

WELCOME TO MAUN



Maun is really much more of a place to get organized than it is a destination in its own right, so few visitors are really looking for activities here. That said, if you have half a day to kill, here are a few suggestions...

The quote above is from the Bradt Travel Guide to Northern Botswana. And yes, throughout living memory Maun certainly has been the place to come and get organized prior to venturing deep into the wilderness in the Okavango Delta or the Central Kalahari Game Reserve.

A place where you might find parts for your landrover; buy a new pair of binoculars; replace your worn out clothes; and stock up on imported provisions.

Or simply a place where you climb into a small plane that takes you to the luxurious lodge that is your real destination.

But Maun offers much more than this. It is a favourite holiday destination for the locals. We are not coming here to buy clothes or safari gear: we come to Maun because there are so many interesting things to see and do.

Maun has a vibrant arts and crafts scene. If you do go to a luxury lodge deep in the Delta the African art objects; the handcrafted furniture; the ceramic plates decorated with hippos and elephants; and the bushman paintings hanging on the walls were probably made right here. 'African chic' style is what tourists expect, and it is what the local artisans will deliver. Maun is a place where those with real talent can make a good, full-time living from their art, and a critical mass of artisans has developed. It is a great place to meet both traditional and contemporary practitioners and examine or buy their wares.





Maun has **nightlife**. It is a place to enjoy live music; relax in an outdoor cinema, or see a live theatrical performance. You can enjoy live afro-jazz six nights a week. You can meet local young people enjoying music at the bar beside a tranquil reach of the Thamalakane River. There are movies once a week. You can sink into a funky couch and enjoy a glass of wine and a light meal whilst you watch the movie on offer. Bats will flit between you and the screen, and you need to remember to wrap up warmly on winter nights as this is a very well ventilated experience.

Did you know that the Tswana are famous for their **poetry** ? Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic Maun hosted weekly poetry evenings. And the Poetavango group organize the annual Maun international Arts Festival in October or November each year. This festival usually runs for about a week and offers live poetry, stand-up comedy, contemporary and traditional dance, and live music.

Maun also hosts blockbuster **concerts**. The Okavango Music Festival in August or September each year draws a crowd from all over Botswana. It gives locals the opportunity to dance the night away to a mix of musical styles performed by both local and regional musicians. And the **Maun Recreational Park** hosts concerts by popular Botswana artists during the Christmas holiday period each year. You can see household names like Vee Mampezy and LA Timmy in live performance.

Maun has a **farmer's market** on the last Sunday every month. This is not a traditional roadside market of local veld and field produce. The hotels and lodges in the area create a demand for products like pickled pepperdews; poached guava in cinnamon syrup; and green tomato jam, and so there will be some real surprises on sale.

Maun has **racing**. The **Maun Derby** is a horse racing day held around Easter time each year. These are not races between thoroughbred horses ridden by professional jockeys: anyone who owns a horse can enter and you will see Tswana horses from the cattleposts in the Kalahari.





There is a different kind of race every winter: the **Nkashi Classic** is a mokoro (traditional canoe) poler's race held on the Thamalakane River. (An nkashi is the pole that boatmen use to propel their boat through the waterways of the Okavango Delta). The course and the exact location depend on the water levels, but there will always be live entertainment for the spectators and wild enthusiasm amongst the local crowd.

Maun has an interesting **history**. Perhaps not so much history as some other parts of Botswana. There was no village here at all until 1915, and Maun became the provincial capital more or less by accident. The dominant Tswana tribe in Ngamiland are the Batawana, and Maun was their capital when the the Bechuanaland Protectorate administration began to establish a permanent official presence in Ngamiland. The administrators needed to be close to the traditional leadership.

But the Batawana had not been here for long. They had moved their capital frequently. The reasons for moving varied, but included fire, flood, disease and defence against invaders. In the course of a century 'Batawanatown', as visitors called the main Batawana village, had moved from Kgwebe Hills to Toteng, Matsiareng, Digogwaneng, Namanyane, Kamakaku, Nakaletswee and Tsau. So the provincial capital could easily have been somewhere else. But though short, the history of Maun is very interesting. This was initially a very unhealthy place to live, plagued by sleeping sickness, malaria, bilharzia and other tropical ailments. In the 30 years following David Livingstone's trail blazing visit to Ngamiland a further 81 European travelers came to visit the area. Of this number two were eaten by crocodiles, one was killed by an elephant, two died lost in the bush, one went crazy and at least five died of 'fever'. The accounts published by those that survived tended to discourage future visitors. So the establishment of a permanent settlement on the edge of the delta was no easy undertaking. The medical history of the area is fascinating, and the elimination of sleeping sickness alone has been a major triumph. The **underground mortuary** of the old Maun Seventh Day Adventist Hospital has been preserved as a national monument.

Maun has always attracted colourful characters and dreamers, and the **Matlapana Old Bridge** is a living testament to this, built by the eccentric Belgian Colonel Charles Naus as part of a mad scheme to increase the flow of water from the Delta. The even grander **Schwarz Scheme** fortunately failed to get off the ground.



Maun was also used as a secure base during WW2 from which to keep an eye on the German community in Namibia, then known as SouthWest Africa. By 1933 South West Africa already had an active branch of the Nazi Party. There were concerns at the outbreak of WW2 that the community might take up arms against the British Empire. A signals intelligence station was established here in Maun in 1939, and the WW2 buildings now house the **Nhabe Museum**, a branch of the National Museum of Botswana.



Maun provides a great opportunity to **get out on the water**. The wild lands of the Okavango Delta are only about 20 km away from the edge of town, and there are many boating operators waiting to take visitors out on the waterways. The commercial operators offer mokoro dug-out canoes; motorboats and in a few cases kayaks.

Scenic flights by both fixed wing aircraft and helicopters are readily available from Maun International Airport. This is said to be the second busiest airport in Africa in terms of aircraft movements, second only to OR Tambo Airport in Johannesburg. The difference is that here in Maun most of the takeoffs and landings are by small planes heading for airstrips in the bush. Scenic flights by helicopter may involve setting down somewhere in the wilderness for lunch or afternoon tea. Scenic flights by **hot air balloon** are a marvelous way to get a panoramic view of the wildlife. These will normally require an overnight stay at a lodge somewhere in the Delta, as the pilot will want to take you up in the cool, still air of the early morning.



Most tourists go to the Okavango Delta because they want to see **big game animals** in the wild. But you can see a surprising number around Maun itself, and often at closer range. You can get up close and personal and even **feed the baby elephants** at a local elephant orphanage. Don't be fooled by the photo – the fence is there to keep the humans confined: the baby elephants are free to wander. And there is **horse riding** for both experienced and first time horse riders in a private game reserve beside the Thamalakane River. There are no dangerous animals there and the horses will get you right alongside giraffe, zebra and and kudu. Hippos and crocodiles can often be seen in the river right in the centre of town.



Paradoxically, perhaps, Maun and its immediate environs are even better for **birdwatching** than the camps out in the Okavango Delta. The absence of dangerous animals close to town means that you don't have to worry about who is watching YOU and can concentrate on watching the birds. There are professional birding guides who will take you for a walking tour to see the amazing diversity of birds around Maun itself.

And finally, Maun has **beer**. It is home to a craft brewery, which has a lovely tasting room and restaurant, and which makes beer from the pure waters of the Delta and from the millet crops grown in the alluvial soils.

So Maun is not just a place to kill a few idle hours. It is a vibrant destination in its own right, and we encourage all of our clients to stay here for at least a couple of days.