

# WELCOME TO GABORONE



Gaborone is a very atypical African capital.

There are no slums; no surrounding shantytowns; and no hordes of hustlers or beggars. You can safely drink the tapwater; and the sulphur dioxide concentration in the air is less than 50% of the US Ambient Air Quality Standard. The ATM machines and government buildings have guards armed with a smile rather than a submachine gun. And it is perfectly safe to walk around the city centre – in fact there is no choice as the heart of the city, Main Mall, is for pedestrians only.

There are traffic problems – it can take a while to get across town during rush hour traffic – and finding your way about can be very confusing, as the city planners of the 1960's deliberately avoided a grid layout. But it is an ideal place to start your self-drive tour of Botswana.

You can buy just about anything a traveler might need on your trip right here – books, binoculars, special batteries, camera lenses, camping gear, cycling gear and golfing equipment are all readily available if you know where to look. Some of these are hard to find elsewhere in the country. There are big modern shopping malls with ample free parking. And when you have done your shopping there are a great many things of interest to do in and immediately around the city.

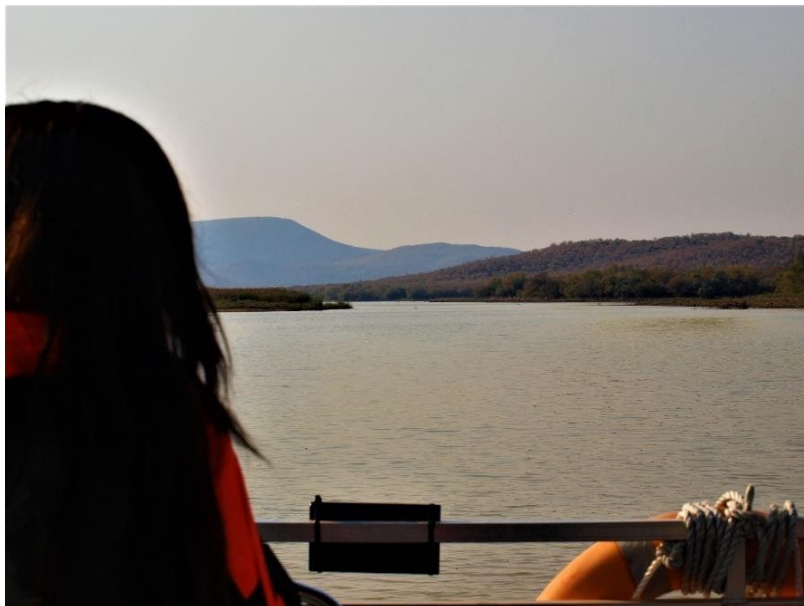


We recommend spending at least three days in and around Gaborone if you can.  
Whilst you are here, you can:

- Take yourself for a **Game Drive in your own car** in the Gaborone Game Reserve, a government-run game park right inside the city. This reserve exists to provide an opportunity for city residents to get up close and personal with their natural heritage, and it is a popular place for locals to take their children.



- Take a **boat cruise** on the Notwane Dam and up the Notwane River to see the crocodiles, the water monitor lizards and the birdlife.



*Cruising the calm waters of the Notwane Dam*





- Walk up **Kgale Hill** to obtain a panoramic view of the city and the Gaborone Dam. Kgale Hill is home to at least three troops of **baboons**. They are harmless and fun to watch, but keep a close eye on your possessions and make sure you lock the car before you set out. They know how to open car doors. Kgale Hill also has a number of **rock climbing** routes and is used weekly by the local club for training.
- Go **birdwatching**. If birds are your passion, there is an IBA (an internationally recognized Important Bird & Biodiversity Area) right beside the upmarket suburb of Phakalane.



- Go **mountainbiking** amongst the animals of the Mokolodi Nature Reserve, or try **rhino tracking on foot** with a ranger.





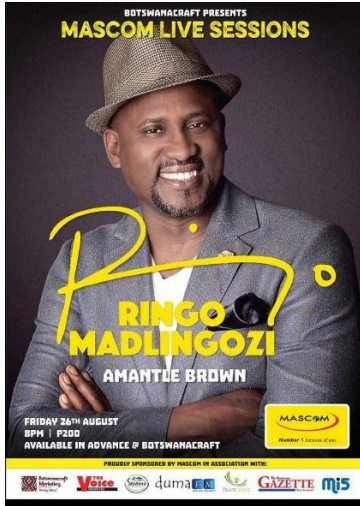
- Paddle a **kayak** to explore the waterways of the Gaborone Dam, or **ride a horse** along the shoreline. No swimming here: the dam is home to some quite large crocodiles.
- Visit the **CBD**. This is, confusingly, not the middle of town but rather a new business park on the far side of the railway tracks, is in a continual state of flux, with new construction of ultra-modern, architecturally designed buildings. It is home to a brand new **cinema** complex; a number of upmarket restaurants and cafes; and features **live music performances** on most Saturday and Sunday nights.
- Check out the local performing arts scene. If music is your thing, Gaborone usually has it somewhere, and there are some **musical and cultural festivals** that you won't want to miss.



- Every summer the city hosts the Son of the Soil festival, featuring traditional music and cultural activities. Spectators are expected to wear their traditional dress, whatever that may be, so if you are a Scot you should bring a kilt.
- Every autumn there is a major contemporary music and arts festival, and this runs for several weeks.
- Midwinter sees the 'President's Day' competitions, which span four days in mid-July. The competitions are in the fields of arts, crafts, music and dance, and usually runs for 3 or 4 days. The final day is a full day of traditional song and dance performances from all of the country's tribal groups. This is not a staged tourist performance: the festival is screened live on Botswana TV and everyone in the country will be watching.
- August is harvest festival time, known in Botswana as Letlhafula. The date changes every year, but the programme is always the same: the day is spent with traditional games; dance and drama; and the evening is devoted to drinking traditional beer and sampling traditional foods from all over Botswana.



- The Mascom Live Sessions are held in the Spring, and in the past have featured famous artists like Franco, Salif Keta, Sereetse and the Natives, the late Oliver Mtukudzi and others. The programme changes every year.



- During the Christmas season, villages compete in traditional choir competitions known as *Dikhwaere*. These are fascinating to watch, and one of the best choirs is in Artesia, a village a little to the N of Gaborone
- Explore the local **visual arts** scene. There is a visual arts centre in the heart of the original village; a **philatelic museum** in the heart of the government enclave; and **weaving, pottery and quilting studios** in surrounding villages.
- Marvel at the creativity of the **pallet furniture** craftsmen in Old Naledi. You will be surprised at what can be produced from used shipping pallets and old car tyres.







- Take a **No. 1 Ladies Detective Agency** tour. The books by Alexander McCall Smith were set here, and if you are a fan you can visit many of the locations.
- Try the **street food** and browse amongst the stalls of the Main Mall, the heart of Gaborone. Whether you want local music on CD; stone carvings; dried caterpillars or local leatherwork it is all here.



- Explore the **history** of Gaborone itself and Botswana in general by taking one of the Botswana Society guided tours of Gaborone. These start from the National Museum of Botswana, and take 3 to 4 hours. We also provide guide notes for some other places of historical interest.
- Visit **Boer War** battlefields. Gaborone (as it was known in those days) fell to the Boers in 1899, and was retaken by Imperial forces in 1900. The NW front received little attention from the war correspondents of the day, probably because it was so remote, but forces from Bechuanaland played an important role in both the defence and eventual relief of Mafeking.

- Relax in the grounds of the **National Botanic Gardens**. These feature displays of plants from all the regions of Botswana; and also harbor a surprising array of animal and bird life, including some very tame hyrax.



- Play a round of **golf** at one of the golf courses in Gaborone. Some of the golf courses elsewhere in Botswana are a little wild, with crocodiles in the water hazards and elephants wandering on the fairways, but here in Gaborone you can enjoy a relaxing round of golf without interruptions.
- Take your **children** to let off steam at the Lion Park amusement complex. The lions are real, but behind a fence. The real action here is at the water park. In other parts of the city you can find a **petting zoo** and stables offering **horse riding** for children. And if you want a really good cup of coffee and a nice lunch whilst the children race around, there are a few cafes with play equipment, and we can direct you to them.



*A waterslide at the Lion Park complex*