts major credit cards like Visa or MasterCard. After payment, the application enters the processing queue. Processing times can vary significantly depending on your nationality, the volume of applications, and whether further checks are needed. While some e-visas might be approved within a few working days, it's wise to apply at least two to three weeks before your intended travel date, or even earlier for Category C nationals, to account for any potential delays or requests for more information from the authorities.

Upon successful processing, you will receive an email notification containing your e-visa approval letter, usually as a PDF attachment. It is crucial to print this letter – colour printing is often recommended – and keep it safe with your travel documents. You must present this printed approval letter along with your passport to the immigration officer upon arrival in Zimbabwe. The officer will verify the e-visa in their system, process your entry, and stamp your passport. Having this letter readily available streamlines the arrival process compared to potentially queuing for a visa on arrival.

Zimbabwe offers several types of tourist visas, primarily differing in the number of entries permitted. The most common is the Single-Entry Tourist Visa, allowing you to enter Zimbabwe once for a stay typically up to 30 days. This is suitable if your entire trip is contained within Zimbabwe's borders. The fee for this generally hovers around US\$30 for many nationalities, but it's vital to remember that costs can vary based on bilateral agreements between Zimbabwe and your home country. Always verify the specific fee applicable to your nationality.

If your itinerary involves leaving Zimbabwe and re-entering – perhaps for a day trip to the Zambian side of Victoria Falls, a quick excursion into Botswana's Chobe National Park, or if you're on a multi-country Southern African tour – you will need a Double-Entry Tourist Visa. This visa allows two entries into Zimbabwe within its validity period (usually 90 days from issuance, with each stay often limited to 30 days but extendable). The typical cost for a double-entry visa is often around US\$45, again subject to nationality variations. Applying for this upfront is more cost-effective and convenient than obtaining two single-entry visas.

For travellers planning more complex itineraries involving multiple exits and re-entries into Zimbabwe, a Multiple-Entry Tourist Visa might be available, though less commonly issued on arrival and potentially requiring advance application or specific justification. Costs and availability vary more widely. It's worth noting the KAZA UniVisa initiative, which historically allowed tourists to travel between Zimbabwe and Zambia (and sometimes Botswana) using a single visa. While its availability and terms have fluctuated, it's worth checking the official KAZA UniVisa website or inquiring upon arrival at major ports like Victoria Falls or Kazungula if it suits your travel plans, as it can offer savings and convenience for cross-border exploration in the Victoria Falls region.

When paying for your visa on arrival, be prepared. While policies can evolve, the strong preference and often the only accepted method, especially at land borders, is payment in cash, specifically US Dollars. Credit card facilities may exist at major international airports like Harare or Victoria Falls, but they are notoriously unreliable due to network issues or machine failures. Relying solely on a card is risky. Furthermore, immigration officers may not have change, particularly for larger denomination notes. It is highly advisable to carry sufficient USD cash in small denominations (\$1, \$5, \$10, \$20) to pay the exact visa fee for each person in your party. Crisp, undamaged notes are preferred, as torn or excessively worn bills might be rejected.

What if your initial 30-day stay granted by your tourist visa isn't quite long enough to soak in all that Zimbabwe has to offer? Fortunately, extensions are possible. Tourists can typically apply to extend their stay for up to a maximum of 90 days in total (including the initial 30 days). It's crucial, however, to apply for this extension *before*

your current visa or entry permission expires. Overstaying your visa is a serious matter that can result in fines, detention, and difficulties departing the country or attempting to re-enter Zimbabwe or even other Southern African countries in the future.

To apply for a visa extension, you generally need to visit a provincial or regional office of the Department of Immigration within Zimbabwe. Major centres like Harare and Bulawayo have dedicated offices where you can submit your application. Increasingly, there may also be options to apply for extensions online via the e-visa portal, similar to the initial application process. Check the official immigration website or inquire locally for the correct procedure applicable during your visit. Don't leave this to the last minute, as processing can take time.

When applying for an extension, you'll typically need to submit several documents. These usually include your passport (containing your current visa/entry stamp), a completed application form (obtained from the immigration office or potentially downloadable online), passport photographs, and payment of the required extension fee. You may also be asked to provide justification for the requested extension, such as a continued tourism itinerary, and potentially proof of sufficient funds to support yourself during the extended stay, along with confirmation of your onward travel arrangements (like a flight ticket).

Beyond the core requirements of a valid passport and the correct visa category, immigration officials in Zimbabwe may occasionally ask for supplementary documentation upon arrival. This is usually done to verify that you are a genuine tourist with the intention and means to complete your visit as planned. While not always requested, being prepared can prevent delays or concerns at the immigration counter. Having documents readily accessible in your hand luggage is advisable.

One common request is for proof of accommodation. This helps assure the officials that you have concrete plans and a place to stay within the country. A printed copy of your hotel or lodge booking confirmation for your first few nights is usually sufficient. If you are staying with friends or relatives residing legally in Zimbabwe, an invitation letter from them, including their contact details and address, along with a copy of their residence permit or ID, can be helpful.

Another potential requirement is proof of onward or return travel. Immigration authorities want assurance that you intend to leave Zimbabwe at the end of your permitted stay. A printed copy of your confirmed flight itinerary showing your departure date and destination is the standard way to demonstrate this. If you are travelling overland, providing details of your planned route and exit point, and potentially bus tickets or vehicle documentation if self-driving, can be beneficial. While not always rigorously checked, having this available demonstrates preparedness.

You might also be asked to demonstrate that you have sufficient funds to support yourself during your stay in Zimbabwe. There isn't a fixed daily amount mandated, but officials need to be reasonably satisfied that you won't become destitute or reliant on state resources. Proof can take various forms, such as a recent bank statement (though less commonly asked for), showing sufficient credit on a major credit card, or having a reasonable amount of cash (primarily USD). Avoid displaying excessive amounts of cash, but be prepared to show you have the means for accommodation, food, transport, and activities.

As mentioned in the reference information but crucial to reiterate clearly here in the context of entry: the Yellow Fever vaccination certificate requirement is specific. It is *not* required for all travellers to Zimbabwe. It is only mandatory if you are arriving from (or have transited for more than 12 hours through the airport of) a country deemed by the World Health Organization to have a risk of Yellow Fever transmission. Your nationality is irrelevant; it's your recent travel history that matters. Check the latest WHO list of countries with YF risk and verify Zimbabwe's specific requirements through official channels or your travel clinic before you depart. Failure to produce a valid certificate if required can lead to vaccination upon arrival (at your expense) or even entry refusal.

Given that visa regulations, fees, category classifications, and even health requirements like the Yellow Fever rule can change with little notice, relying solely on guidebooks (even this one!) or outdated online forums is unwise. The single most reliable sources of information are official ones. Make it a priority before your trip to consult the official website of Zimbabwe's Department of Immigration or its e-visa portal (www.evisa.gov.zw). These sites should contain the most current information on visa categories, fees, application procedures, and required documentation.

For absolute certainty, especially if your situation is complex (e.g., travelling for purposes other than standard tourism, having a nationality in Category C, or concerns about specific document requirements), contacting the nearest Embassy or High Commission of Zimbabwe in your country or region is highly recommended. Consular staff can provide definitive answers tailored to your specific circumstances and nationality. Allow ample time for inquiries, as responses may not be immediate. Remember also that airlines act as a preliminary check; they will verify your passport validity and visa (or eligibility for visa on arrival) before allowing you to board your flight to Zimbabwe. Ensuring you meet requirements avoids issues at check-in.

A final point pertains to travelling with minors. If you are travelling with children under 18, especially if not both parents are present, be prepared for potential additional documentation requirements. This might include carrying the child's full unabridged birth certificate showing both parents' names, and if only one parent is travelling, a notarized affidavit of consent from the non-travelling parent. If travelling with children

for whom you are not the parent, legal guardianship papers or consent letters might be needed. These rules aim to prevent child trafficking. Requirements can be particularly stringent if transiting through South Africa, so investigate thoroughly based on your specific family situation and itinerary, consulting both airline and immigration authorities.

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