



Mapping out the benefits of the Fifa World Cup is a learning curve

Put Foot

ANOTHER good thing about the Fifa World Cup (I daren't write just "World Cup" for fear of being clapped in irons by Fifa) is that our geography has improved.

We all probably knew where North and South Korea were, and had a vague idea about Uruguay, but Slovenia, Slovakia and Honduras? If you could point those out on an atlas full marks.

I was actually in Slovakia last year in its capital Bratislava. It's a tiny country sandwiched between Austria and the Czech Republic.

Thirty minutes drive from Vienna, stop at Bratislava to take a quick

look at the four-towered medieval castle, and then an hour to Prague. Nobody can quite remember why the Slovaks and the Czechs decided to split into two countries in 1993 (it was called the "Velvet Divorce") but everybody seems to speak the same language, eat the same sausages, drink the same beer, and get along just fine.

I didn't visit Slovenia, and have had to look it up (top right of Italy, below Austria and above Croatia). Serbia also gave me a bit of a problem. When I was at school (when dinosaurs roamed the earth) that rather sinister, complicated area of Eastern Europe was known darkly

as The Balkans.

I seem to remember a picture in my history book of a skulking man in a black cloak and wide-brimmed black hat with a round smoking bomb in his hand. So back to the atlas. Slovenia is squeezed between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Bulgaria. (You may have given up by now.)

Now to Honduras. No, it is not a bunch of islands somewhere in the Caribbean, but quite a portly country down below Mexico, next door to Guatemala.

I'm off to Guatemala in October so may just slip over the border and partake of tequila and tamales in

Tegucigalpa, the capital, but shall have to learn to pronounce it first.

Paraguay is challenging. My husband and I once fell foul of the Brazilian authorities at the Iguassu Falls and spent a night in a locked room just over the border in Paraguay.

It was like something out of a Graham Greene novel, with heavily stubbled border guards brandishing personal arsenals, lots of shouting, mosquitoes buzzing, a lazy fan circulating hot steamy air and no way out. Brazil wanted to deport us to Argentina but the Falklands War was on and we carried British passports so thought that wasn't a good idea.

After a fairly traumatic time, it all worked out for the best and the Paraguay authorities finally let us wander into the border town (name unknown and not on any map) where the streets were muddy and full of puddles and deep drains, and any amount of smuggled contraband was on sale. We bought a bottle of Bushmills and some Chanel Number 5.

Cameroon is gorgeous, one of the most beautiful countries in Africa, and when I lived in Nigeria we used to hop over the border to buy strawberries in Bamenda.

A couple of months ago I was on an open-topped bus in Paris and

asked the man next to me where he was from.

Bamenda, he replied cautiously, knowing full well I had no idea where it was. "I used to buy strawberries there!"

On the strength of that relationship we went and had several drinks in the hotel where Princess Di stayed on that fateful night and now are firm Facebook friends.

So it's worth swotting up on remote places. One day you might find yourself in Pusan or Pyongyang and if you can drop the names of a couple of World Cup players you might find yourself invited in for sushi.



KATE TURKINGTON

The water still thunders, as it did for Rhodes

A US dollar may be 30bn Zimbabwean dollars, but some things don't change, writes **Barbara Adair**

'ZIMBABWE, are you going there?" a friend asks as we drink freshly roasted rich Zimbabwean coffee. "Aren't you a bit nervous, what with all that is happening, and what about supporting a corrupt regime, how can you do it?"

"It's the conundrum," I reply, "only by going there will it normalise, only by not going will it normalise? And anyway I have always wanted to visit the falls."

And so I go; air ticket, hotel voucher for three nights, a boat trip on the Zambezi, all of this in one package, and for the price of one night in the Johannesburg Park Hyatt.

The road to the Victoria Falls Hotel is lonely, there are no trees, a vendor sits on the side of the road, there is no energy, just a bright sun. The hotel is white, thick walls set on high ground, below this a sloping watered lawn, a Gabar Goshawk drinks from a pond, a tall stone structure tells me that it is 6700 miles (10700km) to Cairo, and beyond this there is mist.

We follow the sign that says Victoria Falls. It takes us out of a small gate and away from the immaculate green garden into scrubby brown bush. On either side of the path the acacia trees lean inwards. "Careful," the guard tells us, "it has been reported they're here today, somewhere in the trees. You can't see them unless you almost walk into them they are so good at disguise."

I immediately think of bandits, this is a poor country, people are hungry.

"Sometimes on this path you come across elephants," he continues, "they are very big and can be dangerous, so be very careful."

We walk, the path is uneven, I kick a stone. Out of the bush emerge young boys; they are holding elephants, rhino, dollars: "We are hungry..." "Please buy something..." "R20..."

One young boy shows me beautifully carved animals, flowery bowls that have no scratch, smooth, another shows me a bank note, five hundred trillion dollars, a walking stick.

All around us these young men materialise, they are not threatening, they just want to sell something, their eyes are hungry. It's like running the gauntlet but without the danger: I do not feel threatened, only assailed.

We walk across a road that leads to the falls, then across the bridge that spans two countries, Zambia and Zimbabwe. I stand in "no man's land" and watch the Zambezi River; a rainbow, the sun shafts through the mist. I feel cold water on my shoulders. Another young man approaches us. "I can make sure that you have a good time at the falls," he says, "I can show you that they are a world wonder."

"I will go there tomorrow," I reply, "but tell me something about them."

"Step over the railway line, feel the mist in your face," he says, "do you know that Cecil John Rhodes, the Englishman who came here to make a lot of money, he built this railway line exactly at this point because he said that the white passengers, as they travelled on the train all the way from Cape Town to Cairo, should look out of the window at the spray and feel it in their blinded eyes."

I can feel the sound of the train as it thunders across the water, I imagine pink flushed delight.

We walk back, it is not far, but I have been walking for a long time. "Let's stop and have a Coke," I say to my friend. A vendor stands next to the taxi drivers' rusted cars.

Another man approaches us, "buy some dollars," he calls, "thirty billion for only one US".

I turn to the vendor: "How much is a Coke," I ask him.

"One US dollar," he replies.

"If I give a dollar to this man," I point to the man who wants to swop thirty billion dollars, "will you take thirty billion for a Coke?"

He laughs. "No," he says, "now we only take SA rands and US dollars."

"Sorry," I turn to the money seller, "I want a Coke and he will not take that money."

I am tired, so we ask the smoking taxi driver to take us back to the hotel. "Four US," he says and laughs again. He knows that we will pay the price as we are tired, the day has been long.

The Victoria Falls Hotel: a decaying opulence, a time warp, as I walk down the long wide corridor to my room I feel as if I have been transported back into a colonial time.

I look at the pictures. Stanley at the falls points northwards, he is discovering something new, something that no man has ever travelled to, for all men are European, none can be African, they are natives, people to conquer and barter with, a picture of Queen Mary and King Edward VII, the adolescent princesses stand at their side, the now queen of mighty England looks bemused and hot, the native porter who stands nearby with a portmanteau and a fan sweats.

The bedroom is large, a wide bed on one side and thick brocade curtains that hide the sumptuous gardens below, a chocolate waits for me on the pillow, the only glimpse I have of the 21st century is a television set on which CNN plays, it shows war, the ravages of a wasteland. I walk inside the bathroom, the soap is thick and orange, the tap that I turn on is solid brass, black and white tiles under my feet.

We walk to the Stanley Bar: "Let's have a cocktail," I say, "this is the kind of place where you drink cocktails." Above the bar is a picture of Stanley, his foot rests on the wide neck of an elephant, his rifle lies across his shoulders, two native porters carry long ivory tusks, blood seeps from the elephant's wounds, it is craven. The barman, who is dressed in black and white, asks us what we would like. I look at the cocktail menu, mango martini, sweet chilli chocolate rum, mint jellup, the list goes on. "I think a mango martini is what I want," I laugh, "in Africa martini is made with mangoes, not olives."

As I sip the beautiful taste and feel my head grow lighter: I watch the waiters outside on the veranda. All wear

"I can feel the sound of the train as it thunders across the water, I imagine pink flushed delight.

white gloves, they laugh politely; they serve as if ordained by God.

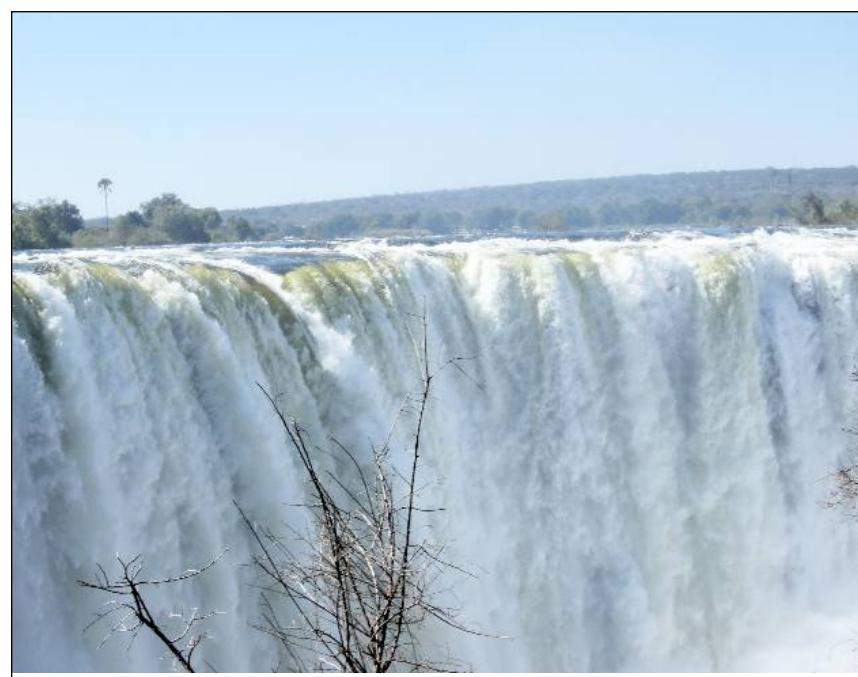
We walk around the hotel and into the Livingstone Room, already the frogs are beginning to sing from the pond outside, it is a melody that is both melancholy and joyful.

"Would you like to dine here



THE BRINK: A Zambian at the edge of the 110m main falls of the Victoria Falls on the Zambezi River, which forms the border between Zambia and Zimbabwe.

PICTURE: REUTERS



THUNDERING WATER: The mighty Victoria Falls.

PICTURE: BARBARA ADAIR



FADING COLONIAL BEAUTY: The Victoria Falls Hotel.

PICTURE: BARBARA ADAIR

tonight," the maitre'd asks us? "My name is Phillip, where do you come from?"

"South Africa," my friend replies.

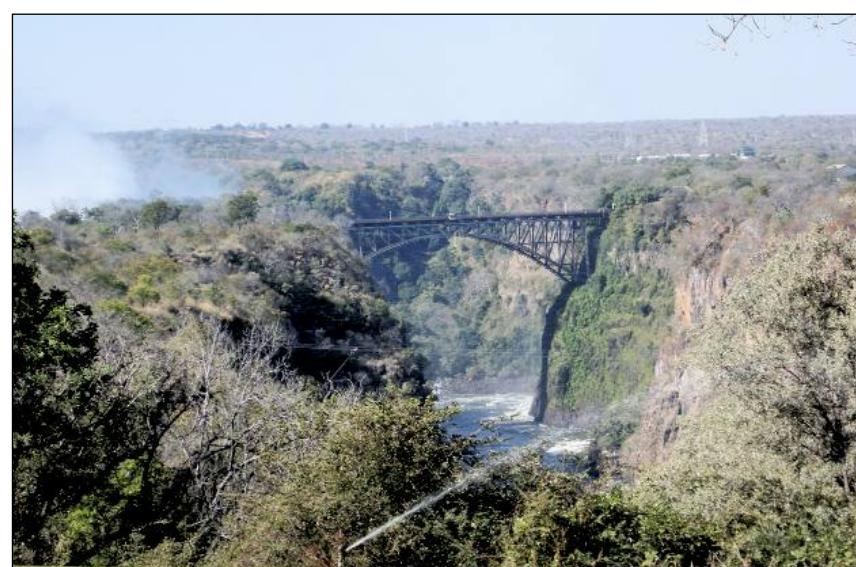
"Ah," he says, "my children are both there, the one is at the University of Johannesburg studying engineering and the other is in Polokwane studying marketing. Come, I will show you to your table."

The restaurant is bigger than three small Johannesburg homes, in its centre is a dance floor, a man sits at a piano and plays jazz sounds. There is no one inside it but us. The table is immaculate, the serviettes are so starched that as I pick one up to wipe a finger it crackles, the wine glasses are in the correct places and the heavy pewter cutlery is just the right distance apart.

"What can I get you? We do not have our Zimbabwean wine, guests do not like it, it is too rough, so try a South African one, oh, I forgot you drink this all the time, well try it anyway."

And no one comes into the restaurant, we are the only guests. And the piano player plays for us, for two hours he does not stop, he plays as if the audience was 25000-strong, he plays because he plays.

The next day the hotel fills up. The Common Market of Eastern and Southern Africa (Comesa) conference is being held nearby. Heads of state, bodyguards with earpieces and sunglasses, delegates from Libya, Kenya Sudan,



ONEACROSS: The Victoria Falls bridge, where Rhodes is reputed to have wanted Europeans to feel the mist from the falls in their faces.

PICTURE: BARBARA ADAIR

Ethiopia. There is no South African delegation; the new colonists have not joined the organisation. Men in black suits alight from Mercedes Benzes, cell-phones held to ears, women in distinct African designs. The elegant colonial grace of yesterday and the bemused free Africa of today; an acceptance of history, it happened, it cannot be erased.

The next day we walk the gauntlet, and what did not prey on us the day

before is here today. Three elephants cross the path; one reaches lazily into the acacia thorns and twists off a branch, another blows its trumpet and the third just stares at us. I am afraid to pass them. A man with a bag over his shoulder approaches, "they are not dangerous," he says, "unless one steps on you," he laughs, "today just walk by, they are doing what they do and you are doing what you do."

At the entrance to the falls two men approach us, "you will get wet, it is very wet down there," one says, "here, buy a raincoat." Two tourists emerge from the park gates, they are sodden. "Two for two dollars," he says.

The Victoria Falls stretches for 1.6km on the Zimbabwean side and 0.6km on the Zambian side. On the Zambian side it is short and dangerous, water and slippery bridges. On the Zimbabwean side it is elongated, winding paths are manicured, rain forest birds dart. The falls are indescribable, there are no words that can tell their magnificence, wide, long, deep, blue and green, rainbows, green trees appear and disappear in the mist. Is this the place to die, I wonder? If I had a terminal disease, what bliss to slip over the barrier and be swept away by the smoke that thunders.

After four hours of wondering and wandering and getting wet and sitting in the sun to dry and then getting wet again we leave. I am happy; there is something bigger than me, a mystery. Outside we walk past the taxi drivers, again I am tired, the driver who charged us four dollars the day before smiles at me. "Want a ride," he asks?

"We have no more money," my friend says, for we only have a hundred dollar note which must last another day. "Today you can have the ride for free," he says, "this is Africa, today I charge, tomorrow I don't."