

Gonarezhou National Park - The Epicenter of Jungle Life

Under the blistering heat, a breeding herd of elephants blocks the way and a cow nudges its calf under a huge baobab tree on the roadside. An irritated bull tells off a wandering calf in a no-nonsense mood, with a shriek but firm voice.



The elephants tolerate our presence for a few moments but as soon as their snorkeling trunks sniff us they retreat in polite disgust. A few meters away, giraffes forage the bush, heads up in indignation above stunted mopane bush shrubbery. The mopane bush shrubbery is level at about two meters high, on a browse line that looks as neatly trimmed as a schoolboy's new haircut.

At sunset, a lion roars, sending shivers down the spines of every living species there, particularly the impala that scamper for dear life and the big baboon that strides to a huge tree in a hunched and swaggering gait. Stubbornly looking back the huge baboon barks a loud "boohoo!" as if shouting obscenities to the king of the jungle, before climbing up a tree.



Thereafter, three lions scramble out of the silhouette mopane shade but immediately melt into the thicket of trees so fast and silently that not all of us are lucky to see their frosty-brown faces or blurs of tails. The impalas, kudu and waterbuck bound swiftly out of sight for, behold, the king of the jungle has spoken.

Then there is the appearance of python-like roots of sausage trees alongside the dry banks of Mwenezi River, the main source of water in the jungle. The Mwenezi River itself turns silver and gold with strips of sand and smoothened rocks between steep banks and quiet deep blue pools.

Once in a while a kingfisher eagle hovers over the pool in aerial acrobatics and shutter our illusion with a splash on the murky waters. One fish is gone!

This is Gonarezhou, Zimbabwe's gateway to the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park and epicentre of jungle life, where untamed wild animals roam wild and free. Gonarezhou is a perfect theatre of the jungle where those who have not experienced the jungle save for snippets in fiction films must go and experience the real Africa.



The national park is situated in the south-eastern lowveld of Zimbabwe and covers 5,033 square kilometers. Gonarezhou means "the place of elephants" and for real there are so many elephants that for you to spend a day without bumping into a herd of the grey mounds of flesh, you must really be cursed.

The park is extremely scenic and full of rugged and beautiful landscapes. Three major rivers - Save, Runde and Mwenezi - cut their courses through the park forming pools and natural oasis for hundreds of species of birds, wildlife and fish gather to feed and drink.

One of the most prominent and enduring natural features of the park is the beautiful Chilojo Cliffs. The magnificent red sandstone cliffs were formed through eons of erosion and they imposingly overlook the Runde River valley.

Then there are the Tababomvu (red) hills, the buffalo bend, Simuwini (the place of the baobab), Mabalauta (the spear-making tree) and Makokwani (the old person), Samalema Gorge, Matombo Pools, Rose Pools - places where one should never miss for either game or scenic viewing.

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Date: 2012-03-26

Article link:

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