



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 !

Day1: Maun

Collect your rental car at the airport, and stock up for the journey. Maun has many artists and artisans. If you have time to spare the craft markets beckon.

Day 2: Maun to Orapa: 326 km, 4 hrs

Follow the Boteti River south to Orapa. The Boteti is the boundary of the Makgadikgadi Pans National Park. During the dry season the wildlife of the park are concentrated along the riverside. Elephants, impala, wildebeest, and zebra galore. It's worth stopping wherever a road gives access to the river. But there are other points of interest along this road too. Something to see in every season..

Day 3: Orapa

Orapa is a giant diamond mine. Visit the huge diamond museum, and perhaps take a tour of the mine itself.



Makgadikgadi Pans Circuit

Diamonds have facilitated Botswana's development from one of the poorest in Africa to the country with the highest GDP per capital. The Orapa Game Reserve is home to all the species of the Kalahari excepting elephants. The internal roads are paved with waste rock from the mines, and you can take a self drive safari in an ordinary sedan car. A good place to find rhino.

DAY 4 Orapa – Mosu – Francistown 323 km, 4 hrs

Detour to Mosu at the southern end of the Sua 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 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. Expect to spend a few hours before motoring on to Francistown, Botswana's 2nd city.

DAY 5 Francistown – Nata 290 km 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 very informative.

Then take a late afternoon tour of Nata Bird Sanctuary on the edge of the Sua Pan. Depending on water levels the sanctuary is home to 70,000 flamingos. Wildlife such as springbok, zebra, wildebeest, and jackal will be here too. The sunset is usually superb.

DAY 6 Nata – Gweta 100 km 2 hrs

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 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.

You need to arrive by 2.30pm to prepare for a night out on the pan. You will be provided with a picnic dinner and bedroll to sleep under the stars.

If a night under the stars is not for you, you can choose to stay in the lodge and visit the meerkats early the next morning.

DAY 7 Gweta- Maun 210 km, 2 ½ hrs

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 will also find San bushmen in their traditional dress.

From USD 2620 per couple

8 DAYS/ 7 nights

LOGDES AND GUEST HOUSES

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 (7days) The advertised price is based on a manual Toyota Corolla or similar, with 1200 free km. It assumes the driver is aged 26 or over. Upgrades are available at additional cost.
- 7 nights accommodation staying in lodges/hotel enroute
- Breakfast on 5 days
- Entry fees for the Orapa Game Reserve
- A step-aboard guide for half a day in Mosu
- A guided tour of the Nata Bird Sanctuary
- 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 the Adrian Gale Diamond Museum and the Orapa Mine Tour
- Entry fees for Douma Crocodile Farm
- 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
- Mileage charges over and above the 1200 free km.
- Tips, gratuities and items of a personal nature
- Flights to and from Maun

They will tell you about survival in the desert You'll be back in Gweta late morning.

The road to Maun passes through Nxai Pan National Park. The elephants 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.

Arrive in Maun in time to explore some places of interest around the town – and perhaps visit the only craft brewery in Botswana. They make beer from millet grown in the Okavango Delta.

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).

