



Makgadikgadi Pans Circuit

Imagine a landscape the size of Portugal, with stark, flat terrain stretching to eternity, fusing with a distant horizon. This is the Makgadikgadi, an area of 12 000 km². In winter dust devils dance across the surface, and the salty grasslands seem barren and lifeless. The rains arrive in massive downpours in summer months, transforming the pans into vast powder blue lakes - a reminder of the gigantic, prehistoric lake that once was here.

The Makgadikgadi Pans are actually a myriad of pans of varying sizes. Interspersed between are sand dunes, rocky islands and peninsulas, and gently undulating grasslands. It's a harsh, forbidding landscape, offering solitude as complete as you'll find anywhere in Africa.

There are a wealth of hidden treasures here for those prepared to look. A plethora of archaeological sites suggest continuous occupation ever since the early stone age. The San (Kalahari bushmen) people are still here. You will find them. And the pans are not as lifeless as they seem from a distance. Desert specialists like meerkats, brown hyaena, and springhare are here all year. Huge herds of zebra and wildebeest are seasonal visitors. And the Sua Pan is the most important breeding site for flamingo in Southern Africa.

Wherever there is fresh water around the margins of the Makgadikgadi there are small villages. Many different tribal groups have been drawn to the area, and each village has a unique character. You will meet BaKalanga, BaHerrero, Bahurutse; Bamangwato and others as you travel.

This is a self drive camping holiday. You will be driving a 4x4 with a rooftop tent, and venturing far out into the Makgadikgadi Pans on your own. The car will be equipped with recovery gear, a satellite phone and a GPS navigation system. Driving on the Pans is not difficult when they are dry, but challenging after rain, and in the event that the pans flood, Self Drive Tours Botswana will make alternative arrangements.



Herero ladies in their traditional dress - which they wear whenever they go to town !

Day 1: Maun

Collect your rental car at the airport, and stock up for the journey. If you have time to spare the craft markets beckon; and there are many other attractions such as the Okavango Craft Brewery, which makes beer from millet grown in the Okavango Craft Brewery. Your campsite for tonight will have lighting, an electrical outlet, an attractive restaurant and a view over the Thamalakane River. It is very close to the airport, and so very convenient if you are arriving late in the day.

Day 2: Maun to Khumaga 89 miles, 2 hrs

Drive south to Khumaga and into the Makgadikgadi Pans National Park. During the dry season the wildlife of the park are concentrated along the waterholes in the Boteti River. Elephants, impala, wildebeest, zebra and hippo galore. An afternoon drive along the river terrace never fails to disappoint, and there is no need for a guide.



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Tonight's campsite is right alongside the Boteti River, so you can be lulled to sleep by the snorting of hippo. The campsite is fenced to prevent the hippo and elephant from mingling with the campers.

Day 3: Khumaga – Kubu Island 150 miles, 4hrs

The road from Khumaga to Kubu Island is full of interest, with much to see and do along the way. It follows the Boteti River south to Mopipi; and then passes the diamond mines at Orapa. The Orapa Diamond Museum (open Tuesday to Saturday each week) is well worth a visit, and tours of the mines are offered every Thursday. Kubu Island itself is a granite rock island on the south western side of the Sua Pan. Magnificent rock formations and baobab trees make Kubu Island a great place for photography especially as the sun is rising or setting over the pan. The campsite here is run by a local community trust. There are cold showers and flushing toilets, but no electricity; and the groundwater is brackish so it pays to bring your own drinking water. There is firewood for sale at the reception, but otherwise campers need to be self sufficient. Please note that Kubu Island becomes inaccessible after rain. In this event your accommodation will either be a campsite near Orapa or at Makgaba.

Day 4 Kubu Island – Mosu – Francistown 201 miles, 5 hrs

The road from Kubu Island to Francistown will take you through the lovely village of Mosu at the southern end of the Sua Pan.

Botswana come here for their summer holidays to go swimming; land yachting; or to camp on the beaches along the shoreline of the Pan.

A guide will take you out to the shoreline for a swim in the hypersaline waters, or across the salt flats if they are dry. The high escarpments here provide an infinity view of the pan. Mosu is also home to an eternal spring, a freshwater lagoon packed with birdlife, and many historic sites. The cost of the guide is included. Expect to spend at least half a day in Mosu before motoring on to Francistown, Botswana's 2nd city. The cost of the guide for half a day is included.

Your accommodation for tonight is a campsite beside the Tati River. There will be hot showers; a swimming pool; electrical outlets and electric lighting.

Day 5 Francistown – Nata 180 miles, 2 ¾ hrs

Francistown began as a gold mining town in the late 19th century. This is reflected in the architecture and street names. Gold is still being mined here today. There's a particularly vibrant market place in Haskins Street, where traders of 3 countries meet and haggle. Well worth a visit.

Douma Crocodile Farm is along the way to Nata. Raising Nile crocodiles, it supplies fine crocodile skins to the Italian fashion industry. A guided tour is highly recommended; and from time to time there is crocodile meat on sale. Arrive at Nata Bird Sanctuary by mid afternoon.

From USD 2620 per couple

8 DAYS/ 7 nights

4x4 CAMPING

DATES: All year round. Weather conditions during the rainy season may require adjustments to the itinerary.

WHAT'S INCLUDED

- A personal meet and greet service on arrival at Maun International Airport .
- Hire of a rental vehicle for the duration of the trip (8 days) The advertised price is based on a Toyota Hilux GD6 4x4 or similar with a rooftop tent and fully equipped for camping and off-road travel, and with a satellite phone and a Garmin GPS pre-loaded with Tracks4Africa. It assumes the driver is aged 26 or over. Upgrades are available at additional cost.
- 7 nights camping at campsites enroute
- A step-aboard guide for half a day in Mosu
- A 'meet the meerkats' tour in Gweta
- Road maps of Botswana and the Makgadikgadi Pans National Park
- A bespoke Self Drive Tours Botswana guidebook covering the route travelled , and tailored to your interests. This will help you to make the most of your journey and provide some unique insights into this special area of Botswana

WHAT'S NOT INCLUDED

- National Park fees – you pay these at the gate as you enter. The cost depends on nationality.
- Entry fees for Adrian Gale Diamond Museum
- Entry fees for Douma Crocodile Farm
- Entry fees for Nata Bird Sanctuary
- Scenic flight over the delta
- Personal vacation insurance. This is essential and cover should be in place from when you book your vacation
- Surcharges for pickup or return of the rental vehicle on a public holiday or a weekend
- Tips, gratuities and items of a personal nature
- Flights to and from Maun





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This is on the northern edge of the Sua Pan, and incorporates the delta of the Nata River, the biggest of the rivers discharging into the Pan. Depending on water levels the sanctuary is home to as many as 70,000 flamingos. Wildlife such as springbok, zebra, wildebeest, brown hyaena; aardwolf and jackal will be here too. Sunset and sunrise views over the Pan are not to be missed.

Tonight's accommodation is a campsite inside the Sanctuary with flush toilets and hot showers, but in other respects campers need to be self sufficient.

DAY 6 Nata – Gweta 62 miles, 2 hrs

Explore the Nata River Delta on foot. People have lived here since the early stone age, and stone tools are often found lying on the shorelines. The delta is also on the lee side of the pan: scavengers like brown hyaena and jackals will patrol the water's edge in the hope that a flamingo carcass will wash ashore.

Then take a walk around the ancient village of Nata and along the riverbank. People have been living alongside the Nata River for at least 80,000 years. They are still making mud bricks and harvesting salt alongside the river in an age-old tradition. The road to Gweta is being rebuilt during 2025, so delays due to roadworks can be expected; and the speed limit is only 80 km/hr to protect the wildlife of grasslands you will be travelling through.

Accommodation for tonight is a campsite with hot showers, flushing toilets; electricity and a good restaurant.

An optional alternative is to spend the night under the stars out on the Ntwetwe Pan, organized by Gweta Lodge. They will provide a full dinner, a bedroll and a breakfast out on the salt crust of the Pan; and you still get to see the meerkats in the morning. Additional charges apply.

DAY 7 Gweta- Maun 2, 2 ½ hrs

The big attraction in Gweta is the opportunity to visit a troop of meerkats out on the shores of the Ntwetwe Pan. These energetic, engaging animals have been habituated to humans. They busily dig and forage right in front of you if you sit quietly. The sentinel of the group may even climb onto your shoulder to gain a better view of any dangers in the surrounding landscape. An early morning guided excursion to visit the meerkats is included in the price.

Your guide will be in contact with a tracker who follows the meerkat troop every day. They are constantly on the move and would otherwise be impossible to find in this enormous, empty landscape. You'll return to Gweta late morning.

The road to Maun passes through Nxai Pan National Park. The elephants of the park have learned to open valves on the water pipeline, and have created their own waterholes alongside the highway.

You can expect to see all manner of wildlife along the roadside, so allow plenty of time.

Arrive in Maun in time to explore some places of interest around the town – and perhaps visit the Nhabe Museum. This is home to a number of artisans pursuing traditional crafts like making paper from elephant dung; making the traditional musical instruments of the area; and basketry.

DAY 8 Maun- onward destination

One 'must do' in Maun is a scenic flight over the Okavango Delta. It's hard to appreciate the geography and scale from ground level. There is usually plenty of time for this on the morning you leave since international flights don't depart until later in the day. Something to consider once you know the timing of your international flight. (Additional charges apply).

