

Botswana Emerges as an Up Market Safari Destinations

We look at what to expect on a Botswana safari. Find out why Botswana has emerged as an exclusive up market safari destination. In this country of seemingly endless open spaces, wildlife does not face stiff competition for land resources from man. As a result the animals have multiplied with a flourish



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1. Botswana Emerges as an Up Market Safari Destination

Botswana is a country of seemingly endless open spaces. Though it occupies an area the size of France, the human population is only 1.6 million. This is one country where wildlife does not face stiff competition for land resources from man. As a result the animals have multiplied with a flourish. Botswana can justifiably claim to host some of the finest game sanctuaries in Africa. The world's largest exporter of diamonds by value, the country is not under pressure to get in more tourists. And the government has adopted a deliberate policy of keeping visitor numbers low. The hidden hand of the market has responded by adjusting the price to reflect this reality. Botswana has therefore emerged as an exclusive up market safari destination.

Bill Clinton, together with his wife went on safari in Botswana in 1998. The power couple was greatly fascinated by the wildlife, and the serious games of life and death they play. Affirming his position on top of the food chain, the president ate for dinner some of the animal species he had watched earlier. His evening buffet included zebra, crocodile, impala in monkey sauce, and giraffe. "I tried it all", he declared with satisfaction. But the former American president is only one in a long line of heavy hitters to enjoy the wildlife havens of Botswana. Hollywood legends, Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor chose to remarry here, for example.

Botswana is dominated by the Kalahari Desert. It occupies 84% of the land area, mostly in the west, central and north of the country. But the Kalahari is not a desert in the Sahara sense. You find the occasional sand dune, but also substantial vegetation in the form of short thorn and scrub bush, trees and grasslands. Very little water though, and hence the desert tag. To the northwest, you find Okavango, the world's largest inland delta. The northeast is a land of gently rolling tablelands interrupted by granite hills and rock formations. The east and southeast, where 80% of the people live has more varied relief. And the rain clouds linger more and unburden themselves more freely, relative to the rest of the country.

Today Botswana is a peaceful, well-managed and relatively prosperous country. The country wealth per man indicator places among middle-income nations alongside Mexico and Russia and ahead of Brazil. But it has not always been so and the country has come along way. The San people (otherwise known bushmen) are believed to be the original inhabitants of Botswana. Their descendants survive to this day, some living as their forefathers did for most of the 30,000 years historians guess they have been around. Later –much later,

Bantu groups, prominent of which were the Tswana, became the masters of these realms.

The modern Botswana nation has been shaped by the alliances made in response to historical currents swirling in southern Africa in the eighteenth century. The rulers at the time aligned their interests with those of the British against the Boers who were approaching from the south and the Germans from the west. For the British, the value of the alliance was strategic and not much was expected in terms of economic advantage. And that is how the relationship resulted in the Bechuanaland Protectorate - the precursor of modern Botswana. The British remained in charge until independence in 1966.

The visitor to Botswana is drawn by the credible intelligence that abounds about the quality of its pristine wildlife sanctuaries. Chobe National Park, one of the finest game parks in Africa is located to the north east of the country. The park has the greatest variety of game anywhere in the country. That is why the busy Bill Clinton found himself at Chobe for his short safari. Wildlife thrives among the swamps and grasslands that stretch along the flood plains of the Chobe River. Occupying 10,560 square kilometers, it is particularly renowned for the great concentration and sheer abundance of its elephants, estimated to number 80,000.

The Chobe elephants are migratory and move along the Chobe River, their reliable redoubt in the dry season. African elephants are the largest among elephant species –and those at Chobe are the largest of them all. The population has gradually built up since the 1930's when wildlife in the area began to enjoy some sort of protection. The infamous trade in ivory, particularly in the 1970's and 80's encouraged the decimation of elephant populations in other parts of Africa. But the elephants of Chobe - thank God - were spared contact with the dirty hands of poachers. Other animals to see here include some of the usual suspects on an African safari - lion, cheetah, hippo buffalo, giraffe, antelope, jackal, warthog, hyena, crocodile, zebra. The birdlife is also diverse. Cruising or driving along the Chobe River, you get the best view of the animals.

The Savuti Marshes of Chobe are reputed to have the largest predator population density in southern Africa. The marshes have the textbook features that draw predators. In a flat and hostile environment, they provide a place where wildebeest, buffalo, zebra and many species of antelope congregate for a drink. The predators – cheetahs, leopards, lions, wild dogs, hyenas, wild dogs, and jackals - naturally follow. Some predators such as lion tend to be rather lazy and the setting here is a gift. The usual entry point for Chobe is Kasane, which is located about 800km north of Gaborone. You get here by flying from Gaborone, Maun or Victoria Falls in neighbouring Zimbabwe. Camps and lodges can be found throughout the park.

The Okavango Delta, in the north west of Botswana is the largest inland delta in the world. Spreading over 15,000 square kilometers, it is formed as the flow of the Okavango River slows down and soaks into the sands. That is why it is referred to as 'the river which never finds the sea'. The network of channels, oxbow lakes, lagoons, swamps and islands that arise is very pleasing to the eye. But that is not all of Okavango's bounty. The delta is filled with wildlife - wildebeest, giraffe, hippo, elephant, zebra and buffalo have all found a home here. The birds too are plenty, more than 550 types, some of which live on the trees and others on the water.

The best place to see wildlife in Okavango is within the spectacular Moremi Wildlife Reserve. The reserve lies in the centre of the delta and occupies 3,000 square kilometres. In Moremi you view game aboard a vehicle or by gliding on a *makoro* (dugout canoe) or other type of canoe. Accommodation is available in camps and lodges within the delta area. In Moremi itself, you can stay in tented campsites but no permanent camps or lodges are allowed.

If you are interested in culture, take a break at Chief's Island, the largest in the delta, and see ancient rock paintings. The paintings were presumably executed by the artistically inclined forebearers on the San people. The Okavango Delta should be avoided in summer, especially December to March, when most of the camps are closed down. At that time, it is very hot and humid - temperatures rise above 38°C, and thunderstorms unleash daily. You enter Okavango through Maun - the delta's principal town, by flying or taking a bus from Gaborone, 600 km away.

Visitors to either Chobe or Okavango may wish to add on a visit to Victoria Falls. Victoria Falls is actually in Zimbabwe but is easily accessible from the northern part of Botswana. Victoria Falls is one of the most spectacular waterfalls in the world and one of Africa's prime attractions. Situated on the border of Zimbabwe and Zambia, the falls occur where the steadily flowing Zambezi River, unwarned, casually approaches and then suddenly plunges down a series of basalt gorges in a breathtaking display of several waterfalls. Mist and thunder emanating from the falls can be witnessed from far off.

The spray from the falls sustains the rain forest on the opposite wall of basalt and creates an almost constant rainbow visible even by the light of the moon. The falls are best seen from the air, thus activities such as helicopter flights, balloon rides and micro-lighting over the falls are a must do. Other exciting activities available are bungee jumping off the bridge - which also gives a spectacular view down the gorge, canoeing, white water rafting, river safaris, elephant back safaris and many more. Be sure to review our offers for a [Botswana safari](#).

Adventure seekers, who travel not merely to convenient places, may wish to check out the Makgadikgadi Salt Pans. The shallow salt pans cover about 6,500 square kilometres and rank among the largest in the world. The atmosphere here is admittedly surreal, with shimmering mirages in a vast open terrain broken only by a few baobab trees. Bird watchers in particular will be intrigued at the unusual environment as they watch numerous flamingos and pelicans. The pans occupy the area between Francistown (410 km north east of Gaborone) and the Okavango Delta. There is plenty of wildlife, in the Makgadikgadi National Park, but not as much as Chobe- so this will not be your only reason for coming here.

Botswana is the site of a unique wildlife conservation initiative in Southern Africa- the concept of cross border parks. The initiative is anchored on the common sense observation that wildlife does not recognise international borders. Successful conservation efforts in an area bordering another country can be reduced to naught if the neighbouring countries do not collaborate. The Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park is a combination of two parks -the former Gemsbok National Park in Botswana and Kalahari Gemsbok National Park in South Africa.

Covering over 36,000 sq km, Kgalagadi is one of the biggest wildlife conservation areas anywhere in the world. Botswana contributes about 75% of the park in the southern Kalahari Desert. The park is a unique conservation area for it allows the large-scale wildlife migratory movements that were once common in the savanna grasslands of Africa, but are sadly not possible any more. The appeal of the harsh beauty of the Kalahari aside, scientists are extremely curious to find out the secret story of the flora and fauna that has adapted to what appears to be a very difficult environment.

For ordinary folks, the park is host to the famous black-maned Kalahari lions. You will also see gemsbok, springbok, eland, blue wildebeest, cheetahs, wild dogs, jackals, bat-eared foxes and leopards. Birding is also excellent and of 297 species recorded, 96 are resident. It is difficult to get to Kgalagadi. From Gaborone, you drive for 860 km, of which 550 km is tarred and the rest gravel. Being a cross border park, you can also access it through South Africa. The park has no permanent tented campsites and on safari you must bring in everything you need.

The dry season, especially between April and October, is the best time to visit Botswana on safari. It is then easy to spot wildlife gathered near water sources. The rains come over the southern summer months of November to March. The roads are then difficult to use and with the abundance of water and pasture, the animals tend to scatter. Early morning and night temperatures in winter (May to August) can drop below freezing, especially in the southwest. But the days are

then cool to warm. The summer experiences high daytime temperatures of up to 38°C. The cloud cover, though, and the rains tend to cool things a little bit. Beware that August is very dry and dust and sand storms tends to rise from the west.

Remember to pack a pair of binoculars- they bring the animals closer without the usual risks. A pair of decent sunglasses is a good idea, especially if you travel to the Kalahari, where the glare can be somewhat unsettling. Also pack photographic and video equipment to record your safari for the sake of those of your unlucky friends who may not have been to Botswana. On safari, you are advised not to wear white or bright clothing to avoid exciting the animals. Light cottons and linens are adequate for summer. To survive winter mornings and evenings, you need warmer wraps and sweaters. Women should avoid wearing scanty beachwear in rural areas away from hotels and campsites to avoid offending locals.

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2. Destination Facts: Botswana

Full Country Name: Republic of Botswana

Area: 581,730 sq km

Population: 1.6 million (2001)

Capital City: Gaborone

Other Major Towns: Francistown, Lobatse, Maun, Selebi-Phikwe.

Peoples: Tswana (79%), Kalanga (11%), Basarwa (3%), Bushman (3%), Other (7%)

Language: English (official), Setswana (national)

Religion: Muslim and Baha'i (small %) Christian (30%), Traditional religion (Animist-50%)

Government: Parliamentary Republic

Time: GMT + 2 hours

Currency: Pula (P)

Electricity: 220-240 V AC, 50 Hz.

Weights and Measures: Metric System

Economy: Mining (Diamonds, Copper, Nickel), Beef, Tourism, Subsistence farming.

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3. Travel Basics: Botswana

Health

Botswana is generally not a risky place to visit health wise. However certain precautions should be taken. Visitors coming from areas where yellow fever is endemic should be inoculated two weeks prior to travel. Malaria is prevalent in the northern parts of Botswana (Chobe, Okavango, Boteti, Ngamiland and Tutume districts/sub districts) especially during the rainy season. It is imperative that one takes anti-malarial drugs two weeks prior to their visit. Protective clothing, nets and insect repellants are also recommended as preventive measures. Typhoid fever is also common through out the region and especially outside the cities. Vaccination before travel is advisable and care should be exercised in handling food and drink. Tap water within the cities is safe to drink but outside the cities sterilization is advisable. Mineral water is available and can be bought instead. Milk, other dairy products, local meat and other foods, fruits and vegetables are safe for consumption.

Other risks are hepatitis A, B, and C, tuberculosis and Bilharzia. Trypanosomiasis (sleeping sickness) is transmitted by tsetse flies in the western part of Chobe National Park, Ngamiland and Moremi Wildlife reserve. Again, protective clothing, nets and insect repellants are essential. To prevent getting bilharzia, avoid swimming or paddling in fresh water; well-chlorinated swimming pools are safer. There is also a high prevalence of HIV/AIDS and appropriate measures should be taken. Dust and heat may present a problem to people with asthma and allergies. Hats and sunscreen are recommended especially for those with fair skin. There are different kinds of health facilities available; 23 district health teams, 3 referral hospitals in Francistown, Gaborone and Lobatse, 12 district hospitals, 17 primary hospitals, 222 clinics, 330 health posts and 740 mobile stops. Medicine provided at government hospitals is free. There is also a private hospital in Gaborone and also several private medical practitioners. All main towns have well stocked chemists.

Visas

All visitors must hold a passport that is valid for at least six months, except those with UN Convention travel documents. Visas are not required by nationals of Commonwealth countries except those of Ghana, India, Nigeria, and Pakistan; nationals of European countries except those of Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary; nationals from USA, Canada and Japan. Nationals of Iceland, Switzerland and Norway also require visas. The validity of visas by nationals the require them is 90 days. Extensions can only be obtained from immigration offices in Botswana. Visitors must also have outgoing travel documents such as return air tickets and adequate funds to finance their stay. Note that visa

requirements vary from time to time and you are advised to check on prevailing status well ahead of travel.

People and Culture

The people of Botswana are divided into several ethnic groups. The largest group is the Batswana. It comprises three major tribes, the Bakwena, Bangwato and Bangwaketse. Other tribes include the Bahurutshe, Barolong, Batawana, Bakgatla, Bakhurutshe, Bateti, Bayei, Basubiya, Bambukushu, Bakgalagadi, Basarwa (Bushmen) and Bakgothu or KhoeKhoe. English is the official language but Setswana is the most commonly spoken. Some knowledge of it would prove useful.

Millet and sorghum porridge is the main dish. You will also come across morama, an under ground tuber, Kalahari truffle which is an edible fungus and mopane worm, a caterpillar-like grub. Traditional brews include palm wine, kgadi (made from distilled sugar or fungus) and bojalwa (cheap sorghum beer). If one is not adventurous enough to taste these culinary delights, the standard of food in most hotels and lodges is very good.

Christianity and Islam are practiced in Botswana but many of the people still practice the traditional animist beliefs.

Communications

Telephone, mobile phones, fax, Internet, telegram and fax facilities are available in urban centers but are limited in the wildlife areas. The country code is 267. Mobile phones are based on GSM 900 network. Coverage is limited to the main inhabited areas. Postal services are slow but cheap and are available in all towns and larger villages. The daily newspaper is Dikgang tsa Gompiano (The Daily News) published in Setswana and English.

Other English newspapers are Mmegi (The Reporter), The Botswana Gazette amongst others. Radio services from BBC World Service and Voice Of America can be received though the frequencies may sometimes change and the current ones can be found online

Accommodation

Accommodation mainly comprises hotels, safari lodges and camping. There is no grading system for the hotels but they all generally maintain reasonable standards and have the basic amenities. Majority of safari lodges are found in Chobe National Park, Moremi Game Reserve and Okavango Delta. The standards in these are generally high with some having permanent structures and others

having tents. There are also designated camping sights in these game reserves. However campers should exercise care when in these areas, especially at night, due to presence of wild animals. Camping is not allowed on private land unless prior permission is sought.

Money

The unit of currency is the Pula (P), which is divided into 100 Thebe (t). Most hotels and lodges accept major credit cards like Visa, MasterCard, American Express and Diners Club. They also accept travelers cheques in US Dollars or Pounds Sterling. Exchange bureaus and credit card advances through banks such as Barclays and Standard Chartered are available in major cities. Cash transfers are easiest and safest done through Western Union money transfer.

There are no restrictions on import of local or foreign currencies into the country but amounts larger or equivalent to P10, 000 have to be declared on arrival. Banking services are available in full in all major towns while in remote towns, there are traveling banks available weekly or monthly and they deal more with travelers cheques than with cash. Tipping in hotels and restaurants is not necessary but about 10% should be sufficient.

Climate

Botswana's climate is semi-arid. The rainy season is experienced during the summer months, i.e. November to March. Very high temperatures are experienced (they rise to 38 degrees and can reach 44 degrees in rare occasions). Rainfall is erratic, unpredictable and highly regional but it helps in cooling things down. The Setswana word for rain is Pula after which their currency is also named. Rainfall decreases in amount the further west and south you go; mean annual rainfall varies from a maximum of over 650mm in the extreme northeast region of Chobe district to a minimum of less than 250mm in the extreme southwest part of Kgale district.

The winter season occurs between May and August. This is the dry season. The days are sunny and cool however night temperatures can drop to below freezing point in some part like the Kalahari. Frost is also common during this period. The in-between periods (April to October) are the best visiting periods. Climate is dry but cooler than in summer and warmer than in winter. Extreme temperatures are not experienced during this period making the conditions favorable for tourists.

International Travel

The best way to gain entry into Botswana is through Johannesburg International Airport. The national airline is Air Botswana and it provides regular flights from Johannesburg, Harare and Victoria falls. South African Airways and British

Airways also provide flights from Johannesburg to Gaborone. The main airport is Sir Seretse Khama International Airport, 15km from Gaborone. Other airports that receive international flights are Kasane, Selebi-Phikwe, Francistown and Maun International Airports.

The road system in Botswana is relatively good thus providing easy access to the neighboring countries. Most of the roads are tarmac. Mini-buses provide the easiest means of road travel. They depart daily during the morning hours from the main bus station in Gaborone to Johannesburg. There are also good roads connecting Botswana to Zimbabwe, Zambia and Namibia.

Railway transport is limited to between Botswana and South Africa and Botswana and Zimbabwe. There are plans to extend the connection to Namibia. There is also a ferry that provides a link to Zambia from Botswana over the Zambezi River.

Local Travel

There are scheduled regular flights between the major cities of Botswana. Charter companies such as Delta Air, Moremi Air services amongst others provide flights to various lodges within Botswana. However this services fall on the expensive side. There are also several bus routes and good train lines between major towns that provide cheaper services. Work on extending the rail network is in progress. There are good tarmac roads linking major towns but gravel roads and sand tracks also exist. Plans to construct more major highways are underway. Taxi services are mainly available in major towns. Care should be exercised in negotiating prices before embarking on journeys using this means.

For those who prefer to drive themselves, car hire services are available and especially for 4-wheel drive cars which are necessary in many areas. Traffic drives on the left and wearing of seat belts is mandatory. An International Driving Permit is recommended, though not a legal requirement, for stays up to six months. A UK license is also valid. For periods longer than six months, a Botswana license must be obtained and can be issued without a test if a valid UK license is produced. Public transport consists of share taxis or minibus services operating at controlled flat fares.

Travel Insurance

Health insurance is essential. It is advisable to have a comprehensive travel insurance policy, which covers you for repatriation to your country. It is advisable to determine whether your insurance plan will pay directly for your health expenditures or reimburse you later.

What to Wear

Light clothing is preferable during the day especially during the summer months. Sun block, sunglasses and hats are essential especially for those with fair skin. Warm clothes should also be carried due to colder nights during the winter season and in case of rain, which is frequent during the summer, a raincoat will be considered a good investment. Bright colored clothes should be avoided especially during safaris to prevent any undue attention from wild animals. Natural, earthy or khaki tones are preferable. Campers are advised to carry warm sleeping bags and insect repellants will prove useful out there in the bush. When walking in the bush, long sleeves, long trousers and closed shoes will prevent you from getting tick and mosquito bites.

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4. About Africa Point

Africapoint.com is an Africa specialist travel agent, offering travel services through the company website -Africapoint.com and also offline. This pioneering Africa travel website has been assisting travelers make bookings online since early 1999.

The company was started in 1997 has its central reservations office strategically located in Nairobi, Kenya.

The company is supported by a network of partner offices in the leading destinations in Africa. This includes Cape Town (South Africa), Arusha, Dar es Salaam (Tanzania), Cairo (Egypt), Kampala (Uganda), Victoria (Seychelles), Harare (Zimbabwe) and Botswana. We are members of the American Society of Travel Agents (ASTA).

What services do we offer?

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Ours is one of very few websites offering one-stop travel booking and information service to a number of different African countries. In addition:

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- We are committed to working to the highest industry standards. We have many our past clients who are happy to share their experiences with you. Please visit the [Client Profile & Testimonials](#) page and see what some of our clients have to say.

- Our patience is the stuff of legend! We will patiently seek to answer all your queries until you are ready to pick what is most suitable for your needs. For high value items such as safaris we have communicated with our clients for 6 months and even longer before they are ready to buy.

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- Together with our partners, we are based in the African destination whose travel services we are selling. For this reason we are usually able to get you very good prices. For some products our prices are **40-50%** below standard rates.
- As members of **ASTA (American Society of Travel Agents)** we are committed to upholding **ASTA's** motto of " Integrity in Travel" and operate to those same standards you would expect from an ASTA member anywhere in the world.

One of our North American clients for whose 36 person missionary group we provided an air charter, hotel booking, safari and road transport to 2 African countries had this to say.

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I'm using them again for an upcoming trip in November and will look forward to using them for years to come."

In addition our membership of ASTA assures you of a **neutral and trusted** arbitrator in the event that a disagreement occurs between us.

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We continue to serve the many needs of travelers who seek our services. From straight forward single night hotel bookings to short and long term **car rental, tours and safaris** for individuals and groups, international conferences.

5. Forward This Report

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