

WELCOME TO THE BOTETI REGION



The Boteti region is one of the places locals go to for holiday, but which are not well known by tourists. For many people, the first thing that comes to mind when they hear the word Boteti is the beautiful diamonds of Botswana. What many people do not know is that the region offers more than that as it is also the gateway to the famous Makgadikgadi Pans and the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR).

Letlhakane

Letlhakane, affectionately known as Zowa is the economic capital of the Boteti region. Letlhakane has a range of shops from food shops, clothing shops, car parts and electrical goods. Like any other place in Botswana, you will find eating outlets or street vendors in most parts of the town especially, around town centres. Most of these eating outlets offer different cuisines. When visiting Botswana one of the best things that you can do is to taste traditional *Tswana* cuisine from one of the different food outlets. **Mi Casa café** is located in the town centre of Letlhakane and offers a variety of foodstuffs such as braai, pap and the famous Setswana dish called *seswaa*. The café also sells a variety of drinks and alcoholic beverages. They have a nice viewing deck where you can relax while enjoying your food and beverages.



Figure 1: Table with benches at Mi' Casa cafe in Letlhakane



Figure 2: Viewing deck at Mi' Casa Cafe in Letlhakane

- For many people holidays, vacations or weekend gateways means having fun wherever they are. While in Letlhakane there are local bars clubs or drinking sports that you can visit. **Makgabana nite club** is situated right in Letlhakane. You can check it out for a nightlife experience. The club normally has a residential DJ who plays both local and international music, different genres. From time to time there are performances by local and sometimes international artists. You can either join the dance floor or find a cosy spot to drink your beverage while watching people on the dance floor or the artist perform. If you want to have a quiet drinking night different hotels such as Phudzi hotel allow walk-in where you can just come and enjoy drinks by the poolside.



Figure 3: Makgabana nite club in Letlhakane



Figure 4: Phudzi hotel in Letlhakane

While in Letlhakane if you want to stay away from the busy noise of the town centre you can go camping just in the outskirts of the town. There is a lovely place called, **The Plot**, where you can camp for a night, have a braai, and watch stars at night. The quietness in the place and a cool breeze of fresh air will make you enjoy your stay and relax both your mind and body.



Figure 5: Braai place with oven at The Plot, in the outskirts of Letlhakane



Figure 6: Ablution block at The Plot, in the outskirts of Letlhakane

Mosu Village

For most people, when they hear the word Mosu village the first thing that comes to their minds is a home for the third president of the Republic of Botswana. As you drive from Letlhakane and join the A30 going towards Francistown. Just before you get to Tlalamabele veterinary checkpoint you will see a turn on your left to Mosu village. The tarred road to Mosu village is still new as it was constructed in 2021. Before getting to Mosu you will see a sign on your left written **Mowana Tree**. Mowana is a Setswana name for the Baobab tree. You can park your car under the **Mowana** tree for a quick snack before you proceed to the village.



Figure 7: A baobab tree sign on the road to Mosu village

As you proceed on your journey to Mosu you will start getting a beautiful view of the Makgadikgadi Pans. Mosu is slightly elevated, so, you are guaranteed a nice view of the pans.



Figure 8: " Welcome to Mosu" board just as you enter Mosu village from the Tlamabele veterinary checkpoint side

When you see this sign, you have reached your destination. Proceed straight until you get to the **Kgotla**. The Botswana National Museum has offices at the **Kgotla** where local guides are available to escort you to the following sites; **Mmakgama Ruins, Unikae Spring, Kaitsho Escarpment and Mosu Escarpment**. The Unikae spring is a perennial spring that is a very reliable source of freshwater despite being in a salty area. The spring was used for watering domestic animals and some religious groups believe this water is sacred. Mosu escarpment is one of the hilltop iron age villages in Mosu.

The Mmakgama ruins are an important cultural heritage site that was built in the 14th century as an extension of Great Zimbabwe into the Makgadikgadi Pans. Mmakgama ruins occupants traded glass beads with the local Khoisan for salt and furs. The Mmakgama ruins site is at the top of the hill in Mosu. It is a great place to climb up to the viewing deck which provides a great view of the Makgadikadi Pans.



Figure 9: Wall built by the Mmakgama ruins residents during the 14th century Great Zimbabwe extension into the Makgadikgadi Pans



Figure 10: View of the Makgadikgadi Pans (far end, without trees) from the Mmakgama Ruins viewing deck

The drive from the tarred road in Mosu to Kaitshé is quite a distance but it's worth it. When you get to the Kaitshé Escarpment viewing deck you will get a nice view of the Sowa Pans, which are one of the pans of the Makgadikgadi Pans. Kaitshé is a multicultural site located on a promontory escarpment overlooking the southernmost edges of the Sowa pan. The free-standing stones were built around AD 1000 by the Leopard Kopje farmers. There are large middens with scatters of stone tools, animal bones, iron tools, glass beads and pottery fragments suggesting people lived here for a long time. Kaitshé Escarpment is also ideal for hiking.



Figure 11: View of the Kaitsho Escarpment from the southern part of the Sowa Pans, one of the largest pans of the Makgadikgadi Pans

Moriti wa Selemo- Tlalamabele

A drive along the A30 from Letlhakane to Francistown, when you get to Tlalamabele veterinary checkpoint you drive a distance less than 5km and you will see the **Moriti wa Selemo Bushcamp** sign on your left. The distance from the tarred road to the camp is short, about 200m. Moriti wa Selemo will be on your right-hand side. Moriti wa Selemo has very affordable **camping sites** in which you have to bring your tents. There are different activities offered at the camp such as **zip-lining, mini-golf, quad bikes, snooker** as well as a **children's playground** which you must pay a fee to partake. There is also an entrance fee for both adults and kids. A braai stand and swimming pool are offered for free after paying the entrance fee.



Figure 12: Moriti wa Selemo Bush Camp just after Tlalamabele veterinary checkpoint. Photo credit, Stay Botswana

Orapa

Orapa, the diamond capital of Botswana is situated 20 km from Letlhakane town along A14. The Debswana Orapa diamond mine is the world's largest diamond mine. Entry into Orapa requires a valid entry permit. Orapa has the **Adrian Gale Museum** which is Botswana's first diamond museum with many exhibits to showcase Botswana's diamond mining history. Still in Orapa, one can go on a game drive at the **Orapa game park**. Different kinds of birds, animals such as eland, zebra, giraffe, wildebeest, springbok, and waterbucks among others are found at this game park.

Makumutu Lodge and campsite is situated about 3km from the Orapa south-east entry gate. The Bushmen Corner pan opposite Makumutu Lodge is a perfect place for one to watch the sunset while having a few snacks or even over a glass of wine or cup of tea/coffee. There are different activities that one can do while staying at Makumutu such as visiting the pans, going on a game drive at the Orapa game park, a tour of the Adrian Gale museum as well as visiting the Lions park along the B300. The Lodge will arrange for the permit you require for entry to Orapa which is otherwise difficult to obtain.



Figure 13: Wooden cabin at Makumutu lodge and campsite along B300

Mopipi

As you drive along the B300 from Orapa going up north you will eventually get to Mopipi village. To the west of the village lies a lakebed which is the floor of the Mopipi dam. The Mopipi dam was constructed in the late 1960s to provide water to the Orapa Diamond mine. From time to time the dam holds water which attracts domestic animals. Different birds can be viewed at the dam. Therefore, if you are a keen birdwatcher then Mopipi dam is the ideal place for you otherwise there isn't much to do in Mopipi.



Figure 14: Mopipi dam lakebed, ideal for birdwatching

Mmadikola

Mmadikola is a settlement along the B300 just before Rakops village on your way to Maun. There isn't much in the settlement itself, however, there are leadwood trees that are on each side of the road. Many locals travelling up north or down south quickly stop there to take a picture. On your way stop by the trees and take pictures of yourself or the leadwood trees.



Figure 16: Leadwoods on each side of the road along B300, a few kilometres from Mmadikola village

Rakops

As mentioned earlier, Boteti is the gateway to the Makgadikgadi Pans and the Central Kalahari Game Reserve. Driving along the B300 going up north you will pass through the village of Rakops. Rakops is on the edge of the desert and is located about 200m from the Central Kalahari turnoff and about 45km from the Central Kalahari Game Reserve entrance gate. There are tour operators in Rakops who take people into the CKGR as well as the Makgadikgadi Pans National Park. Arrangements can be made if you want to visit either of the two places as they are not reached by two-wheel drive cars.

Engliten Investments in Rakops village has a bar, an ATM and a restaurant that sells freshly-prepared hot meals throughout the day. Be sure to check out the restaurant at Engliten Investment for a nice plate of Setswana cuisines such as *phaleche* (pap) and *seswaa*. The bar is also open at normal trading hours. Oftentimes, you will find locals at the bar seated enjoying their drinks, you can join them and have a nice chat about their village and the experience they have of living next to one of the world's largest game reserves.



Figure 17: Engliten investments complex in Rakops



Figure 18:Engliton restaurant in Rakops



Figure 19: Phaleche (pap) and seswaa bought at Engliton restaurant in Rakops.

From Rakops going up north, there is a beautiful grass plain where you can go mountain biking. Residents of Rakops are farmers, therefore you should expect domesticated animals such as cattle, goats, sheep, and horse grazing on the grass plain. You will at times find wild animals such as zebras and antelopes on the grassy plain as well. For some people safari mountain biking is part of the bucket list, so why not try it as you pass through the grassy plain.



Figure 20: Grass plain between Rakops and Khumaga, ideal for biking.

Khumaga

Khumaga, a small village that sits on a terrace above the Boteti River. The Boteti River is a boundary between Khumaga and the Makgadikgadi Pans National Park. Boteti River is an overflow of the Okavango Delta and the famous Thamalakane River in Maun. The Boteti River is a seasonal river that depends on the direction of the overflow of the Okavango Delta. If the overflow goes south the Boteti River will have water. When the Boteti River flow is strong, it fills up the Lake Xau and the Mopipi dam after which it discharges its water into the Makgadikgadi Pans. **Fishing** is one of the activities that is carried out by the locals in the Boteti River. If you like fishing you can join locals for a few hours. Water lilies can also be harvested in the river. The domesticated animals of Khumaga residents and the wild animals from the national park also drink water from the same river.

The proximity of Khumaga to Makgadikgadi Pans National Park and the Central Kalahari Game Reserve pose challenges for the residents. Wild animals such as lions' prey on their livestock and elephants destroy the crops in the field before they can even be harvested. The interaction of the livestock with wild animals is not ideal as the latter is a carrier of different diseases such as foot and mouth disease as a result have an impact on exports. The human-wildlife conflict in this village does not end here. Human lives have been lost because of wild animals such as elephants. Therefore, it's vital to take great precautions and follow the instructions while in the area to ensure your safety.

The Boteti River Camp in Khumaga has various campsites you can choose from; they also have chalets and standard rooms offering you a variety of accommodation to choose from. The Boteti River Camp is close to the Boteti River, therefore when sleeping at night you can hear honking calls of a hippopotamus. You will also be able to hear the trumpeting sound made by elephants. The camp also offers game drives to the Makgadikgadi Pans for a minimum number of two people per session. There are no boat cruises offered by the Boteti River Camp. Food at the camp is prepared upon request/order, alternatively, you can have a braai as a braai stand is available and firewood is readily available for sale to clients. From the elevated bar, you get a great view of the river where you can enjoy a cold drink while you watch the various animals from the Makgadikgadi Pans National Park across the river come down to drink.



Figure 21: Boteti River Camp in Khumaga village



Figure 22: Camping at Boteti River Camp in Khumaga