



OUT OF AFRICA

HIGH TEA AT ZIMBABWE'S VICTORIA FALLS

Writer / Photography: **Cindy-Lou Dale**

With its elegant Edwardian decor, majestic views, and refined Edwardian architecture, High Tea on the Stanley's Terrace of the Victoria Falls Hotel, possibly the oldest hotel in Africa, stands out head and shoulders above from the rest.

The iconic hotel is a neo-colonial gem with a courtyard entrance overlooking lily ponds, lush flowering shrubs and palm trees. This leads through to several secluded lounges and delivers you to the renowned Stanley's Terrace. From the terrace the views across the Victoria Falls Bridge, which connects Zambia to Zimbabwe, are uninterrupted. At certain times of the year, massive plumes of waterfall spray rise several hundred metres above it.

I asked Head Waiter, Wilbert Mazana about the history of the bridge. He explained that back in the day, travelling to the interior of Africa, before the advent of the railway, was near impossible. On land the journey between Cape Town and Victoria

Falls could take the better part of four months. On a train though, it would take just a little more than four days. By 1904 the railhead from Cairo had reached the Zambezi River and needed a bridge to be built to cross the chasm. It was the dream of Cecil John Rhodes (English mining magnet and politician, who served as Prime Minister of the Cape Colony from 1890-1896), to build such a bridge. He contracted the Cleveland Bridge Company, a British firm, who constructed it in just 14 months.

Whilst the bridge was being built the Victoria Falls Hotel was constructed, initially to house twenty of the engineers working on the bridge. Originally it was a simple long structure of wood and corrugated iron, containing a dining

room and bar, bedrooms and an office. Today the 149-room Victoria Falls Hotel is one of the most famous luxury hotels in the world and is the preferred African address for members of the Royal family, statesmen, and celebrities from around the world.

Sitting under an umbrella on the wide stone patio of the Stanley's Terrace, soaking up the ambiance, I pondered the immense landscaped garden which stretched down to views of the Victoria Falls Bridge, the Zambezi River below, and the 'smoke that thunders' (water spray from the Victoria Falls). Occasionally warthogs would trot across the lawn then, on bended knees, snuffle out grubs from under the ancient trees.

The sophisticated clink of silverware on vintage bone china, and the approaching indulgences, upheld my resolve to skip lunch. After all, taking High Tea at the Victoria Falls Hotel is a tradition that cannot be missed.

I asked Wilbert about the Falls: "Oh madam, these Falls are like no other in the world." He turned to look at the Falls,

speaking to them. "Madam, our Victoria Falls, she is a natural wonder that defies description. Every day her turbulent waters gush more than 700-million litres over a 110-metre-high gorge. The lush rainforest over there, she is teeming with wildlife, prevalent especially at dawn. If madam wants, I could arrange a guide to take you there and view our Falls from numerous observation points." We struck a deal, and he went off to arrange it.

The selection of teas on the menu are immense, with everything from a robust black Assam, to refined green varieties. And on the three-tier cake stand is a selection of dainty finger sandwiches - chicken mayonnaise on caraway seed bread, smoked salmon on brown seeded bread, thinly sliced beef sandwiches, and traditional cucumber sandwiches which are perfectly cut into triangles of cooling delight.

The pièce de résistance of course is the mouth-watering buttermilk scones, with strawberry jam, and clotted cream.

The best thing about taking High Tea on the Stanley's Terrace is the price. At just \$15 per person, you'll struggle to find a High Tea of this level of excellence anywhere in the world. Also, you don't need to be a hotel guest to partake in this pleasure. Booking ahead is a good idea but they always have space for walk-ins. It's not overly formal, yet formal enough to make it special. There is no dress code as such, but remember, you may be sitting amongst royalty, so girls, live your

Meryl Streep moment and put on that gorgeous sundress and top it off with a wide brimmed straw hat, and gentlemen, go full on Robert Redford and don those khaki chinos, polished shoes and a crisp white cotton shirt.

Taking the silver service High Tea on the Stanley's Terrace is the perfect way to experience a touch of colonial decadence, plus the unforgettable landmark vistas. Explore the stylish lobby, foliage-rich courtyard, and sophisticated lounges, and see the fascinating curios and memories that line the walls. It just oozes history.

The Victoria Falls Hotel is playing a leading role in an eco-initiative by developing community-based enterprises which contributes toward creating a clean and resilient conservation-economy. This is done by way of promoting green technologies that are efficient, affordable and user friendly. The initiative proposes to reduce pollution, avoid deforestation, make maximum use of areas already in use, rehabilitation of degraded land and create conservation commodities such as eco-compost and conservation-farmed produce. Special project emphasis is on food security for communities living in and around the wildlife areas with emphasis on well-managed, high yielding gardens and plots. Intensive eco-training teaches tillage practices together with the building of eco-compost worm units, organic vegetable gardens and rotational crop plots.

www.victoriafallshotel.com



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Based between Italy and the UK, Cindy-Lou Dale is a photojournalist with a passport full of questionable stamps and stories worth spilling over a good bottle of wine. Writing for major travel titles and trade journals worldwide, she covers everything from eco-escapes and food pilgrimages to luxury detours and self-drive expeditions gone gloriously off track. With a fondness for the road less maintained, Cindy believes the best travel writing smells faintly of dust, diesel and discovery - proof that real adventure begins the moment the GPS gives us.