



Hike and bike the Hills of Eastern Botswana

Botswana has much to offer hikers and cyclists. You can track rhino and giraffe on foot; explore 19th Century goldfields; and cycle along elephant trackways, pounded smooth over millenia. But we need to face facts. For half the year the daytime temperatures are simply too hot for these activities to be enjoyable. From April to August conditions are a lot more temperate.

This self-drive circuit is aimed at the fit and active. It avoids the National Parks, in which hiking and cycling are forbidden because of the lions. There is wildlife everywhere in Botswana and you will see a lot of it regardless. And in the Northern Tuli Game Reserve you might even see a lion. But there you will be cycling alongside a ranger with a rifle. On this itinerary you can do as much or as little as you like. At the end of each day you will find yourself somewhere with a comfortable bed and a good meal to help you to prepare for the morrow. It's a unique way to see the country. You will need a high clearance 2x4 vehicle, and hire of a Toyota Cross or Rav 4 or similar with unlimited mileage is included in the price.

Day 1: Mokolodi Nature Reserve 12 miles, ½ hr

Arrive at Sir Seretse Khama International Airport, collect your rental car, and stock up on trail snacks etc before heading to Mokolodi Nature Reserve, just outside the city. Your accommodation is a comfortable self catering chalet in the bush, overlooking a small lake. Mokolodi has a lovely restaurant so you don't need to cook, though you may want to prepare your own breakfasts so you can watch the animals coming to drink in the morning.

Day 2: Mokolodi

A 7500 acre, hilly bushland reserve, owned by a wildlife conservation trust. It is criss-crossed with mountainbiking trails, and there are mountain bikes for hire at reception. It would take all day to cycle all of the trails, especially as you often have to give way to animals. For the non-cyclists there are three walking trails, of 3, 5 and 8 km respectively.

Day 3:

The hills inside Mokolodi Nature Reserve provide splendid views to the south and east, but you can't see Gaborone through the imposing bulk of Kgale Hill. The solution is to leave at first light and go and climb Kgale Hill itself. The trail is well marked and the summit rocks provide a panoramic view of the whole of Gaborone. On the way up you will almost certainly encounter some of the Kgale baboons: they sleep on the crags, but spend their days in suburbia. Always fun to watch but keep a close eye on your possessions. After climbing Kgale Hill either return to Mokolodi, or head for the 20 km Tlokweng loop trail on the NE side of the city. It's popular with local mountainbikers and joggers, but unknown to tourists. It passes through a mix of farmland and bush. There is limited wildlife along this trail, but there will be plenty of cattle, goats and donkeys. On Saturdays an alternative is a fun run amongst the animals on Kenmoir Game Farm at Ruretse.

Days 4 and 5: Lobatse 44 miles, 1 hr

Leaving Mokolodi, head south to Lobatse. Along the way you will pass Lentswe-la-Baratini, one of the two contenders for being the highest hill in Botswana

It towers over the little village of Otse. Stop in at the village kgotla to organise a guide to the summit for tomorrow. The trail to the top is poorly marked. There are abandoned manganese mines to explore around Otse as well. At Lobatse itself the largely abandoned golf course makes for an interesting walk with a great deal of birdlife and some interesting history. At one time the main fairway was the local airport, used improbably by Air Alaska in the 1970's as they flew dubious cargoes to trouble-torn parts of Africa; and earlier by Bechuanaland Air Safaris, a tourist airline that was actually a front for the British Secret Service.

Your accommodation is a lovely thatched cottage on the NW side of the town; and it has a great swimming pool. After climbing Lentswe la Baratini you might really appreciate it !



Hike and bike the Hills of Eastern Botswana

Days 6:& 7 Kanye 78 miles, 1 ¾ hrs

The other contender for the title of highest hill is Monalanong Hill, near the village of Mogonnye. It probably has the better title, but it would take a detailed survey to separate the two as the difference in height is well within the 15m margin of error of satellite altimetry measurements. If you want to be sure you have climbed the highest hill in the country the solution is to climb both. Alternatively, the 10 km return walk from the gatehouse to Mogonnye Gorge is less strenuous but still interesting. It's a deep gorge cut into the basalt rock and home to quite a variety of ferns.

Your accommodation for the next two nights is a rondavel hut at the Kgogomodumo Lodge & Cultural Village. They have a nice restaurant and a swimming pool, and are close to the Pharing and Kanye gorges, and the Mmakgodumo Dam. The first is a bit of a scramble (pictured below) but the second is popular with walkers and contains a number of pools of permanent water. The pools attract the local wildlife and this gorge is well worth a visit. The dam has been stocked with American smallmouthed bass, and attracts both birdwatchers and sports fishermen. A walk to the far end of the dam takes you to a curious stone walled structure built in the shape of a snake with the head of a goat. The original significance has been lost in the mists of time.

About an hour to the W of Kanye is the Motsekenatse ruin, a stone walled hilltop village dating back 1000 years. It was long abandoned, but reoccupied for a time in the early 19th Century by the warlike Amandebele tribe under their feared Chief Mzilikazi. The ruins are a national monument, and the National Museum stations guides here to conduct tourists around the ruins and to explain the part the Amandebele played in the history of Bechuanaland. It's a large site and will take at least 90 minutes to explore on foot.

Days 8 & 9: Shoshong 186 miles 3 ½ hrs

Follow the B112 northwards. Better known as the 'Missionary Road to the North' this was pioneered by Dr David Livingstone in the 1840's. It remained part of the main route from the Cape Colony to Rhodesia until the coming of the railroad in 1896. Nowadays it is a high quality tarred road, though with very little traffic, but there is still a lot of interest along the way, so make a day of the journey. The route skirts the edge of the Kalahari Desert. Near the halfway point of Lephephe Wells there is the opportunity to explore some of the vegetated dunes typical of the 'sandveld' country. The dunes are interesting but the powdery sand is exhausting to walk through and presented serious difficulties to the ox carts of the 19th Century.

From US \$4000 pp twin share

25 DAYS / 24 NIGHTS

LODGES, GUEST HOUSES, SELF CATERING

WHATS INCLUDED

- A personal meet and greet service on arrival at Sir Seretse Khama International Airport
- Hire of a Toyota Cross, Rav4 or similar for the duration of your stay
- 5 breakfasts, 5 dinners, 4 lunches
- 3 nights at Mokolodi Nature Reserve
- 2 nights at Firethorn Cottage, Lobatse
- 2 nights at Kgogodumo Lodge
- 2 nights at Mashusha Guesthouse
- 2 nights at Goo-Moremi Resort
- 3 nights at Segagai Farm
- 1 night at Khama Rhino Sanctuary
- 2 nights at Makumutu Safari Lodge
- 2 nights at Tantebane Resort
- 1 night at Phokoje Bush Lodge
- 4 nights Northern Tuli Game Reserve
- A unique Self Drive Tours Botswana guidebook to the route travelled, tailored to your interests.





Hike and bike the Hills of Eastern Botswana

Shoshong itself is another very historic village. Formerly the capital of the Bamangwato tribe, the original Shoshong was built in the mouth of a narrow gorge, easily defended against Amandebele raiding parties. If you are interested in the history, the ruins of old Shoshong, and the even earlier ruins on nearby Pitsane Hill are both National Monuments. Both make interesting walks, as does the Shoshong Gorge itself, which is popular with local runners and hikers. A hike to the head of the gorge takes about 5 hours return. It is also possible to carry on over the hill to Kalamare Village and return by public transport.

Days 10 to 13: The Tswapong Hills 296 miles 5 ½ hrs (over 4 days)

The Tswapong Hills are a massive block of very ancient sandstone and banded ironstone, running NW to SE for about 80 km. They offer some of the very best hiking opportunities in Botswana. Make a day of the journey. Bantu people were smelting iron here as early as 600 AD, and some of the sites have been preserved by the National Museum, along with the ancient mine pits. Modern mineral exploration has focused on manganese, and you can walk in to an abandoned manganese mining site as well. There are sacred springs, a Boer War battlefield, and a restaurant with a lovely deck overlooking the Limpopo River.

End the day at the Goo-Moremi resort, ready for a long hike up the Goo-Moremi Gorge in the morning. Endangered Cape Vultures nest on the towering cliffs at the head of the gorge, and you are in for a 5 hour return hike with a guide from the local village. The Goo-Moremi resort is also home to the Senwedi Trail, which you can walk unguided. Taking this slowly you might see zebra, kudu, impala, baboon, steenbok, duiker and other animals along the way. Then move on to Segaiyai Farm at the NW end of the hills, stopping to explore Toutswevogala Hill along the way. Walk the 8 km Porcupine Loop self guiding interpretive trail; go foraging for wild foods in the hill forest with a local lady; taste the traditional beverages of the Batswapong people and enjoy a very traditional outdoor dinner with dishes you won't find on any restaurant menu. Segaiyai Farm is also the starting point for the OPM trail, the ancient walking track to Old Palapye and Malaka Village. It takes about 6 hours to walk; is well marked; and is through forest all the way. Malaka is a picturesque hill village with beautiful gorges round about and ready access to the big historic site of Old Palapye. A day in Malaka is always a day well spent, and you can return to Segaiyai Farm for a second night and enjoy the company of some very tame nocturnal animals.

Day 14: Khama Rhino Sanctuary 57 miles 1 ½ hrs

Head for Serowe, and climb the steep Swaneng Hill to see an intact 19th Century Hill fort built on the flat top; and the hyrax making their home amongst the basalt columns. If you wish, also take a tour of Serowe (partly driving and partly on foot) with a guide from the Khama III Memorial Museum. Or follow a self guided, self driving ethno-botanical trail along the Paje to Serule road

End the day at the Khama Rhino Sanctuary with a late afternoon guided game drive. The internal roads of the Sanctuary really need a 4x4.

At dawn tomorrow you can choose to go rhino tracking on foot with one of the guides if you wish. But they will take you only if they think you are fit enough, so organise this when you arrive.

Days 15 and 16: Orapa, 134 miles, 2 ¾ hrs

Orapa is a town built on diamond mining. It has a very informative diamond museum open five days a week; an opportunity to join a tour of the mine every Thursday; and a game reserve which has all the animals of the Kalahari Desert including lions. The lions mean that you can't walk here, but you can drive yourself around the reserve in any ordinary car since the roads are paved with waste rock from the mine. Entry to the Orapa Game Reserve is included in the price.

On the way to Orapa there will be an opportunity to explore Khubuladintsha Hill on foot.

Days 17 & 18: Tsamaya, 228 miles, 4 ½ hrs

Leave Orapa early and head for the village of Mosu, on the southern shore of the Makgadikgadi Pans. This is a place where you can often swim in the hypersaline waters of the giant Sua Pan, or hike up one of the high escarpments for an infinity view over the pan. When the pan is dry it is possible to drive out over the salt crust to the foot of the 130m high Kaitshe Escarpment. The only way to obtain a better view over the Pans is to take a scenic flight. A guide at Mosu is included in the price.



At Makgaba wave action from the long vanished Lake Makgadikgadi has created a shoreline of islets and wave cut embayments, exposing the petrified remains of trees dating back to the Triassic period.

Further on, you can walk up Nyangabwe Hill for a view over Botswana's second city, Francistown.

Tonight's accommodation is a hilltop chalet overlooking a small lake in the centre of a private game resort.

Tantebane is a resort where you can walk the many trails amongst the animals; play golf on a course where the greens are mowed by antelope; take a boat cruise on the dam; or simply use the resort as a base from which to explore the many points of interest in the surrounding area. We will provide notes on some of the latter.

Day 19: Selebi Phikwe via Old Tati goldfield 101 miles, 3 ½ hrs

Gold was discovered in the Tati River in the 1860's, sparking the first gold rush in southern Africa. (The famous Witwatersrand gold rush didn't get underway until 1886). The Tati gold rush attracted parties of miners from all over the world. The alluvial gold was quickly exhausted and attention switched to mining the quartz reefs. The 'New Zealand' mine was the deepest on the field, and said to have been sunk to a depth of 360 m.

The village of Old Tati has been deserted for more than a century and the old goldfield has been reclaimed by the African bush, but there are still many relics which make this a very interesting place to explore. There is no tourist infrastructure here and visitors need to be self sufficient and prepared for a walk of 10 to 15 km.

End the day at a comfortable lodge near the mining town of Selebi Phikwe.

Days 20 to 23: Pont Drift 113 miles, 3 ½ hrs

Arrive at Pont Drift by mid day ready to embark on a unique three day / four night mountain bike safari . You'll be cycling through the vast, remote wilderness of the Northern Tuli Game Reserve, home to many elephants and most predators – including lions, leopards and cheetah. All equipment is supplied, though you may prefer to bring your own helmet.

The aim is to ride four to five hours per day, covering 30 to 40 kms (20 to 25 miles). You'll be cycling on paths trampled by herds of elephant for thousands of years, resulting in single track that is often smoother and more free-flowing than any man made equivalent.

Accommodation is in permanent bush camps, where you will be well fed and looked after. Out on the trail you will be accompanied by two experienced professional rangers. The complex interlinking network of elephant trails allows the guides to adjust the route to cater to different levels of fitness.

You will, of course, meet the elephants that use the same trails.

They don't feel threatened by cyclists, but of course they have the right of way. A unique cycling experience !

Day 24: Palapye 172 miles, 4 hrs

You will be back at Pont Drift by lunchtime. It's too far to return to Gaborone by nightfall, so your accommodation tonight is in Palapye. You can get there either by following the Limpopo River south, passing through Baines Drift, or by taking the tarred road through Bobonong and Sefhope. We will supply guide notes to points of interest on both routes. The former is a gravel road, rough in places, for about half the distance but offers good wildlife viewing. If you've seen enough wildlife already the latter is a good quality tarred road.

Day 25: Gaborone and fly out 170 miles, 3 ½ hrs

Drive to Gaborone, return your car at the airport, and fly out to your next destination.



Hike and bike the Hills of Eastern Botswana