

13 April 2019

Photography trip report to Zimbabwe: emotions and wildlife at Mana Pools

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About the tour

Tour	Photography tour to Zimbabwe: wildlife of Mana Pools
When	11/10/2019 - 23/10/2019
Number of travelers	5 - 6
Guide	& & & & & & & & &

In the first half of October 2017, STARLING tour guide and wildlife photographer Carole Deschuymere traveled to Zimbabwe with six enthusiastic nature photographers. Destination: Mana Pools and Victoria Falls. Goal: to take a huge amount of beautiful photos and experience African wildlife up close. Wondering if those expectations were met? Read the report by participant Birgen Ryckbosch and dream away with the fantastic photos he gave us.

Warm welcome in Zimbabwe

On October 2nd it was finally that time: the journey I had – for so long – been looking forward to!

On the way to our first stop in beautiful Harare, we immediately noticed the blissful African temperatures as well as the purple trees. The capital of Zimbabwe was just a stopover for us, but it did us good after the flights.

We stayed at the Armadale Lodge, where we received a warm welcome and the keys to our cottages. They were decorated very attractively, with a beautiful garden and swimming pool around it. After freshening up we were served a delicious three-course menu by the pool and we could already dream a little about everything that awaited us. Unfortunately we could not continue to enjoy this for a long time as the next morning a six-hour drive to Mana Pools awaited us.

Classic stop for photographers: hamburger at 9 a.m.

So the next morning we got up early and with an extensive breakfast we decided to do something a little different than planned. Instead of driving six hours, we chose to do the second half of the trip with a motorboat on the Zambezi river. That way we could already do a safari on the water.

And then came that time: our van was ready. The first part of the trip could start. Halfway through the ride we stopped at Lion's Den, a restaurant known for the best burgers in the entire region. And yes, they were fantastic, even if it was only between 8 and 9 in the morning! This place is apparently a regular stop for many photographers who venture into Mana Pools.

Spectacular boat tour with first wildlife

On the Zambezi river we met Kevin, the owner of the camp. He brought us into Mana Pools with his two boats. On the way on the water



we already got a very nice sighting from countless elephants that swam from one island to the other, masses of hippos standing in the water as well as on the islands and various bird species. This was already quite a spectacle for us, but it just had to start still!

The boat trip took a little longer than expected: we could not stop taking pictures of all the wonderful things we encountered along the way.

Two elephants playing in the water during the hottest moment of the day. © Carole Deschuymer

Taking a shower under the open sky, hippos among the tents

Back on land our jeep had been waiting for us for a while and we were kindly welcomed. All our luggage was transferred for a ride through the magical forest to our camp. Once there, our tents were divided, which actually had everything that was needed. Who can say that in a place like Mana Pools they have taken a shower under the open sky or went to the toilet ... with the risk that an elephant would come to have a sip from your toilet! The idea alone made it exciting to just wash your body ...

And what a view! We looked straight from our tents on to the Zambezi river and the beautiful mountains beyond there that were trying to hide in the blue mist. A breathtaking view. Everyone had settled him- or herself and we were expected in the large communal tent that was very cozy with a minibar, seats and a long table.

After our delicious meal it was time to go over the next day and experience the first night in our tents. And yes, it was exciting! With hippos walking around our tent and elephants walking between our tents to litter up the pods of the albida trees. The sounds were exciting and yet soothing (for me personally then).

The savage power of a hippo, shown on screen. © Carole Deschuymer

First real safari, magical photo opportunities

The next morning it was time to experience the first real safari day. Early in the morning, a quick toast baked on an open fire, a fruit juice or yogurt added and we were gone. It was beautiful! Real wildlife, both animal and nature. Something we certainly do not see where we're from. The trees that provided picturesque backdrops for taking powerful pictures, the blue hue over the photo's and possibly a beautiful animal standing there and your day couldn't go wrong anymore.

Easy afternoons, beautiful evening light

Every day we saw different things, in terms of air, the fog, the light and then of course the different animals. All of them were beautiful observations. The afternoons were our moments of rest back in the camp. For one afternoon nap and for the other time to view photos on the computer and possibly obtain information and advice from our guide on how we can do it next time to make it even better. Then it was time to leave again and see if we could take beautiful pictures with the evening light that started to come on. And yes, every moment there was one to shoot beautiful images.

Elephant during sunset. © Carole Deschuymer

Lion prey

One of the following mornings at the table with our yogurt we heard the baboons sound the alarm, a sign that something was happening all of a sudden, our toast still in our hands, we were already in the jeep en route to hopefully a unique view ... unfortunately nothing . We did come across a carcass of a buffalo that had fallen prey the night before, probably by lions, but we didn't see them. There was a hyena around the carcass and a handful of vultures. It is a shame that we haven't been able to see anything else, but many more days were ahead.

A spotted hyena leaves with a piece of prey. © Carole Deschuymer

Adrenaline as never before

Another morning we were even more lucky and suddenly came across a whole group of wild dogs, after which we carefully got out of the car and lay down to enjoy the beautiful view of how they awoke and began to greet each other ... little by little we, just like soldiers, moved closer to take even better photos. We were less than ten meters from these beautiful animals!



We could watch it for hours. Being so close to these animals gives you a shot of adrenaline that you've probably never experienced in your life and it didn't stop there. For example, we stopped for a few elephants that we saw walking around and sat down with our cameras hoping they would come our way and yes, they even came so close that you couldn't take a photo anymore !!! One of these mastodons was less than two meters away from me!

Afraid, happy, ecstatic... you didn't really know how to handle your feelings at the time, but when he was gone, you realized what a special moment you just experienced. And we have had the opportunity to experience several of those moments. Two lions to the left of you and one to the right of you and one almost in between ... wild dogs that were just devouring prey right in front of you ...

Those yellow eyes © Carole Deschuymere

Every evening we could enjoy the wonderful things that we had experienced during the day by sitting at the campfire with a gin and tonic. Mana Pools has a lot to offer and I can keep talking about it for hours and days.

Africa from the water

After this it was time to leave for Lake Kariba.

Our journey to Lake Kariba started just like in the beginning with the motor boats that brought us back to our departure place. Once there, the bus continued to Kariba. Once arrived at the port we were taken to our houseboat. Luxurious rooms with air conditioning, a beautiful deck with a bar, a jacuzzi and a pontoon at the back where we then spent two days on the lake from one place to another. Beautiful views with the dead trees that were just above the water in some places and again made for top pictures. There was plenty of wildlife to be seen there too, and there was also plenty to see for birders.

An elephant in the landscape. © Carole Deschuymere

That's how it went from kingfishers over a lost pelican to a European white stork! We even came across red elephants and no, it was not because of the drink that was present on board, but because of the red sandy soil! Sunset and sunrise were a beautiful spectacle from the water! Unfortunately, that also ended and it was time to leave for Victoria Falls.

Everyone was ready to go with the houseboat to the airport which was close to the water. A little walk and our plane was already waiting A farewell to real life and hop on to the concrete world that also had its beautiful sides of course!

Impressive landscapes

Arrived in a cozy town with many shops and a patio here and there. We stopped at the hotel, and what for a hotel! Equipped with every luxury and we hadn't seen the rooms yet! This was really to prepare us for the way back home! When opening the patio door, the monkeys suddenly jumped from one balustrade to the other, warthogs walked around in the garden, it seemed all possible there. And if you looked a little further away, you could already see the mist rise from the falls. In other words: a breathtaking view!

I haven't seen many waterfalls but when you see one... impressive! And apparently the one we saw was only half her normal volume due to the dry season! We stayed there one evening and morning to take pictures of the dancing water that created beautiful rainbows and the small rain forest that we encountered on the road with various bird and flower species.

The sun sets along the mountains of Zimbabwe. © Carole Deschuymere

Goodbye Africa

Our last evening arrived, quickly reserved in a local restaurant to enjoy the African music and the delicious food for a last time. Now the most painful moment had arrived, going home again... Saying goodbye was the most difficult for me personally, once at home the grieving could begin and hoping for a return at some point, cause as far as I'm concerned, that'll definitely happen!

I would like to thank the STARLING team for making this dream trip come true for me, together with our passionate, professional and pleasant tour guide/photographer Carole Deschuymere.

Want to experience this trip yourself? It's possible! Click here for info about the [photography tour to Mana Pools in Zimbabwe 2019](#).

