

Victoria Falls

July 21



While spending 3 months in Singapore we took a 3 week trip to Africa - airfare component was part of a return SYD-SIN return so did not cost us anything. First stop was Victoria Falls.

VICTORIA FALLS

21/07/06

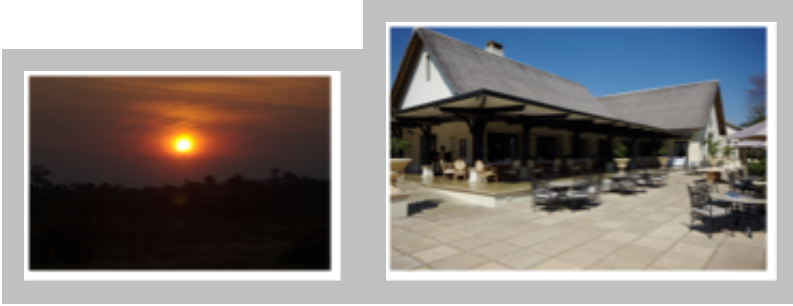
We left SIN on flight SQ478 at 2:00 AM !!! In spite of our understanding to the contrary the 777 had Sky Beds in Business Class. Good flight, friendly service, usual pretty ordinary SQ food. We both took a sleeping pill so managed to get a few hours of sleep. Arrived Jo'burg at 7:00 AM - welcome to Africa - waited 5+ minutes on air-bridge as door was locked.

Got through immigration and customs (referred to as I & C henceforth) quite quickly - and steeled ourselves for a 5 hour layover. Checked-in with Nationwide Airlines about 8:30 AM but were unable to get on an earlier flight - fully booked !!

Dieter sussed out the lounge situation and sweet talked his way into the Virgin lounge - very swish - great service, ultra modern, SQ and Qantas could learn a few things.

Boarded Nationwide flight to Livingstone in Zambia on time at 12:30PM for the 1.5-hour flight. Full plane (mainly holiday makers) - great service again - snacks and free drinks. Arrived Livingstone on time at 2:00PM again got through I & C quickly. Our pickup mini-bus was waiting as planned - short 15 minutes trip to the Royal Livingstone Hotel with "guided" drive-by tour of Livingstone town on the way.

Hotel



The Royal Livingstone Hotel exceeded our expectations – right on the banks of the Zambezi River, 10 minutes walk to Victoria Falls. The hotel's main complex looks like a colonial mansion – every detail just perfect. It is within a national park so monkeys and zebras wander the grounds with Hippos lounging in the river – some less than 100 meters from the “Sundowner” deck.

Sundowners on this deck would have to rate a 10 out of 10 – wonderful African sunset, zebras grazing on the manicured lawns only meters away, monkeys jumping all over the place. A large bonfire burning to ward off the chill of the evening and a great flutist playing our favorite songs. A couple of Mosi beers and G&Ts – wonderful !!! Also, the free canapés were top notch.

Food

Dinner at the Royal Livingstone was in the beautiful dining room – with inside and outside dining – we sat outside in spite of the cool evening. The food and particularly the wine was quite expensive – 2 mains, 1 dessert and 2 glasses of wine each was \$US120. Unfortunately the food really lets the place down – Dieter's flet steak seemed to have been steamed not grilled and my grilled fish was very dry and tasteless.

The buffet and a la carte breakfast was excellent making up for the disappointing dinner.

Activities

On the first morning we got up early for a walk to the falls before brekkie. Pat's first view – very spectacular. After breakfast – we did a full falls walk with camera and jackets.

After an afternoon kip and diary updating – we went off for a sunset cruise on the Africa Queen. At first we thought we had fallen for the real el-touristco tour – the African Queen was a real old style double decker river cruise boat. But we were very pleasantly surprised – it was very beautiful – we got a great seat (wicker arm chairs at polished timber tables) – all drinks and canapés were included. Of course the best part of the cruise was the wildlife along the river. It started with a group of hippos then a small heard of elephants at the

river side drinking – including several babies and juveniles, on the return we saw 2 (very rare) white rhinos also drinking by the water's edge then the herd of elephants crossing the river – looked fantastic – unfortunately one of the babies got left behind.

Back to hotel – late – it was almost 7PM so we had to rush to dinner. The food was much better this evening – 2 entrees, and we both had a pasta dish for the main.

The following morning we were up early again for showers then another excellent breakfast – fruit, then Dieter had poached eggs and I had scrambled eggs with smoked salmon – very delicate – gallons of coffee.

Then off for the first activity of the day – a morning trip to Zimbabwe to see the falls from that side. We had booked a car and driver – you can walk but we had decided it would take too long. On leaving the hotel we saw (more) zebras, some giraffes and antelope in the bush.

This half-day sojourn was not a cheap visit – visa was \$US30 pp + falls entry of \$US20 pp + car & driver = \$US40 + road tax of \$US10. It was all worth it the falls from this side are much more spectacular – we walked along the falls for about 1 hour 15 minutes – then to the famous Victoria Falls Hotel – about 1KM away. Dieter stayed here nearly 40 years ago – fortunately they have done a few renovations over the years and while the hotel retains it's colonial appeal it is somewhat a "crumbling splendour" – we were happy with our decision (which we had agonised over) to stay at the Royal Livingstone on the Zambian side.

Since it was almost mid-day when we got the hotel we stopped for a drink – 2 Zambezi's (the local beer) and one large mineral water cost Zim \$ 3,300,000.00 or \$US15 in real money.

On leaving the Vic Falls Hotel we saw 3 warthogs grazing on the lawn – so cute !! We also saw a small antelope along the falls walk.

So back to the RLH for lunch at the bar again – we then exchanged our walking tour of the Zambian side of the falls for High Tea on Livingstone Island.

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