

## Same, Old Zambia?

A man entered the front of the bus that I was riding in between Lusaka and Livingstone, Zambia, and stood as the bus took off from the stop. Our bus was a privately-owned, air-conditioned express bus that cost more than regular buses but had assigned seats and was on a strict arrival/departure schedule. After a few minutes, a man named John who was sitting kitty-corner from me questioned the man standing near the front.

“Excuse me sir, where is your ticket?”

“I’ll just be on for a little while.”

“I didn’t ask how long you’ll be on the bus, I asked where is your ticket. We have all bought tickets in advance. Also, it is illegal to stand on this bus it is a safety issue. The driver could get a ticket.”

“I paid the driver at the stop and I’ll sit on the floor if there is police around.”

“That’s not the point.” He turned to me, noticing the obvious – that I was a foreigner and asked, “Sir, what country?”

“U.S.”

“Where?”

“U.S.A.”

“What?”

“United States of America.”

“You mean America?”

“Yes, America.”

“In America, would they leave this man on the bus without a ticket?”

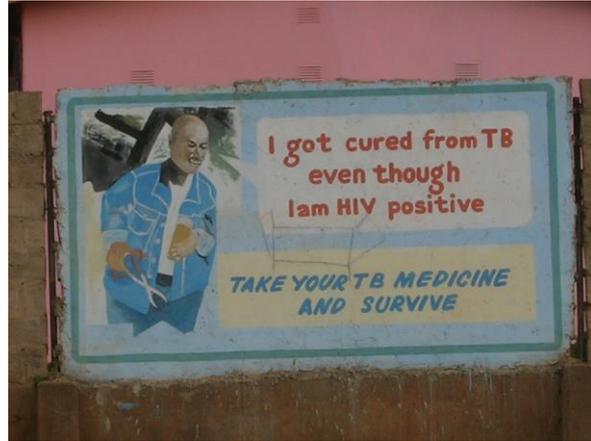
“Well, probably not. He doesn’t really have a ticket. But he’s not really hurting anything is he?” trying to be as diplomatic as possible.

“Yes, he is.” He then turned back to the man, “Sir, if we want to be as prosperous as America or Europe, we need to act as they do. We need a system where things are organized and not corrupt. Zambia will never move ahead if we stay the way we are.”

“I just want to see my mother,” joked the man standing in the front of the bus.

The debate between the two men was an intriguing one. How does Zambia change so that her citizens become more prosperous yet still remain Zambia? Others on the bus joined in the argument, most supporting the man near me, but a significant minority supporting the ticket-less man. The debate centered on corruption and “African time”, the idea that things will get done, eventually, but don’t set your watch to it. Africa time may be tradition but for those businesspeople who want to invest in Africa, or tourists who want to visit, this system can be discouraging. The argument was done in typical African fashion. It was light-hearted with a lot of joking, but both sides clearly made their point. Interestingly enough, the police did stop the bus for having a passenger who was not seated, but the driver bribed the officer just adding to the frustration of John.

The capital of Lusaka illustrates both sides of the debate. Although there is a lot of action and positives in the city, there are plenty of negatives also. Most of the activity is located along Cairo Road in which people can visit bars, restaurants, galleries, etc. The Zambia National Tourist Board located on this road was helpful and well organized. Not far from Cairo Road is the National Museum, which depicts the country's history. It includes the Chachacha rebellion, which led to independence, as well as a good art exhibit. In front of the museum is the Freedom Statue, a simple yet poignant monument of a black man with his arms raised, breaking the chains attached to his wrists. There are also several markets on the southern side of Cairo Road which are of interest to see.



Although the markets are interesting, they are also crowded and confusing and illustrate some of the negatives. The parks are big but include a lot of litter and homeless and unemployed people, who moved to the capital. The bus station has a luggage check but the queue turned into a pushing match at times. The departure times posted at the train station do not match the actual departure times and there are also cancellations.

Many tourists skip Lusaka altogether and only visit Livingstone. The main reason to visit Livingstone is its proximity to Victoria Falls, which is truly a wonder. It is one mile wide and over 300 feet tall, nearly twice as high as Niagara Falls. Visitors can get to the edge, just one step away from a 300-foot drop. A natural pool in the river is made due to rock formations, so visitors can sit in a pool and sip on wine about five feet from the edge. A little further upstream, it is possible to swim across the stream, which is an unnatural feeling; people are naturally pulled downriver to the falls. However, it is not deep so just standing up will ease any fear.



The actual journey to Vic Falls is also of interest. Many tours start from the Zambezi Sun, which is an upscale hotel that has zebras walking on its front lawn and the Zambezi River as part of its back lawn. On the Zambezi, there are many hippos and birds. Also, from the hotel one can see the mist from the Falls, which gives an idea of how massive the Falls are. Most boat trips to the Falls will stop for tea and biscuits at Livingstone Island, where Dr. Livingstone first witnessed the Falls. Also the trails around the actual falls are enjoyable, but due to the mist bring or rent a raincoat.

The city of Livingstone seems to have been designed specifically for tourists. Many of the restaurants serve pizza and ice cream, which can be surprisingly tasty after a few weeks of local food. The Livingstone Museum includes a life-size model of an African village and photos and personal items of Dr. David Livingstone, the 19<sup>th</sup> Century British explorer. There are heaps of travel agents and most hotels and hostels can help in making travel arrangements. Activities at or near the Falls include abseiling, canoeing, wildlife drives, a helicopter ride over the Falls and bungee jumping over 300 feet – the second-highest jump in the world.



Livingstone travel agents can also arrange trips to Jungle Junction, an extremely mellow complex located on Bovu Island, an island 30 miles from Livingstone. The trip starts with a truck ride from Livingstone and then a canoe trip to the remote island. Departing the canoe, one sees a bar and then an extensive library with several hammocks. Trails lead to small chalets or areas where you can pitch a tent. Visitors can self-cater or there is a restaurant with a resident

caracal, which looks like a big cat except you don't want to get scratched by it. Included in the trip is a sunset canoe trip as well as a walking trip to the neighboring villages. This trek is largely an excuse for the tour guide, George, to bum homemade wine and whiskey off his friends in the other villages; however, it's still a good look at these male-dominated village societies.

Jungle Junction is close to the border of Botswana, while Chipata to the east is the main Zambian border town next to Malawi. For a border town, Chipata is fairly pleasant and a good place to spend a lazy Sunday afternoon but probably doesn't warrant more than one day. There is a central market and an interesting mosque in the center. But of more interest is simply walking around the city and the neighboring area. Writing on the white-washed walls next to the road gives health advice about TB and AIDS, as well as beer advertisements. Also, there are some narrow roads to walk on and thus one can take a close and personal look at peoples' houses.

John should be proud of his country as Zambia has much to build on. The corruption is problematic and things aren't done on time or sometimes not at all. However, there are several reasons to visit the country. Livingstone is the most obvious attraction due to Vic Falls, but there is also the chaos of Lusaka and the tranquility of Jungle Junction. Hopefully Zambia will solve the problems it has, yet still remain Zambia.