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MANA POOLS **KARIBA and MATUSADONA**

12 DAY TRIP 24 September to 5 October 2012

"There's tranquility in the African Bush that creeps up unexpectedly and nestles in your soul. Maybe it is because nature is so close - the wildlife and the birds, the wind in the trees- or maybe it's just Africa and its rhythms"-Anon



Easily the largest river in our part of the continent, the Zambezi flows 2,524 km across Central Africa before meeting the sea just above Beira in Mozambique. In the process it passes through, or borders, Zambia, Namibia, Zimbabwe and Mozambique

The Zambezi is a life force supporting great numbers of hippos and

huge crocodiles that resemble floating logs. Many people come here to fish for tiger fish, perch, bream and catfish.

THE DESTINATIONS

Mana Pools (lower Zambezi)



The lower Zambezi Valley is one of the last great wildernesses in Africa. The area stretches from the Kariba Gorge in the north to Cahora Bassa in the south. The Zimbabwean side of the valley is, at places 70km wide and is almost entirely uninhabited, as much of the area is in the national parks.

The best known national park is **Mana Pools**, a world heritage site.

The meanders of the Zambezi in years gone by have left behind the remains of old ox-bows, shaping small seasonal pools scattered over an area of 2,000 square kilometres. The Park is named after the four main pools on the old riverbed, with Mana meaning “four” in the Shona language. The pools support a variety of game and numerous species of birds, along with the unique vegetation of the Zambezi valley, dominated by Nyala Berry and Natal Mahogany.

This portion of the Zambezi Valley is a true wilderness area with one of the highest dry-season concentrations of game in Africa. The *big Five* mammals all call this region home, as does the endangered African Wild Dog. In the drier months (May-September) the wildlife is drawn to the river as most inland sources dry up. At this time great herds of elephant, buffalo and antelope can be seen on the river banks. The open Albida woodland provides good visibility and allows visitors the unique privilege of walking escorted by a guide or unaccompanied in an area with carnivores and larger mammals.

Mana Pools also abounds with over 300 species of birds. During August to December the banks of the Zambezi are burrowed by nesting Carmine, White-fronted and Little Bee-eaters. Colourful kingfishers include Malachite, Brown-hooded, Grey-headed, Woodland, Pied and Giant. African Skimmer, Goliath Heron and Black Egret are also found along the river.



Our home for the first two nights of our trip is Tiger Safaris Camp, on the banks of the Zambezi, some 40 km below the dam wall. The camp is easily accessible while still being wild enough to have resident lion and elephant strolling through. The chalets are all situated on the river allowing easy access to the river for some truly sensational birding and game viewing.

Accommodation in Mana Pools is in self-catering lodges located on the Zambezi River. The camp has stunning views across the river to the Zambian escarpment beyond, with an almost endless parade of birds and animals on offer on the surrounding floodplain and islands in front of camp

From the camp we are able to walk unaccompanied by guides in the open Albida woodland because visibility is good and there is little danger of being surprised by dangerous animals.

Kariba and Matusadona

The construction of **Lake Kariba** in the late 1950s finally tamed the Zambezi, and this was followed by the completion of another great dam midway between Kariba and the ocean, being Cahora Bassa in Mozambique.

Kariba Recreational Park contains one of the largest man-made lakes in the world, created by a hydroelectric dam built to provide power to both Zimbabwe and Zambia. The lake has a surface area of 5,000 square kilometres and a maximum depth of 116 metres. It extends to a length of 282 kilometres with an average width of about 32 kilometres. Kariba supports a successful fishing industry and the annual Tiger

International Tournament is held here, drawing fishermen from all over the world to pit their wits against the cunning and fighting tiger fish. The main fish in the lake is kapenta, or the Lake Tanganyika sardine, which was introduced in the early 1960s from Zambia.

Stunning sunsets are a distinctive feature of Kariba, as are the bleached skeletal trunks and bare branches of dead trees that were drowned by the flooding of the lake all those years ago. They make excellent perches for fish eagles, cormorants and other water birds.

There is considerable wildlife on the banks of the lake including elephant, buffalo, crocodile, impala and common waterbuck

Matusadona National Park lies along the southern shores of Lake Kariba and is bounded in the west by the Umi River and in the east by the dramatic Sanyati Gorge. The Park takes its name from the local Matuzviadonha Hills and is a stunning combination of flat plains and rugged mountain country. The area is a photographers dream with “drowned forests” containing fossilised trees still standing from when the dam was flooded. Sunsets are irresistible

Large herds of elephant and buffalo inhabit the area, along with plentiful antelope and lion. There is also a small population of the endangered black rhinoceros. The Park is home to what is considered to be the highest concentration of lion per square kilometre in Africa – even greater than the Ngorongoro Crater of Tanzania. Leopard, hyena, cheetah and other predators also occur in good numbers throughout the Park.

Bird life is compelling, with over 240 species recorded in the Park.

Inquisitive yellow-billed kites swoop down to have a look at you and other raptors and vultures circle high in the thermals. Carmine bee-eaters flit about in a purple blur as they emerge from the sandbank pitted with their nesting holes.

African Fish eagle is common along the lake shore, and there are good populations of Grey and Goliath Herons, Augur Buzzard, Verreaux’s Eagle, Bronze-winged, Double-banded and Three-banded Coursers, Trumpeter and Crowned Hornbills, Great Egrets and Saddle-billed Storks. Waders are generally plentiful and there are notable populations of Osprey, Woolly-necked Stork and African Openbill, White-crowned Lapwing and Collared Pratincole. Several large colonies of Darters and Reed Cormorants can be found within the many fossilised trees on the lake.

We spend two nights at Spurwing Island Lodge, situated on Lake Kariba and overlooked by the majestic Matusadona Mountains.

The lodge offers a range of activities including scenic boat trips and game viewing on foot, by boat or Landrover.

BIRDING ATTRACTIONS

Osprey, Verreaux's Eagle, Ayres's Hawk-Eagle, Western Banded Snake-Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, Red-necked Falcon, Dickinson's Kestrel, African Cuckoo Hawk, Verreaux's Eagle-Owl, African Wood-Owl, Southern White-faced Scops-Owl, Pennant-winged Nightjar, Grey-headed Parrot, Rufous-bellied Heron, White-crowned Lapwing, Long-toed Lapwing, African Skimmer, Rock Pratincole, Collared Pratincole, Collared Palm-Thrush, White-browed Coucal, Yellow-billed Oxpecker, Orange-winged Pytilia, Bohm's Spinetail, Mottled Spinetail, Racket-tailed Roller, Arnot's Chat, Lilian's Lovebird, African Golden Oriole, Eastern Nicator, Orange-winged Pytilia, Livingstone's Flycatcher, Black-throated Wattle-eye, Red-throated Twinspot, Shelley's Sunbird, Purple-banded Sunbird, Northern Grey-headed Sparrow.

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