



WE ARE VICTORIA FALLS PRESS RELEASE

'In absence of tourists, Victoria Falls residents come together to explore their own city'

**Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe
18, December, 2020**

December is usually one of the busiest periods for Zimbabwe's tourism hub of Victoria Falls, with typical hotel occupancies of around 90%. This year, following the downturn in tourism as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the tourism community has been hard hit. Businesses, livelihoods and local communities have all been impacted. In an extraordinary effort to show solidarity with small businesses and rekindle some of the inspiration that this sector can bring, local residents came together to play 'tourist' for a week of exploration and adventure.

The initiative, coordinated by 'We Are Victoria Falls', mobilised around 100 local members of the community - residents and players in the tourism industry - to step out and experience the activities in their 'backyard' that are normally offered to tourists.

"I think it's important to support our industry at the moment because it is the lifeblood of this town. And we all need to just really pull together". said Michelle Keefe, resident 'tourist' and owner of local business Africa Addict.

Experience and service providers opened their doors to groups of resident 'tourists', showcasing the best of the destination's 'hidden gems'. The complimentary experiences included canoeing safaris, game drives, cultural village visits, intimate guesthouse breakfasts, star-gazing, horse-back safaris and tours of Victoria Falls.

Many of the guests represented destination management companies in Victoria Falls who were able to enjoy first-hand the services of a potential future supplier, others were peers, competitors or members of the community who have been tirelessly working for the city's recovery from Covid-19.

Commenting on the initiative, Ms Tsika Mberi, Regional Manager of Zimbabwe Tourism Authority said "We have been 'wowed' again by our destination and feel renewed with energy to keep fighting."

In the long absence of tourist activity it has been widely reported that wildlife has been roaming undisturbed in areas of the Zambezi National Park – rarely witnessed at this typically busy time of year. On one of the game drives which took place along the Chamabonda Vlei-line within the Zambezi National Park, hundreds of buffalo, elephants and giraffe were sighted. "The buffalo! This was such a highlight for me" said Barbara Murasiranwa, local resident and Business Development and Corporate Affairs Director of Wild Horizons.



“It has been an intense week” said Shelley Cox of We Are Victoria Falls, “but one that has really brought out the best of this community. We all want to believe 2021 will be a better year, and I feel this week has rekindled some of that hope, and reaffirmed what a wonderful city we have here. I would love to see the community do something like this in future years as well! ”

Judith Dzimbahete, owner of Dzimbahwe Guest Lodge and one of the small businesses to invite in the city’s residents under this initiative said “I started this business three years ago. This has been my dream and I've loved that. What makes Victoria Falls different from all other towns and cities, is the people...”

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