

BOTSWANA - GENERAL INFORMATION

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Botswana is two-thirds desert and Kalahari sand. The Okavango Delta fans out across the north-western region, making a maze of islands, waterways and lagoons teeming with birds and wildlife.

Geographically, Botswana is flat, with up to 70 percent of its territory being the Kalahari Desert. It is bordered by South Africa to the south and southeast, Namibia to the west and north, and Zimbabwe to the northeast. Its border with Zambia to the north near Kazungula is poorly defined but at most is a few hundred metres long.

Botswana has diverse areas of wildlife habitat. In addition to the delta and desert areas, there are grasslands and savannas, where blue wildebeest, antelopes, and other mammals and birds are found. Northern Botswana has one of the few remaining large populations of the endangered African wild dog.

COUNTRY

Area: Botswana covers 600,370 sq km
Location: Botswana, officially the Republic of Botswana, is a landlocked country located in Southern Africa.
Population: Slightly more than 1.9 million.
Capital City: Gaborone

STATEHOOD

Official Name: Republic of Botswana
Date of Independence: 30 September 1966
System of Government: Parliamentary system

CULTURAL

Language: English (official language), Setswana and Khoisan are amongst the other languages spoken
Literacy: The current literacy rate in Botswana is about 85.1%
Religion: The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice.

PASSPORT / VISA REQUIREMENTS

The Botswana Government requires all visitors to Botswana to have a minimum of two full blank pages in their passports on arrival into the country. The passport must be valid for at least six months beyond the intended departure date from Botswana. Proof of onward travel documents will also be required. Upon entry into the country, the passport is stamped with a tourist visa (maximum stay three months). Citizens of certain countries do require VISA's in advance – *please enquire with the nearest Botswana Embassy or your local Immigration Office.*

CURRENCY, CREDIT CARDS AND BANKS

The currency in Botswana is the Pula (P). The word 'Pula' means rain and 'thebe' means shield. The shield appears on the national coat of arms. Bank notes come in denominations of P10, 20, 50 and 100, and coins in denominations of 5t, 10t, 25t, 50t, P1, P2 and P5. Major credit cards, including Visa, MasterCard, American Express and Diners Club, are accepted widely. Most hotels and lodges accept foreign currency.

Foreign currency can be exchanged easily at any of the commercial banks. Normal opening hours are Mondays to Fridays from 09h00 to 15h30, and on Saturdays from 09h00 to 11h00 and they are well represented throughout the country.

Note: No credit cards are accepted at the petrol service stations, however debit card are accepted.



ATMS

Keep in mind that although there are some ATMs available in larger towns, they are few and far between. Please do not rely on the use of ATMs to access your cash. Any money withdrawn from ATM's will be in the local currency.

PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

The dates of certain public holidays change from year to year – refer below. If a public holiday falls on a Sunday, then the Monday is also declared a public holiday. Most shops are closed with only some grocery shops that are open for limited hours on these days. We recommend you avoid staying in the cities over long weekends or public holidays.

01 January	New Year's Day
Varies	Good Friday
Varies	Easter Sunday
Varies	Easter Monday
01 May	Labour Day
Varies	Ascension Day
01 July	Sir Seretse Khama Day
20 July (varies)	President's Day
30 September	Botswana Day
25 December	Christmas Day
26 December	Boxing Day

TAX AND CUSTOMS

All goods and services in Botswana are priced to include value added tax (VAT) of 12%. To claim 12% VAT refund for total value of goods purchased, the amount spent should be more than P5 000. In such cases, the following is required: a tax invoice stating VAT paid, your passport number and your bank account details.

It is always advisable to keep a copy of the VAT form as a record for any follow-up on the transaction.

VAT claims usually can be made at all major border posts and airports.

VAT on services rendered or goods consumed cannot be refunded!

SAFETY

Botswana is a peaceful and democratic country, and crime is relatively low. However, as in any other country in the world, opportunistic petty crime can occur. For a safe journey and pleasant stay, we recommend the following precautions:

- When leaving the vehicle, make sure it is locked and the alarm activated. Make sure nothing of value is left in your car. If you cannot take it with you, make sure it is not visible.
- Especially in urban areas, keep track of your valuables and camera when walking about.
- If you have traveler's cheques, always remember to write down the serial number on a separate paper which you should keep somewhere different than the originals.
- Make sure you always have a photocopy of your passport and flight ticket. Keep these in a safe place - separate from the originals.

TIME

Standard Time Zone: GMT/UTC + 02:00 hour

Daylight Saving Time: Daylight Saving Time NOT applied

CLIMATE

Botswana is landlocked and has a subtropical desert climate characterized by great differences in day and night temperatures, virtually no rainfall and overall low humidity.



Dry season - May to October - Winter

There is little to no rain during the entire winter and humidity is low, typically 20-40%. Animals will concentrate around waterholes and rivers when other water resources dry up.

May - The temperatures are relatively cool, typically 10°C/50°F in the morning and 28°C/80°F in the afternoon.

June, July & August - Be sure to pack winter clothing because morning game drives in open vehicles will be cold. The average morning temperature is 6°C/42°F. Night temperatures can drop below freezing, especially in the dryer Kalahari areas. Afternoons will be more pleasant with temperatures around 25°C/78°F.

September & October - The heat gradually builds and it can get very hot in October (38°C/100°F), but the average temperature remains around 34°C/93°F in the afternoon.

Wet season - November to April - Summer

November & December - Clouds start to appear, bringing cooler temperatures and an occasional late afternoon shower. This pattern of change continues in December, with typical temperatures between 20°C/69°F in the morning and 33°C/91°F in the afternoon. The more extreme Kalahari areas can still have very hot days, and cold mornings. Humidity is typically between 50-60%.

January & February - These are the wettest months, characterized by torrential downpours in the afternoon and sometimes continuous rainfall for days. Daytime temperatures are around 32°C/90°F and the humidity is between 50-80%.

March & April - Rainfall decreases and it steadily cools. This trend continues through April, which has lovely, clear weather and few clouds. The nights tend to be cooler but the days are very temperate at 30°C/87°F.

WATER

The water is safe to drink throughout the majority of Botswana. When visiting the remote areas purification tablets should be used, or bottled mineral water bought en-route. Plenty of water must be drunk to prevent dehydration. We recommend 2-3 liters minimum, excluding beverages such as tea, coffee, juice and alcohol. Dehydration is responsible for many emergency evacuations and can cause very serious problems, it is totally avoidable, so don't let this spoil your holiday!

VOLTAGE

220/240 volts AC. 3-Pin Plugs are used.

The main supply of electrical current in Southern Africa is 220 volts using both three and two round pin plugs. We recommend bringing an international adapter with you as these are not always available at all lodges/camps. International adapters are widely available for purchase in the UK before travel. Some camps use either solar panels, generators or mains electricity depending on their remoteness but all are used to charging camera batteries and phones.

An inverter is used to charge camera batteries whilst on a mobile safari. Please bring your international adapter with.

LAUNDRY

Most camps/lodges/hotels in Botswana provide laundry service (although some may charge a nominal fee). Please keep this in mind when packing so that you can keep your luggage down to the basics.

Laundry serviced is offered on our mobile safaris when we overnight 2 nights in the same camp. A small gratuity may be given to the staff that renders this service. Weather dependant and please note we do not offer any ironing.

CHECK-IN/OUT TIMES

Hotels in the Botswana towns and cities generally have a check in time of 14h00 and a check out time of 10h00, though many lodges and hotels will try to be accommodating and flexible if they are not too fully booked the preceding night. Otherwise we recommend you book a day room in advance to secure a longer stay in your room.



DRIVING IN BOTSWANA

It is not necessary to have an international driving license to rent a vehicle and drive in Botswana, the license from your country will be valid (however the license needs to be in English). Please do not forget to bring this with should you be hiring a vehicle and self-driving. In Botswana we drive on the left side of the road. Speed limits are usually 80km/h on dirt/gravel roads, 120 km/h on long distance tarred roads, and 60km/h in residential areas. However please take careful note of road signs as they may indicate otherwise in certain areas. **The law requires that all drivers and passengers wear their seat belts.**

Avoid driving at night and before dawn. If absolutely necessary because of an emergency, make sure your headlights are on (as well as the brights, unless there is an oncoming vehicle – the brights help you to see further, in case of obstacles or animals).

Roads are generally quiet although they can get very busy on weekends and around public holidays. It is an unfortunate fact that some vehicles you encounter on the road may not be in a good condition. Please be cautious of other drivers.

COMMUNICATION

Mobile telephoned roaming agreements exist with most international mobile phone operators. Coverage is limited to urban area.

MEDIA

Botswana has several English language daily and weekly newspapers. Mmegi, Botswana Gazette, Botswana Guardian and Sunday Standard being the most respected. The Government produces the Daily News, which is distributed free and invariably has a picture of the President on the front cover. For quality international news the South African Mail & Guardian is available in Gaborone.

INTERNET

There are internet cafes stated throughout the country. Some lodges and hotels do have Wi-Fi available or internet connection, for guests use.

POST

Good postal service. Airmail to Europe takes approximately four days to two weeks. Postal service affiliated with Universal Postal Union.

HEALTH TIPS

It is essential that you carry all prescribed medication in your hand luggage.

Malaria is caused by a blood parasite which is spread by the Anopheles mosquito. The northern part of Botswana, including Chobe National Park and the Okavango Delta is in a malaria zone, so it is advisable to take the relevant precautions. Seek medical advice before travelling to these areas. Malaria is a serious disease and can be fatal if not treated immediately. You can reduce the risk of infection by taking a prophylaxis (treatment should start one week before arrival in Botswana and under the advice of your doctor); however you should also make use of insect repellants which can be applied to the skin.

Southern Africa has recorded the highest rate of skin cancer caused by the sun, therefore it is essential to apply high SPF sunscreen regularly, several times a day, especially when outdoors doing activities such as hiking or swimming.

For up to date information, visit the World Health Organisation website www.who.int

Medicines and Pharmacies

Botswana pharmacies are more like a traditional chemist's shop. The pharmacy section is usually limited to an area behind a counter in the back of the premises. Most pharmacists are available to give sound advice. Many types of medicines are available without prescription and cost less than in Europe or North America. Stock up on your supply of medicines in time, as only the larger towns have pharmacies. Some pharmacies have extended hours and some run emergency services. Pharmacies are listed in the Yellow Pages of the telephone directory. Contact the local hospital in emergencies during weekends and after hours.



Doctors and Hospitals

Medical care in towns and cities is fairly good, especially in the capital city, Gaborone. Most remote towns have a modest hospital or first-aid-clinic. All of them are listed on the first page of the local telephone directory under 'Emergency Services'. Doctor listings are located in the Orange Pages under 'Classified Medical Listings'. Alternatively, ask your accommodation establishment for recommendations. Since Namibia is scarcely populated and the distances between towns and villages are vast, bear in mind that in some places it may take the majority of a day to reach a doctor or a hospital.

Medical Evacuation Services:

All clients for our safaris must have their own medical evacuation insurance.

Competent assistance by **Okavango Air Rescue**.

Okavango Air Rescue is a private company, inspired by the Swiss Rescue Service "REGA" www.rega.ch who originally established the Patronage system. This created a steady flow of income, for the service to remain airborne. OAR is based in Maun and transports medical assistance to its Patrons by Helicopter in the event of a medical emergency. Professional staff on board will treat and stabilize you at the scene of the accident or incident. Patrons will then be flown to the nearest appropriate location or medical facility from where further arrangements will be made.

Okavango Air Rescue complements existing road and air ambulance services operating in Botswana.

Our current radius of operation is Northern Botswana and the Central Kalahari.

Costs: P175.00 per tourist

Please note, Pula 175.00 equals approximately € 17.50 or SFR 20.00 or £ 14.50 or US\$ 22.00

Our office will make all the necessary arrangements and registration on your behalf should you not have your own medical evacuation insurance. It is essential to do this at the same time you confirm your safari.

Stored Blood

Botswana's Blood Transfusion Centre only uses blood donations by unpaid volunteers. Donations are thoroughly tested for transmittable diseases, including HIV. Tests are carried out according to internationally recognized standard methods and are regularly submitted to strict quality controls.

Snakes & Scorpions

Just to put you at ease: most visitors never see a snake or scorpion during their stay in Botswana. In any event, about 80% of Botswana's snakes are not venomous. Most snakes beat a hasty retreat when humans approach and therefore are never spotted – they pick up the tremors caused by footsteps. The lazy puff adder may become dangerous, as it is not able to disappear fast enough and you might unwittingly get too close. When walking in the "wild" you should always wear sturdy shoes, preferably covering the ankle. Watch your step and listen to sounds – snakes usually warn you before they attack. Refrain from picking up or turning pieces of rock, and do not put your hand into holes in the ground or into rock crevices, as these are favourite hiding places for snakes and scorpions. Always carry a torch in the dark. When camping, zip your tent completely and shake out your shoes before putting them on in the morning.

WHAT TO PACK

In general we recommend practical clothing such as sportswear, shorts, t-shirts etc, long sleeved shirts and long pants for evenings and early mornings, comfortable shoes, sandals, walking shoes, hat, sunglasses and sunscreen with a high SPF. Do not forget a sweater and jacket, especially for any open vehicle drives and along the coast where there may be fog and wind.

In the summer, the weather is generally very hot, about 35 degrees Celsius in the day. The temperature at night is usually pleasant throughout most of the country; however the Deserts and coast can get cold at night. In winter, the days are usually warm; however the temperature at night can go below 0 degrees Celsius on occasion. It is advisable therefore to be prepared for hot and cold weather.



Suggested Clothing:

1. Sun hat/bush hat.
2. Headscarf/bandana – particularly for dusty dry regions.
3. Golf-shirts and/or T-shirts – preferably with sleeves to protect your shoulders from the sun.
4. Long-sleeved cotton shirts.
5. Shorts and/or skirts – (short skirts are not practical for getting in and out of game drive vehicles)
6. Long trousers/slacks.
7. Track suit.
8. Pajamas – Lighter set for summer and a warmer set for cooler nights.
9. Underwear (sports bra recommended for game drives as the roads can be bumpy and uneven) and socks.
10. Good closed walking shoes (running/tennis shoes are fine).
11. Sandals – preferably low healed or flat if you are going on safari.
12. Swimming costume.
13. Warm winter jersey.
14. Warm anorak or parka and scarf / gloves for cold winter months (May to September).
15. Light rain gear for summer months (late November to April).
16. More formal attire for your stay at prestigious city hotels or on one of the luxury trains.

Equipment/Other:

1. Good quality sunglasses - preferably polarised. Tinted fashion glasses are not good in strong light.
2. Flashlight with batteries.
3. If you wear contact lenses, we recommend that you bring along a pair of glasses in case you get irritation from the dust
4. Southern African bird guide if you are a keen birder, e.g. Newman's or Sasol
5. Personal toiletries (basic amenities supplied by most establishments).
6. Malaria tablets (if applicable). *Please note that Namibia is a very low-risk malaria area, and that the best defense against malaria is to avoid mosquito bites. To avoid being bitten, pack long-sleeved shirts, trousers, socks and shoes (in addition to your insect repellent), to wear in the evening when mosquitoes are most active.*
7. Antihistamine tablets if you suffer from any allergies.
8. Anti nausea tablets if you suffer from motion sickness.
9. Moisturising cream and suntan lotion – SPF 20 or higher recommended.
10. Insect repellent for body application, e.g. Tabard, Rid, Jungle Juice, etc.
11. Basic medical kit (aspirins, plasters, Imodium, antiseptic cream and Anti-histamine cream, etc.)
12. Tissues/"Wet Ones"
13. Visas, tickets, passports, money, etc.
14. Camera equipment and plenty of film/memory sticks – refer to photo tips
15. Waterproof/dustproof bag/cover for your camera.
16. BINOCULARS ARE ESSENTIAL (night vision binoculars are not essential, but highly recommended if your safari includes night activities)

Note 1: Bright colours and white are not advised while on safari. Camouflage clothing is not recommended for travel in southern African countries.

Note 2: Space in vehicles and aircrafts is limited and therefore we recommend that you adhere to the 20kg luggage limit (unless specified otherwise). Please ensure that you use soft bags and not hard suitcases – please ensure that you have the details from your agent according to your itinerary and that you ask your agent ahead of time if you would like details regarding the feasibility and cost of taking excess luggage with you on any of these restricted luggage safaris.

USEFUL TIPS:

- Do not go on any walks without drinking water
- Take snacks and water along in the vehicle as the routes are often long without places to stop and eat
- Don't walk away from lodge / resort at night. Most predators and dangerous animals are nocturnal.





- Be aware even at the lodge / resort. Wildlife can enter the lodge areas, especially at night.
- Do not approach wild animals, even if they appear relaxed. Their feelings about our presence can change quickly.
- Do not sleep with parts of your body exposed or on the ground without protection around you. Sleep in your tent when camping.
- Do not disturb wildlife in anyway. Excessive noise can irritate and scare the animals. A sudden gesture could be viewed as a threat to the animals.
- Do not drive off road. You may damage vegetation and soil especially in a delicate and fragile eco-system as you will find in Namibia. Damaged areas are also unsightly. Avoid night drives as it can upset animals and the light can damage their eyes.
- Do not offer food to wild animals. Even small, cute animals can give a nasty bite and may carry diseases harmful to humans.
- Monkeys and Baboons can cause havoc and steal food. Always make sure vehicles / tents are closed properly and food is packed away safely.
- Do not leave any rubbish. Take it with you and discard of it into a rubbish bin.
- Be courteous and respectful of people of other cultures and races.

RULES AND REGULATIONS FOR GOVERNMENT PARKS AND RESERVES

This below is a brief summary of the main rules of the park. Please read your permit carefully for further details.

- Gates open after sunrise and close before sunset. You must return to your resort before sunset. At the entrance of the park, take note of the opening and closing times of the gates
- At the entrance to each park / reserve, you must report to the office nearest you and pay the park entrance fee or show your pre-paid park entry permit.
- You must follow the paths already marked – it is forbidden to drive off the roads
- It is forbidden to enter any areas with No Entry signs
- No driving or entry will be allowed outside the prescribed opening hours for the park or reserve.
- Persons holding reservations for camping sites must take up their campsite by 17:30 hours on due date of arrival, otherwise the site may be re-let and pre-payments forfeited.
- Visitors may only camp in designated campsites.
- Visitors must not harass or feed the animals, as this can lead to human habituation and will result in the destruction of the animal(s).
- Fires may only be lit in designated fireplaces.
- All litter must be placed in the bins where they have been provided for that purpose, except for combustibles, which may be burnt in a designated fireplace. Where no bins are provided, litter must be bagged and taken to the Wildlife Camp for disposal. Litter must never be buried.
- Removal of animals or plants (live or dead) is strictly prohibited.
- No dog or any other domesticated animal or bird is allowed within the parks or reserves.
- Firearms, and any other form of weapons, are strictly prohibited.
- Visitors are required to conduct themselves in a quiet and orderly manner at all times whilst within a protected area. Do not disturb any animal or person.
- Visitors may not drive in a park or reserve in a vehicle that does not offer adequate protection, nor may they ride on roof racks or other exterior parts of the vehicle.
- The speed limit within the parks is 40 km/h. Costly fines will be charged to visitors who exceed the speed limits. The speed limits are in place to ensure the safety of visitors and animals
- Do not disturb, harm or kill any animals
- Do not shout or make any noise which can be a nuisance to other visitors and animals
- Do not exit your vehicle while in Etosha National Park. You may have windows open but it is advisable to not make any sudden movement with hands and arms, as cats hiding in the bushes may be attracted by a simple movement. Do not let any part of your body lean out of the window.
- Do not get too close to the animals to take a photo, or make noises to get their attention.
- Do not feed the animals





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- If an animal happens to get too close to your vehicle, do not panic and make a noise. If possible you can drive away slowly, otherwise just remain calm and still until the animal moves away.
- Do not camp outside of the resorts
- Do not drive around at night
- When you are a waterhole or at a sighting, please turn off your vehicle's engine and park in a way that does not obstruct other visitors view. Please also talk quietly.
- Visitors enter the park / reserve at their own risk
- The park staff may at any time request the proof of payment of the park fees, so keep this with you at all times
- All visitors have permission to travel in the park provided that you adhere to the rules and conditions stipulated on the permit. Therefore please read the permit carefully.

TIPS

Although a long standing tradition, staff tips are at the **GUEST'S** discretion.

