

WELCOME TO THE WEST



Almost no-one lives on the western side of Botswana. You can expect vast and empty landscapes; river valleys that last flowed in the Pleistocene; and tiny dusty villages an hour or two apart along the highways.

Ghanzi is the only real town. It's not so long ago that the Kalahari Arms Hotel removed the fence built to stop roaming lions frightening the patrons.

Tumbleweed and cowboys wouldn't seem out of place in the main street.

It's an inhospitable land, but there is much here to interest a tourist.

This is San (i.e. Kalahari Bushmen) country. The San live all over Botswana, but here in the west is the easiest place to connect with them. Most of the local lodges and camps offer animal tracking, foraging or cultural excursions with local San groups; and the small museum in D'Kar village is dedicated to San artifacts and history. The Kuru Arts Centre in D'Kar is a home-grown San art project, and well worth a visit.



Music lovers will enjoy the Gantsi Picnic Sessions, typically held on a Sunday at 'The Gat', an open air venue beside a quarry pond. Contemporary music and stylish outfits: this is where the hip young people of Ghanzi go to socialise. But the highlight of the cultural year is undoubtedly the Kuru Dance Festival. San groups from all over Namibia and Botswana gather to show off their traditional dance and music. It is held on a night with a full moon in winter.





The Ghanzi district is also cattle country. Pockets of land favoured with good soils and artesian water are used for both ranching and horticultural production. Many of the farmers here are 'Kalahari Boers', descendants of the thirstland trekkers of the 19th Century. They found grazing land around Ghanzi and decided to settle. The annual Ghanzi Agricultural Show is one of the biggest in the country, typically held in late July.



Wherever there is surface water there will be a great abundance of birds. Where there is no water the birdlife will be dominated by the desert specialists. The Kalahari grasslands are home to the long-legged Secretary Bird, which preys on snakes and lizards, and the Sociable Weaver. The huge colonial nests of the sociable weaver are said to be the biggest nest produced by birds anywhere in the world.



Children will love the C.L. Woolcott Vulture Restaurant. This attracts all the vulture species found in the area, along with Marabou storks and a range of mammalian scavengers. The birds can be viewed up close from an underground bunker, the walls of which are covered with fun facts about the birds.



And of course all the animals of the Kalahari Desert are to be found in the district. The Central Kalahari Game Reserve has the name recognition, but the private game farms and reserves on this western side of the country have all the same animals. Springhares, bat-eared fox, jackals, and the elusive brown hyaena are found everywhere, and if you have time there is also a cheetah conservation project to visit.





For those wanting physical activity there is horseriding and trail running on offer, and it may be possible to sign up for a multi-day total immersion experience with the San in the desert, tracking animals, foraging for wild foods and finding water the hard way.