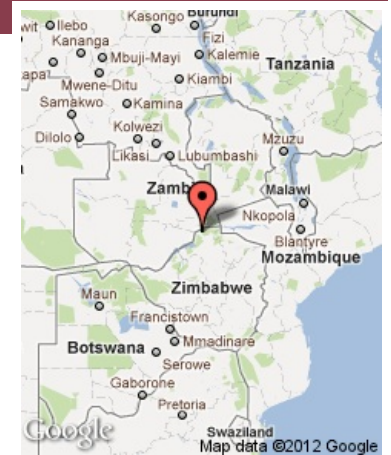


Luxury Canoe Safari in Mana Pools National Park



Highlights

Enjoy a luxury four-day guided canoe safari in a small group (maximum 8 people) along the Zambezi River running through Zimbabwe's Mana Pools National Park. Constantly listed as one of the top ten game reserves in Africa and all of your accommodation and food taken care of, this is a tour guaranteed to delight and astound.

Mana Pools is a 2,500 km national park in Zimbabwe where the Zambezi River breaks into floodplains and forms four giant pools after which the park is named. Escorted by a fully trained and licensed expert guide, this trip will see you both walking and canoeing along the shores of the Zambezi River, staying in a series of luxury mobile camps at the end of each day.

The Mana Pools is home to some of the most magnificent animals of Africa, including lions, hippos, buffalo, elephants and an incredibly diverse range of birds. The park is a rare haven in the modern world, having no permanent structures, fences, electricity or any other outward signs of man's existence. Being able to tour this natural playground at your leisure and under the watchful eye of a jovial host is a phenomenal way to get up close to the wildlife of Africa.

The tour is geared towards seeing the above animals and many more, all in the context of a classic bush camping experience. The aim of the trip is to get as close to nature as is possible, enjoy the sunrise as you drift along the water in your 18ft Canadian canoe, listening to the sounds of the African bush waking to a new day. When not in a canoe, your guides will take you on walks into the bush, tracking down animals and birds to spot in the open lands as well as the expanse full-canopy mopane and acacia forest. The guides are incredibly knowledgeable of the landscape and its wildlife, making sure every step of the way is as wonderful as it is safe.

Is it for me?

Without a single shadow of a doubt this is a truly exceptional safari and seriously worth considering. Conducted in a way which pays the greatest of respects to nature, the aesthetic of the trip is one of old-fashioned bush camping and a real treat for wildlife enthusiasts. Canoeing is the main feature of the tour, and the operator also offers more extensive guided game trips along the river and in the park which can be added on to either the beginning or end of this tour. What is also excellent about this is that no previous experience is necessary, as all training is given by one of the expert staff members.

Children under 14 can only be accepted onto private departures or trips in conjunction with other families (a 20% discount applies for under 12s). It's advised to check out visa restrictions before travelling – at the time of writing a compulsory 30-day visa is required at a small fee (£20.) Currently no injections are required before entering the country, but it is necessary to undertake a course of anti malaria tablets before, during and after your tour.

Accommodation

By law, permanent settlement structures are prohibited in Mana Pools National Park, so your luxury camp will be set up ahead of you on each day of the tour then taken down after you leave. While there, you'll be treated to a

Prices from

589 GBP (4 days) per person

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bush camp experience par excellence - not only are the tents and other camping equipment of a premium level, but you'll have full chef and waiting service looking after you when you're not gallivanting around Mana Pools. There are separate tents for cooking, dining and showering (all completely mosquito-proof,) and you'll be able to enjoy a hot evening meal around the fireplace enjoying freshly prepared food while swapping stories of the day passed. While canoeing during the day there will be stops for both breakfast and lunch, served picnic style and made fresh for each day.

Itinerary

Day one: After being collected by your guide you are driven to the first night's camp, Vundu, where you will be met with the welcome smiles of our support staff and a lunch of cold meats, a variety of salads and freshly baked breads. The drive to the camp goes through an area which has some of the highest concentrations of wildlife in Zimbabwe, enabling your guide to give you an overview of the various animals, birds and plants that make up this unique floodplain habitat.

After a refreshing lunch break you will be taken on a short drive to the launch spot near the confluence of the Ruckomechi and Zambezi Rivers. Here the professional canoe and walking guides give a full safety briefing include pointing out where all the equipment is kept, such as radio and first aid kits, as well as explaining what to do in the case of an emergency. The briefing will also run through the basic ideas of steering and controlling the Canadian style 18ft canoes. After the briefing, the group depart downstream.

This is a slow paddle, allowing time to become used to the canoes and the different steering techniques. You should also start to see some of the multitude of animals and birds that are attracted to the water's edge. Hippo, buffalo, elephant and crocodile as well as a variety of antelope species may be seen.

Arrival at camp is around sunset. The camp is fully prepared and you will be able to sit back and relax with sundowners and snacks – tea, coffee and hot showers are also available. A campfire will already be burning and this is invariably where guests will gather to discuss the day's events and plan for the morning. In the background, your support staff and resident chef are busy preparing a three-course dinner for you.

Day Two: You'll begin the day with an early start, just as the dawn breaks. Hot water is placed in raised basins outside each tent, while tea, coffee, muffins or home made biscuits are already waiting by the campfire. While everyone gets their personal kit together the support staff loads the canoes with everything that will be needed for the day. You need only worry about a small daypack carrying the essentials such as sun block, camera and spare film, hat and binoculars. A large dry bag per canoe is provided.

The aim is to be in the canoes and on the water in time to watch the sunrise. This is one of the most magical times of the day and you will be enchanted as you drift along quietly, listening to the sounds of the African bush waking to a new day. After breakfast under a grove of acacia trees, you'll set off on a walk into the floodplains and surrounding woodlands. This is a great time to try and catch some of the predators before they hide up for the day. This walk offers an opportunity not only for game viewing but also a chance for you to explore some of the smaller more interesting aspects of the environment. You will spot a variety of animal spoors, and may even find yourselves engrossed in tracking down a particular species, all the while listening to the sound of the many brightly coloured birds and marvel at the beauty and tranquillity of this unique area.

Returning to the canoes, you'll head downstream to an area renowned for its huge old elephant bulls. Your guides try to time the trips to catch them swimming or wading out to the grass islands, where you will be able to glide quietly alongside these awesome giants. Their age makes them so placid they tend to ignore the canoes. Lunch break coincides with the heat of the day, consisting of cold meats, freshly prepared salads, pizza, quiche and cheese and biscuits under the shade of dense mahogany trees.

After enjoying an afternoon of walking or simply indulging in a siesta, the late afternoon and evening is spent drifting down to camp and watching the game and birds on the river's edge. This night's camp, Chessa, overlooks a small channel, with a large grass plain separating it from the main Zambezi 500 metres away. Frequently the plain hosts buffalo, waterbuck, elephants and hippos in the evenings.

Day Three: Today follows the same basic itinerary as day two, with a predawn wake up and sunrise whilst drifting down the Zambezi. However, this is the day that you will enter the 'wilderness area' of Mana Pools National Park where there is limited access to people and vehicles. In fact the only road is 3 to 5 kilometres in-land and is the one that the support team will use. From here on it is a much more remote environment with very few people.

Breakfast will be taken on the Mbera River floodplain, which comprises stunning acacia woodland with large patches of thick 'adrenaline' grass – a habitat much favoured by all the predators, and towards the end of the dry season it also hosts large groups of female elephants with their babies. This day's paddling is through a maze of small channels before once again joining the main Zambezi River. For a change, lunch is on one of the shallow sandbanks in the middle of the river, where a table and chairs are set up in ankle deep water with the whole width of the river stretching out on either side of us.

This afternoon is your last chance for canoeing. Depending on water levels and time allowed, there may be an opportunity to explore Chikwenya Island on foot. This is the largest island on this section of the Zambezi River, and host to a prolific bird population and a number of interesting mammal species. In the afternoon you will paddle into Illala Camp to spend the last night.

Day Four: Depending on your departure time, or if you are moving on to an alternative camp, you may either take another early walk before breakfast or have a lie in. After that, there will be a short game drive to the airstrip where you'll (no doubt regrettably) bid your farewells.

Getting there

The canoe safari departs from Kariba (Zimbabwe, just over the border from Zambia). There are no international flights into Kariba so you will need to get international flights to either Harare (Zimbabwe) or Lusaka (Zambia). A new service is operating from Harare to Kariba on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sundays, costing 800R (approx £75) per person each way operated by **Federal Air**. Alternatively you can take a 3 hour (300km) ground transfer from Lusaka Airport (serviced by BA) to Kariba costing \$110 per person each way. Whichever option you choose, you will need to plan to be in Kariba the day before your safari and stay on the day afterwards (for an early start and late return). We can arrange a stay in Kariba or alternatively there are a few game lodges in the area if you want to extend the trip.

Price includes

Price is per person fully inclusive of Zimbabwean tourism levy, fully qualified guides, accommodation in luxury camp and meals for the duration of the tour, all activities and equipment. Price does not include government sales and value added taxes where applicable and national parks and river usage fees which must be paid directly by the client to national parks along the way.

When is best

This trip departs Mondays, Tuesdays, Fridays & Saturdays April to November, high season is June through October.

Comfort level

Reasonably comfortable (Inns, B&Bs, luxury camping etc.)

Experience required

A reasonable level of fitness and interest is all that is needed