



Wildflowers, Wildlife and Lifeways of Botswana

Botswana has the land area of France, but only 2.3 million people. Most live in the east. The sparsely populated west is mostly desert, and home to the San (Kalahari Bushmen); the Bakgalagadi; the Nama, the Herero; the Hambukushu, and the BaYei. Setswana is only a minority language on this side of the country.

The arid beauty of the Kalahari captivates year round, but the rainy season brings the desert to life. Carpets of wildflowers colour the landscape. Lush grasses and ephemeral waterbodies attract wildlife and birds from afar. The rains bring renewed zest to the lives of people and animals alike, and the western tribes invite visitors from all over the country to join them as they celebrate. There is a festival of some kind almost every weekend from August to March. Treats like the Yecho Cultural Music Festival in Ghanzi; the WaYei Cultural Festival in Gumare; the Okavango Music Festival in Samochima; the Nama Cultural Festival in Lokgabe; and the Xere Cultural Festival near Rakops.

This three week camping holiday will take you through the wildlife reserves and villages of the Kalahari Desert to experience all that it has to offer. Hire of a 4x4 Toyota Hilux with a rooftop tent and fully equipped for off-road travel and camping is included in the price

It would be best to come at the right time to see the wildflowers. Unfortunately the 'right time' depends on the rains. The desert blooms only briefly. The months of December to February are perhaps the best to pick. But the wildlife is here year round, and you can always expect a warm welcome from the local people. And in any three week period from August to December, or in February and March, there will be a cultural festival somewhere along the route. This is a 23 day circuit from Gaborone to Gaborone, but it would also be possible to start and end in Maun.

Days 1&2: 15 miles, ½ hr

Arrive in Gaborone, collect your car and stock up for the journey ahead.

Accommodation for the first two nights is a campsite inside the Mokolodi Nature Reserve, a 7600 acre wildlife sanctuary only 10 km from the city. It's a good opportunity to try out all the camping equipment. You can expect to see giraffe, ostrich, rhino, zebra, warthog, baboon and many other animals. There are no lions here, so it is safe to walk the trails, and mountain bikes are available for hire at reception. It's a good place to recover from the long journey to Botswana, recover from jet lag and take some exercise.

The reserve is not far from the Notwane River, and it is possible to cruise the tranquil waters in a silent electric boat: an ideal way to see the birds and Nile crocodiles along the forested banks. A 2 hour late afternoon cruise is included in the price.

Day 3: Gaborone to Kanye 100 miles, 2 hrs

Kanye is a hill village, the capital of the Bangwaketse tribe. The distance is short, but there is a lot to see and do along the way. You can:

1. Climb Kgale Hill for a panoramic view over Gaborone
2. Visit a pottery where clay from termite mounds is used to make lovely pieces of art.
3. Take a guided tour of the Kolobeng Mission historical site – home of Dr David Livingstone in the 1840's until it was destroyed by a Boer raiding party in 1853.
4. Visit the Manyana rock art site
5. Take a guided walk through the scenic Mogonye Gorge

And more ...

Detailed guide notes for all of these will be included in your personalised guide book.

Accommodation in Kanye is the campsite at Kgogomodumo Cultural Village, which is close to the Kanye gorges and the Mmakgodumo Dam bird sanctuary; and not far from the small Bathoen Memorial Museum, which has an outstanding collection of mineral specimens.

Day 4: Kanye to Werda 174 miles, 4 hrs

You are heading for the campsite of a small, family run safari lodge about 10 miles from the small village of Werda. The lodge has a swimming pool, a tennis court, and a small restaurant: the last touch of luxury you will see for a few days. Along the way, be sure to stop at the Motsekenatse Ruins, home of the notorious Amandebele chief Mzilikazi in the early 19th century. Human occupation of this hill goes back at least 1000 years, and the National Museum has guides stationed here to help you understand the history.



From USD 5870 per couple

23 DAYS
4x4 CAMPING

WHATS INCLUDED

- Hire of a Toyota Hilux GD6 4x4 or similar, fully equipped for camping and wilderness travel
- All campsite fees
- Entry to Mokolodi Nature Reserve
- Entry to Khama Rhino Sanctuary
- 2 hr cruise on the Notwane River in an electric boat
- Bushman foraging walk
- All day motorboat excursion from Guma Lagoon
- All day excursion in a dugout canoe from Guma Lagoon
- 1 x breakfast
- A road map of Botswana and a map of the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park
- A bespoke Self Drive Tours Botswana guidebook tailored to your route and interests

WHATS EXCLUDED

- National Park entry fees (pay in cash at the gate)
- Entry to Tsodilo Hills (pay in cash at the gate)
- Fuel for motorboat excursion (assessed at the end of the day and charged at BWP 20 per litre)
- GPS navigation unit (available at an extra cost)
- Satellite phone (available at an extra cost)

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The route will also take you through Sekoma, a tiny village famous as the base for a Zeppelin airship in the 1990's. The Zeppelin was used for diamond exploration by the Debswana mining company, and was equipped with a sophisticated suite of geophysical instruments. It came to a sad end when high winds tore it from its mooring mast, but memories of the time when Sekoma Pan was home to the only Zeppelin in Africa are still fresh. Stop and chat with one of the locals and you are sure to hear all about it.

Days 5 to 7: Werda to Kaa via the Transfrontier Park 250 miles, 10 ¼ hrs

The Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park is 9 million acres of unspoiled wilderness. You'll enter through the Mabuasehube Gate on Day 5, and exit via the Kaa Gate on Day 8. The distance shown includes the shortest route between the two gates, but you might want to explore further. The big attractions here are the wildflowers; the endless vistas; the grazing herds and all the predators. Sightings of the Kalahari black-maned lions are almost guaranteed. The campsites are unfenced, and the wild animals pass through as they please. The campsites have showers, toilets and shade, but you have to be self sufficient with water and everything else. A true wilderness experience.

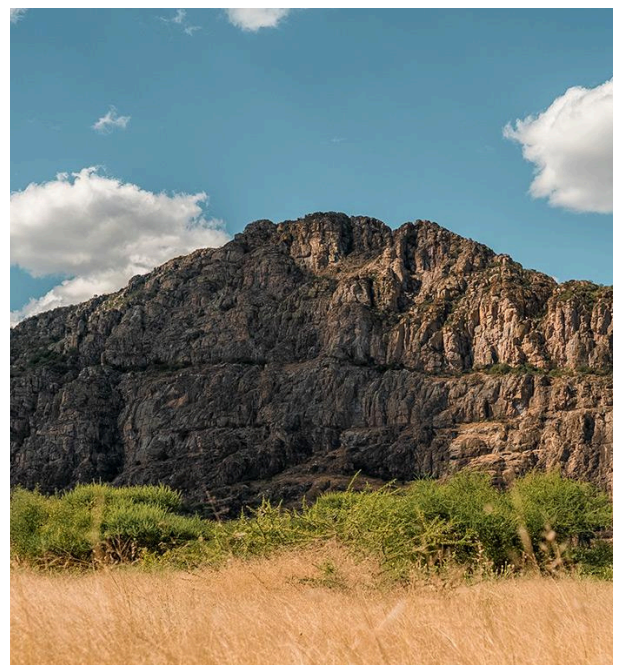
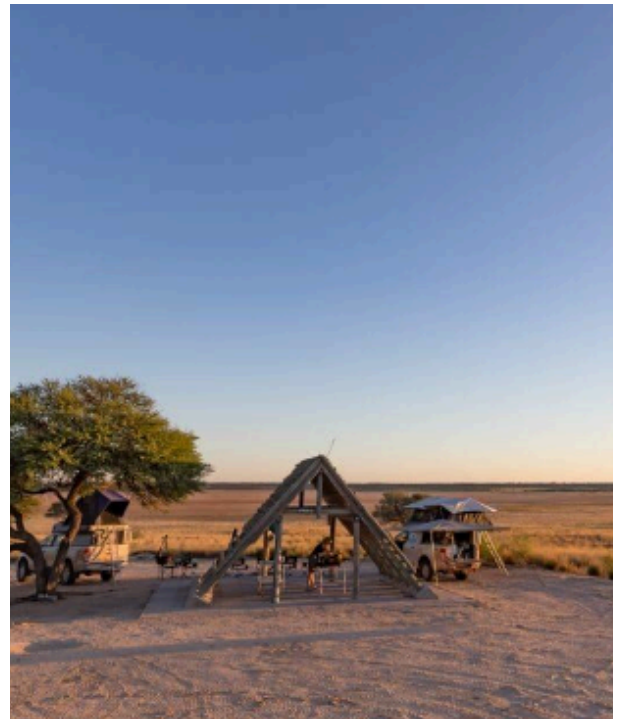
Days 8 to 11: Kaa to Ghanzi 335 miles, 9 ½ hrs

It's a long drive from Kaa to Ghanzi, with an overnight stop along the way. But it's not without interest. Lokgabe is a Nama village, populated by descendants of refugees from the Nama and Herero genocide in German Southwest Africa. There is a small museum here which tells the story. Lokgabe is also the venue for the annual Nama cultural festival. Further on the road passes through the Okwa Wildlife Management Area and the enigmatic dry river valleys of the Okwa and the Hanahai.

Your accommodation in Ghanzi is a game ranch, where San bushmen will take you on a foraging expedition to learn about the edible plants of the Kalahari and their traditional ways of living. A foraging excursion with the San is included in the price. It's another place where you can safely walk or jog amongst the wildlife. The campsite has hot showers, electric power points, internet and a lovely restaurant and bar with a view of a floodlit waterhole. There is a lot to do in the surrounding area as well.

Day 12: Tsodilo Hills 295 miles, 6 ½ hrs

The mysterious Tsodilo Hills rise steeply out of the northern Kalahari. There is a small and unsophisticated campsite here, operated by the tiny nearby village of Hambukushu.





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The aim is to arrive in time to watch the sunset in the late afternoon, and then climb the hills and see the outstanding display of rock art in the cool of the morning. This is a UNESCO World Heritage site, with evidence of human occupation stretching back to the Early Stone Age. There are hiking trails here too: it's a great place to get some exercise.

Tsodilo Hills are the northernmost point in your journey.

Days 13 to 15: Guma Lagoon 65 miles, 3 ¼ hrs

It's not far to Guma Lagoon, but the road is not very good. Nothing that a Hilux can't handle, but it takes a while. Guma Lagoon is at the N end of the Okavango Delta; and the surrounding area has deep river channels; permanent lagoons covered with water lilies, and swamps of papyrus. So it's well worth the drive.

The price includes two full days out in the waterways with a guide: the first in a motor boat to explore the deeper channels and lagoons; and the second in a dugout canoe which can get you deep into the swamps. There are animals here like otters, water mongoose and sitatunga antelope that you won't see elsewhere in your journey, and the birdlife is simply amazing. You'll be camping on the edge of one of the lagoons, and may have hippo grazing around your car during the night.

Days 16 & 17: Guma Lagoon to Sankuyo 226 miles, 5 ¼ hrs

The villagers of Sankuyo operate a lovely community campsite on the eastern side of the Okavango Delta. The people here are BaYei, one of the river tribes. The staff are old friends and maintain a wonderful, family atmosphere.

The campsite is located on their own tribal land, which extends all the way to the Gomoti River, the boundary of the famous Moremi Game Reserve. In a good season there is no need to enter the Reserve at all, as the wildlife of Moremi comes across the river and into the tribal concession lands. Our past customers have seen wild dog, hyaena, honey badger and elephants right in the campsite. When conditions are dry the animals leave again and head back into Moremi. But the entrance gate to Moremi Game Reserve is only a 20 minute drive down the road.

You can spend your day here either exploring the tribal concession with a step-aboard guide from the local community; or head into the Moremi Game Reserve. The choice is yours to make on the day.

Day 18: Khumaga 126 miles, 2 ¾ hrs

Khumaga is a small village beside the Boteti River. A motorised punt takes vehicles across the river to the entrance to the Makgadikgadi Pans National Park.

When there is water a drive along the Boteti Riverfront is one of the great wildlife spectacles of the world, with herds of animals taking turns to drink all day long. When the river is not flowing the wildlife is reliant on water in residual pools, and simply sitting beside one of these will be very rewarding.

Your accommodation for the night is a lovely campsite on the river terrace, close enough to see and hear some of the action.

Days 19 & 20: Khama Rhino Sanctuary 236 miles, 4 hrs

Khama Rhino Sanctuary is a community initiative, established by the Bamangwato Tribe in the 1990's. It was created to protect the very last of Botswana's rhino. It has been a real conservation success story: the offspring of the Sanctuary's rhino have gone on to repopulate many other reserves around Botswana. The sanctuary covers 21,000 acres, and it's home to nearly all the animals of the Kalahari desert. There are self driving trails, a bird hide, and a nice campsite. You will be here for two nights. This leaves a whole day to explore the Sanctuary yourselves, and, if you wish, participate in one of the organised activities like rhino tracking on foot with one of the rangers.

There is also an ethnobotanical drive nearby, for which we will provide notes.

Day 21: Shoshong and Lephephe Wells 150 miles, 3 ½ hrs

Shoshong was once the capital of the Bamangwato tribe and their famous chief Khama III. Probably the only 19th Century chief in Africa to be the subject of multiple biographies. A temperance reformer; a stalwart of the London Missionary Society; and a staunch anglophile, he was lionised in Britain. In the 1870's Shoshong was larger than Capetown, with a population of > 30,000. Khama III moved his capital to Old Palapye in 1889, and then Serowe in 1902, and Shoshong was abandoned. The Bamangwato are still the most influential tribe in Botswana, and have produced three of the five Presidents since independence. This is a day to immerse yourself in the history of the tribe and the nation.



- Visit the Bamangwato Royal Cemetery in Serowe, and the graves of Khama III, Sir Seretse Khama and other notable Bamangwato figures.
- Tour Serowe village with a guide from the Khama III Memorial Museum
- Tour the remains of Old Shoshong with a National Museum guide stationed in the area
- Hike up the scenic Shoshong Gorge
- Explore the iron age sites of Pitsane Hill
- Visit the remote Sojwe Pan and its abundant birdlife

End the day camping at a ranch deep in the sandveld country, dedicated to the conservation of White-backed vultures.

Day 22: Lephephe Wells to Gaborone, 150 miles, 3 ½ hrs

The drive to Gaborone will take you to the capital of the BaKwena tribe, a large village with the tongue-twisting name of Molepolole.

The Bakwena produced another of Botswana's famous 19th Century chiefs, Sechele I. Sechele was David Livingstone's first convert to Christianity, and was also the victor in the Battle of Dimamwe. In this battle he led a coalition of tribes against an invasion by the Boers. Winning a battle is one thing, but winning the peace is another. Sechele proved just as adept at peacemaking as he was at military strategy. The Sechele I Memorial Museum in Molepolole tells the story.

Just outside Molepolole you'll also find Livingstone's Cave, which played an important role in the conversion of Sechele and the BaKwena to Christianity. The cave is high on a hillside, and the view alone is worth the climb to the cave entrance. Tonight's accommodation is a boutique hotel close to the airport. It's a chance to empty out the vehicle; and pack the suitcases ready for the flights home. Breakfast in the morning is included to get you away to a good start.

Day 23: Fly out from Sir Seretse Khama International Airport

