



BOTSWANA

This is a country of adventure, challenge and discovery: mokoro trails up secret waterways; overnight camping on islands and highlands; fighting the mighty Tiger Fish; surveying the vastness from elephant and horse back; admiring the abundant bird and wildlife; discovery of weird and wonderful plant and tree species on bush walks; sampling the Okavango bream, the sweetest eating fish of the realm. Most of all, it's a unique experience just being there . . .



With a population of about 1.7 million people and covering almost 582 000 square kilometres, Botswana is one of the most sparsely populated countries in Africa. Having scarcely been developed under a British colonial administration between 1885 and 1966, the discovery of diamonds, a year after independence, has allowed Botswana to develop rapidly.

Sir Seretse Khama, the country's first post-independence president, one of the most remarkable and future-thinking leaders that any nation could wish for, laid the foundations for a free and uncompromisingly democratic society. Continuing political stability and economic growth truly makes Botswana a role model for

success in Africa.

With the exception of the eastern part of the country, which receives slightly higher summer rainfall and hence is the most densely populated region, most of Botswana is technically desert. This makes the Okavango Delta, situated in the north-west of the country, particularly unique.

At around 17 000 square kilometres, the Okavango is the world's largest inland delta and is an extraordinary wetland environment surrounded by the strikingly flat and arid Kalahari Desert, the world's largest expanse of sand.

The northern portion of the Okavango Delta is known as the 'panhandle'. Here, the river is mostly still confined to its banks with seemingly limitless beds of papyrus. The area is attractive to birdwatchers and those hoping to glimpse the rare and elusive Sitatunga antelope. It is also popular with sport fishermen for the renowned Tiger Fish.

The Okavango Delta is a labyrinth of islands, secret lagoons and hidden water channels. It varies in size throughout the year, being dependant largely on the rains which fall in the Angolan Highlands, 1 000 kilometres to the north. Although the flood arrives in the panhandle in March, it doesn't reach Maun at the southerly end of the delta until August.

The Moremi Wildlife Reserve occupies a large portion of the Okavango Delta. It contains diverse habitat, ranging from permanent swamp to floodplains, islands and large areas of dry land including 'Chiefs Island' and the 'Mopane Tongue' of dry scrub and Kalahari sands, which results in prolific bird and animal life. The Chobe National Park in the north of Botswana is noted for the superb game viewing year round along the river front and famous for the heaviest concentrations of elephant anywhere in Africa today.

Getting There

By Air

Air Botswana, Botswana's national and only airline, provides international flights between Gaborone and Johannesburg, Gaborone and Harare, Maun and Johannesburg, Kasane and Johannesburg and Francistown and Johannesburg. Domestic flights run between Gaborone and Francistown, Maun and Kasane, and the airline has recently re-introduced its Maun to Kasane flight (three times per week).

Air Botswana has thrice daily flights between Gaborone and Johannesburg. South African Airways has twice daily flights between Johannesburg and Gaborone, during the week.

South African Express has five flights daily between Johannesburg and Gaborone, during the week.

Air Botswana has daily flights from Johannesburg direct to Maun.

Air Namibia flies Windhoek to Maun every day of the week, except Tuesday and Thursday.

Kenya Airways flies Nairobi to Gaborone.

Air charter services are also available.

Light aircraft transfers have a 15kg luggage restrictions in soft, squashable bags PLUS 5kg of hand luggage. The size of the cargo pod of a Cessna 206, which is generally used on inter-camp transfers is 72cm wide and 29 cm high. Travelers coming for safaris are advised not to bring hard suitcases as they will not fit on light aircrafts.

Most major international airlines from Europe, the United States, Asia and Australia fly to Johannesburg, South Africa, where connecting flights can be booked to Sir Seretse Khama International Airport in Gaborone, or to Maun, Francistown or Kasane.

By Road

Botswana is accessible by tarred road from South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia and Namibia. Vehicles are driven on the left hand side of the road. A valid international driver's license, along with vehicle registration documents, are required to drive in Botswana, and drivers should always carry them. Most major roads in Botswana are tarred and driving conditions are generally good. The main roads to established areas are regularly graded. Four-wheel drive is required when travelling in the national parks and reserves, as well as in remote areas. Car and four-wheel drive rental services are widely available in major tourist centres, airports and hotels.

By Bus

There are scheduled bus services across borders between Botswana and South Africa, Zimbabwe, Namibia and Zambia, as well as good internal bus services linking major and minor towns and villages across the country.

By Rail

There are no passenger train services in Botswana. Cargo services run on a daily basis.

For more information consult:

The Botswana Railways website: www.botswanarailways.co.bw

Getting Around In Towns

Taxis are normally a convenient way to get around in towns and are reasonably priced. They are easily identified in designated stations or can be contacted by telephone. Taxis to Gaborone are also available from Sir Seretse Khama International Airport.

Communications

Most of Botswana is networked by automatic telephone exchanges, with public telephones in even the most remote places.

The International access code in Botswana is 00. When calling international to Botswana, dial +267.

Cellular phone coverage is provided Mascom, Orange and be Mobile. Mobile Sim cards are available in most supermarkets and service stations. All major towns in Botswana are network covered, as well as portions of the national highway.

Mobile networks in Botswana offer various services to their subscribers, including Internet access, fax, and International Roaming. It is always important to seek advice about network services so as to choose one that will work for you.

Using a cellular phone whilst driving is against the law in Botswana, and liable to a P300 fine. Earphones or hands-free devices are recommended.

Money

Currency

The Botswana currency is the Pula (meaning 'rain' in Setswana).

It is divided into 100 thebe (meaning 'shield' in Setswana). Travellers' cheques and foreign currency may be changed at banks, bureaux de change, and authorised hotels.

The US dollar, Euros, British Pound and the South African Rand are the most easily convertible currencies.

Automatic teller machines accept foreign visa cards, but are mostly found in larger towns and cities. Cultural sites and community art and craft outlets usually only accept cash.

Banks

Seven main commercial banks, as well as a number of foreign exchange bureaux, operate in Botswana.

Banking hours

Monday to Friday 8:30-15:30

Saturday 8:30 to 10:45

Credit cards

Major credit cards, such as MasterCard and Visa, are accepted throughout the country, in most hotels, restaurants, retail outlets and safari companies. However, shops in remote areas and service stations may only accept cash.

Health

Botswana is one of the healthiest countries in sub-Saharan Africa, with good primary health care facilities available throughout the country. However, the following health precautions are advised.

Travel insurance

It is essential for visitors to remote areas of Botswana to have a comprehensive medical insurance policy, to provide coverage for the treatment of serious illnesses/accidents, and if required, medical evacuation. Personal effects insurance is also advisable.

Check that your insurance policy will be accepted by service providers in Botswana. Ensure that you are treated by licensed medical personnel to enable you to provide your insurance company with appropriate documentation and receipts.

Reasonably priced medical services are available at government clinics and hospitals throughout the country. Private medical practitioners are available in the cities and major towns, such as Gaborone, Francistown and Maun.

Gaborone Private Hospital is the largest private hospital in Botswana. The hospital requires medical coverage, or cash payment in advance where medical coverage is not available.

Drinking water

Tap water throughout the country is safe to drink. Bottled mineral water is readily available in most shops and supermarkets, and at camps and lodges.

Tourists travelling by road are advised to carry sufficient water at all times.

Malaria

Malaria, including cerebral malaria, is common in northern Botswana, in the Okavango and Chobe areas, particularly during and immediately following the rainy season, from November to April.

As the strains of malaria, and the drugs used to combat them, frequently change, and as certain strains can become drug resistant, it is best to seek medical advice before your departure and take any medication prescribed. Pregnant or very young children are not advised to travel to malarial areas.

Other precautions are: to wear long sleeves, socks, closed shoes, and generally keep the body covered, to sleep with a mosquito net and to use mosquito coils and repellent.

Sun And Heat -Related Problems

Always take preventive measures that include wearing a wide-brimmed sunhat and sunglasses, liberally applying sunscreen every three or four hours, regularly taking

rehydration mixes, drinking plenty of water and fruit juices (at least three litres of liquid daily), avoiding prolonged exposure to the sun, and avoiding excessive amounts of alcohol, which causes dehydration.

What to bring/wear

What to Bring

Binoculars, torch, insect repellent, lip salve, sunscreen, sunglasses. Cosmetics, medications, and cigarettes are all available in the major towns, but if specific brand names are needed, it is best to bring enough to last your stay.

However, care needs to be taken to comply with international aviation security regulations for items in carry on luggage. Contact your airline for details.

What to Wear

- In summer, lightweight, lightcoloured cottons are preferable.
- Garments of neutral colours that blend with the bush and forest are advisable for safaris and game viewing.
- Avoid synthetic materials and black clothing, as they increase perspiration and discomfort.
- Bring a lightweight jacket and/or jersey for unexpected temperature changes or rain.
- In winter, wear trousers, longsleeved shirts / blouses and jerseys.
- From May – August, night temperatures can fall below zero degrees celsius, so warm jerseys and jackets are vital, especially on morning and evening game drives.
- Closed, comfortable walking shoes or gym shoes are a must in all seasons.
- Special attention should be given to protection from the sun. Bring a sunhat, good quality sunscreen, sun lotion and polarised sunglasses.
- Wide brimmed hats are preferable to baseball caps.

Entry Formalities

Visas

Citizens of most European and Common-wealth countries do not require a visa for entry into Botswana.

Visitors should check with Botswana embassies or consulates, or their travel agents, before departure.

It is vital for visitors to carry a valid passport and sufficient funds to facilitate their stay. Note: For countries with whom Botswana has no diplomatic representation, visa information and processing is available through British Embassies and High Commissions.

Luggage Restrictions

It is advisable to adhere to the luggage restrictions for both scheduled international, domestic and charter flights: 20kgs (44lbs) on domestic flights (including Okavango Delta charter flights), and 20kgs (44lbs) on international flights.

Vaccinations

If you are travelling to Botswana from areas infected with Yellow Fever, you must have a valid Yellow Fever vaccination certificate. Otherwise, no other immunisations are required. However, it would be wise to have an updated TPD (tetanus, polio, diphtheria) vaccine, and a Hepatitis A vaccine.

Customs

All goods acquired outside Botswana must be declared when you enter the country.

Drivers' Licenses

Drivers are required to carry their licenses at all times. Licenses from neighbouring countries are accepted in Botswana. If not written in English, a certified written translation is required. International drivers' licenses are accepted in Botswana.

General Information

Language

English is an official language in Botswana. It is taught at schools, and is widely spoken in all urban centres. Even in rural areas, many local villagers (especially younger ones who have received schooling) will be able to converse in English. All guides and general staff in the camps, lodges and hotel have got a good command of English.

German, Italian and French translators are available on request – request through your travel operator or agent. When staying at a private camp or lodge, your guide will very often be able to introduce you to his or her friends and family, and will act as interpreter if necessary. Some amazing interaction with local people is possible, and more than likely to occur while on your trip to Botswana.

Electrical Supply

Electricity is supplied at 220/240v. Both square and round wall plugs are used.

Gratuity Guide

In Botswana, one is not under any obligation to offer gratuity (tips) for services rendered at restaurants, bars, hotels, etc. It is at the discretion of the individual whether or not to pay gratuity for services.

