

In the heart of Africa, within the tropics, is the landlocked country of Zambia. Zambia is truly central Africa, being equidistant from both the Atlantic and Indian Oceans.

Zambia covers about 752,610 square kilometres, making it only slightly smaller than the United Kingdom and France combined, almost twice the area of Zimbabwe, but only two thirds the size of South Africa.

Most of Zambia is between 1000 and 1600 meters above sea level, which contributes to Zambia having one of the best climates in Africa, if not the world. The valleys of the Zambezi, Kafue and Luangwa rivers intersect the country. Zambia has two great lakes on its borders, Tanganyika in the far north and the man-made Kariba in the south.

The Climate

The climate of Zambia has three separate periods: The hot, wet season from about November through to April, when there are often torrential downpours in the late afternoon; the cool, dry season between May and August, covering what passes for the Zambian winter, when the temperature very seldom drops below 8-10°C, and from September to October, when it gets progressively hotter. October is referred to as 'Suicide Month,' when the humidity builds yet the rains do not fall. The river valleys are always a great deal hotter than the rest of the country, with the temperatures often reaching above 40°C.

The Economy

Zambia's economy has historically been very dependent on mining and refining of non-ferrous metals of which copper has been the most important. Falling world copper prices in the 1970's and the economic policies of the Kenneth Kaunda government led to a very marked decline in living standards, and a partial collapse of much of the national infrastructure. The return to multi-party democratic elections in 1991 brought the Frederick Chiluba government to power on an economic reform manifesto. Major changes occurred including privatisation of much state-owned industry and the abolition of exchange controls, but corruption became widespread. The Levy Mwanawasa government came to power in 2001 with a pledge to expunge corruption, and the economy has grown substantially in recent years. Rupiah Banda became President in 2008 following the sudden death of Levy Mwanawasa. The government is working to diversify the economy and has recently granted licenses to international companies to prospect for a range of minerals.

The Geography

Zambia is one of the most urbanised countries in sub-Saharan Africa with over 40% of the population living in cities and towns along the main communications corridors. Of these Lusaka, the capital, in the centre of the country, and the Copperbelt towns and cities in the north are the largest population centres.

Rural Zambia is sparsely populated and much of the land area is designated as national parks, Luangwa and Kafue National Parks being the best known.

Luangwa National Park

The Luangwa National Park is in the Luangwa river valley in the east of Zambia. It is split into two, North Luangwa and South Luangwa, and is one of the largest parks of Africa, with a wide variety of game. The predators - lion, leopard, hyena and wild dog can be found in the park, with lion being the one most likely to be seen during the day. Luangwa has a large number of herbivores which survive on the valley's rich vegetation. Large herds of elephant and buffalo roam the park, giving the visitor the best chance of seeing most of Africa's "big five." Walking safaris have been offered in the Luangwa Park for most of the time the park has been in existence. This gives a true impression of wild Africa. There are a number of sub-species of animals found in the park - Thornicroft's giraffe, Cookson's wildebeest and Crawshay's zebra are a few of Luangwa's specialities. There are a large number of other antelope in the valley, including bushbuck, eland, kudu, roan and sable.

Kafue National Park

The Kafue National Park is situated in the center of the country and is about two and a half times the size of South Luangwa. The Kafue river runs through the northern part of the park and then forms the eastern boundary of most of the rest of the park. At the point that the Kafue turns into an easterly flow is the Itezhi-Tezhi dam which was built in the 70's to help with the country's electricity supply. The Kafue National Park has a superb range of antelope spread throughout the park and you will have to travel throughout the park if you wish to see them all. In the north of the park is the Busanga Swamps, where the secretive Sitatunga makes its home. The Sitatunga is a very shy antelope that will even hide under the water, with just its nostrils showing, to get away from any perceived threats. Further south are the Busanga Plains, where there are large herds of red lechwe and puku. In the rest of the park kudu, eland, hartebeest, reedbuck, and waterbuck are often seen. The park has a full complement of predators - lion, leopard, spotted hyena, cheetah and wild dog.