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TRUTH IN TRAVEL

MAY 2006

A
GLOBAL
GUIDE

10th
Annual

HOT
LIST

TOP NEW

130 hotels

STARTING AT \$80 A NIGHT!

82 restaurants

55 spas

AND MORE ...

Denizens of Loango National Park



ADVENTURE

BEACHES & WILDLIFE

VITALS

- VISITOR NUMBERS: 155,000 in 2000; 222,000 in 2004.
- BEST TIME TO GO: June through September, when it's cool and dry.
- CAPITAL: Libreville.
- AIR SERVICE FROM THE U.S.: Air France.
- OFFICIAL LANGUAGE: French.
- SPECIAL SAFETY CONCERNS: Carjackings have been reported in Libreville.
- TOUR COST: Approximately \$370 per person per day.

The New Frontier



A lack of paved roads, accommodations, and experienced guides has until

recently kept Gabon off-limits for all but the most intrepid travelers. But that began to change in 2002, when President Omar Bongo, faced with dwindling revenues from declining oil reserves, started aggressively developing tourism. In a move reminiscent of Teddy Roosevelt's creation of the American national parks system, Bongo set aside 11 percent of the country's land to create 13 parks, declaring 11,000 square miles of rain forest, savanna, and coastline off-limits to future development. Now Gabon is

ripe for exploring and a natural choice for adventurous types in search of the real Africa.

THE BIG PICTURE Gabon has a small human population—1.4 million in a country the size of Colorado—and plenty of room for wildlife, notably elephants and western lowland gorillas; six species of whales swim just offshore. Even so, only a fraction of the foreigners who visit the country each year are tourists—the rest come for the timber and oil. Few of the 13 national parks have upscale lodgings or are easily accessed by plane or jeep.

THE DRAW At dusk each night, a procession of elephants, buffalo, and even the occasional hippo emerges on **Petit Loango Beach**, a 60-mile stretch of white sand in **Loango National Park**. The park is one of the few places in the world where you can observe these and other big beasts—including chimpanzees and humpback whales—in such close proximity. Sightings of western lowland gorillas are guaranteed in the park's **Evengue Island Gorilla Sanctuary**. **Ivindo National Park** is the site of **Langoué Bai**, an isolated clearing remarkable for its large concentration of elephants and

gorillas. Also within Ivindo's borders are the **Kongou and Mingouli waterfalls**, the most impressive in Central Africa. **Lopé National Park**, reached by a four-hour train ride from Libreville, is known for its gorillas, troops of rare and brilliantly colored mandrill monkeys, and 400 bird species. The neighboring **Offoué River** can be explored

porch with views of the Mpio River. A motorized canoe ferries guests into the park, where waiting Land Rovers take you on game drives to see forest elephants and bush pigs (31-26-370-5567; operation-loango.com; doubles, \$365). In Ivindo National Park, a research station has been transformed into the rustic **Langoué Bai Camp**, run by the Wildlife Conservation Society. A network of paths extends from the camp, making the park's gorillas easy to spy on (31-26-370-5567; doubles, \$480). In Lopé National Park, the cabanas of the new **Lopé Hotel** are set on a hill above the Offoué River and face Mount Brazza. The



Loango Lodge.

hotel offers daily excursions with a naturalist (241-77-85-61; doubles, \$61-\$92).

in traditional dugout canoes. Fans of Albert Schweitzer will want to visit the small riverside town of **Lambaréné** to see the hospital he built and a museum dedicated to his work.

THE DIGS The **Evango Lodge**, near Lambaréné, is perhaps Gabon's nicest (241-76-27-87; doubles, \$246-\$273, including meals). In Loango National Park, the new **Loango Lodge** has seven bungalows with large bathrooms, comfortable beds, air-conditioning, and a

hotel offers daily excursions with a naturalist (241-77-85-61; doubles, \$61-\$92).

RESOURCES The easiest way to explore the new parks is with a reliable outfitter such as **African Outposts** (africanoutposts.co.za), **Operation Loango** (operation-loango.com), **Explore Africa** (888-596-6377; exploreafrica.net), and **Mistral Voyages** (ecotourisme-gabon.com). For national parks information, visit **gabonnationalparks.com**. —Jon Bowermaster

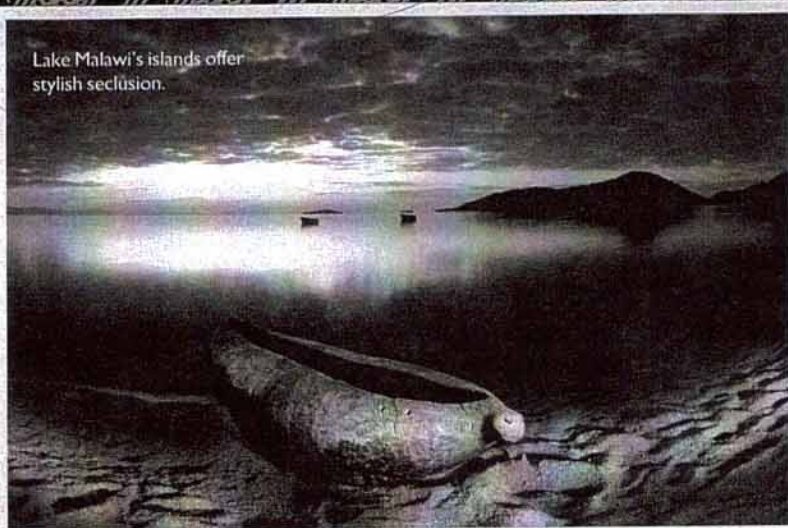
HASSLE FACTOR high

Little runs smoothly in Gabon. While the rewards of a visit are great, you have to work for them by trekking—often carrying your own load—and by being willing to wait for trains and planes that seem to operate without regard to schedules. One upside: Unlike parks in most African countries, Gabon's don't require gorilla-trekkers to buy expensive permits. Visas must be obtained in advance, and visitors are strongly advised to travel with a tour operator.

HOT TIP

The earliest signs of human civilization in Central Africa are rock engravings near Mikongo Camp, in Lopé National Park.

Lake Malawi's islands offer stylish seclusion.



ADVENTURE

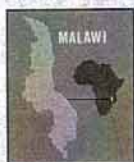
BEACHES WILDLIFE

VITALS

- ▶ **VISITOR NUMBERS:** 228,000 in 2000; 414,000 in 2004.
- ▶ **BEST TIME TO GO:** May through August has the mildest weather.
- ▶ **AIR SERVICE FROM THE U.S.:** British Airways, KLM, and South African Airways.
- ▶ **CAPITAL:** Lilongwe.
- ▶ **OFFICIAL LANGUAGE:** English.
- ▶ **SPECIAL SAFETY CONCERNS:** None.
- ▶ **TOUR COST:** Approximately \$460 per person per day.

AFRICA
HEATS
UP

Nice and Easy



Malawi's lakes, mountains, and wilderness have been drawing an increasing number of visi-

tors since 1993, when President Hastings Kamuzu Banda's three decades of autocratic rule finally ended. The country's five national parks and four wildlife reserves are home to a wealth of big game, and Malawi has wisely begun promoting itself as an affordable alternative to safari destinations such as Botswana, Kenya, and Tanzania. Unlike countries with more established safari operations,

Malawi's protected areas are easily and inexpensively accessed by independent travelers and are conspicuously devoid of tourist-laden Land Rovers.

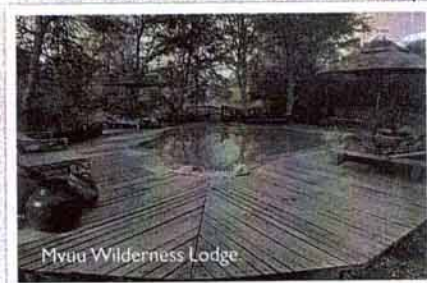
THE BIG PICTURE Slightly smaller than England, Malawi is wedged between Mozambique and Zambia. Within its narrow boundaries lie amazingly varied landscapes, from a massive lake edged by palm trees and mountains to a pine-forested plateau stitched with streams and hiking trails. Although there's no shortage of accommodations, luxury options are few. Simply furnished hotels and guesthouses are the norm, as is a warm welcome: Malawians are said to be the friendliest people in Africa.

THE DRAW The centerpiece of the country is 360-mile-long **Lake Malawi**, which covers 20 percent of the nation. Typically calm and crystal-clear, it supports some 1,000 species of fish and is one of the world's best freshwater diving locations. (Beware of areas affected by the bilharzia parasite.) Some of the nicest accommodations on the lake are on the island sanctuaries of Mumbo and Domwe (see "The Digs"). **Likoma Island**, accessible by public ferry just once a week (or by chartered boat

or plane), is well worth a visit to see **Chipyla**, a quaint town with cobbled roads and a stone church, built by Anglican missionaries in 1906, that is nearly as large as Westminster Cathedral. Thirty miles south of the lake, **Liwonde National Park** teems with hippos, crocodiles, and elephants. In the north, the hills of **Nyika National Park** attract hikers; horseback safaris are also popular. Other prime trekking areas are the misty slopes of 10,000-foot **Mount Mulanje** and the pine forests of the **Zomba Plateau**.

THE DIGS The **Zomba Forest Lodge**, a tranquil homestead on the Zomba Plateau, offers perhaps the best value for the money. It has five simple but comfortable rooms, and there are few better places to watch the bloodred sunsets than from its front lawn (265-9200369; z.f.lodge@mw.celtelplus.com; doubles, \$60, including dinner). Reservations at the following properties include all meals and must be made through travel agents or tour operators (see "Resources"). Visitors reach **Mumbo** and **Domwe** by kayak and stay in tastefully furnished tents with lake views

(wilderness-safaris.com; Domwe doubles, \$300; Mumbo doubles, \$350). On **Likoma Island**, **Kaya Mawa** is a beachfront lodge that offers snorkeling, scuba diving, water-skiing, boat trips, and full-day excursions to nearby Mozambique (wilderness-safaris.com; doubles, \$500). Inside Liwonde National Park, the **Mvuu Wilderness Lodge** has five extremely comfortable tents facing the Shire River; animals



HASSLE FACTOR low

English is widely spoken, and many visitors travel independently even though tours are available. Distances between towns are short, and most roads are well maintained. Apart from a few trouble spots, such as the market in Lilongwe and sections of Blantyre at night, crime is rare. Visitors should be aware that malaria is prevalent in most of the country, and bilharzia (a disease caused by parasitic worms found in freshwater) can be a problem in some parts of Lake Malawi. Check out cdc.gov for recommended precautions.

sometimes wander through the unfenced camp at night (wilderness-safaris.com; doubles, \$460-\$590).

RESOURCES **Explore Africa** customizes Malawi itineraries (970-871-0065; exploreafrika.net). Among guidebooks, the **Bradt Travel Guide** (Globe Pequot Press, \$19) and **The Spectrum Guide** (Interlink Books, \$24) are thorough and informative. —Jeremy Jowell

HOT
TIP

One of Malawi's foremost traditional healers can be visited in the village of Khuyu, on Likoma Island.

Mozambique has 2,000 miles of coastline.



AFRICA
HEATS
UP

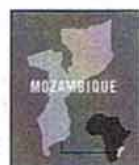
ADVENTURE

BEACHES LUXURY

VITALS

- **VISITOR NUMBERS:** 404,000 in 2001; 711,000 in 2004.
- **BEST TIME TO GO:** June through August, for cool, dry weather.
- **AIR SERVICE FROM THE U.S.:** Air France and TAP Portugal.
- **CAPITAL:** Maputo.
- **OFFICIAL LANGUAGE:** Portuguese.
- **SPECIAL SAFETY CONCERNS:** Stay off the streets and beaches at night to avoid crime. Land mines may still be present on little-used roads.
- **TOUR COST:** Approximately \$380 per person per day.

Water World



After decades of political strife—including a bloody struggle for independence from Portugal followed by a 16-year civil war—Mozambique has enjoyed peace, stability, and robust economic growth since holding its first multiparty elections in 1994. Peace has brought prosperity in the form of a booming tourism industry, with oceanfront resorts and small luxury hotels opening at a rapid clip. Fortunately, uncontrolled development is unlikely anytime soon: The government's commitment to the environment and to responsible tourism was recently underscored when it created two national parks and

two reserves and designated some 15 percent of the country off-limits to development. Most of the national parks—and the big game that once populated them—were destroyed during the war years, so for now visitors are flocking to the coast. In a country with some of the world's best beaches, who can blame them?

THE BIG PICTURE Stretched out long and lean along the South Indian Ocean, Mozambique has more than 2,000 miles of palm-fringed coast, most of it undeveloped. The beaches and the 32-island Bazaruto Archipelago are its star attractions. In the cities, buildings with a faded colonial grandeur are cheek by jowl with shanties, and mud huts stand in the shadows of Eastern European-style concrete apartment blocks. Large-scale poaching during years of civil unrest wiped out virtually all of Mozambique's big game, so this is not a destination for those seeking a classic African safari. But that may change: The government and private investors are working to replace the animals that were lost. Internet mogul Greg Carr, an American who is the

former chairman of Prodigy, is spearheading one of the most ambitious schemes, promising up to \$40 million to rebuild Gorongosa National Park, in the center of the country. Part of the plan is to reintroduce game, including cheetahs and black rhinos.

THE DRAW A lively mix of European, Mediterranean, and African influences, **Maputo**, on the Indian Ocean, is one of Africa's most attractive capitals. **Gustav Eiffel's railway station** (yes, he of the Eiffel Tower) is the most beautiful in sub-Saharan Africa. At night, great jazz musicians play (Buena Vista Social Club-style) in countless venues, none of them more atmospheric than the historic railway bar. Other Maputo must-sees include Eiffel's **Iron House** (a wrought iron dwelling donated by France); the pulsing, quintessentially African market; the **Art Deco cathedral**; and the eighteenth-century Portuguese fort. Most of the action in Mozambique these days, however, is on the coast, where water activities naturally rule. Sport-fishermen head to **Vilanculos**,

Inhaca Island, and the **Bazaruto Archipelago** to do battle with marlin, while divers and snorkelers frequent Two Mile Reef, off the coast of Vilanculos, to swim in the limpid sea with the manta rays, whale sharks, and sequined reef fish. **Vilanculos Dive** operates charters (258-828-562700; mozzies@teledata.mz; snorkeling day-trip, \$60 per person; two dives, \$130 per

HASSLE FACTOR *medium*

Driving is discouraged, owing to poor road conditions and carjackings on major thoroughfares. Travel long distances by plane, and do not drive in Mozambique after dark, when roads are most dangerous and crimes are more likely. Credit cards are not widely accepted outside major hotels and restaurants.

Beachcombing on Pansy Island.



person). Inhaca Island is also a prime spot to crest the waves in a kayak with **Hardy Ventures** (27-13-751-1693; hardyventure.com; two-night excursion, \$575 per person).

THE DIGS In Maputo, a night or two at the elegant old-world **Polana** is a must. Journey back to a time of decadent colonial luxury as you sun yourself by the grand pool overlooking the

HOT TIP

Take a dhow around the Bazaruto Archipelago with Sailaway, which has day-trips (\$45) and one- to three-night sea safaris. Accommodations are at island camps (258-293-82-385; sailaway.co.za; safaris, doubles, \$320-\$640).

A bungalow at Benguerra Lodge.



Bay of Maputo while savoring mega-sized prawns dipped in *peri-peri* (a hot chili sauce) and a glass of *vinho verde* (258-1-491-001; polana-hotel.com; doubles, \$195-\$275).

The tiny, tucked-away **Tartaruga Maritima** tent camp is in the extreme south, close to the South African border. Getting

there requires a 370-mile drive on good roads from Johannesburg: Camp staff will collect you at the border, where it's safe to leave your vehicle. Set on a gorgeous Indian Ocean beach, the eight comfortable, airy tents have en suite bathrooms and decks (27-11-728-4942; tartaruga.co.za; doubles, \$150). For first-rate pampering, fly to **Benguerra Lodge**, on the island of the same name in the stunning Bazaruto Archipelago, 390 miles from Maputo. Set in a national park, its thatched bungalows are built on stilts, just a coconut's throw from the sea. Diversions include world-class diving, ocean fly-fishing, and a boat ride to remote Pansy Island, where pansy shells (similar to sand dollars) lie scattered on the

sand like so many fossilized flowers (27-11-452-0641; benguerra.co.za; doubles, \$790, including meals).

The more hotel-like **Indigo Bay**, a bit farther north on Bazaruto Island, is undergoing extensive renovations. By November, it will have bigger beach bungalows, new fishing and dive centers, and a new restaurant, pool, and golf course (27-11-465-6904; indigobayresort.com; doubles, \$586-\$726, including meals). For the ultimate tropical escape, head even farther north to Pemba and catch a chopper to **Quilalea Island**, in the Quirimbas Archipelago. Malaria-free and located in a remote marine reserve, Quilalea is as close as you'll come to finding a fantasy island in Africa. Laze on the beach in front

of your luxury villa fashioned from coral, wood, and reeds—or dive, snorkel, fish, or kayak. Then, as the red sun dips down, indulge in a seaside massage (258-272-2-1808; quilalea.com; doubles, \$750, including meals).

RESOURCES The handy **mozguide.com** offers all manner of travel advice. Contact **Explore Africa** (exploreafrika.net; 888-596-6377) for itineraries. If you can't find the information you need on the site itself, the popular forum will almost certainly have the answer. The **Bradt Travel Guide to Mozambique** may be aimed at budget travelers, but it provides a wealth of up-to-date information (Globe Pequot Press, \$19). —Kate Turkington

The Namib Desert, on Namibia's coast.



AFRICA HEATS UP

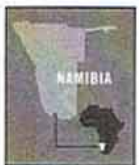
NAMIBIA

ADVENTURE BEACHES
LUXURY WILDLIFE

VITALS

- ▶ VISITOR NUMBERS: 655,586 in 2000; 695,221 in 2003.
- ▶ BEST TIME TO GO: May through October is drier and cooler.
- ▶ AIR SERVICE FROM THE U.S.: South African Airways.
- ▶ CAPITAL: Windhoek.
- ▶ OFFICIAL LANGUAGE: English.
- ▶ SPECIAL SAFETY CONCERN: Use care driving on gravel roads.
- ▶ TOUR COST: Approximately \$600 per person per day.

Desert Bloom



Europeans have known about Namibia's haunting landscapes and luxury lodges for years, but now the rest of the world is learning

that southern Africa's newest country is ready for prime time. Independence from South Africa came in 1990, and with it a government committed to conservation and limited development. The intervening years have brought new and

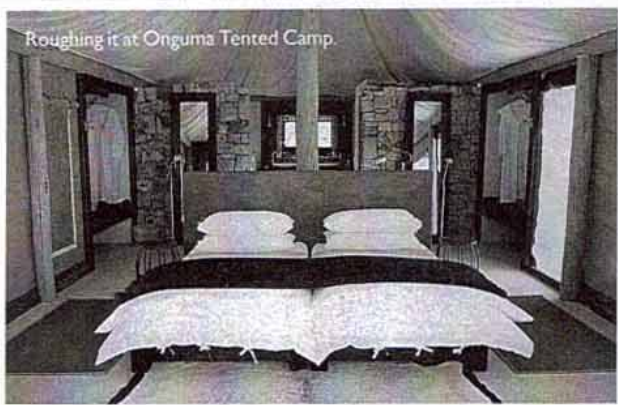
improved national parks and other protected areas, as well as the construction of low-impact, high-end lodges. In 2000, the Namibia Tourism Board was established, and in 2004 all accommodations and tour operators were subjected

to regulations based on those in the European Union. Now, standards are among the highest on the continent.

THE BIG PICTURE Two-thirds desert, Namibia is one of the world's least populated coun-

HOT TIP

For a glimpse of Namibia's urban culture, past and present, take a three-hour **Face to Face Tour of Katutura**, the former township just outside Windhoek (264-61-265-446; \$32 per person).



Roughing it at Onguma Tented Camp.

tries, with just 2 million people living in an area twice the size of California (which has a population of 34 million). Travel a mile outside one of the few urban centers and you'll be entirely alone. Though their numbers are small, Namibians belong to at least a dozen ethnic groups, including some 20,000 descendants of the German settlers who colonized the area before World War I. Colonial-style architecture, *kaffee* houses, and beer gardens are common in the larger towns—a strange and splendid contrast to the country's rugged terrain.

The landscape, not the wildlife, is the lure here, from glowing red-rock plains to lush river valleys to coastal sand dunes.

HASSLE FACTOR low

Crime is rare, there's no language barrier, and tourist facilities are plentiful and, more often than not, squeaky-clean. Although driving is on the left and gravel roads are common, travel by car is a popular and affordable way to see the country. Avis, Budget, and Hertz have offices in Windhoek—be sure to check the condition of the car carefully before driving off (the rugged terrain causes lots of wear and tear). Banks and ATMs are plentiful in the larger towns, and credit cards are accepted at most lodges and many restaurants and shops.

Visit the right spots, though, and you'll still see elephants, lions, hippos, rhinos, and even the elusive cheetah. Driving is an affordable and relatively easy way to see the country, but nothing beats hopping around by bush plane: Several tour operators specialize in fly-in safaris, offering tailor-made itineraries.

THE DRAW The world's oldest desert, the Namib, meets the icy Atlantic in **Namib-Naukluft National Park**. Explore by foot, hot-air balloon, quad-bike, even surfboard (to ride the dunes, not waves). Nearby Swakopmund is a lively seaside resort, but for a dose of desert solitude, stay in one of the park's excellent lodges or camps (see "The Digs," below). Farther north, **Skeleton Coast Park** makes the Namib look like Las Vegas. This foggy, 300-mile coastline bordering a savage desert earned its scary sobriquet from the whale bones and shipwreck debris that littered its beaches; its forbidding conditions continue to deter all but a colony of hardy seals. The vast **Kaokoveld** region, in Namibia's northwest, resembles the American Southwest, with its bright red soil, mammoth boulders, and mesas nearly big enough to land a plane on. The area's most famous inhabitants are the Himba, a semi-nomadic tribe of cattle herders and one of Namibia's oldest ethnic minorities. Visitors also come to see the

desert-adapted elephants (some 600 roam the dry riverbeds with unquenchable optimism).

Etosha National Park's scruffy savanna lacks knockout scenery, but within minutes of driving into the park (visits are self-guided), you have a good chance of spotting nearly all of Africa's iconic big game (no gorillas). South of Etosha, **Waterberg Plateau Park** contains more rare fauna, but to see the shiest of all, visit the research and education facility of the nearby **Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF)**. Guardians of Namibia's 2,500 cheetahs—the world's greatest concentration of the highly endangered species—CCF staff let visitors watch them feed and exercise captive cats and cubs; call in advance for feeding times (264-67-306-225; cheetah.org; suggested donation, \$9). Often overlooked, the **Caprivi Strip** is a slender tract extending all the way to Zimbabwe. Its elaborate river system supports a variety of big game and makes for spectacularly scenic boat trips.

Windhoek, the country's relaxed and tidy capital, has sights and shopping that merit at least a day or two.

THE DIGS Just outside Namib-Naukluft National Park, **Sossusvlei Lodge** has 45 cushy bungalows with uninterrupted views of the desert (264-63-693223; sossusvleilodge.com; doubles, \$320, including meals). **Wolwedans**, also in the Namib, offers even more luxurious accommodations as well as simple tents, all of which are surrounded by multicolored sand dunes (264-061-230-616; wolwedans.com.na; doubles, \$601–\$889, all-inclusive). **Namibia Country Lodges** has nine properties scattered around the country, including three in the Kaokoveld.

All are moderately priced and simple but comfortable (264-61-374-750; namibialodges.com; doubles, \$85–\$220). **Serra Cafema**, perhaps the country's most secluded, and priciest, property, lies just across the border from Angola (wilderness-safaris.com; doubles, \$1,100, all-inclusive). The swankest new arrival around Etosha National Park, **Onguma Tented Camp** consists of stylish tents overlooking a water hole (264-61-23-2009; ongumanamibia.com; doubles, \$590, all-inclusive). In the Caprivi, the brand-new, four-room **Ntwala Island Lodge** manages to be both decadent and laid-back (see "Hot List," page 219).

Windhoek's **Hotel-Pension Kleines Heim** has large rooms and a swimming pool shaded



Himba tribespeople in Kaokoveld.

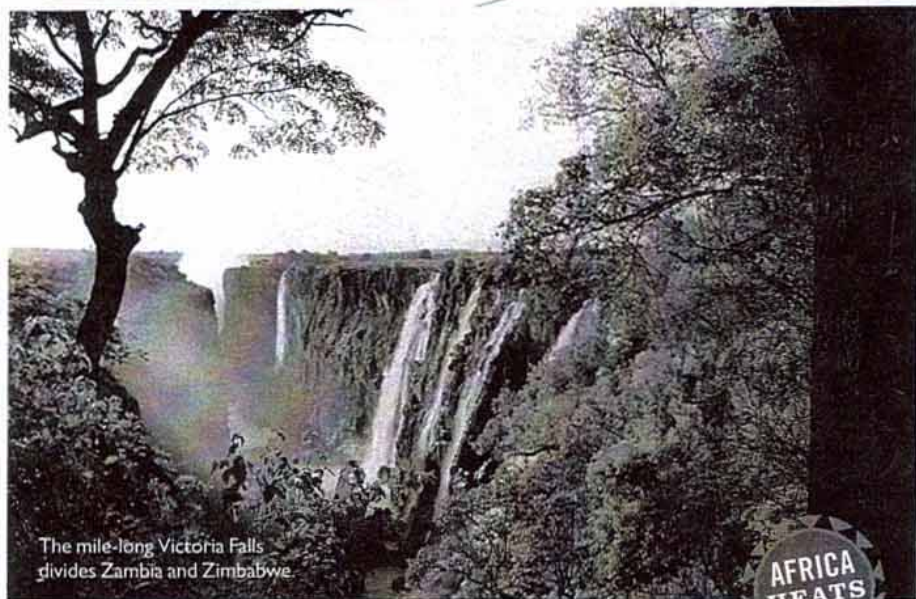
by date palms (264-61-24-8200; kleinesheim.com; doubles, \$55–\$100). The ritziest place in town is the hilltop **Hotel Heinitzburg** (264-61-249-597; heinitzburg.com; doubles, \$280).

RESOURCES The site of the Namibia Tourism Board, **namibia tourism.com.na** provides the basics, but for details on accommodations, visit **hannamibia.com**. Based in Windhoek, **Wings Over Africa** customizes fly-in safaris (264-61-255-001; flyinafrica.com). In the U.S., **Explore Africa** (888-596-6377; exploreafrica.net) and **Premiere Tours** (800-545-1910; premiere-tours.com) know the country intimately. The **Bradt Travel Guide to Namibia** is invaluable (Globe Pequot Press, \$21).

—Deborah Dunn

HOT TIP

At the three-year-old Wine Bar in downtown Windhoek, South African varietals—and fine snacks—are served on a shady hilltop terrace (3 Garten St.; 264-61-237-997; \$2–\$7 per glass).



The mile-long Victoria Falls divides Zambia and Zimbabwe.

AFRICA
HEATS
UP

ADVENTURE

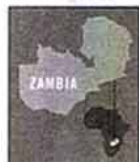
LUXURY

WILDLIFE

VITALS

- **VISITOR NUMBERS:** 457,000 in 2000; 610,000 in 2004
- **BEST TIME TO GO:** May through August for cool, dry weather; August through October for the best wildlife viewing.
- **AIRLINE SERVICE FROM THE U.S.:** Air France, British Airways, KLM, and South African Airways.
- **CAPITAL:** Lusaka
- **OFFICIAL LANGUAGE:** English
- **SPECIAL SAFETY CONCERNS:** Avoid areas near the Congo border.
- **TOUR COST:** Approximately \$400 per person per day.

Wild Ride



Widespread corruption and rampant poaching dampened Zambia's appeal for much of the

last 30 years. But since 2000, the government has made a concerted effort to protect wildlife and court tourists by cracking down on illegal hunting and upgrading the national parks. The country has also benefited from neighboring Zimbabwe's political and economic turmoil: Zambia is now the premier destination for viewing Victoria Falls, one of the natural wonders of the world.

THE BIG PICTURE Zambia is large—about the size of Texas—and has 19 national parks, where

HASSLE FACTOR *medium*

Independent travel is not advised: Roads are improving, but many are still in poor condition and signposts rare. Visitors are advised to travel by air or with an experienced driver familiar with the surroundings. Electricity is sometimes rationed, and blackouts are common. On the bright side, apart from the areas near the Congo's border, much of the country is quite safe.

both wildlife and luxury lodges are plentiful. Livingstone, the gateway to Victoria Falls, has a burgeoning tourist industry and several museums worth a visit. The dry season is best for viewing big game, although the rainy season has its own rewards, including verdant scenery and discounted prices. Lodges are becoming world-class, and the service is typically Zambian, meaning remarkably friendly.

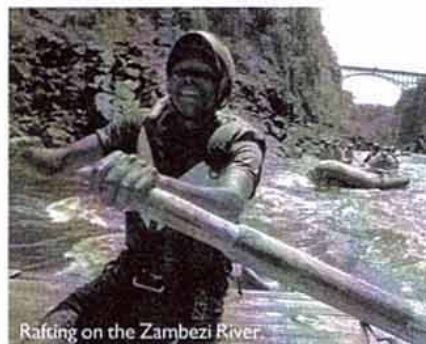
THE DRAW South Luangwa National Park has a number of excellent lodges and camps and is the most accessible of the four parks in the wildlife-rich Luangwa River Valley. It's best known for its walking safaris—rare in Africa—in which visitors explore by foot or even trek from one camp to the next. With its thick woodlands and gentle waterways, the **Lower Zambezi National Park**, on the other hand, is best seen by boat or, better still, by canoe. In Zambia's oldest and largest park, **Kafue**, the best game viewing is on the Busanga Plains, which support roan and sable antelopes, elephants, lions, and cheetahs. Of course, there's **Victoria Falls**, as well as lesser-known but spectacular cata-

acts including **Sioma**, which stretches like a giant horseshoe-shaped curtain across the entire Zambezi River; and **Kalambo**, Africa's second highest waterfall, which spills into **Lake Tanganyika**. History buffs interested in David Livingstone's missionary journey should visit the village of Chitambo, near **Kasanka National Park**, where he died and where his heart is buried beneath a tree.

Adventurous types can pursue white-water rafting on the Zambezi (arguably the world's most exciting day-trip), jet-boating, horseback riding, rappelling, bungee jumping, elephant riding, canoeing, and flightseeing. **Safari Par Excellence** arranges all of the above (260-3-320606; safpar.com).

THE DIGS Lusaka has fine hotels, but the most stylish accommodations are in the national parks. In the dusty bush, far from civilization, fresh linens and chilled chardonnay are now customary. A favorite with South Africans and Europeans, **Tongabezi Lodge**, on the banks of the Zambezi, has five lovely

cottages and four spacious houses. Activities include boat safaris, visits to Victoria Falls, and a trip to Livingstone Island, where you can swim in a pool on the lip of the falls near where Livingstone himself once stood (260-3-324450; tongabezi.com; doubles, \$710–\$1,060, all-inclusive). At **Chaminuka Lodge**, in a nature reserve outside Lusaka, hundreds of original works of Zambian art decorate the 18 chalets and the common areas



Rafting on the Zambezi River

(260-1-213303; chaminuka.com; doubles, \$500, all-inclusive). Built by an eccentric in the 1920s, **Shiwa Ngandu** is an English manor house in the remote North Zambian bush, complete with silver service, four-poster beds, horseback riding, and fishing (260-1-220747; shiwa

HOT TIP

From November through December more than five million straw-colored fruit bats inhabit the forests of Kasanka National Park. At sunset, watch them take flight in a massive wave (kasanka.com).

Boundaries blur at Mfuwe Lodge in South Luangwa National Park.



ngandu.com; doubles, \$700, including meals). In South Luangwa National Park, several camps seem engaged in a competition to be the most cossetting. Robin Pope Safaris, one of Zambia's foremost safari operators, owns **Tena Tena**, a cluster of 12 elegant tents, all with en suite bathrooms and showers that open to the elements. Robin Pope also offers walking safaris and fly-camping and recently opened **Luangwa House**, an exclusive four-suite bush retreat (260-6-246091; robinpope

safaris.net; Tena Tena doubles, \$840-\$980, all-inclusive; Luangwa House, \$2,000 for four people, all-inclusive). **Mfuwe Lodge** has 18 pleasant bungalows overlooking a lagoon (260-6-245041; mfuwelodge.com; doubles, \$380, all-inclusive). The Bush Camp Company, which owns Mfuwe, also operates five notable bush camps in the park (260-62-45041; bushcampcompany.com). Expect warm hospitality, great food, and good value at **Kafunta River Lodge**, reached by ferry from

South Luangwa Park. The swimming pool and natural hot tub are a bonus for weary travelers (260-6-246046; luangwa.com; doubles, \$420, all-inclusive). **Kaingo Camp**, where photo hides allow visitors to covertly observe several hundred grunting hippos, is a favorite of shutterbugs (260-6-245064; kaingo.com; doubles, \$880, all-inclusive), and at **Tafika Camp**, guests can take a 15-minute flight in a microlight aircraft (264-61-240561; remotefly.com; doubles, \$375-\$465, including meals; flights, \$90 per person). In Lower Zambezi National Park, **Sausage Tree Camp** has brought white tents and an upbeat atmosphere to this spectacular reserve (260-1-212597; sausagetreecamp.com; doubles, \$680-\$1,048, all-inclusive) and **Chiawa Camp** offers some of the region's best canoe trips (260-1-261588; chiawa.com; doubles, \$1,100, all-inclusive). Each season, a few of the old-style bush camps—

constructed of wood and reeds, with bucket showers—are erected from scratch. One fine example is **Mwaleshi** in North Luangwa National Park, situated in a wilder part of the valley rich with lions and buffalo (264-61-240561; remotefly.com; doubles, \$700, all-inclusive).

RESOURCES The Zambia National Tourism Board provides a good overview of the country on its site, zambiatourism.com. For birding, photographic, and other specialty tours of Zambia, contact **Africa Geographic** (27-21-762-2180; africa-geographic.com/expeditions). **Star of Africa** sells a variety of itineraries, with overnight stays in its own terrific lodges (star-of-africa.com). Chris McIntyre, who wrote the excellent **Bradt Travel Guide to Zambia**, offers advice and a booking service through his agency, **Sunvil** (44-20-8568-4499; sunvil.co.uk). —David Rogers

HOT TIP

Local guides lead walks through 700-year-old Mukuni Village, just outside Livingstone. Tours begin and end at the village market, an excellent place to find highly original batiks and wood carvings.

African Airlines Scrutinized

The sub-Saharan airline industry is under mounting international pressure to make drastic and immediate improvements. Barbara S. Peterson reports

Although the chances of being involved in an aviation accident in Africa are remote, the continent has one of the world's worst air safety records: Last year, nearly 40 percent of all fatal crashes involved African airlines, while the continent accounts for only 3 percent of global air traffic. The reasons for the disparity include antiquated air-traffic-control equipment, aging Soviet-made aircraft, and lack of investment in aviation infrastructure. To remedy the problem, safety advocates in Africa and abroad are calling for

corrective measures that include a blacklist of unsafe airlines. In March, the European Union published its first list of carriers banned from serving EU countries. Of the 92 airlines named, 85 were from African states—specifically, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and Swaziland. The list, to be updated every three months, is posted on europa.eu.int/comm/transport. Over the past few years, several EU member states have devised their own blacklists: In 2005, for instance, authorities in France banned

LAM Air Mozambique, but service was restored after the carrier defended its safety record.

In lieu of a blacklist, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) is requiring all member airlines to pass a safety audit by 2008 or be dropped from the organization. While nearly 100 carriers worldwide have already passed the audit, IATA says that just two airlines in sub-Saharan Africa have done so—Kenya Airways and South African Airways. Conceding that the expense may be a problem, IATA is offering grants to help developing countries pay for the audits.

Air-traffic control is another sore spot: Some African airspace is not covered by radar, and IATA reports that a plan for a "Cape to Cairo" air-traffic-

control network has been stalled by a lack of cooperation among countries. One solution may be to implement a satellite-based navigational system, but doing so could take years. Realistically, any solution to Africa's aviation problems will take time: Five years ago, the U.S. Department of Transportation announced a "Safe Skies for Africa" initiative that was to include technical support from the FAA. Asked recently what had transpired since then, DOT responded that it was too early to comment.

Travelers wary of flying African airlines and weary of traveling to Europe to connect to Africa-bound flights may soon find relief: In December, Delta plans to launch direct service from the United States to Dakar and Johannesburg.

AIR SAFETY