

Botswana has a unique blend of magnificent wildlife regions, from the searing mirages of the Kalahari Desert to the lush waterways of the Okavango Delta. This is a country with a proud history of wildlife management and conservation, making it one of Africa's premier safari destinations. Intriguing landscapes, abundant wildlife and a myriad of bird species await the traveller.

THE OKAVANGO DELTA

The Okavango is a unique ecosystem of papyrus-lined waterways, knee-deep floodplains, water-lily lagoons, shady forest glades and rich savannah grasslands. All this fecundity lies in the middle of the largest continuous stretch of sand in the world - the Kalahari Desert Basin. Seen from space as an emerald swirl surrounded by a parched landscape, the Okavango Delta is an incredible source of life in a country that is 80% arid.

Rather than a delta, it is in fact an alluvial fan of sediment and debris, which filled a trough formed by the sinking of the earth's crust, between a series of parallel faults across the Okavango River.

The fan (or delta as it is more commonly called), resembles the shape of a hand. The palm is a permanent delta of constant water, and the fingertips are seasonally flooded swamps and lush floodplains. The water of the Okavango literally floats on a saturated sea of sand.

The Delta is fed by the Okavango River originating over 800 miles (1,280 km) away in the highlands of Angola. The Angolan highlands have an average rainfall of between 1,200 and 2,000mm per year, compared to around 400-600mm in the Okavango. The delta therefore fluctuates in size depending on local rains and the Angolan floodwaters. The spill over from the rising river starts pushing gently into the Okavango in January and reaches a peak at the top of the Okavango in about May. By June or July each year (depending where you are within the Okavango), the water levels are at their maximum.

The Okavango region contains the state-run Moremi Game Reserve surrounded by a number of strictly controlled, privately managed wildlife concessions. The game viewing in all of these areas is no less than outstanding and activities can either be undertaken on foot, in a game-viewing vehicle or in a mokoro (dug-out canoe) or motorised boat. Such varied opportunities in a beautiful and diverse range of habitats, makes the Okavango the best all-encompassing safari destination in the world.

MOREMI GAME RESERVE

Moremi falls within the tribal land of the Batswana and is named after the late Chief Moremi III. It was clear to his wife, who reigned after his death that the game in their traditional hunting grounds was fast disappearing. With encouragement from conservationists, Mrs Moremi proclaimed the Moremi Game Reserve in March 1963 and the tribe agreed to vacate the land.

Chief's Island is the largest landmass within Moremi and was the Batswana tribe's richest hunting grounds with a vast array of animals. The dry sandy interior of this 100,000 hectare (1,000 square kilometres) island is full of mopane woodland and acacia thorn scrub interspersed with clay pans.

These pans fill with rain and attract large herds of buffalo who seem to prefer drinking from the pans rather than the river. They also like the sparse but sweet grasses found here, as opposed to the long but coarser fodder of the floodplains. As the mopane bush gives way to floodplains and riverine forests, other animals become abundantly visible and the whole spectrum of Africa's game can be seen.

Today, Moremi rates as one of the leading wildlife areas of the world. The mosaic of grasslands, floodplains, palm-tree islets, forests, lily lagoons and winding water channels combine to form a perfectly constructed puzzle, in which animals wander as they please.

ANIMALS & BIRDS

The lure of the Okavango and its extraordinary range of habitats provide the perfect environment for African animals to thrive and people to watch them. Great herds of antelopes, zebra, buffalo and elephants roam the pastures, and lions, leopards, cheetahs and all the other carnivores prosper. As Moremi Game Reserve contains large areas of constant water, game viewing during the dry season is particularly good as animals are drawn to the permanent water sources.

There are no fences between Moremi and the private reserves so the entire Okavango merges into a unified animal kingdom of grand proportions.

Each area has its own particular habitats, resident herds and familiar predators, and night drives in the private reserves, (also soon to be permitted in Moremi), often reveal secretive animals like porcupine, pangolin, aardwolf and genet.

SEASONS

Wet Season: November to March is the hot rainy season and the roads can be quite bad. The advantage of this time of year is that most of the animals give birth, providing a wonderful game watching experience. The landscape is lush and green and there is an abundance of wild flowers.

Dry season: April to October is the dry season and the drier it becomes the easier it is to spot animals close to permanent water holes. At this time much of the Okavango dries out, apart from permanent rivers in Moremi Game Reserve and the northern reaches of the Okavango. The heat starts to build in earnest from October onwards.

OKAVANGO & MOREMI SPECIALITIES

- Being poled in a dugout canoe through lagoons crammed with water lilies
- Tracking big game on foot
- Peaceful fishing excursions
- Choice of game drive, game walk, canoe or motor boat safari
- Exceptional animal watching
- Abundant birdlife
- Exquisite thatched lodges and tented camps providing unsurpassed luxury in the bush
- Watching animals at waterholes
- Exceptional variety of scenery
- Perfect honeymoon destination

FACTS

Moremi Game Reserve was first established in 1963 but during the 1970's it was enlarged to include most of Chief's Island. In 1991 another area was added bringing the total area to 1,880 sq. miles (4,871 sq. km).

The only free-roaming rhino in Botswana are those recently introduced in the Mombo area of Chief's Island.

Moremi Game Reserve covers one third of the entire Okavango Delta

This is a malarial area.

In 1962 the local BaTswana people set aside a third of the Okavango Delta to protect it for the future. They called this the Moremi Game Reserve, and it now forms the core of the region's reserves.

Moremi encompasses a large area of the Delta's wetlands and the main dry peninsula that juts into the Delta, known as the Mopane Tongue. Moremi is lush and varied - a patchwork of lagoons, shallow flooded pans, plains and forests. It is one of Africa's finest areas for wildlife, with particularly high game densities. The animals found here are numerous and relaxed, often allowing vehicles to approach closely. Most of Moremi is only accessible to the fly-in camps on its fringes. However, there are several prime areas on the edge of the Mopane Tongue, a dry peninsula, where the land meets the Okavango's permanent waters.

These include Khwai River, Xakanaxa Lagoon and Third Bridge - and they can be reached with a mobile safari.

CHOBE NATIONAL PARK

The Chobe River has its origins in the highlands of Angola and once it enters Botswana, it goes through several name changes. It enters as the Kwando River and immediately becomes the Linyanti, then the Itenge and is finally called the Chobe River. Knowing this may avoid confusion when looking at maps or reading information.

The Chobe River area contains an interesting variety of habitats and is rich in plant life, with mopane woodland, mixed combretum, sandveld, floodplain, grasslands and riverine woodland. Many trees have suffered considerable damage from the high numbers of elephants, who push them over and rip off the bark - and some woods have been totally denuded.

The most popular area in and just outside Chobe National Park is the short 9-mile (15km) stretch of Chobe River from Kasane town to the Serondela campsite. Few people come to Chobe without taking a trip on this river to see hundreds of hippopotamuses and crocodiles. Both hippos and elephants epitomise this park more than any other animals and are often featured on the cover of brochures to the area. The only subject more photographed in Chobe are the exquisite sanguine sunsets sinking slowly over the water.

Chobe National Park is probably the most affordable of Botswana's parks and with the lure of excellent game watching both on and beside the river, the well frequented areas can become quite crowded.

ANIMALS & BIRDS

Notwithstanding the elephants, Chobe has some of the finest game viewing in Africa. It is notable for huge herds of buffalo and zebras, lechwe, Chobe bushbuck and being the southernmost point where puku antelope can be seen. Where there are buffalo, lions are never far away and there is a good chance of seeing large prides who laze around in the shade all day and only yawn themselves awake at dusk. Hyena and leopard also hunt at night while cheetah are diurnal predators.

Chobe is rich in bird life with the Pel's Fishing owl a favourite for bird watchers and the peculiar strangely beaked African skimmer another speciality.

African fish eagles are common and their distinctive cry is as evocative of the African wilderness as the roar of the lion.

SEASONS

Rainy season: November to March with a peak during January and February. Rains often only begin in mid- December. Travelling through areas of clay soil can be very difficult at this time, but much of the Chobe River area is accessible. These are the warmest months with temperatures and humidity high and mosquitoes abundant. The wild flowers that emerge during the rains are quite stunning and bird life is abundant. Many animals give birth during this period of abundant grazing and if you are prepared to negotiate some mud, the rainy season in Chobe is a delightful time.

Dry season: May to October is dry and as the months progress and water dries up inland, animals congregate in huge numbers along the river. Game is at its most dense and easily visible during the dry season and most visitors come at this time. October is the hottest month and although it is the best for game viewing, it is also the most uncomfortable as the expectation of rain is high and the heat can be oppressive.

CHOBE'S SPECIALITIES

- Elephants by the hundreds especially by the Chobe River during the dry season
- Sundowner river cruises culminating in spectacular Chobe sunsets
- 440 species of birds
- Big cats may be seen stalking buffalo on the grassy floodplains
- Fishing on the Chobe River for 20 different species of edible fish
- Spectacularly positioned safari lodges and tented camps along the Chobe River
- Rare Pel's Fishing owl can be spotted at night
- Small flocks of African skimmers, only found in this region are best seen in June or July
- Exceptional photographic opportunities

FACTS

In line with many of Africa's national parks, off-road and night driving is not permitted. Chobe National Park covers 7 270 square miles (11,700 square kilometres)
This is a malarial area.

Located in the northern Kalahari region; Chobe National Park covers about 11,700 square kilometres, and consists mainly of dense thorny bush emerging from deep alluvial soils. A well-worn safari circuit, made famous by the massive herds of elephant and buffalo and significant prides of lion that have become skilled at hunting large herbivores. The Chobe River apparently flows in both directions and holds the secrecy of the Savuti Channel which vanished in recent time.

The highlight to this safari area is Chobe's animal migrations. The animals move with the available food and water in the district, exhibiting the ancient patterns of time.

Many head for open plains to the south and east during the rainy months (December to March). Then, eventually, from April to November, as the land dries out and the heat builds, the animals migrate back to the great rivers of the north and west.

LINYANTI

The Linyanti River (which is later named the Chobe River), forms a natural border between Namibia and Botswana. The river's course is smooth and gentle until it hits a volcanic fault line which causes a dramatic 90-degree change of course from south-east to north-east. Inside the right-angle corner created at this juncture, a swamp has formed (on the Namibian side), similar in appearance to the Okavango Delta, with papyrus lined waterways leading to towering riverine forests of giant ebony and marula trees.

On the southern banks of the Linyanti River (in Botswana), is the private Linyanti Wildlife Reserve. Here the marsh subsides into lagoons and steadily flowing rivers with riverine forests of jackalberry and sausage trees leading to open grasslands, and dry inland wooded areas.

SEASONS

Rainy season: Rain falls during the warm months of November to March creating high temperatures and humidity. Mosquitoes breed well in these conditions.

Dry season: May to October is dry and as the months progress and surface water becomes scarce animals congregate in huge numbers along the river. Game is at its most dense and easily visible. October is the hottest month.

LINYANTI SPECIALITIES

- The Narina Trogon (bird) is a rarity
- Amazing dawn choruses
- Aquatic sitatunga antelopes have specially adapted hooves for marshlands and can submerge if frightened
- Magnificent-horned sable antelope
- Elephants and zebras in vast numbers
- Bat-eared foxes
- Wild dogs on the move
- Luxury in the bush at one of the top class camps and lodges in the Linyanti

FACTS

Linyanti Wildlife Reserve covers an area of 275 000 acres (111 288 hectares)

It is a private reserve so night drives and off road driving is offered

This is a malarial area

SAVUTI

Recognised as a prime game viewing area, the Savuti (also spelt Savute), covers almost 1,930 sq. miles (5,000 square km) in the south west of Chobe National Park.

The western edge of Savuti is encircled by the Magwikhwe sand ridge, 156 miles (100km) long and 65 feet (20 metres) high, which is the ancient shoreline of a super-lake that covered much of northern Botswana. It is difficult to imagine that this harsh dry landscape was once submerged beneath an enormous inland sea.

A channel from the Linyanti River once fed the now dry Savuti Marsh, which is the deepest part of the Mababe Depression and is the only part to have filled with water in recent history.

This marsh has something of a mystical renown as it can dry up or flood regardless of local rains. David Livingstone, on his way to 'discover' the Victoria Falls in 1851, commented, that it was a "dismal swamp," but sometime around 1888 it started to dry up and remained completely parched until 1957. Camelthorn acacia trees established themselves in the channel and along the banks and grew to full size. During unexpected floods these trees were drowned but as the channel and marsh dried out again, the dead trees became one of the most prominent features of the landscape.

Today, parts of Savuti are almost desert-like with a scorching sun and hot sand, while at the other extreme are vast grass plains full of game, reminiscent of Tanzania's Serengeti. These rich grasslands are boosted into fecundity by summer rains, at which time huge herds of zebras migrate south from the Linyanti to gorge on the abundant grazing. Savuti also contains a number of pans that hold water for months after the rains, enabling animals to remain long into the dry season.

Another strikingly different terrain found in Savuti, are the Gubatsa Hills. Formed some 980 million years ago during volcanic movement, these dolomite rock outcrops create a series of extraordinary hills. They rise to an astonishing 290 feet (90 metres) high, out of a completely flat landscape.

ANIMALS & BIRDS

The area promises sightings of endangered wild dog, which is said to be the most efficient hunter in Africa. Large concentrations of lion follow the annual zebra migration intently, and leopard and cheetah are to be seen. Many hyenas live here and researchers have found that lions lose 20% of their kills to them. Hyenas are formidable hunters in their own right but are opportunistic feeders who will annoy and threaten a pride of lions until they give up their meal. Savuti is also famous for its elephants that roam great distances for the best fodder. Large secretary birds and kori bustards are often seen strutting around the Savuti marsh and small redbilled francolins provide as a noisy morning wake up call. Interesting summer migrants and water birds include Abdim's storks, carmine bee eaters and even fish eagles. Little quelea

finches are quite a spectacle as they gather in thousands. They reach a frenzy of numbers in about April when a single flock could contain tens of thousands of these small twittering birds.

SEASONS

Rainy season: Rains arrive from November to April, at which time the animals make their way to pastures rich in new grass. Sometime in November or December thousands of zebras migrate from the Linyanti in the north and move south through Savuti to the grasslands of the Mababe Depression. In February they start heading northwards again. Humidity and heat is high.

Dry season: From May to October the water pans dry up and the animals are attracted to three artificial waterholes. Elephants dominate these while other animals have to wait their turn. September and October can be extremely hot but game viewing is very rewarding as predators are concentrated around the waterholes.

SAVUTI SPECIALITIES

- Rare and endangered wild dog are a pleasure to observe
- Thousands of zebras moving slowly across the plains in their twice yearly migration, is a sight to behold
- Hyenas have the most complex social system of all African animals and are fascinating to watch at their den when youngsters are around
- Sit for hours watching elephants at waterholes
- Safari lodges offer luxury in a completely different environment from Chobe or Linyanti
- Quelea finches gather in flocks of tens of thousands
- The sage bush (or bitter bush) releases its herbal aroma as it is crushed by foot or vehicle

FACTS

Savuti is in Chobe National Park so off-road and night driving are not permitted
This is a malarial area.

MAKGADIKGADI PANS NATIONAL PARK

Much of Makgadikgadi Pans National Park comprises nutritious grasslands attracting thousands of animals. It is however, an area of low rainfall and the Boteti River rarely flows to capacity, but often has perennial pools that attract waterbuck, bushbuck and resident hippos.

The area was once a superlake almost 100 feet (30 metres) deep, over an area of 30,888 sq. miles (80,000 square km). The climate changed and it 10,000 years ago Lake Makgadikgadi was well on the way to drying up. As the water evaporated, huge glistening salt-encrusted pans were left. These pans look as flat as a billiard table and stretch as far as the eye can see. Occasionally, this extraordinary landscape is dotted with rocky outcrops and large stranded sand dunes.

The Makgadikgadi Pans National Park includes a portion of these enormous Makgadikgadi Pans, which are almost devoid of human habitation. However, villages on the periphery and in between the pans are evidence that the area has supported people as far back as the Stone Age.

Today the area contains large numbers of animals who migrate to grasslands in the west of the park after the rains.

Journeying into this magical land and across the desolate pans, you somehow feel its ancient mystique. The subtle hues at sunset transform Makgadikgadi into a surreal wonderland, which is unlike anywhere else. During the day the dusty pans, with whirlwinds skirting across a seemingly endless desert, offer the best way to come face to face with true isolation.

The park contains four main vegetation types; riverine woodland, scrubland, pure grassland and salt pans. The pans support palm groves and peculiar looking Baobab trees whose branches look more like roots, giving rise to the name 'upside down tree'. These are interspersed with short spiky yellow grass found on rises between the pans, known as 'prickly salt grass'. This is extremely saline resistant to the extent that salt crystals can sometimes be seen on the leaves. The interior of the reserve comprises scrub and grassland with a few 'islands' of Real Fan Palms and Camel thorn acacia.

ANIMALS & BIRDS

From April to November game such as springbok, gemsbok, wildebeest and zebra move slowly from the pans area in the south east of the park, to the Boteti River on the western side. During this migration animals accumulate in their thousands. The heavily wooded areas beside the river also contain shy antelopes like duiker and bushbuck.

If the rains arrive with enough force and river water floods into the Makgadikgadi salt pans, there is nowhere more complete in its transformation than here. Tiny crustaceans hatch and algae blooms to provide food for the largest breeding flocks of greater and lesser flamingos in Africa.

The surface of the pans turns a deep pink from 30,000 breeding pairs of these birds. This occurs mainly in the pans to the east of the National Park, particularly Sowa Pan. Other water birds are also abundant and a good place to see them is at Nata Bird Sanctuary, just off the main road at the northern end of Sowa Pan.

As animals and birds are most prevalent during the rainy season in areas normally inaccessible by vehicle, the prime objective in visiting this reserve is not to view game, but to experience true remoteness and absolute isolation.

SEASONS

Rainy Season: November to March the pans fill up and retain water until April or May. Much of the Makgadikgadi Pans area becomes inaccessible during the rainy season and the only way to see the spectacular flamingo flocks is by aircraft. It is extremely dangerous to venture into the pans during the rainy season unless you are with a guided experienced in the area. During a low-rainfall year, May, October and November are also acceptable. This area gets very hot during the day (up to °F (40°C), but is mild and pleasant at night.

Dry season: April to September is the dry season with strong winds from August to November. From April to July game viewing is best within the park and after that it moves to inaccessible areas. March to September are the best months to experience the pans. Winter is very pleasant during the day but ice-cold at night.

MAKGADIKGADI PANS SPECIALITIES

- Riding a quad bike across the desolate pans
- Flamingo breeding season on Sowa Pan
- Staying in a luxury lodge by the salt pans
- Night sky studded with a million stars
- Feelings of total isolation
- Complete and unrelenting silence
- Self discovery
- Finding Stone Age tools in the middle of nowhere, and leaving them for others to discover

FACTS

It was proclaimed a game reserve in 1970 and in 1992 its boundaries were extended and it was given National Park status.

The Makgadikgadi Pans National Park covers an area of 1,891 sq. miles (4,900 sq. km) but the pans outside the national park are the largest salt pans in the world exceeding 4,633 sq. miles (12,000 sq. km).

This is a malarial area

NXAI PAN NATIONAL PARK

Nxai Pan National Park lies just north of the Maun-Nata main road and adjoins the Makgadikgadi Pans National Park on its northern border. The pan itself is another fossil lakebed about 15 sq. miles (40sq. km) in size. The landscape is dotted with clusters of umbrella acacia trees and mopane woodland in the north. During the rains from November to April, the pans become covered in grass - a landscape typical of the Kalahari.

Livingstone passed this way during the middle of the 19th century and as traders and explorers followed, it became an important trade route. Kgama Kgama pan, in the centre of the park, held water at that time and many travellers rested here and replenished their water supply before continuing across the Kalahari towards the Linyanti.

The famous artist Thomas Baines arrived in 1861, and painted an unusual group of Baobab trees, which became known as 'Baines Baobabs'. It is rare to see these trees so close together and as one was growing on its side, Baines named his painting 'The Sleeping Five'. The Green brothers passed this way too and to this day their inscription into the bark, 'Green's Expedition 1858-1859, can clearly be seen. The Baobabs are not far from the main road and are worth a visit, but be wary of venturing there when the ground is wet.

ANIMALS & BIRDS

Nxai Pan is well known for a huge springbok population, as the short-cropped grasses can testify, and extraordinarily large herds of giraffe with up to 30 in a group. Also to be seen are blue wildebeest, gemsbok, eland, greater kudu and red hartebeest. The more commonly seen predators are spotted hyena, cheetah, leopard and jackal with the elusive brown hyena a rare treat. During the rains buffalo and elephants may also be seen. Once the rains start, game viewing can be good and the birdlife is excellent. The noisy black Korhaan, who rises with a squeak when flushed out by a vehicle, is a hallmark of Nxai Pan and small raptors such as kestrel and goshawks abound.

SEASONS

Rainy Season: November to April is the hot wet summer season and the time when Nxai Pan is at its best. Game is abundant from December to April but if the rains have been heavy the roads may be difficult to negotiate.

Dry Season: May to September are more accessible times to be in Nxai Pan.

NXAI PAN SPECIALITIES

- Baines' Baobabs
- Springbok and giraffes in large numbers
- Good birdlife in the rainy season
- Wide variety of raptors (birds of prey)

FACTS

Nxai Pan National Park covers an area of 810 sq. miles (2,100 sq. km)

Other than at Baine's Baobabs, the park is not frequented by many tourists

This is a malarial area

CENTRAL KALAHARI GAME RESERVE

The Kalahari is the largest sand basin in the world, stretching 1,560 miles (2,500km) from the northern part of South Africa, through Namibia and Angola and ending in the DRC (Congo). It may have no permanent surface water, but unlike the image of most deserts, the Kalahari is well vegetated with a wide variety of habitats including acacia trees and areas of flat grasslands that seem to stretch forever.

The Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR) is the largest game reserve in the world, and has until recently been closed to the public. Its remoteness, unforgiving climate and harsh terrain have kept it pristine and only the fully self-sufficient traveller would venture into the reserve alone. Those that do are rewarded with untamed Africa at its best.

The CKGR was originally created as a refuge for the San Bushmen - the inhabitants of the Kalahari for the past 30,000 years. They lived in nomadic hunter-gatherer family groups only taking what they needed to survive - which is an art form in the Kalahari. Their simple lifestyle became anathema to the sophisticated Europeans who colonised Southern Africa and the Bushmen found themselves the hunted rather than the hunter.

Bushmen survival became an issue in 1961 when Botswana was still a British Protectorate, and the Central Kalahari Game Reserve was formed as their homeland. Most have now intermixed with other tribes such as the Bakgalagadi, and live in villages at the southern end of this reserve. Their traditional lifestyle is all but gone but some bush survival knowledge is still passed down from generation to generation.

Safari lodges based in various parts of the Kalahari often hire people of Bushman origin to guide visitors into the desert and to impart their wisdom of how to survive. Often dressed in traditional animal skins and carrying a bow and arrow, they show you how to find water-filled tubers in the sand and explain how to catch an ostrich - which is no easy task! Bushmen are

great storytellers and like nothing better than to embellish a tale with elaborate and hilarious demonstrations, accompanied by their fast and furious clicking language. At the end of the day they take off their working clothes - in this case animal skins - and go back to their village. The romantic dream that Bushmen might still be able live as they once did is not a reality, and even the CKGR is no longer theirs as diamond mining companies are taking over what was once Bushman land.

ANIMALS & BIRDS

After the summer rains arrive in the northern section of CKGR, from Deception Valley to Piper Pans, the vast plains burst with sweet grasses and it becomes one of the prime game-viewing areas in Botswana. Not many people seem to be aware of this and visitors are few. The clear blue sky fills with gigantic clouds and the stage is set for an amazing transformation. Into the scene enters thousands of gemsbok, springbok and wildebeest, with plentiful lion, cheetah and jackal in attendance. This gathering of animals is a sight to behold and can be compared with the Serengeti/Masai Mara migrations of Tanzania and Kenya.

Out in the bush, the ceaseless daytime call of the Black korhaan is replaced at night by the continuous loud cough of the male barking gecko, and under the cover of darkness scorpions emerge. Those with thick tails and small pincers are the most dangerous, while the ones with small tails and big pincers give a painful but harmless sting.

SEASONS

Rainy season: Summer rains are expected to fall on northern CKGR between November and March, but as rainfall is erratic this is by no means certain. Rainstorms are frequent but fast and roads can become very muddy and a fully equipped 4x4 vehicle is essential.

Dry season: May to October is hot, dry and dusty in the Kalahari with little water and limited animals. October is the hottest month.

CENTRAL KALAHARI GAME RESERVE SPECIALITIES

- Magnificent cloud formations during the summer rains
- Thousands of grazing animals on the grass plains of northern CKGR from February to April
- Fascinating reptiles, scorpions and insects
- Beautiful Deception Valley
- Starry nights of spectacular proportions

FACTS

CKGR is the largest game reserve in Botswana covering 32 808 square miles (52,800 square kilometres).

It is located right in the centre of Botswana

This is a malarial area

MASHATU AND TULI BLOCK

The attractions of eastern Botswana are today, one of its best-kept secrets. In the past however, it was populated by a civilisation that we know very little about. Some of the ruins at Mashatu pre date the nearby mysterious Great Zimbabwe ruins, and there is a permanent on-site archaeologist to enlighten you as to its ancient inhabitants.

The Tuli block became its awkward long narrow shape when it was given to Cecil John Rhodes in the late 1800's to build a railway line. There were far too many small rivers to cross, so the line was eventually constructed further west.

Access to the area was historically bad due to poor quality dirt roads and by the 1960's it became obvious that game farming and tourism were the better options for Tuli Block land. Farms began to consolidate into conservation areas, which became privately owned reserves including the Tuli Game Reserve and Mashatu - which is the largest privately owned game reserve in Southern Africa.

The wildlife areas are located between the Limpopo, Motloutse (Great Elephant) and Shashe Rivers and is a diverse wilderness of open grass plains, marshlands, massive trees hugging the riverbanks and a fascinating variety of rock types. Giant boulders and rocky outcrops are punctured by huge peculiar-looking Baobab trees and cacti-like Euphorbias.

ANIMALS & BIRDS

There are few fences in the entire Tuli area which permits unrestricted travel for animals along a large section of the Limpopo River. As a result most game farms and private lodges see migrant populations of impala, wildebeest, kudu and zebra as well as resident bushbuck, waterbuck, warthog and hippo. Nearer the Motloutse River you can add hyena, elephant, lion, leopard and cheetah to the list.

Mashatu boasts the single largest population of elephants on privately owned land (in excess of 700), and you are almost guaranteed to see lion and leopard while staying there plus a zebra, giraffe, eland, impala, steenbok and cheetah.

During night drives you are likely to encounter the strange-looking springhare, which resemble small kangaroos as they hop around in the headlights. Genet, lynx, leopard, porcupine, aardwolf and armadillo are all shy nocturnal animals that might be seen.

There are a wonderful variety of birds here, some who soar and others who prefer to keep their feet on the ground. Circling in the thermals you will see lappetfaced vultures, majestic black eagles and martial eagles, while darting to catch insects are brilliantly coloured bee-eaters, kingfishers and rollers,. On the ground are ostriches, huge kori bustards, saddle-billed storks and the rather peculiar-looking ground hornbill. Other birds to watch out for are giant eagle owls and Meyer's parrots.

SEASONS

Rainy Season: Rain falls any time between September through to May and the area turns green and many of the antelopes give birth. Mid-summer months are December, January and February.

Dry Season: The land is arid and dry during the winter months of June - August. There are few insects around and although it is cooler, it is still very pleasantly warm during the daytime with cold nights.

TULI & MASHATU SPECIALITIES

- Elephants of every size in large numbers
- Good chance of seeing leopards, lion and cheetah
- Mashatu offers mountain biking, horse riding, walking and game drives
- Night drives reveal rare nocturnal animals
- Eagles and eagle owls
- Strange-looking ground hornbill
- Unique geology with unusual rocky outcrops

FACTS

The Tuli wildlife areas are all under private management, so all visitors must have prior bookings

Night drives are a speciality

Rangers and trackers are usually from the Tswana tribe

Mashatu is right on the South African/Botswana border so a safari to this reserve is an easy trip by road from Johannesburg or by direct flight into Mashatu by Air Botswana.

This is a malarial area.