

The Grand Circuit

Botswana is a large and diverse country. Desert dunes in the south; forested hills in the east; huge seasonal swamplands in the north; vast salt pans and arid grasslands in the centre; and wildlife everywhere. The people are as diverse as the landscape, but always peaceful and friendly, and English is one of the two national languages. The main roads are (mostly) excellent, making this a wonderful place for an African road trip.

In terms of size, Botswana is larger than France and Belgium combined. To get right around the country and experience the diversity of landscapes, people and wildlife takes time.

This self-driving tour is a complete and leisurely circuit of the country, staying in a mixture of guesthouses, hotels and lodges. At some it will be possible to cook for yourself, but all can either provide meals or are close to a restaurant that does.

This is not a luxury trip – more the equivalent of a road trip along Route 66. The accommodations will be clean, comfortable, friendly and safe, but usually furnished to about the same standard as an American roadside motel. You will be well fed and well looked after. But you will be straying far from the usual tourist hotspots.

The tour can be completed in an ordinary 2x4 sedan, but some of the roads are a little rough and the extra clearance of a vehicle like a Toyota Cross or Fortuna would be helpful on occasions. Where a 4x4 is necessary to access a national park or reserve there will always be a commercial operator willing to take you, and a number of such excursions are included in the price.

The emphasis is on what you can see and do along the way – the journey should be just as interesting and exciting as the destination. -and this tour will get you well off the normal tourist routes.

Take a deep dive into a unique African country !





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Gaborone and surrounds (5 nights)

Gaborone is a very atypical African capital city. With a population of about 250,000 it is small – the size of Scottsdale, AZ. There are no slums. You can safely drink the water, sample the street food, and rely on the electricity supply.

Restaurants are numerous and varied, and nightclubs and venues often host live music by local and regional artists. The National Museum is situated near the old town centre, housing essential collections of traditional crafts and southern African fine art. But you can also begin your African safari without even leaving the city limits.

The Gaborone Game Reserve is a small national park right inside the city – over 1200 acres of bushveld and marsh well stocked with eland, kudu, zebra and other game. You can drive the internal roads in an ordinary sedan car – no 4x4 needed here. And it is typically deserted on weekdays.

10 km from the CBD is the 7500 acre Mokolodi Nature Reserve. City folk come here to walk and cycle amongst the wildlife; and to go on rhino and giraffe tracking excursions. There are some lovely thatched chalets in the reserve, and you'll be staying in one. We have also included a trip up the tranquil reaches of the Notwane River in an electric boat to meet the birdlife.

A little to the south of the city is the historic town of Lobatse, several Boer war battlefields; the famous potteries at Gabane and Thamaga; and the ruins of the Kolobeng Mission, home of Dr David Livingstone in the 1840's. Immerse yourself in Botswana history; explore the area, and make the most of the wildlife experiences.

Tsabong (3 nights) 324 miles, 6 hrs (1 night along the way)

The village of Tsabong is in the SW corner of Botswana, deep in the desert, in the only part of Botswana with mobile dunes. Once upon a time the police patrolled hereabouts on camels. Your accommodation is at the Tsabong Ecotourism Camel-Park, a community initiative based on the descendants of the police mounts. Camels are still a very practical way to get out into the desert, but there are also walking and quad biking trails. The desert wildlife is here all year round, but the very best time to be here is about six weeks into the rainy season when the desert is carpeted with wildflowers. There is plenty to see and do along the way from Gaborone so the journey is spread over two days.

Ghanzi (3 nights) 433 miles, 8 hrs (1 night along the way)

Although the regional capital, Ghanzi is still just a dusty outpost in the middle of nowhere. But it offers the best opportunity in the country to immerse yourself in the culture of the San (the Kalahari Bushmen).

From US\$9500 for a couple

35 DAYS / 34 NIGHTS

LODGES, GUEST HOUSES, SELF CATERING

WHATS INCLUDED

- Hire of a 2x4 Toyota Cross or equivalent for the duration of your tour
- A night game drive, Mokolodi Nature Reserve
- Guided boat excursion on the Notwane River
- Bushman foraging walk, Ghanzi
- Transfers from Etsha 13 to Guma Lagoon
- Full day boat hire, Guma Lagoon
- 3 hr boat cruise, Kwwando River
- Sunset cruise on Chobe River, private boat
- Transfers between Kasane & the Victoria Falls
- Full day excursion into Nxai Pan National Park
- Meet the meerkats excursion, Ntwetwe Pan
- A scenic flight over the Okavango Delta
- Foraging and a wild foods dinner in the Tswapong Hills
- 21 x breakfasts, 5 x dinners

WHATS EXCLUDED





It makes a very convenient base from which to explore sections of the Chobe National Park; take a sunset cruise on the Chobe River; and take a day trip to see the Victoria Falls.

A return transfer to the Zambian side of the Victoria Falls is included in the price. Note that USA citizens do not require a visa to visit Zambia – you just have to have your passport stamped at the border post. If you wish to visit the Zimbabwean side of the Falls a visa is required.

We have also included a 3 hour game drive into Chobe National Park, and a sunset cruise on a private boat on the Chobe River. Accommodation for the first three nights is in a riverside chalet where you can expect to have hippo grazing on the lawn. The fourth night is spent further south at Elephant Sands, where you can expect to have elephants walking past your chalet.

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Just beyond Ghanzi you come to D'Kar, a Naro Bushman Village famed for its arts project. The Bushmen have always produced outstanding rock art. The artists of D'Kar have switched to painting their traditional designs on canvas. They have a large studio and are always pleased to welcome visitors and show off their works.

Your accommodation is a chalet on a private game reserve. This features a unique 'vulture restaurant' which enables you to get up close views of the vultures feeding from an underground bunker, and walking and driving tracks that enable you to get out amongst the animals. The family owners work closely with the local Naro community, who will take you out foraging for wild foodstuffs and show off their skills of desert survival. The Bushman walk is included in the quoted price.

Okavango Panhandle (3 nights) 292 miles, 6 hrs

The Panhandle is at the northern end of the Okavango Delta. This area has permanent lagoons, swamps and deep river channels, along with all the riverine and aquatic wildlife anyone could wish to see. Hippo, elephant and reedbeek galore, along with 83 species of fish, short clawed otters and the ever present Nile crocodiles. You have two nights in a chalet beside a huge lagoon covered in water lilies, and where you can be lulled to sleep by the snorting of the hippos. A full day on the water with a private boat and guide are included in the price.

Heading north, detour to visit the Tsodilo Hills, a prominent landmark rising high above the northern Kalahari desert. The hills are a UNESCO World Heritage site preserving the ancient rock art of the San people – there are many thousands of paintings here, with evidence of human occupation dating back more than 100,000 years. Then spend a final night beside the Okavango River at Shakawe.

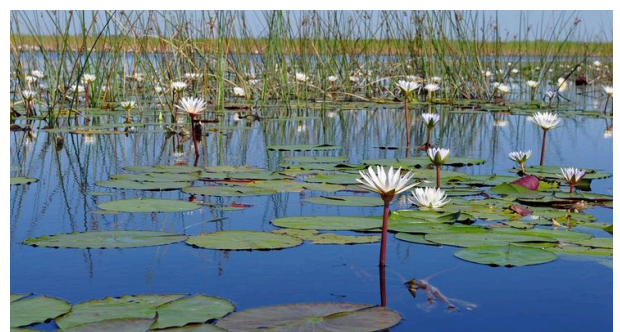
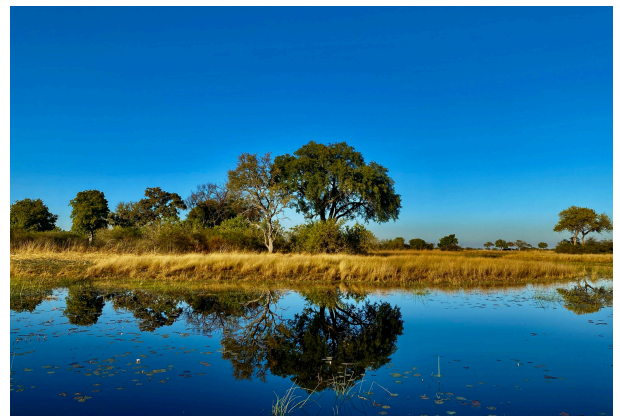
Kongola (2 nights) 155 miles, 3 hrs

The Caprivi Strip is a long finger of Namibia which stretches across the north of Botswana. Driving the Namibian TransCaprivi Highway is the easiest way to get from NW to NE Botswana. Most of the distance is through a National Park, and the speed limit is set to protect the wildlife that wanders onto the road. The Namibian village of Kongola makes a convenient halfway stop. There are some lovely lodges here beside the Kwando River, much beloved of bird watchers who come here to see Fish Eagles, Pel's fishing owl, African skimmers and other iconic avian species.

A 3 hour birdwatching cruise on the Kwando River is included in the price.

Chobe and the Victoria Falls (4 nights) 160 miles, 3 ¼ hrs

Kasane is a small tourist town, with warthogs, baboons and sometimes elephants wandering in the streets.





The great salt pans (2 nights) 100miles, 2 ½ hrs

The Sua Pan is the largest of the famed Makgadikgadi Pans, and the most important breeding site for flamingo in all of southern Africa. You can get access to the northern shore of the pan and see the flamingo at the Nata Bird Sanctuary. Desert animals and birds are always there and the view of the pan itself is always impressive so the bird sanctuary is always worth a visit. But the flamingo are there only when there is water.

You'll be staying for these two nights in the village of Gweta. The big attractions here are (i) a guided, full day excursion to Nxai Pan and the surrounding savannah grasslands; and (ii) the opportunity to visit a troop of habituated meerkats on the edge of the giant Ntwetwe Pan. Everyone loves an encounter with a meerkat ! These are so tame that the troop sentinel might sit on your shoulder to get a better view of the surrounding environment.

Both of these excursions are included in the price.

Maun and the Okavango Delta (3 nights) 128 miles, 2 ½ hrs

The Okavango Delta is an enormous mosaic of seasonally flooded grasslands, wooded islands, permanent river channels, swamps and lagoons. The flat terrain makes it impossible to appreciate the geography from ground level; and the winding waterways and seasonal flooding makes this a difficult area to explore by vehicle. For much of each year boats and aeroplanes are more practical means of travel.

Maun is the traditional jumping off point for the Delta, and the Island Safari Lodge is a comfortable and convenient place to stay. It is built on a 300 acre wooded island in the Thamalakane River. The lodge has its own jetty; a network of walking and cycling trails through their private reserve; a good selection of wildlife and birds on the island itself; and occasional hippos and crocodiles in the river alongside. And it is less than 10 miles from downtown Maun, giving guests the opportunity to explore both the southern end of the Delta and Maun itself.

A 45 minute, early morning scenic flight in a fixed wing aircraft is included in this package. This is worth doing throughout the year.

The lodge offers a range of options for accessing the Delta: safari vehicles; dugout canoes; motor boats and flights into remote airstrips. Horseback safaris can be organised on request. Which is best really depends on the water levels at the time, so should be discussed with the lodge staff on arrival. You can check out their offerings in advance at www.islmaun.com/activities/. A full day excursion into the Delta (including park fees and a packed lunch) for a couple is likely to cost around US\$ 590.

Other activities which you can do for yourselves are visiting an elephant orphanage to get up close and personal with the orphans; a tour and tasting at the only craft brewery in Botswana; checking out Maun's vibrant arts scene; and visiting the artisans working at their traditional crafts at the Nhabe Museum.

Desert and Diamonds (2 nights) 205 miles, 4 hrs

Head south to Orapa, home of Botswana's diamond industry. The B300 follows the Boteti River southward, and there is much to see and do along the way. But there is plenty to see and do in Orapa as well. The big Adrian Gale Diamond Museum showcases all aspects of the diamond industry, and includes an outdoor display of mining machinery. The mine itself is open for tours on Thursday morning. And the 118,000 acre Orapa Game Reserve has roads paved with waste rock from the mine. All the animals of the Kalahari desert are here excepting elephants, and you can take yourself for a game drive in any 2x4 car.

The eastern hills (7 nights) 793 miles, 13 ½ hrs

The eastern hills of Botswana hold a lot of history, a lot of wildlife, wonderful scenery and some great opportunities to get out and about on foot. And you will meet the Kalanga and BaBirwa tribes, both speaking languages unrelated to Setswana and with their own unique cuisines.

The plan is to spread the journey through the east of the country over 6 days, stopping for 2 nights each in Francistown, Mathatane and Goo-Moremi. Along the way you can

- Take in the infinity view over the Sua Pan from the high escarpment that defines its southern boundary, and take a swim in the hypersaline waters
- Drive yourself through the 190,000 acre Northern Tuli Game Reserve. This is an otherworldly dry, rocky landscape. Think of Joshua Tree National Monument, but with lions, giraffe, zebra and a lot of elephants.
- Play a round of golf on a course where the greens are mown by antelope and giraffe
- Visit a lively street market where the traders of three countries come to haggle
- Visit the site of the first gold rush in southern Africa. The rush began in 1869, and gold is still mined in the area today
- Visit Boer War battlefields
- Hike up a deep sandstone gorge, home to a large colony of the endangered Cape Vulture.
- Explore ancient iron smelting sites in the Tswapong Hills

And finally, arrive back in Gaborone, ready to fly out next morning

