go!

TRAVEL GUIDE

go! Botswana

TRAVEL GUIDE 2024/25

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MOREMI
First-timer's guide

KHAMA RHINO SANCTUARY
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- MAPS

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CENTRAL KALAHARI Scott Ramsay's soulful desert photos
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2024/25

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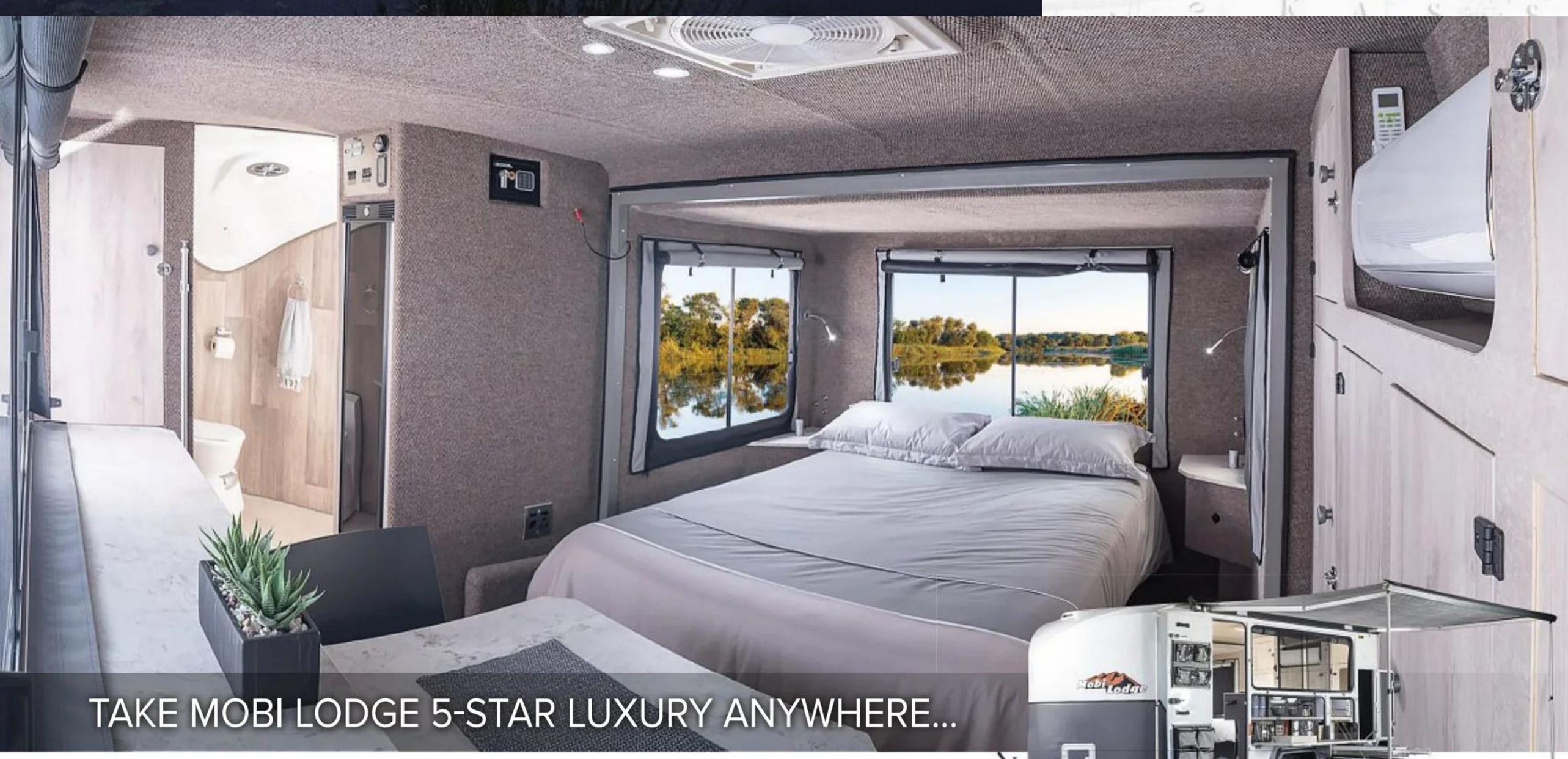

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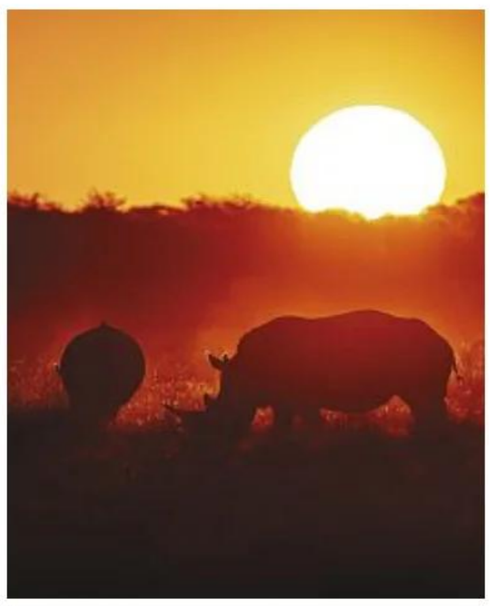

COVER PICTURE
WHITE RHINO,
KHAMA RHINO SANCTUARY

WILLIAM STEEL/
PANGOLIN PHOTO SAFARIS
IG: @williamsteel-photography
pangolinphoto.com

TOAST COETZER

Game-viewing cruise, Chobe River

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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Aqua Nature Farm near Palapye (see p 101)

TOAST COETZER

It is morning at Khama Rhino Sanctuary, and peace reigns in the campsite. But then I hear a racket coming from the Suzuki Jimny I'm borrowing for this trip. A yellow-billed hornbill is trying to rip the rubber off the windscreen wipers! What's your problem, pal? Do you think it's a tasty snack?

I step back into my tent and grab the Fujifilm X-T5 camera with its 100–400mm lens. I need a photo of this in case the guys at Suzuki SA back in Joburg don't believe me! Click, click. Evidence in the bag.

Now: Coffee. I pull out my Cadac gas cooker from where I tucked it away under the braai stand last night and start boiling water. Above me, the hornbill is sitting in the manketti tree (called a mokongwa here in Botswana), giving me a filthy look. Then it jumps down and hangs deftly at the edge of a hole in the tree trunk – a nest! I can hear the chicks from the inside, excited that dad has brought home a morsel. (Hopefully not a piece of windscreen wiper!)

The first sip of coffee affirms what I already suspected: It's going to be a good day. It's February and for now the morning is almost cool, but soon the heat will come. I'll be in my car by then, off to Malema Pan to see what awaits.

In all the years I've visited Khama Rhino Sanctuary (see p 60), I've only ever stayed over for one night before moving on. The excuse is that it's a small reserve, which you can "see" in a morning or afternoon. What a mistake! This time I stayed three days and if I could choose, I'd be back there with my tent in a flash.

Did it also drive you crazy during the Olympic Games when the American commentators butchered the pronunciation of Botswana's champion sprinter, Letsile Tebogo? I could've thrown my TV out of the window! (Sadly, my phone is my TV these days...) Botswana is home to many wonderful people and although they're not all as fast out of the blocks as Tebogo is, they're certainly all quick with a smile.

As you travel through the country, you'll meet a range of people who work in the tourism industry and related businesses. On page 32 we get to know a few of them better, ranging from a gin maker to a couple of bush pilots.

On page 22 we set out an easy-to-follow road trip to the Chobe and back. Yup, we've done the homework, you just need to block off some leave.

Jon Minster took his family on an epic holiday this past winter. Read about how he tackled Moremi as a first-timer (p 48), why Namibia's Zambezi Region buddies up so well with the Okavango Panhandle (p 66), and don't miss his column about the "hyena door" (p 16).

Christoff Eilerd went exploring some unusual corners of the Kalahari (p 42), while Chris Leggatt was in neighbouring Zimbabwe to investigate the merits of adding Hwange National Park to your itinerary (p 54). The verdict? It's a must!

The Central Kalahari Game Reserve is Botswana's biggest, wildest reserve. Scott Ramsay's fabulous photographs (p 76) will stir your wanderlust.

We hope you enjoy this issue – drop us an e-mail and let us know what you'd like to see more of!

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go! Botswana

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BORDER FEES

Botswana

Fees are payable in pula – you can usually pay by card. Vehicle fee P260 (R348). Trailer P110 (R147). This fee includes the National Road Safety Fund levy, vehicle insurance and a road transport permit. If you plan to pass through Botswana twice on your trip (if you're also driving through Namibia, and then re-entering Botswana) you can request a double-entry permit so you don't have to pay the full fee every time.

Namibia

You can pay in rand (cash or card). Vehicle fee R371; trailer R236.

Zambia

Some fees are payable in US dollars only; others in kwacha (K). You can exchange dollars for kwacha informally at most borders. Carbon tax K368 (R243); insurance US$25 (R450); council levy K50 (R45); toll/road tax US$20 (R360). Some fees may vary according to your car's engine size. If you cross the Kazungula bridge, there's a bridge fee of US$20 (R360).

Zimbabwe

Fees are paid in US dollars. Carbon tax US$10 (R180); third party insurance US$30 (R540); road tax US$10 (R180). Figures may vary according to how big your vehicle's engine is. At some borders a gate pass might also be payable.

FOR YOUR VEHICLE

- **ZA sticker.** Put it on the back.
- **Emergency triangles.** Pack two in case someone asks. Keep them close at hand.
- **Fire extinguisher.** Compulsory. Keep it within easy access.
- **Reflective vest.** Wear it when you get out of your car at the side of the road to fix a tyre.
- **Reflective strips for your bumpers.** White or silver reflective strips stuck to the front bumper; red reflective strips stuck to the rear bumper. Even if your car already has reflectors! This is compulsory in Zimbabwe and Zambia.

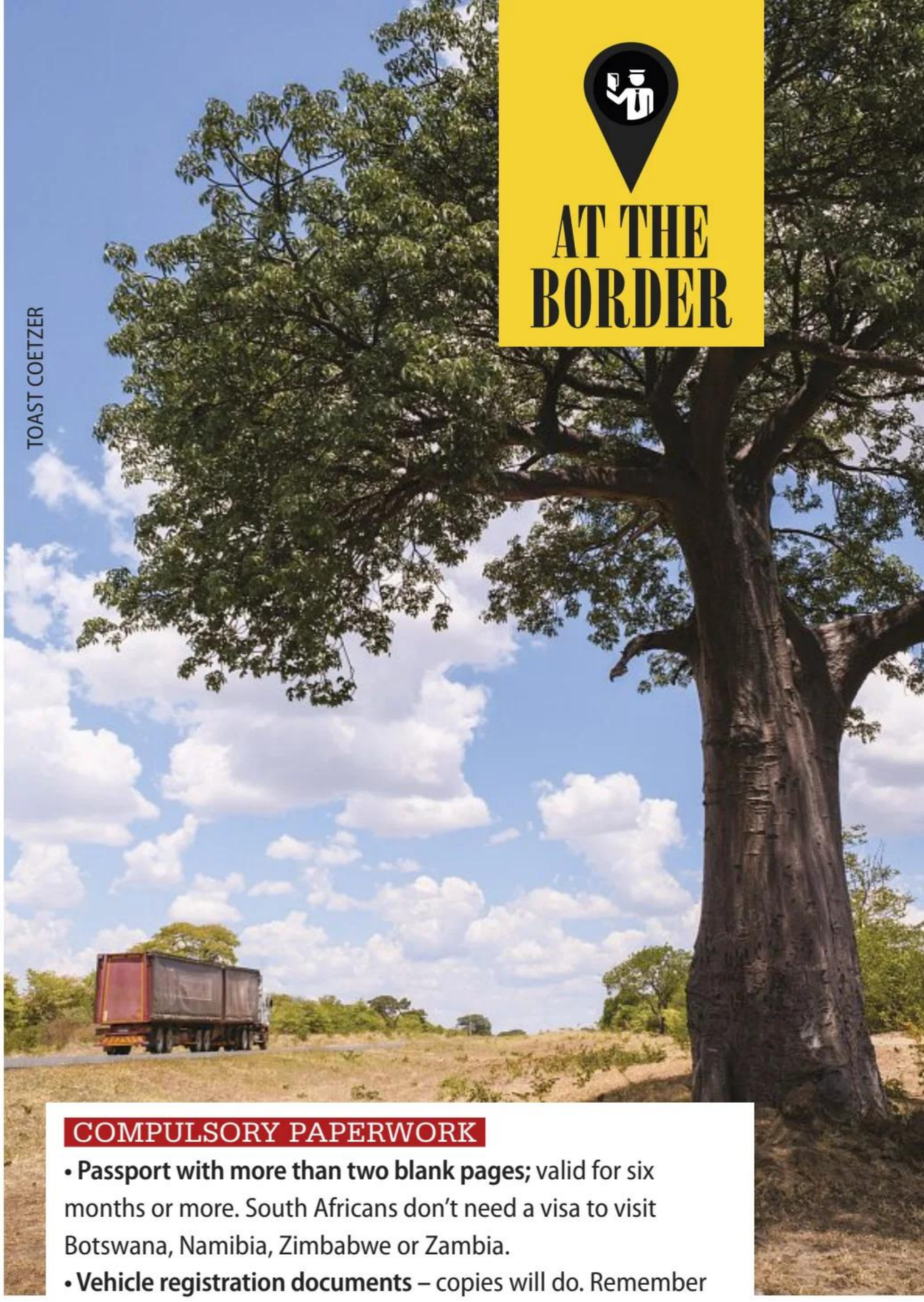
PLAY IT SAFE

Crocodiles can be found in all of Botswana's rivers, and in the rivers in neighbouring Namibia, Zimbabwe and Zambia. Never linger by the water's edge and keep children well away.

Hippos also like to mow the lawns of campsites at night – use a torch when you trundle to the bathroom.

Crime is a reality. Leave someone with your vehicle when you stop in a town to do shopping. Tourists make for easy targets.

AT THE BORDER



TOAST COETZER

COMPULSORY PAPERWORK

- **Passport with more than two blank pages;** valid for six months or more. South Africans don't need a visa to visit Botswana, Namibia, Zimbabwe or Zambia.
- **Vehicle registration documents** – copies will do. Remember your trailer's documents, too.
- **Letter of authorisation from the bank** if you're still paying off your vehicle, or from the owner of the car if you're borrowing it. This should specify the dates you intend to take the vehicle across the border, countries you plan to visit, the registration number, and the physical address, ID number and name of the owner.
- **Unabridged birth certificates for all children under 18,** unless your kids have new passports that list the parents' names in the back. If your children have these new passports, you don't need to bring birth certificates along.
- **SA driving licence.** Have it ready for presentation at checkpoints.

VETERINARY CONTROL POINTS

These control points might have two stop signs – stop at both and proceed only when the official waves you along. Your vehicle might be searched, usually only when you leave an area in the north of the country with foot-and-mouth disease, like when you're travelling south from Kasane to Nata, or east from Maun to Gweta. Meat, vegetables, fruit and dairy are sometimes confiscated.

BUY YOUR MEAT IN BOTS

There have been repeated cases of foot-and-mouth disease in South Africa in recent years, making it illegal to transport any raw meat from SA to Botswana or Namibia. To support local farmers, Botswana also currently has an import ban on fresh fruit, vegetables and dairy products. Rather buy your groceries at a good supermarket or butchery once you've crossed into Botswana. Meat is widely available and of good quality.

DO YOUR HOMEWORK

Crossing the border is easy if you're well prepared. If the Covid-19 pandemic taught us anything, it's that regulations can change overnight. Do extra research before you depart so you don't get caught unawares at the border. Search for these news and travel information pages on Facebook:

- **Botswana:** BWgovernment; DriveBots
- **Namibia:** Ministry of Health and Social Services – Namibia; DriveNam
- **Zimbabwe:** Ministry of Health and Child Care; DriveZim
- **Zambia:** Ministry of Health Zambia; DriveZam

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TRAVEL TIPS

CROSS EASILY

- Try to avoid the bigger border posts, especially around the end of the month and during peak holiday season.
- Keep cash handy; some border posts don't have card facilities.
- Before you leave home, write down the serial number(s) of your camera, lenses, cellphone, GPS, etc. Print copies of this list and attach a copy to a customs declaration when required.
- A printout of your itinerary is occasionally requested at a checkpoint. Have a few ready in your Flip File.

MEDICAL

- **First aid kit:** As needed.
- **Malaria:** Take precautions; consult with your GP.
- **Medical insurance:** Good to have. Make sure your medical aid and/or insurance covers unexpected medical tests, foreign hospitalisation and/or evacuation.
- **Yellow fever vaccination:** Not compulsory, but outbreaks do occur.

MONEY

- Notify your bank that you'll be using your credit and debit cards outside of South Africa.
- Your bank cards won't be accepted everywhere. Make sure you have some cash, especially at filling stations.
- Use local ATMs to draw currency like pula (Botswana) and kwacha (Zambia). You can use rands in Namibia and US dollars in Zimbabwe and Zambia.

THRIFTY TRAVEL

- **Cellphone:** Save money on roaming charges by buying a local SIM card for your phone. You can't do this informally at any little shop any more – you must register (RICA) it properly in an authorised mobile network shop, like Orange.
- **Internet:** Most places you'll stay at will have free Wi-Fi.
- **Drive slowly:** This will keep your fuel consumption low. Speeding fines can also unexpectedly dent your budget.

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>>> CHECK THIS

Stars streak across the night sky above the baobabs of Kubu Island (also known as Lekhubu Island), captured by Cape Town photographer Jon Kerrin. Using a Fujifilm X-T5 camera and wide 16 mm lens on a tripod, Jon left the shutter open for 50 minutes at aperture f1.4 and ISO 400.

Jon offers night sky photography workshops – see more at jonkerrin.com or check out Instagram: @wherethelight_is

Cocooned in Khwai

On a two-week camping trip with his family through northern Botswana, **Jon Minster** discovered the simple pleasure of being all together in a small space.

ILLUSTRATION **AIMEE LINDEQUE**

I was never much of a camper growing up and neither was my wife, Jess. So, it was a big deal for our family when we booked a 16-night camping trip through northern Botswana in the winter of 2024. To make the experience a little bit easier for us newbies, we hired a Hilux with a built-in canopy that pops and flips and folds, kitted with all the gear that we'd need to be self-sufficient in the bush.

I stressed about the holiday for months. Would we manage? Would we tear each other's hair out?

Normally, when we travel, we stay in self-catering houses or on guest farms where everyone can escape to a quiet corner if the Monopoly Deal game gets too heated. Here, we'd be on top of each other. Literally! The kids would be sleeping in the roof pop-up, right above me and Jess...

I distracted myself by thinking about the positives. I've worked for *go!* for nearly 20 years and I've edited hundreds of stories about the joys of overlanding and camping. Now that our boys were old enough, Jess and I were determined to give them an experience they'd never forget. Of course, if we got lost or broke down in some far-flung wilderness, Elliot (11) and Francis (9) would never forget being helivacked to safety, but I really hoped the holiday would be memorable for less dramatic reasons!

Camping offers a special kind of freedom. Your house is on wheels and you can go wherever you please, park wherever you want and choose your morning view. Life is stripped down to the essential moving parts: food, water and shelter. Even in a newfangled vehicle like the one we'd be hiring, I hoped we'd get to experience a little bit of that freedom.

We flew to Vic Falls, got wet in the spray, and then took a taxi to the Botswana border post. We booked our 4x4 through Bushlore Africa: They have a vehicle depot in nearby Kazungula. While their friendly staff patiently showed us how everything opened, closed and folded away, I found myself breathing out with relief. We were going to be okay. This Hilux-cross-Bush Lapa was *boss*.

One of the most boss things about it was the hatch door at the back. Once you'd parked the vehicle, popped the roof bed for the kids and flipped open the side bed for the adults, this hatch was your access to the space inside. It opened on hydraulic struts with a *whoosh* sound, like an air-lock capsule on a spaceship. Inside, there were two beefy steel latches that allowed you to lock the door against the world outside.

We soon dubbed it the Hyena Door. We'd be camping in places where spotted hyenas were known to carry off your shoes (and your sirloin) and this door would be our protection against them and any other curious nocturnal denizens.

Snug in our sleeping bags on our respective mattresses, with the Hyena Door latched tight, the spaceship feeling was amplified. It was wonderful to be cocooned with the people I loved the most, adrift in silent darkness while the world spun slowly through the night.

As the days went by, I began to cherish the routine of the Hyena Door. In the morning, when the first child woke needing to wee, I'd unhook the latches and pop the door on its struts. With a *whoosh*, the glory of a bushveld dawn would flood into the canopy: all birdsong and slanted orange light. I'd peek my head into the cold June morning and breathe in scents of water and woodsmoke and elephant dung. I'd hang onto that moment for as long as possible, until I was pushed out of the way by the child who had now found his Crocs and puff jacket and was ready to bolt to the ablution block.

At night, after everyone had brushed their teeth, we'd board Spaceship Minster one by one. I always climbed in last – my job was to latch the door. Doing so gave permission for liftoff, destination dreamland.

The Hyena Door did its job. While camping in Khwai, a scraggly one-eyed hyena carried our bin into the bush, dropping it with a crash. We only knew this because the teenagers camping on the stand next to us filmed it with a cellphone. Safe behind the hatch, we didn't even bother to investigate the reason for the crash – we'd learnt that lesson the hard way a few days previously...

On our way to Moremi, we spent a night at Kaziikini Community Camp, about 30km from South Gate. Kaziikini might technically be outside the park but it has a permanent waterhole and it was crammed with elephants that walked right through our campsite in an almost endless procession. Seeing an elephant from a car or on the other side of a fence is one thing, but when there's nothing between you and the animal, it seems bigger and wilder than you could ever have imagined.

That night, we were visited by another wild thing. Around midnight, we heard a metallic clang. I got the spotlight and shone it out of the side of the canopy. A honey badger had forced open an external hatch on the vehicle and was raiding our food!

It looked at me disdainfully with a carton of Parmalat milk in its mouth. I quickly popped the Hyena Door – *whoosh* – and jumped out, fully expecting the badger to scamper off. Wrong. It dropped the milk and came striding at me like an Australian scrumhalf looking for a fight. (*Pretty sure a badger would come for you even if your surname was Etzebeth... – Ed.*) I leapt back inside and shut the door as fast as I could.

Jess suggested trying to chase it away using the spotlight on strobe mode. *Whoosh*. I opened the door again, more hesitantly this time. The badger was burying its muzzle in a packet of mielie kernels that would now never become popcorn.

The strobe effect seemed to work, so I passed the spotlight to Jess who used the pulsating beam to keep it at bay while I frantically moved all the food from the hatch to the cabin of the Hilux.

Whoosh.

Back inside, all of us awake now, we listened as the badger investigated every nook and cranny of the car before skulking off.

I was very glad we weren't sleeping on the ground.

Of all the things I miss about our Botswana camping holiday, I miss the Hyena Door the most. I was worried about being crammed into the camper but it was actually the most special time; something to be cherished.

Imagine you had a Hyena Door in everyday life – a way to instantly protect your family from danger and darkness. Rude clients at work? *Whoosh*. Doctors delivering bad news? *Whoosh*. Bullying on social media? *Whoosh*. With the door closed, you're all together and nothing can get in. You can slink down in your sleeping bag and close your eyes, knowing that you're safe.

Elliot will be a teenager soon and Francis is growing up just as fast. We won't be able to protect them forever. Give me a Hyena Door of life, so that Jess and I can tuck them into bed side by side under the Milky Way, and she can read to them by headlamp while I latch the door and stop time.

Please. Just for one more night.

NORTHERN BOTSWANA

ANGOLA
NAMIBIA
BOTSWANA
Luiana
Kwando
Loanja
Zambezi
Chobe
Kavango
Xaudum
Thaoge
Linyanti
Okavango Panhandle
Masasara
Qmuramaba Eiseb
Epukiro
Rietfontein
Okwa
Passarge Valley
Lake Ngami
Lake Xau
Bwabwata National Park
Mahango Game Reserve
Mudumu National Park
Nkasa Rupara National Park
Tsodilo Hills World Heritage Site
Moremi Game Reserve
Okavango Delta
Chobe National Park
Nxai Pan National Park
Makgadikgadi Pans National Park
Central Kalahari Game Reserve
North-West District
Ghanzi District
N
50 km
to Mongu
Wenela/Sesheke
6 am – 6 pm
Sesheke
KATIMA MULILO
Kasaya
Mwandi
Schuckmannsburg
Katongo
Gunkwe
Batoka
Ngoma
7 am – 6 pm
KASANE
Ihaha
Ikumwe
Muchenje
Ngoma
Mabele
Kavimba
Kachikau
Masowa
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Linyanti
Nogatsaa Pans
Savuti
Chobe Dist
Khwai North Gate
Xakanaxa
Third Bridge
Mababe
Maqwee (South Gate)
Shukumukwa
Shorobe
Lekaweng Drift
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Samedupi
Serogo
Xhana
Tshatshamo
Motopi
Matimo
Menoakwena
Senagom
Dorokae
Makalamabedi
Baines Baobabs
Boteti River Camp
Xhumaga
Boteti
Magodi
Sukwane
Xwatshaa
Rakops
Mopipi
Xhumo
Xhorodomo
Mokhoxane
Gidikwe
South Camp
Matswere gate
Motopi
Sunday
Deception Pan
Phokoje Pan
Letiahau
Lekhubu
Piper Pan
Molapo
Xade
Xaka
Metsimanong
Letiahau
Okwa
Tjova
Mayara
Kapako
Andara
to Rundu
Divundu
Bagani
Omega III
Omega I
Chetto
203
B8
110
70
58
A33
C49
38
C48
Mohembo
6 am – 6 pm
11
Shakawe
Samochimo
Gudikwa
Basarwa
Tsodilo Hills (1 390 m)
A35
91
Sepopa
Seronga
Jumbo Junction
Ikoga
Guma Lagoon Camp
Etsha 13
Etsha 6
42
Gumare
39
Nokaneng
to Tsumkwe
Qangwa
Gqose
Qabi
Dobe/Tsumkwe
7 am – 5 pm
Aha Hills (1 189 m)
112
Tsau
67
Komana
Tikaseolo
34
Toteng
Sehithwa
Mogapelwa
Lechana
A3
125
81
62
Kuke
189
El-Fari Bush Camp
D'Kar
GHANZI
Kwakhanai
45
166
A2
Chobokwane
to Mamuno border post
Tswaane
225
Takachu
to Kang
Bere
New Xade
B300
128

ZAMBIA
ZIMBABWE
Kariba Dam
Zambezi National Park
Hwange National Park
Makgadikgadi Pans
Ntwetwe Pan
Sowa Pan
Nata Bird Sanctuary
Khama Rhino Sanctuary
Central District
North-East District
Matobo National Park
Northern Tuli Game Reserve
RSA
Kasane/Impalila Island
7.30 am – 6.30 pm
Sikaunzwe
M10
Kazungula
Kazungula
Kazungula Bridge
6 am – 6.30 pm
Kazungula Road
6 am – 8 pm
Lesoma
Simonga
LIVINGSTONE
Victoria Falls
6 am – 6 pm
Mukuni
VICTORIA FALLS
81
111
A8
Senkobo
to Lusaka
Zimba
T1
Ngwezi
Kalomo
Zambezi
Matetsi
Lukosi
Gwayi
Shangani
Hwange
Matetsi
Sinamatella
Dete
Main Camp
Tinde
Mlibizi
Binga
Manjolo
Siabuwa
to Kariba/Harare
Sanyati
Bust
Munyati
Pandamatenga
Pandamatenga
8 am – 5 pm
Robins Camp
A33
203
Ngwasha veterinary checkpoint
(no meat products may pass north to south)
Elephant Sands
Sepako
Tsuli
Gwavasabua
Nata
Gweta
100
Zoroga
Nata
Nata Lodge
Debetsha
Maitengwe
7.30 am – 4.30 pm
Nkange
Senete
Selolwane
Tutume
Domboshaba Ruins
Ramokgwebana/Plumtree
6 am – 10 pm
Figtree
Marula
Plumtree
Ramokgwebana
Masunga
Makuta
Sebina
Shashe
Ntashe
Tshesebe
Mowana
Tsamaya
80
Sowa Pan mine
Sowa Town
Dukwi
Mosetse
Kutamogoree
Kutamagone
188
A3
Marapong
Matsitama
Mea
Piljane
231
Samsongwe
Mokubilo
Tlalamabele
A30
Mmatshumo
Mosu
Tati
A1
Mathangwane
Borolong
Woodlands Stop Over and Lodge
FRANCISTOWN
Matsiloje/Mphoengs
7 am – 4.30 pm
Mphoengs
Matsiloje
Mupane mine
Matope
Shashe Bridge
Tonota
Makamoto
92
Foley
Robelela Kgotla
Shashe
Motloutse
Sedibe
Hwali
Mabolwe/Mlambapele
Gobojango
Mabolwe
Semolale
Thuli
Filabusi
to Masvingo
Mulungwane
A9
A6
A7
A5
A8
BULAWAYO
Kezi
Gwanda
Maphisa
Mwewe
Simukwe
Thuli
Umzingwani
West Nicholson
Insiza
to Gweru
to Kwekwe
ORAPA
75
26
Letlhakane
Tuuthebe Lodge
Sesaljwe
A14
195
Serule
A15
71
SELEBI-PHIKWE
Selebi mine
Bobonong
Molalatau
Sefhophe
Thume
Mathathane
Tshimoyapula
Mabeleapodi
Topisi
77
Maope
Paje
Serowe
46
Mogorosi
Thabala
Motshegaletau
Moiyabana
96
A145
Dikabeya
Palapye
74
Lecheng
Malaka
Tamasane
Aphiri
Moremi
Maunatlala
Seolwane
Lerala
B140
to Gaborone
to Grobler's Bridge
Mogapinyana
Tsetsebjwe
Baines Drift
Zanzibar
Zanzibar
7 am – 6.30 pm
Platjan
6 am – 6 pm
Alldays
to Polokwane
R572
R521
Pontdrift
7.30 am – 4.30 pm
to Musina
Lotsane
Tshokana
Limpopo
Swartrivier

KEY

- Town
- Settlement
- Accommodation
- Campsite
- Private camp
- Restaurant
- Picnic spot
- Viewpoint (alight)
- Viewpoint (don't alight)
- Waterhole/pan
- Dam
- Point of interest
- Historical site
- Notable tree
- Mountain/hill
- Activity
- Border post
- Gate
- Police/checkpoint
- Medical
- Fuel
- Auto workshop
- Car rental
- Information
- Airport/airfield
- Railway station
- Parking
- Bathroom
- Shopping centre
- Shop
- Post Office
- Communication
- Financial
- Government building
- Industrial building
- Church
- School
- No entry
- Tar road
- Gravel road
- 4x4 track
- Seasonal 4x4 track
- Railway line
- No access
- Distance marker

SOUTHERN BOTSWANA

NAMIBIA

189

D'Kar

to Sehithwa

GHANZI

Kwakhanai

Phokoje Pan

Piper Pan

Letiahau

Molapo

Mamuno/Buitepos
24 hours

Karakopis

Charles Hill

Xanagas

A2

164

Tshootsha

Jungle Light
Rest Camp

Chobokwane

Rietfontein

New Xade

Xade

Okwa

Xaka

to Windhoek

Makunda

Okwa

Tswaane

Ghanzi District

N

50 km

Takachu

Bere

225

Central Kalahari
Game Reserve

Ncojane

Metsiimantsho

Ranyane

Lokalane

A2

Palamakoloi

Ncaang

Hunhukwe

Ukhwi

Khutse
Game Reserve

Kalahari Rest

Nicote

Monong

Kang

Ngwatle

Lehututu

B210

116

56

Kane

Dutlwe

214

B120

Hukuntsi

Phuduhudu

Tshane

Thusanang

Zutshwa

Lokgwabe

Name Pan (permit holders only)

Inalegolo

A2

102

Mabutsane

Swartpan

Kaa Gate

Kokong

Kgalagadi District

Thupapedi

Sesatswe

Sekoma

Gnus Gnus

Jack's Pan (permit holders only)

Keng

Khakhea

Southern
District

Union's End

Lang Rambuka

A20

129

Kokotsha

Mabuasehube

Khiding

Lesholoago

Grootkolk

Entrance Gate

Mpayathutlwa

Polentswa

Cornwall Safari Lodge

Matopi

Werda

Molopo

Bosobogolo

144

Makopong
7.30 am – 4.30 pm

Bray

Nossob

Phepeng

Hereford/Bray
7 am – 4.30 pm

A20

Kgalagadi
Transfrontier Park

Khisana

R378

Molopo Game
Reserve

Vorstershoop

Mata-Mata

Nossob

Maleshe

Omawaneno

Tosca

R379

Tshabong

A20

Tshabong/McCarthy's Rest
8 am – 6 pm

Khawa

Rooiputs

B211

R378

Deekbos

Twee Rivieren

Two Rivers/Twee Rivieren
7.30 am – 4 pm

Lokolong

Middlepits/Middelputs
8 am – 4 pm

SOUTH
AFRICA

Rietfontein

R380

Bokspits/Gemsbok
8 am – 4 pm

Molopo

Khuis

R31

B211

Melekgon

Van Zylsrus

Askham

R31

BOTSWANA

Central District

Kwaneng District

Khama Rhino Sanctuary

Kgatleng District

South-East District

to Letlhakane

Sesaljwe

A14

195

to Francistown

92

Makamoto

Robelela Kgotla

Shashe

Motloutse

Foley

Sedibe

to Gobojango

Serule

Mmadinare

71

A15

SELEBI-PHIKWE

Bobonong

Selebi mine

Thume

Sefhophe

Tshimoyapula

Topisi

Mabeleapodi

77

Maope

Paje

A1

Mogapinyana

Tsetsebjwe

Metsimanong

Mogorosi

Serowe

46

Dikabeya

A14

Tamasane

Tshokana

Lotsane

Thabala

Lotsane

Palapye

Aphiri

Maunatlala

Motshegaletau

Malaka

Moiyabana

96

Goo-Moremi Gorge

Seolwane

Lecheng

A145

Lerala

B140

Limpopo

R572

Swartwater

95

Mosolotshane

74

Sherwood Ranch

Martin's Drift

Mosopha

Sefhare

Seleka

Shoshong

55

Mahalapye

Shakwe

N11

Kodibeleng

Ikongwe

Taupye

123

B147

Martin's Drift/Grobler's Bridge

6 am – 10 pm

to Mokopane

Machaneng

Makwate

Lephepe

Sojwe

Dinokwe

R510

R572

Parr's Halt/Stockpoort

8 am – 4 pm

Kukumane

Letiahau

Khutse

Kaudwane

Dovedale

Mushu

Mmambula

Mmaphashalala

R518

Vlakpan

Lephalale

A1

Mookane

Buffels Drift

Salajwe

223

Boatlaname

Seisante

Matsane

B112

Dibete

Ngware

Bodungwane

193

Leshibitse

Kudumelapye

Botlhapatlou

Mosomane

Lokala

Cumberland

Metsebotlhoko

Malwelwe

Takatokwane

Sesung

Letlhakeng

Medie

Dikgonnye

Bulge River

Hatsalatladi

Limpopo

Olifants Drift

Ditshegwane

Mantshwabisi

63

B120

Lentsweletau

Dikgatlhô

Malotwane

Vaalwater

Monwane

Mochudi

Bokaa

Morwa

R510

R517

MOLEPOLOLE

60

A12

Kotolaname

Mmopane

Malolwane

JWANENG

Metsimotlhabe

Modipane

Thabazimbi

85

A2

Gasese

Sikwane/Derdepoort

7.30 am – 4.30 pm

Gabane

Sese

83

36

GABORONE

Tlokweng/Kopfontein

6 am – midnight

Mosepele

88

Mokhomma

Mosopa

Ramotswa

Lefhoko

Mogonye

Goedehoop

Hotel California

Monalanong Hill (1 476 m)

Ramotswa/Swartkopfontein

7 am – 6 pm

Maokane

Seherelela

A1

R516

Bela-Bela

Ranaka

Ntlhantlhe

Selokolela

KANYE

Magotlhwane

52

56

Gasita

A2

Otse

to Mokopane

B202

Lobatse

Pioneer Gate/Skilpadshek

6 am – midnight

N1

Lorolwane

Mmathethe

R511

Lorwana

Sun City

Metlobo

Tswaaneng

Goodhope

55

Hammanskraal

Pitsane

Metlojane

R556

R510

R556

Mokgomane

Sedibeng

Tswagare

Ramatlabama

Ramatlabama

6 am – 10 pm

Zeerust

N4

Brits

Hebron

B101

Molopo

Swartruggens

Rustenburg

Sekhutlane

Makatako

N4

PRETORIA

Mabule

Leporung

Koster

R30

R53

R52

Derby

R509

Mmakgori

Phitsane Molopo/Makgobistad

7.30 am – 6 pm

Mahikeng

R505

to Bronkhorstspruit

R375

N18

R503

R52

R30

R500

to Emalahleni

Piet Plessis

Lichtenburg

R53

N14

N12

R377

R52

R505

Ventersdorp

JOHANNESBURG

N17

Carletonville

to Bethal

Coligny

R501

N3

Heidelberg

Sannieshof

R53

N12

R30

Stella

to Harrismith

Delareyville

Potchefstroom

N14

N1

Vryburg

Klerksdorp

to Upington

to Kimberley

to Wolmaransstad

to Kroonstad

Eight days to Chobe and back

This itinerary is designed for first-time visitors to Botswana, who want to pack a variety of sights into an eight-day road trip to the Chobe River and back. Mind the elephants!

WORDS & PICTURES **TOAST COETZER**

You step out of your tent and take your first wobbly steps of the morning. But then you stop. And stare. An elephant is marching past the ablution block, barely 50m away! It's heading straight to the waterhole at Elephant Sands and not giving you a second thought.

Botswana has the same wildlife as South Africa, but it offers a much wilder type of holiday because most of its campsites, like the one at Elephant Sands, are unfenced. This is why a camping road trip to the banks of the Chobe River should be on any keen wildlife lover's bucket list.

It can be a daunting holiday to plan, and the prices are steep, but this Classic Road Trip will put your mind at ease. We've provided a day-by-day itinerary that covers the route from Grobler's Bridge to Palapye, then north to Francistown, Nata, and eventually Kazungula and Kasane: the key access towns to Chobe National Park. It returns the same way, but with different tailor-made stops. Even though your main destination might be Chobe, there are other – often quite surprising – attractions to see.

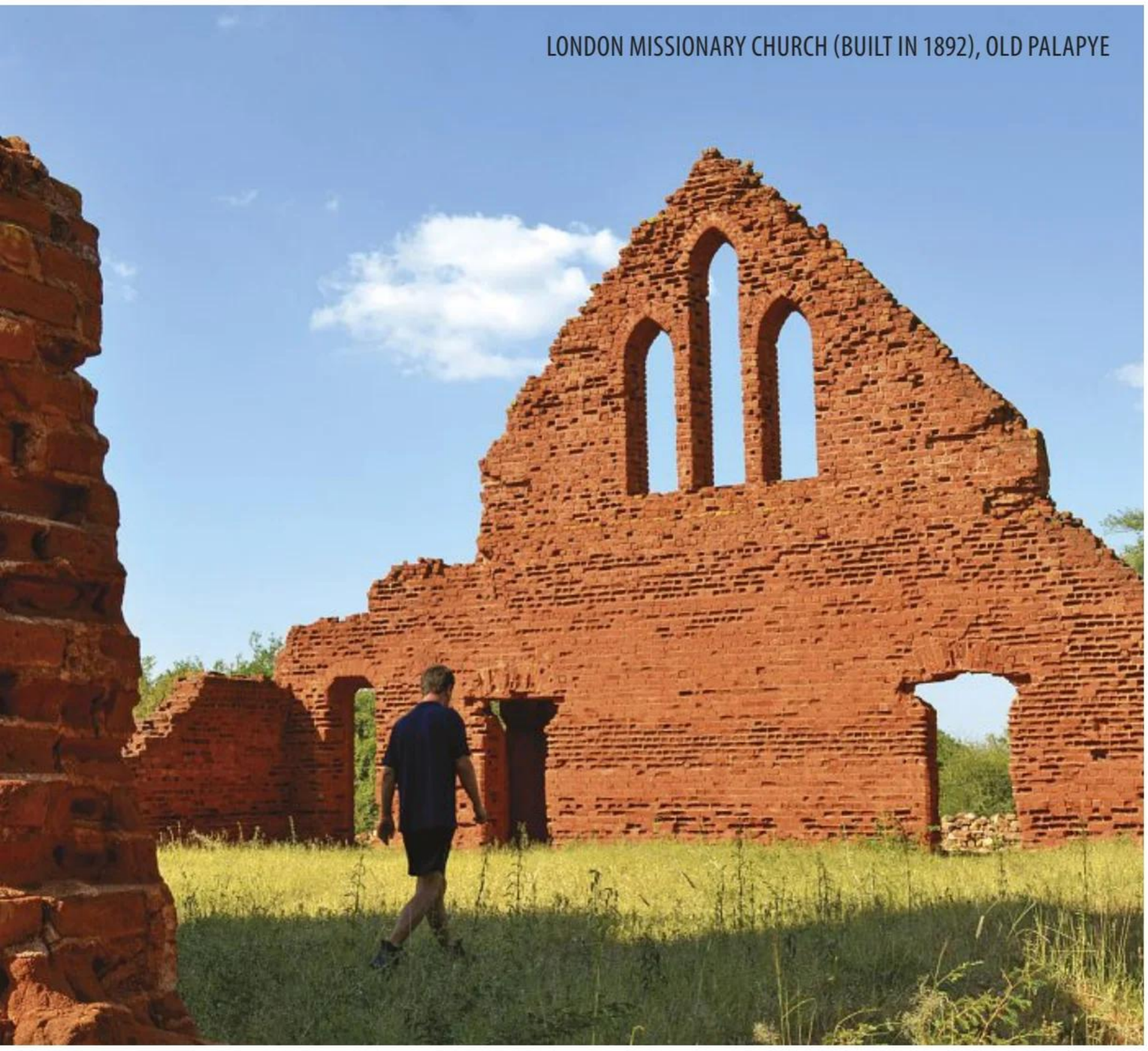
The main road is tarred all the way and you'll only encounter short stretches of sand or gravel on the access roads to the campsites. It's much easier to tackle a trip like this than you thought. Let's go!

CLASSIC ROAD TRIP

HIGHLIGHTS

- HIDDEN GORGES & WATERFALLS
- EXCELLENT, EASY BIRDING
- LOTS OF ELEPHANTS
- A SUNSET CRUISE ON THE CHOBE RIVER
- CHOBE NATIONAL PARK
- VIC FALLS
- SOWA PAN (MAKGADIKGADI)
- LIMPOPO RIVER

Elephants next to the A33 near Pandamatenga.



LONDON MISSIONARY CHURCH (BUILT IN 1892), OLD PALAPYE

DAY 1 PALAPYE

The route: Measured from Joburg, it's about 545 km to the busy town of Palapye – a full day's drive considering that you have a border post to negotiate. Budget two hours for the border, even though it seldom takes more than one. You can skip the busier Grobler's Bridge/Martin's Drift border post by tiptoeing through the dead quiet one at Stockpoort/Parr's Halt. (See map on page 20 – 21.) If you pass through the latter, there's a stretch of gravel on the Botswana side before you encounter the first tar road.

Rather use Grobler's Bridge if this is your first visit to Botswana. Don't be intimidated by the long queue of trucks at the border; you drive past them all and park in the normal vehicle area in front of the immigration office. (See page 11 for all the paperwork you need.)

The logic: Since you can't take fresh meat, veggies or fruit across the border, it's best to shop at one of Palapye's handful of malls, all next to or near the A1. If you want to, get a local SIM card at a cellphone shop, even though most places you'll stay at will have Wi-Fi. Draw cash at an ATM so that you have pula in hand for the journey ahead.

Don't miss: The Tswapong Hills east of Palapye don't look like much from a distance, but once you're up close, a magical world of gorges reveals itself.

STAY HERE: These places all offer a gentle introduction to rural life in Botswana. There are no dangerous animals around so you can go walking – not something you can do in the north of the country!

Segaigai Farm is a few kilometres south-east of Palapye, but you need to wind your way through a residential neighbourhood to get there. It's in the foothills of the Tswapong Hills and co-owner James Bremner has laid out the excellent Porcupine Nature Trail on adjoining land. (The trail is short, but set aside two hours to do it properly.) It's self-guided and you'll get a booklet with numbered points along the trail – a great way to learn about local trees like red bushwillow, shepherd's tree, mogwagwa (black monkey orange) and others.

OUR ROAD TRIP RIDE

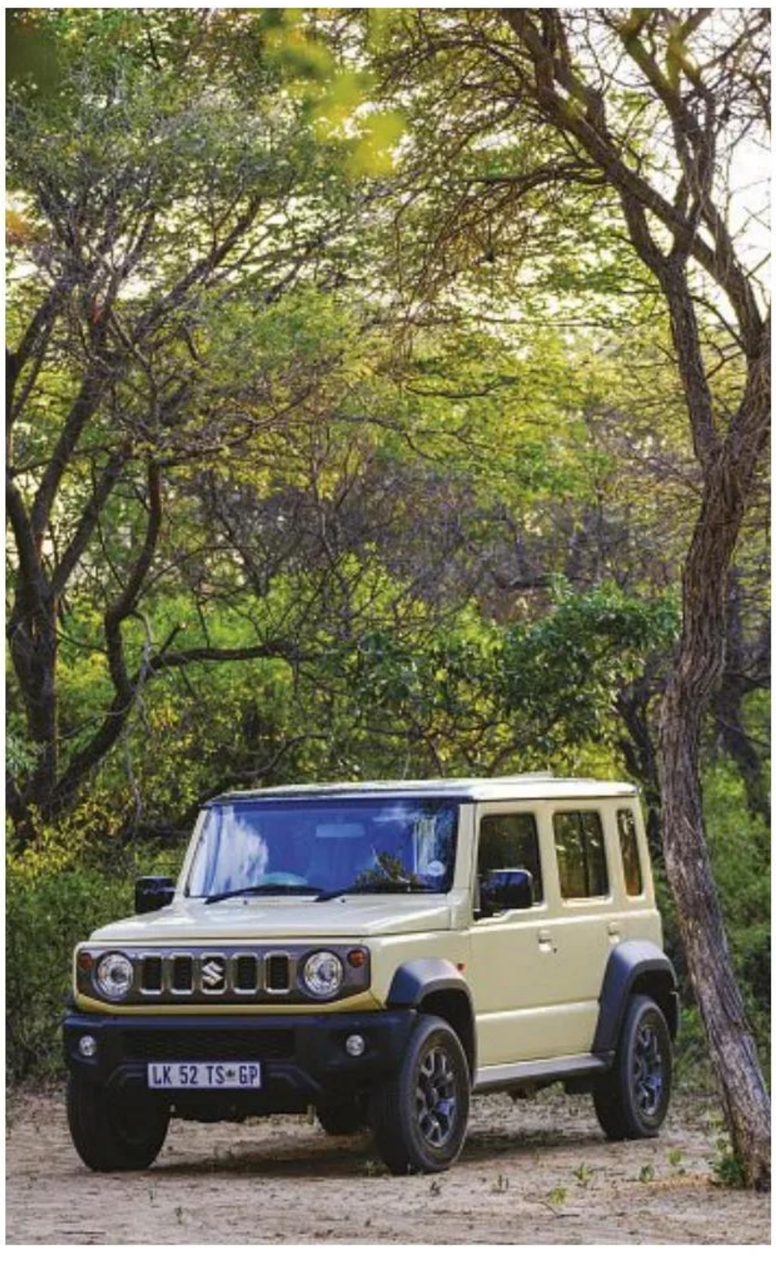
Suzuki Jimny

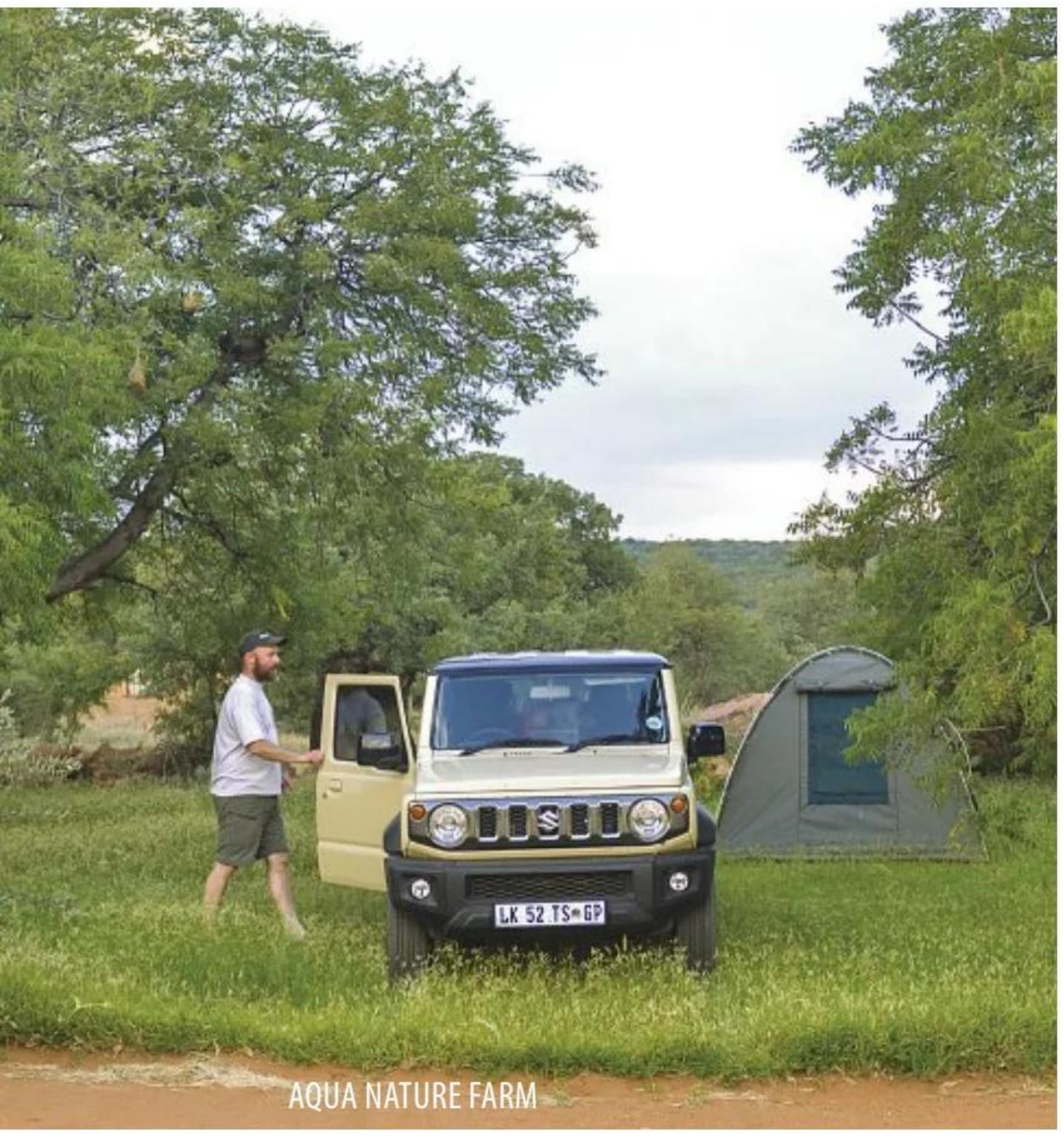
The new five-door Suzuki Jimny is the perfect camping road-trip vehicle for two people. Flatten the back seats so you have space for all your gear. If you have a small family, it's best to tow a trailer or get a rooftop luggage box.

The automatic version we drove was brilliant. It's easy to use cruise control, which helps to avoid traffic fines in those pesky 80 km/h zones, and fuel consumption is good, especially if you don't exceed 110 km/h. (Considering the potholes and roaming livestock on some roads, it's safer to drive at least 20 km/h slower than you usually would in South Africa.)

The range starts at R429 900 for the five-door 1.5 GL manual transmission model.

suzukiauto.co.za





AQUA NATURE FARM

PALAPYE

JAMES BREMNER, SEGAIGAI

BAME KELESEGILE, CHEF AT SEGAIGAI FARM

If you're staying for a couple of days, ask James about the day hike from Segaigai to Old Palapye. Segaigai also offers a special traditional meal (order well in advance). It was the first time I'd tasted "coffee" made from the roasted roots of a shepherd's tree! You can even go on a foraging walk with their chef beforehand.

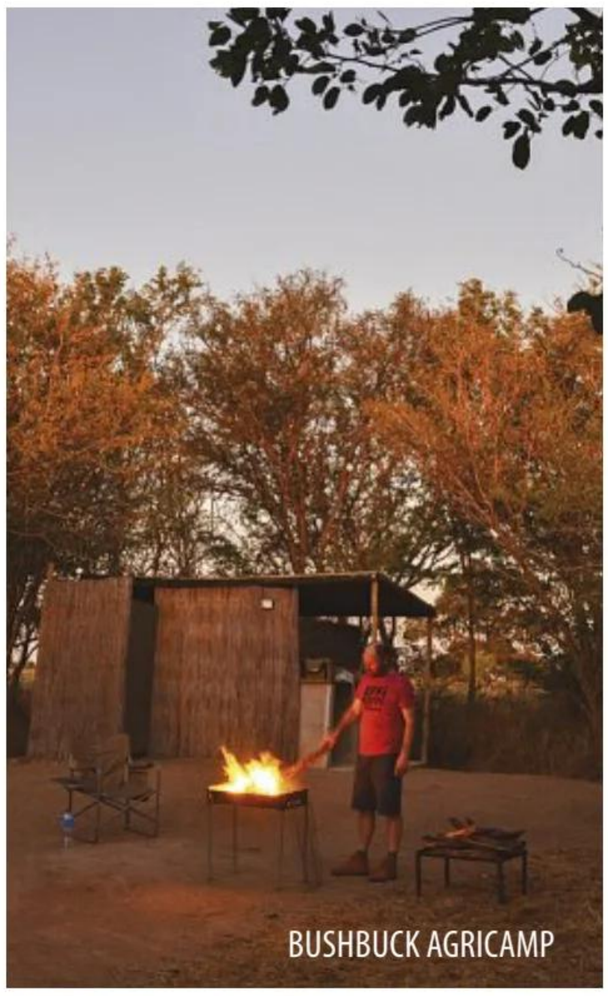
Aqua Nature Farm is 35 km south-east of Palapye near Malaka, on the same land as the historical site of Old Palapye – the original village before it moved to its current location. You can see the ruins of an old London Missionary church here, and you can also enter Motetane Gorge where you'll walk past giant fig trees to small pools and waterfalls where local people come to worship. Look up: You might see a pair of soaring Verreaux's eagles or a vervet monkey scuttling around in a treetop.

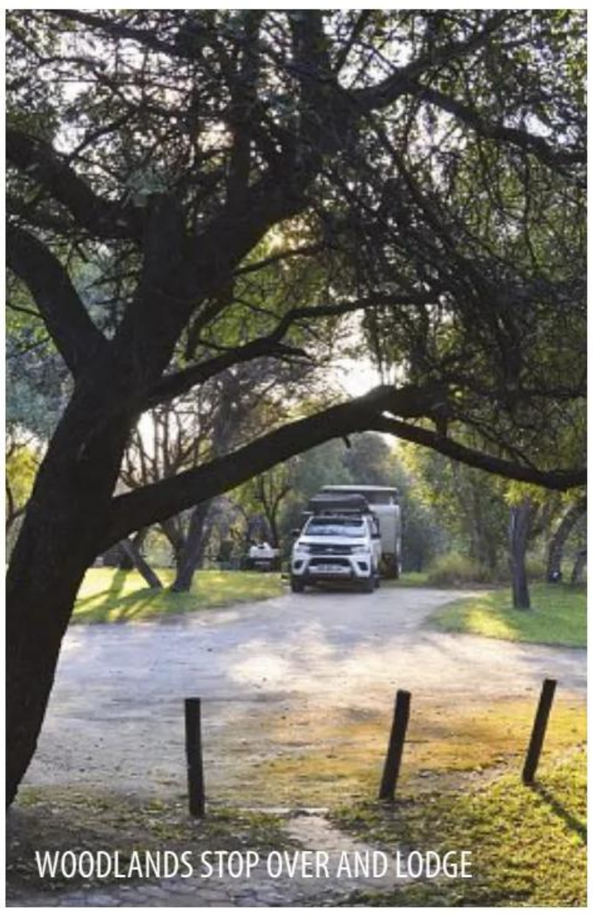
On the northern side of Tswapong Hills is **Goo-Moremi Gorge** (68 km from Palapye), a small reserve that encompasses the gorge itself. Goo-Moremi is home to a colony of Cape vultures and you can only visit with a guide since it's a sacred place to residents. The walk usually ends at a waterfall near the colony, but if you're a die-hard birder you can venture further (with a guide).

See p 101 – 102 for accommodation details for Segaigai, Aqua Nature Farm and Goo-Moremi Gorge.

MOTETANE GORGE

CLARRISE KACHUNGWE SELLS MOPANI WORMS


BUSHBUCK AGRICAMP


WOODLANDS STOP OVER AND LODGE

YELLOW-BILLED HORNBILL, WOODLANDS

THORNTREE CAFÉ, FRANCISTOWN

DAY 2 FRANCISTOWN

The route: From Palapye, it's 168 km along the busy A1 to Francistown. Adhere to the speed limit and you'll be alright. There are a couple of compulsory stops at veterinary check points, but you're usually just waved through since you're not near the Red Line yet. Because Botswana exports beef, they take foot-and-mouth disease very seriously. These vet check points (which you'll see all over the country) are part of a system that helps to prevent the spread of the disease.

The logic: Driving in Botswana requires extra concentration: livestock and donkeys wander freely. Take it easy and try to reach your destination in the early afternoon.

Don't miss: En route you'll see roadside traders selling things like peanuts, marula nuts (a tasty snack, or to use in baking) and dried mopane worms. Have cash handy if you'd like to buy some. Pro tip: Dried mopane worms are meant to be rehydrated before you eat them – toss them into a tomato-and-onion relish and serve it with pap at your next braai. Who's the braai master now?

Aim to be in Francistown for lunch and head to the stylish Thorntree Café (corner of St Patrick Street and First Avenue, entrance around the other side). The menu covers everything from toasted sandwiches and pizzas to pasta, steak and chicken.

Thorntree is next to Diggers Inn – ask the receptionist if you can look at the historical photos and relics of the region's gold-rush era exhibited in the foyer.

If you have an extra day around Francistown, seek out the Domboshaba Ruins about 90 km north of the town – they're similar to what you'll find at Great Zimbabwe.

STAY HERE: If you're a townie, try **Cresta Marang Gardens** in Francistown, otherwise head straight to our favourite establishment in the area: **Woodlands Stop Over and Lodge**, about 15 km north of town. Here, you'll enjoy the hospitality of Mike and Anne West and their staff. There are short trails and the bush around the campsite and chalets offers easy but very rewarding birding. In summer, a woodland kingfisher is bound to be your morning alarm clock; also look for pearl-spotted owlet, tropical boubou and groundscraper thrush.

A little further north along the A3 (50 km from Francistown) is **Bushbuck Agricamp**, which has tented units (if you don't have your own) and a bigger, open campsite. Book a private campsite – they're more sheltered.

See p 100 – 101 for accommodation details for Cresta Marang Gardens, Woodlands and Bushbuck Agricamp.

DAY 3 ELEPHANT SANDS

The route: The A3 from Francistown to Nata (190 km) has virtually no shoulder. It's potholed and you'll often find yourself competing for space with an oncoming truck. Not a vibe! Take extra care and drive slowly. There are always speed traps and traffic cops en route. Stop often to stretch your legs and explore the seemingly "nothing" towns along the way – they'll surprise you!

The logic: Since you'll be coming back the same way, don't try and squeeze in all of Nata's attractions in one go. (Save Makgadikgadi Pans for the return leg.) Nata has fuel stations and shops if you forgot your toothpaste in Palapye.

Don't miss: In summertime, you might see women selling veld fruit by the roadside – pull over when you spot an informal stall and try what's on offer.

At the village of Mosetse (115 km from Francistown), turn off to the left just south of the bridge over the Mosetse River – there are incredible leadwood trees on its banks.

A bit further north, in the town of Dukwi, there's a beaut of a baobab tree worth a gawk, just behind the Puma filling station. Pro tip: On the Puma forecourt, you'll find a liquor store called The Barrel House where you can stock up on local St Louis Lager and a limited selection of wine.

STAY HERE: Once you venture north of Nata, you're in elephant country. And there's no better place to see them than at the famous **Elephant Sands**, 55 km north of Nata. (Preferably while sipping a gin and dry lemon.) Elephant Sands has the only permanent waterhole for many kilometres in each direction and it draws large numbers of ellies, especially during the dry season. Pitch your tent and park your butt on your camping chair: The show will start at sunset.

See p 100 for accommodation details for Elephant Sands.

A DONKEY CART NEXT TO THE A3

ELEPHANT SANDS

WILD MEDLAR FRUIT

BAOBAB, DUKWI

CHOBE NATIONAL PARK

DAY 4–6 KAZUNGULA & KASANE

The route: It's a relatively easy 300 km cruise through undulating bushland from Nata to Kazungula. Along the way, you'll drive through the farming town of Pandamatenga (fuel available), where sorghum, beans and other crops are grown. See a farmer? Say howzit in Afrikaans – he's bound to be an ex-Saffa.

If you stop at any of the picnic spots along the route, scan the area for wildlife first. Elephants (and even lions) roam freely here. If you want to take a photo of an elephant next to the tar road, drive past the animal for at least 200 m and photograph it from a distance using your zoom lens. Do not approach wildlife of any kind – always stay close to your car.

Kazungula is full of trucks since it's near the borders with Zimbabwe and Zambia. Neighbouring Kasane is a classic safari town: Land Cruisers hog the main drag.

The logic: West of Kasane is the mighty Chobe National Park, the main reason you're here! If you have time, extend your stay in this area since there's so much to see.

Don't miss: Enquire with the lodge you're staying at about day visits to Vic Falls. You're so close, it would be a pity to miss out on seeing one of the world's most spectacular waterfalls. You'll be driven to the Zim border in the morning, cross over and continue your journey in a partner vehicle on the other side. You'll have about three hours to explore the falls, some time to grab lunch in town, and you'll be back in Kasane by late afternoon.

On your second full day, arrange a Chobe double whammy: A morning game drive in the park, followed by a sunset river cruise in the afternoon. Again, your camp or lodge will be able to arrange this for you, but book in advance. Doing both excursions on a single day will save you park fees, since you'll only have to pay the fee once.

If you've had one too many plates of gas-cooker pasta, have a meal at PPCC (it stands for Pizza Plus Coffee and Curry) in the main road of Kasane (President Avenue). They have burgers, pizzas, sandwiches and so on, but you should really try their excellent Indian cuisine.

Also go grab a selfie at the Prison Baobab Postal Tree (next to the police station, on the main road). In the past, this hollow tree was used as a "post office" where parcels would be left; apparently it also served as a jail cell.

RUGGED CAMPING GEAR

Tentco

While rooftop tents have their benefits, if you use a ground tent you can set up a base and drive out to explore the surrounding area. The **Tentco Ranger Safari Bow** (R4 510) is tough and sturdy – it feels like a little house! Once you get the hang of it, you'll be able to pitch it on your own in five minutes. Buy a small padlock to secure your tent whenever you leave the campsite – just in case there are vervet monkeys or baboons in the area. In general, never store food in your tent in wildlife areas.

The **Tentco Box with dividers** (R215 for the box, R100 for the six-compartment divider) is just the thing to store food in. Keep your coffee, tea and sugar in one compartment, your spices in another, and so forth.

Tentco makes a wide range of camping chairs, but we love the **Fisherman Stool** (R470) which folds up small and doesn't take up much space in your car. Tentco also makes a neat **Toiletry Bag** (R130), which is big enough to fit two people's stuff in. (Although, some people…)

011 397 6451; tentco.co.za

CHOBE RIVER CRUISE

JON MINSTER

VICTORIA FALLS

CHOBE MOPANI FOREST LODGE

SENYATI SAFARI CAMP

STAY HERE: In Kasane, popular camping options are **Chobe Safari Lodge** (watch out for tent-raiding warthogs, no jokes!) and **Thebe River Safaris** (which has a great restaurant and bar), while **Kubu Lodge** has secluded camping in Kazungula.

Just south of Kazungula in the Lesoma Valley, you'll find our favourite in the area, **Senyati Safari Camp**. The attraction here is the permanent waterhole where you'll see anything from elephants by the dozen to the odd lion or wild dog dropping in for a quick *dop*. Be alert when walking around their grounds – Senyati is unfenced. If you'd like to see wildlife without having to pay the steep park fees for Chobe National Park, Senyati should be your base. A 24-hour stake-out at the waterhole will yield excellent results. There's even an underground photography bunker…

Further south along the A33 is **Chobe Mopani Forest Lodge**, which also has a waterhole – you might see elephants here, too.

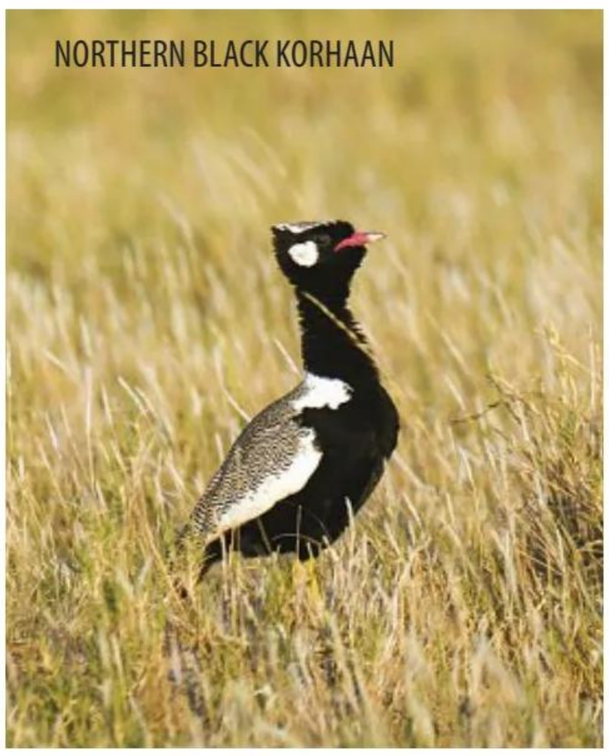
See p 112–114 for accommodation details for Chobe Safari Lodge, Thebe River Safaris, Kubu Lodge, Senyati Safari Camp and Chobe Mopani Forest Lodge.

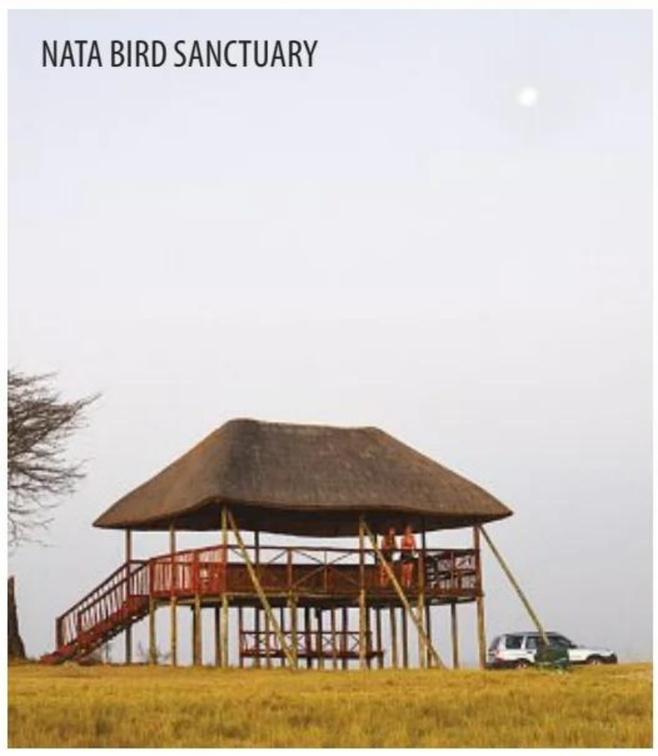
CURRY AT PPCC, KASANE

THE SPAR IN KASANE

THE A33 NORTH OF NATA

FLAMINGOS ON SOWA PAN


NORTHERN BLACK KORHAAN


NATA BIRD SANCTUARY

RUPERT BARSTOW, OWNER, ESELBE CAMP

ESELBE CAMP

DAY 7 NATA

The route: You're heading south again, leaving a foot-and-mouth disease area, so take care at the Ngwasha veterinary gate, 6 km north of Elephant Sands. Your vehicle might be searched since you're not allowed to carry fresh meat, dairy or any other produce past this point. (Fruit and veggies might even be confiscated.) At the checkpoint, you'll have to get out of your car and walk through a shallow dip; an official might also ask you to dab all your other shoes in the dip. Keep your flip-flops behind the seat and not at the bottom of your duffel bag.

The logic: You might want to pin your ears back for the long trip home, but it pays to take it slow. Nata has a unique atmosphere because of its proximity to the Makgadikgadi Pans. Try to get to your camping spot by lunchtime then head to the pans – you'll want to experience sunset here.

Don't miss: The eastern extension of the pan system is called Sowa Pan; at Nata Bird Sanctuary there's a viewing deck and picnic table at the edge of the pan. Look for wildebeest and scan the veld for northern black korhaan, or the skies for big raptors like black-chested snake-eagle. If the rains have been good, the normally dry pan might have some water, which draws large numbers of flamingos and pelicans. The road from the entrance gate to the edge of the pan is usually traversable in a 4x2, but don't try your luck after rain: You'll get stuck in the mud.

STAY HERE: There's a basic (and cheap) campsite at **Nata Bird Sanctuary**, but nearby **Nata Lodge** has better facilities. They also have chalets if you've bunged your thumb once too many with your tent peg hammer.

Our favourite campsite in the area is **Eselbe Camp** just north of Nata – it has a backpackers vibe on the banks of the Nata River, which is usually filled with water thanks to a dam downstream. They have canoes – go for an early morning paddle before it gets hot. There are no crocs or hippos, so it's safe.

See p 99 – 100 for accommodation details for Nata Bird Sanctuary, Nata Lodge and Eselbe Camp.

MORITI BUSH CAMP

LIMPOPO RIVER

DAY 8 GROBLER'S BRIDGE

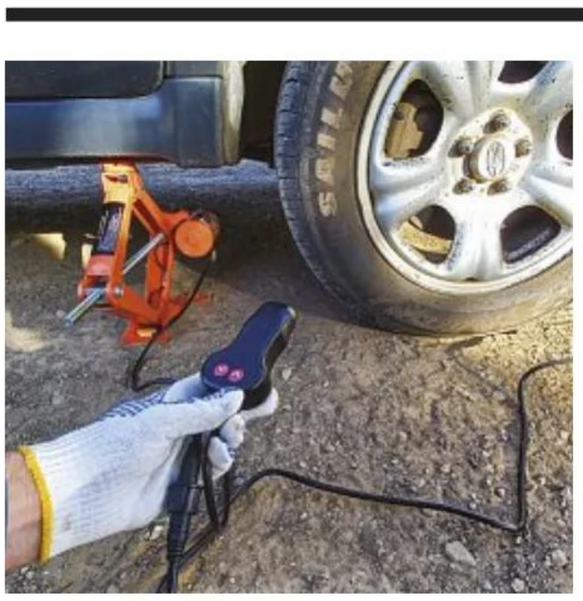
The route: Today is a long 450 km drive from Nata to the border at Grobler's Bridge. Of course, you can choose to linger another day around Francistown or Palapye, but we suggest crossing the border and spending your final night on the South African side of the Limpopo River.

The logic: You've had one heck of a holiday and if you're anything like us, you're trapped in that headspace of knowing that you have to return to work but also wanting the bush feeling to carry on as long as possible. Embrace it…

Don't miss: Scan the riverine trees with your binoculars – birds are plentiful. Light a fire, make a braai and enjoy your final night. Pro tip: Buy meat at the co-op in Tom Burke, which is near the crossroads of the N11 and R572.

STAY HERE: Moriti Bush Camp is just south of the border post. It has long been a favourite of ours. Its campsites are private and very well equipped – owners Adele and Alberto Engelbrecht clearly have an eye for detail. You'll want to bookmark this place to return to – for a week next time!

See p 88 for details about Moriti Bush Camp.



ESSENTIAL EMERGENCY KIT

Adendorff Machinery Mart

While this Classic Road Trip doesn't include 4x4 destinations, it still pays to be well equipped for mishaps like flat tyres. The **Mac Afric Electric Scissor Jack** (R1 595) takes the heavy lifting (so to speak) out of the job. Simply connect the contact points to your car battery to power the unit, then press a button to jack up your car and lower it back down. It's like flicking between SuperSport 1 and 2.

A key piece of gear is the **Mac Afric Heavy Duty 12 V Portable Compressor** (R1 995). If you drop your tyre pressure for driving on sandy or gravel roads, you'll need to pump them up again when you hit the tar. Simply connect the compressor to your car battery to power the unit, and inflate your tyres.

Car battery flat? No stress, the **Mac Afric Professional Li-Ion Jump Starter** (R3 495) will sort you out. Charge the unit before you leave home and store it in your boot in case of an emergency.

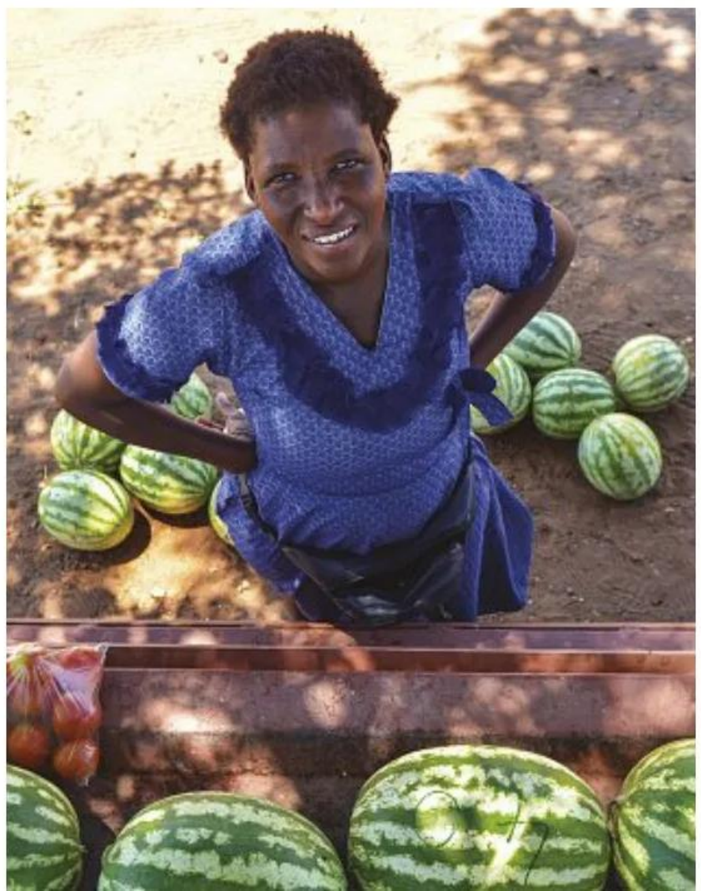
011 434 7000; adendorff.co.za

Thanks to Suzuki South Africa, Tentco and Adendorff Machinery Mart, who gave us a batch of products to test during our 2024 visit to Botswana.

Power to the people

Travelling through Botswana, you'll encounter a diverse range of people involved in the tourism industry. Some are at the centre of it, as camp managers or bush pilots, while others might make the gin you're sipping at sunset!

COMPILED BY **TOAST COETZER & GORATA OGOTSENG (SIXTY SECONDS MEDIA)**



SUPPLIED

Riana Jonker

Manager at Jungle Light Rest Camp, Tshootsha

Riana Jonker first came to Botswana in 1990. She briefly worked as a tour guide in the delta, but her passion was always food. She settled in the Ghanzi district where she worked as a caterer for nearly 20 years before Jungle Light Rest Camp opened in 2011 in nearby Tshootsha – and she got the job as manager.

Tshootsha is a dusty town that most travellers hardly notice as they jet along the Trans-Kgalagadi Highway, but a stop at Riana's place is a revelation. A conversation with her is full of wit and quiet wisdom.

"This is my retirement plan," she says with a chuckle. "I'll probably need someone to push me around in a wheelbarrow one day, since a wheelchair won't work in this sand!"

Jungle Light is owned by Jaco van der Merwe, a local businessman who also owns the filling station and shop in Tshootsha. Riana and I sit and talk under a camel thorn tree outside a building that serves as reception, restaurant and Riana's kitchen.

"I grew up in Jeffreys Bay, in a home where cooking was part of the daily rhythm," she says. "There was never something like cereal for breakfast, it was always home-made porridge served with meat, like lamb, or goat rib slow-cooked in the old coal stove. I don't serve fast food here – no hamburgers – just honest, proper *boerekos*. That's also why you have to book a meal well in advance.

"I like cooking game, which is in ready supply in the Kalahari, or a leg of lamb, and for bigger tour groups I set out a buffet. It gives me a kick to feed people. I like to hear guests laughing and speaking different languages. It has almost become spiritual to me – living here in the back of beyond, doing what I love and somehow feeling closer to the essence of who I am in the process.

"I've been here for 13 years now and I still live in a tent. Peace and quiet was what I came looking for, and I found it in Tshootsha.

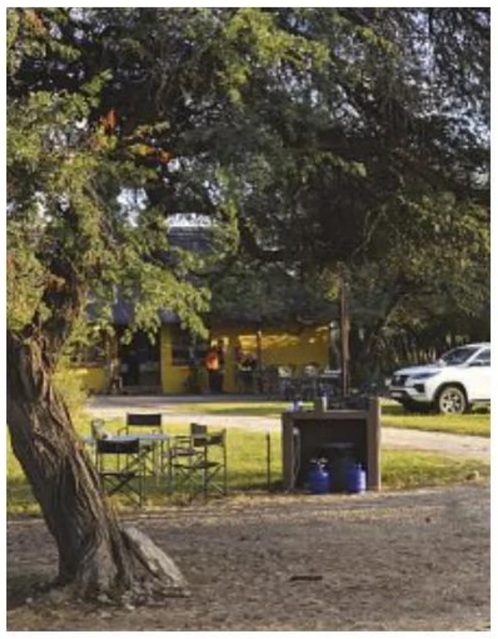
"Ghanzi, which is our closest 'big' town, has changed a lot from when I first lived there in the 1990s. Back then, fresh veggies were scarcer than hen's teeth. At one stage carrots were more expensive per kilogram than fillet steaks! Chickens also couldn't survive in Ghanzi; it was too hot. We had to order frozen chickens from Tannie Nelie de Graaff at her Hollandia shop. She'd put in the order and someone would fly up a cooler box from Gaborone."

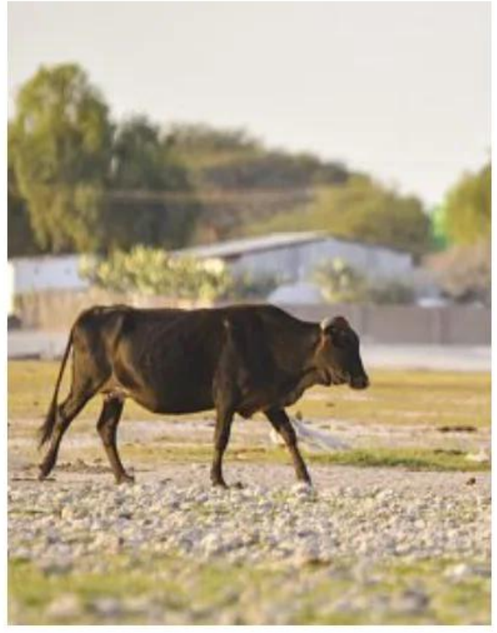
Riana also remembers how bad the early roads were. "They only tarred the Lobatse-Ghanzi road in 1997. Before then, it was a sand track you could only drive in a desert truck, or maybe a Ford F250 bakkie. I drove up here in 1990 in a brand-new Hilux Raider; the locals called it a 'Rider'. It took 16 hours to drive from Lobatse to Ghanzi."

Tshoothsa is a perfect halfway stop along the route between Gauteng and Henties Bay in Namibia. Make it part of your next trip, and don't forget to book a meal!

See page 94 for accommodation info for Jungle Light Rest Camp.

Thati Babokele, Riana Jonker and Agnes Moetsabatho, Jungle Light Rest Camp





Opposite page, clockwise from the top: A guide from Planet Baobab with guests on the Makgadikgadi Pans. Elijah Tsamba sells metal buckets and chests on the roadside, Maun. Pilots Lefika Pheto and Sidney Maloba, Kasane. An aerial view of a rural village. Farmer Khidi Thusanang sells watermelons near Lethlakane. Okavango Gin in its natural habitat – the delta. Scott, Linda and George Monkhouse from Bushbuck Agricamp, Francistown. This aardvark statue is at the entrance to Planet Baobab, Gweta. Peo Senau and Bame Kelesegile from Segaigai Farm, Palapye.

Doembie Seymour and Yola van Rensburg

Owners, Okavango Essence, Maun

Doembie Seymour grew up in Pietermaritzburg but moved to Botswana in 2012 when she came to work as a teacher and au pair for a filmmaker couple from Maun. Here she met her husband, Richard Uren, who co-owns the well-known Audi Camp.

Yolandi van Rensburg, or Yola to her friends, grew up in Maun – her father owns Okavango Pharmacy in town. She's one of three sisters and met Doembie through one of them. "It's a small town; everyone knows everyone," Yola says while Doembie nods in agreement. We're at Hilary's Coffee Shop, a favourite of theirs.

After qualifying as a chartered accountant at Stellenbosch University, Yola returned to Maun with the idea of starting a business that would celebrate local skills and products. Doembie was already making soap under her own brand – Doembie's Handmade – using natural oils and selling them at her mother-in-law's shop (Motsana) near Audi Camp. This was before Okavango Essence was born.

Yola: "I went to a lodge with my boyfriend and saw that all their products were made in Cape Town or elsewhere; there was nothing made locally. I thought, this could be the business opportunity I was looking for, but I didn't know the first thing about soap… My sister Lindi suggested I call Doembie."

After that meeting, the two threw their energy together and launched Okavango Essence in early 2024. Less than a year later, they have a local client base of upmarket lodges and mobile safari operators who purchase their shampoos, conditioners, body wash, hand wash, room spray and body lotion.

A key focus of Okavango Essence is to use as many local products and services as possible. The marula oil used in one of their ranges, for example, comes from Selebi-Phikwe in the east of Botswana, where kernels of the marula fruit are gathered by local women. The oil is pressed from these kernels.

Doembie: "What I've learnt over the last few years is that you don't need chemicals and you don't need a lab. The natural products are so much better for us and the environment."

"You know how Richard Branson started Virgin in his parents' garage?" Yola says. "Well, we started in Doembie's kitchen! And my spare room at home is the admin office."

DOEMBIE SEYMOUR AND YOLA VAN RENSBURG

"The 'bottling machine' is a piping bag for icing," Doembie adds with a laugh. (They have since acquired a proper bottling machine.)

Maun is a town full of entrepreneurs because they have no other choice. Big business is far away in Gaborone or South Africa, and most people simply find a way to make do.

Yola: "It's a different lifestyle here, you need fewer things. If you go to Cape Town and walk into the Waterfront, you're just overwhelmed. Here, if I want a nice pair of dungarees, I ask Doembie to sew me some."

Maun has seen plenty of development over the past two decades but the first pioneers – like Audi Camp – are still around. "The really beautiful undercurrent of community remains a strong feature here," Doembie says. "People support us because we're delivering a product that they've needed for a long time. And that's pretty cool."

In Maun, the easiest place to buy Okavango Essence products is at The Duck Café (opposite the airport). Okavango Pharmacy (opposite Riley's Garage) also has stock. Follow them on Instagram @okavangoessence or contact doembie@okavangoessence.com

OWEN BANDS

Malebogo Mangwegape

Safari guide, Chobe Game Lodge, Kasane

Malebogo, better known as Lebo, is not just a regular safari guide. She's a "Chobe Angel", which is what the 20 all-female cast of guides at Chobe Game Lodge are called. A decade ago, the owners of the lodge, Chobe Holdings Limited, set out to only employ female guides. They wanted to open doors for women to a part of the industry that has historically been very male-dominated.

"Working as a tour guide is fulfilling because it allows me to meet and interact with people from all walks of life while doing something I'm truly passionate about," Lebo says. She's worked at the lodge for most of the past 12 years, during which she's had time to see how the industry changed around her.

Lebo also acknowledges the unwavering support of her family. They understand the demands of her job, which often requires her to be away from home, and they help out where they can.

With years of experience guiding guests through Chobe National Park, Lebo is renowned for her understanding of the local ecosystem. She's particularly adept at tracking the big cats and sharing her knowledge of their behaviour.

She also works with local schools to educate the next generation on the importance of protecting the environment, and mentors young women aspiring to enter the tourism industry.

Even if you're not staying at this iconic lodge, you might spot one of their (solar-powered – a first for the Chobe!) game-viewing boats on a sunset cruise. Maybe Lebo is behind the wheel!

– Gorata Ogotseng (Sixty Seconds Media)

Learn more about Chobe Game Lodge at chobegamelodge.com

SUPPLIED

ROAD TO THE DISTILLERY

Ruth de Nobrega

Co-owner, Okavango Gin, Maun

When Maun-based mobile safari operator Simon Byron got the brainwave to distil and bottle gin using water from the Okavango Delta, he called his friend Ruth de Nobrega to help.

"All the directors of Okavango Gin worked in the safari industry in different capacities," Ruth says. "Simon realised that his guests were drinking gin and tonic for sundowners every day; why not serve them one made right here in Botswana?"

The group of friends – which includes Simon's wife Marleen, who is now the managing director of the company – got together and started experimenting with various local plants including water lily and even Kalahari truffle.

"I was guiding at the time and my interest was in plants – I enjoyed working with flavours in the kitchen creating new recipes. Simon had confidence in me that I could combine my two interests and make it happen. Over time, I developed the recipe and we slowly began distilling Okavango Gin. As things grew, we brought in more people. We now have a distiller, Aubrey Moitoi, a distillery manager, and four other people on the production line. That's our little team."

Their distillery is north-west of Maun, at Tsutsubega.

"Tsutsubega is a floodplain and also the name of the village," Ruth explains. "It's named after the mournful call of the emerald-spotted wood-dove – they're prolific in the ebony woodlands around the distillery."

Tsutsubega is at the end of a 4x4 sand track, which tests your driving skills if you're not used to that sort of thing. (It's a miracle they get all the glass bottles to Tsutsubega in one piece, and then back out again once they've been filled with gin!)

"We've employed some Tsutsubega ladies and they've joined our production team; we also buy our star ingredient, mopane seeds, from them. The mopane seed has been a beautiful discovery for us. It has similar compounds to the juniper berry, which is the core ingredient of all gin. We realised there's a compound called α-Pinene that is found in both, which gives the berries and seeds their resinous, earthy flavour.

"Our other star ingredient is the water from the Okavango Delta, which started its journey in the Angolan Highlands and travelled through the delta's sand and papyrus, gathering more earthy flavours along the way."

Simon first got the idea for the gin in 2018 and Okavango Gin now produces upwards of 20 000 bottles per year. They export to South Africa, Germany and elsewhere. Ask for it at the bar next time you're in Botswana!

See okavangogin.com for more details about their different gins. In South Africa, you can buy a bottle at Norman Goodfellows outlets. If you're flying via Maun, Kasane or Gaborone, look for it at the duty-free shop.

Hadassah Smith

Artist, Maun

I meet Hadassah Smith in the industrial area of Maun, where her workshop sits on a dusty street next to a panel beater, mining company and safari outfitter. This is where she creates beautiful nature-inspired artworks out of metal.

Hadassah grew up as the youngest of four kids in the farming community of Pandamatenga. Her father Frans and brother Lance taught her and her sister Tehillah how to weld before they were 10 years old!

"We've been doing art and creative things since I can remember," she tells me while making us each a cup of rooibos tea. Her dog Phoebe stretches out on the cool cement floor next to a skateboard. "We were home-schooled at first – my mom Maryna exposed us to everything from drawing to oil painting. My dad taught us woodwork and how to make jewellery from bone, copper and even silver. One Saturday he had an idea to make a fire drum (konka) which we could use while camping. He got a drum and asked me and Tehillah to draw animal outlines on it with koki pens. Then we filled the drum with sand for stability and started bashing out the shapes of the animals using hammers and nails. We got some blue thumbs in the process, but it was fun!"

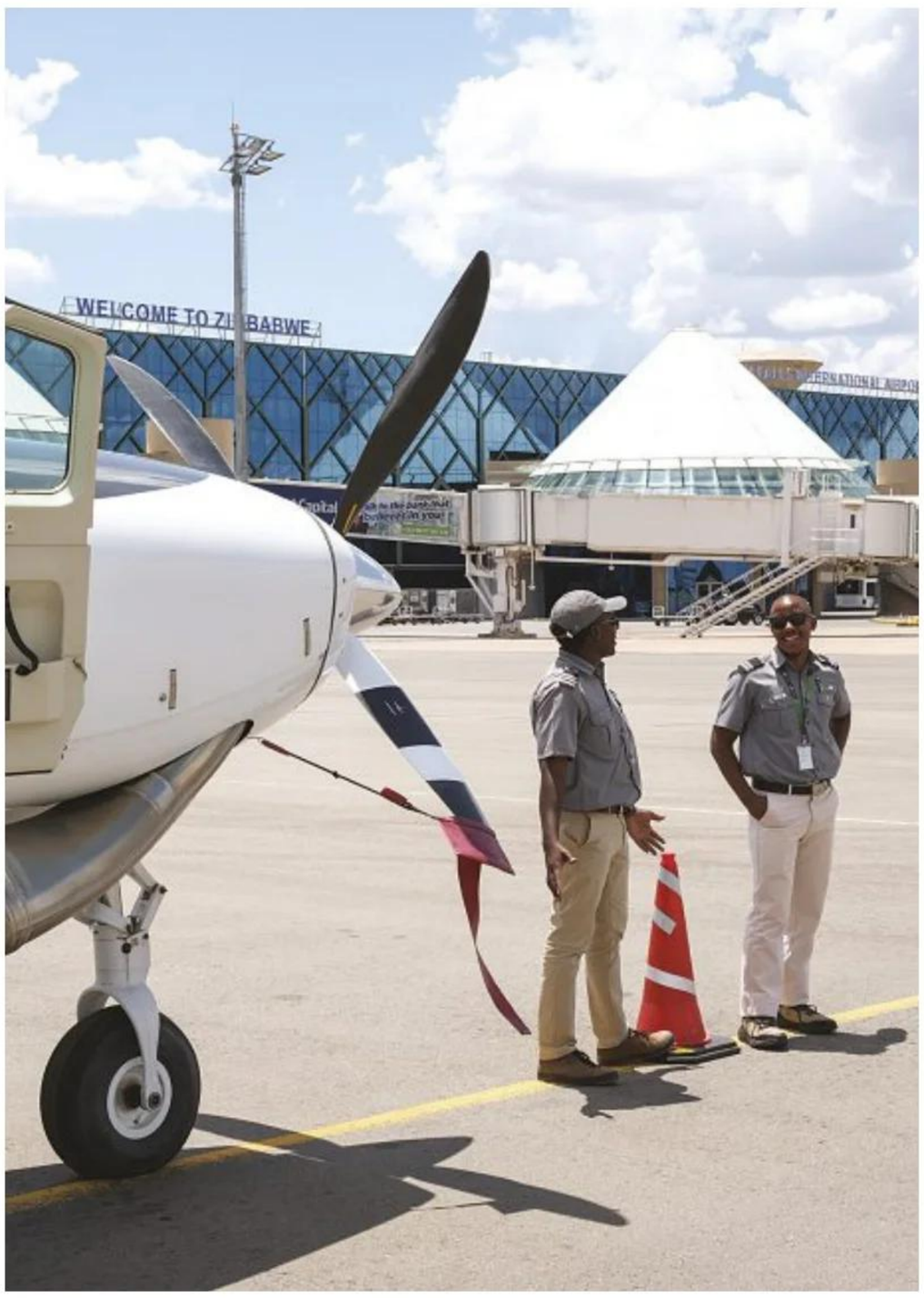
When her eldest sister Cynthia got married a few years later, Hadassah again helped to make fire drums for the wedding venue. This time they ditched the hammer and nails and used a neighbour's plasma cutter, which made things easier. But it would take a while for Hadassah to embrace her career as artist. After finishing high school in Cape Town, she eventually settled in Maun during Covid.

Friends encouraged her to take the next step with her art, which had been a sideline until then. One of her early works is the elephant emblem she made for Elephant Sands, the lodge near Nata. It's still there today, at their turn-off next to the tar road.

During my visit, some of her work – including a very detailed pelican – was on display at The Duck Café opposite the Maun Airport. She often uses throwaway items like old diesel drum lids. The first step is to draw the animal or nature scene onto the metal, then she cuts out the shape. Her artworks look great as a wall display with a light added behind for effect. It's painstaking work – the pelican I saw took her 10 hours to cut!

"I still don't really know what I'm doing," she says modestly. "But I do know that it clears my head to create something out of nothing. My grandfather taught us to respect nature and I've seen for myself how being in nature can be good for you. Since I mostly make wildlife or nature-themed pieces, I hope that whoever buys the work and puts it up in their home will carry something of this spirit with them. Maybe it's a way that I help to make a difference in the world."

Follow Hadassah on Instagram: @rustic_viewsss



LEFIKA PHETO

SIDNEY MALOBA

Lefika Pheto and Sidney Maloba

Junior and senior pilot, Mack Air, Kasane

I meet Lefika Pheto at the Kasane International Airport and he invites me to the spotless Mack Air offices. I have an appointment with him and Sidney Maloba, who's still on his way from Khwai near Moremi Game Reserve.

"Let me show you where he is," Lefika says, pointing to a small yellow icon on a computer screen. The dot is currently over the Chobe River, but keeps inching closer.

Lefika is from the capital Gaborone and caught the flying bug as a school kid.

"At school we attended career fairs and at one of them I got a ride in a Botswana Defence Force helicopter – I was hooked! After I finished school I went to IAS, International Aviation Solutions, which was the pioneer of pilot training in Botswana."

I glance over to the computer screen where Sidney is now over the Serondela picnic site in Chobe National Park. He'll land in a minute or two. Lefika makes radio contact with him, checking his number of passengers (six) and whether he needs to refuel the Cessna 208 Grand Caravan upon landing (yes). It's a steaming hot day in March and low season for tourism – there's only one more flight for the day. (In peak season they can do up to six or seven "hops" from one delta lodge to the next.)

Once Sidney arrives, they finish some paperwork and then we sit down to chat. For someone who was up at the crack of dawn and just flew a small airplane across one of the wildest places on earth, Sidney has a calm "all in a day's work" look about him. He's Kenyan and his father was in the Kenyan Air Force, which naturally led him to a similar career as pilot. He joined Mack Air late in 2019 and is currently the Kasane base manager.

Flying as a bush pilot in northern Botswana is very different from your regular scheduled flying between big towns and cities, Sidney explains. "When you work for an airline it's very boring in a way – things are more rigid. As a bush pilot you never know what you'll do tomorrow. I enjoy the beauty of being in the wild, and the freedom of movement. It can be dangerous, too: You can encounter vultures in the air and the runways must always be checked to ensure there are no animals close by. I once hit a marabou stork in Kenya – it's an event you never forget. They're huge!

"Operating in the bush, you do a bit of everything as a pilot. I'm also the maintenance guy, the bag handler, sometimes even the counsellor when you have a passenger who is afraid of flying. This is a proper blue-collar pilot job compared to flying in East Africa, where you always fly with a cabin attendant and expect baggage handlers on the ground. There you fly in a white shirt, but you can't fly in a white shirt in the delta. Within 30 minutes that white shirt will be brown!"

MAUN AIRPORT

OWEN BANDS

"These days, we have pilots coming from airline jobs to fly in the delta," Lefika adds. "They're enticed by the lifestyle. I'm also a city boy from Gabs so all of this was new to me. Flying over the delta for the first time, I was mesmerised by its beauty."

Besides the wildlife, other hazards include very short runways of just 1 000 m, strong winds at certain times of the year, and thunderstorms in summer.

"When it starts raining from October to January, we still have to get people where they need to be," Sidney says. "We don't fly on instruments, we fly visually. During thunderstorms we dip below the clouds so you must be very alert since three or four other planes could now be at the same level, converging on the same airstrip from different directions. There's no controller in the bush to tell us how to position ourselves; the pilots must co-ordinate between themselves. You have to tone down your ego – it's not about who is first or who flies the bigger machine."

Flying is more than just a job to Sidney and Lefika. They seem to absolutely love what they do.

"I enjoy seeing the world from above," Sidney says. "I grew up in Nairobi, but during school holidays we never went to the seaside, we only ever went to our family's village. Once I became a pilot, I'll never forget that first time I flew from Nairobi to the coast. Just as you leave the Nairobi control area, you see snow-capped Kilimanjaro on your right – spectacular. And then, approaching Mombasa, the ocean, the beach…"

Lefika agrees: "The office view is great in this job – tourists pay for the view we see every day!"

Mack Air operates chartered and scheduled flights. 🖱 *mackair.co.bw*

Evelyn Majojo

Aircraft engineer, Safari Air, Maun

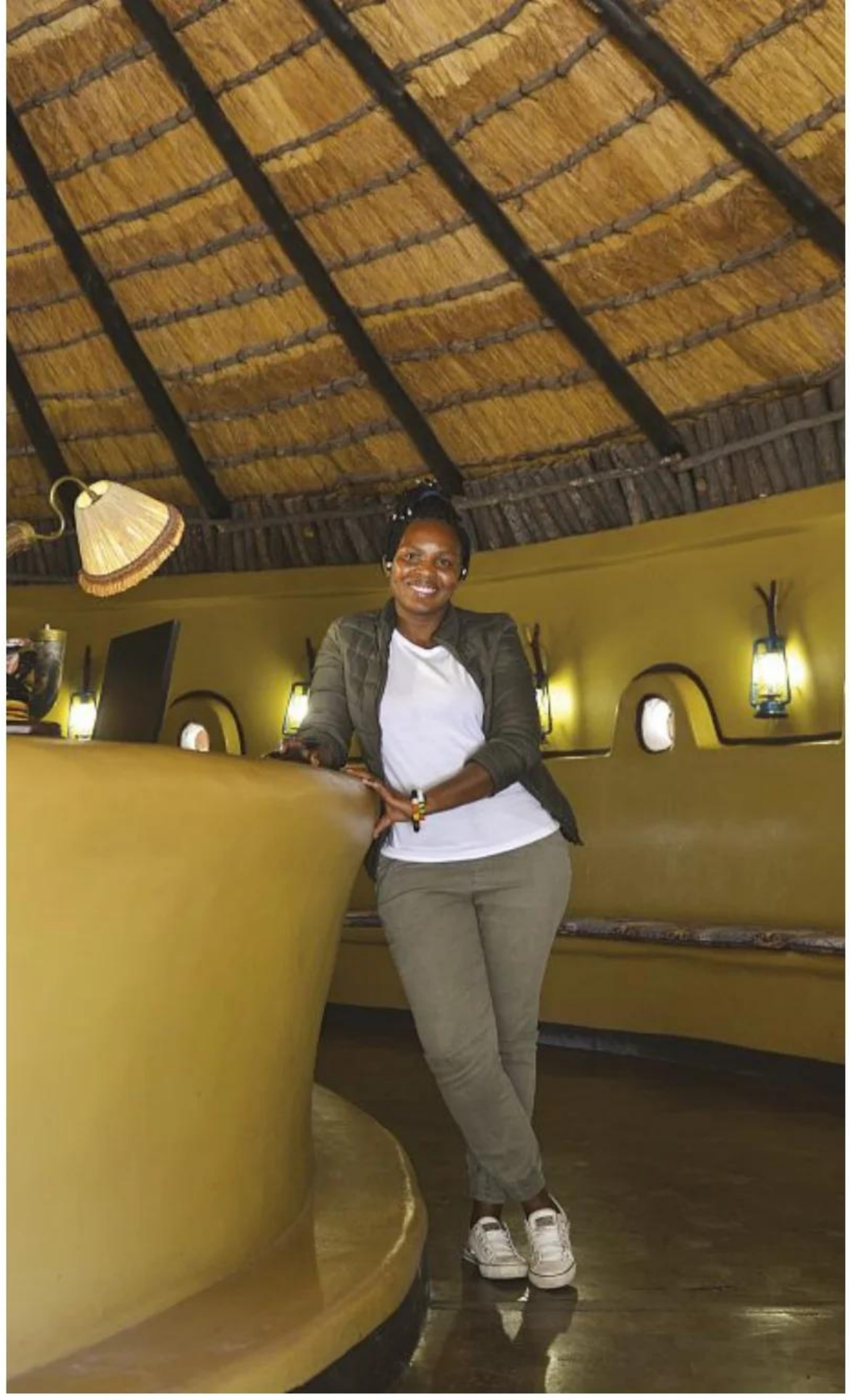
If you've ever taken a scenic flight over the Okavango Delta, or flown from South Africa to Maun, you have a large team of dedicated people to thank for getting you safely to your destination. The pilot with his cool shades might be the one you remember, but it's staff on the ground who keep the plane shipshape and make sure you're safe.

Aircraft engineer Evelyn Majojo, who grew up in Palapye, is one of these people. She graduated from Gaborone-based school Flying Mission in 2022 and holds a Diploma in Aircraft Maintenance Engineering. She now works for Safari Air, based at the Maun Airport. Her day-to-day tasks include inspecting and repairing aircraft, diagnosing mechanical and electrical issues, and performing routine safety checks. Her meticulous attention to detail plays a key role in upholding Safari Air's safety record.

"As a female engineer it gives me great pride to work in a previously male-dominated field," she says. "I believe I can be an example to other women who may aspire to be aircraft engineers. It can be done – just keep looking out for opportunities and chase your passion!"

– Gorata Ogotseng (Sixty Seconds Media)

Contact Safari Air 🖱 *reservations@safariair.co.bw*



Nonofo Lebang

Sales and marketing representative, Koro River Camp, Tuli Block

As a child, Nonofo would often be taken to the family farm, about 150 km from Kanye along the Trans-Kgalagadi Highway. This is where she learnt to love the bush and all the things in it.

"My father took me and my two brothers there," she recalls with a smile. "He taught me to know the animals and plants. We had a VCR player and he'd hire videos about wildlife and birds. But still, I didn't know I would end up here."

After school, she did a course in business administration but convinced her parents that a second degree in tourism management was necessary. "I had no idea what tourism management was, but I knew what *tourism* was. I loved the fact that it included cultural studies, because I love culture. I was brought up in a way where we upheld our culture."

By the time she graduated in 2010, she already had a job at a lodge near Gaborone, but she wanted something deeper in the bush. A move to Tati Siding near Francistown followed, and then to Sowa on the eastern edge of the Makgadikgadi.

"The lodge there is owned by the mine so lots of people passed through for work. While they were there, I would arrange activities for them. It was my first experience with the pan and I fell in love with it."

From Sowa, she moved to Jack's Camp and then to San Camp on the opposite side of the pan system; and in 2023 when I met her, she was working at Planet Baobab. (Nonofo has since started a new job in the Tuli Block, at Koro River Camp.)

During the quiet Covid period, she was doing online research and discovered the African Tourism Board, a non-profit organisation that helps African countries to develop and market tourism products. She followed her nose and ended up becoming the "Botswana ambassador" for the African Tourism Board.

"It's important that we as Africans tell our own stories. People travel here to get to know us and understand our stories – and we have beautiful stories!"

According to Nonofo, these stories are not just told by the guide on the game drive… The story starts the moment a guest arrives at a lodge. "If your experience at the reception desk is bad, it kills everything else. As someone working in the tourism industry, it's about being proud of who you are, what your roots are. It's about welcoming people to your home. That's the feeling you want to give. And when they leave, it should feel like they're leaving family behind and they should come and visit again soon."

Read more about Koro River Camp at the-africa-experience.com

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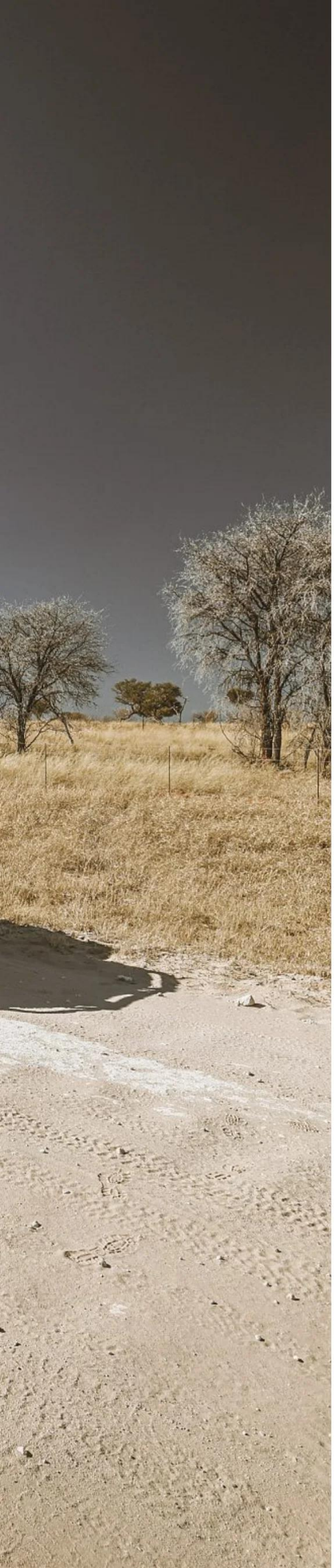
With you, for the long run

Just you and the camel thorns

There's a lot of Kalahari out there, and exploring it doesn't mean you must stay within the confines of the well-known parks. In this story, we visit two remote concession areas in Botswana via two smaller South African game reserves that also offer rock-solid Kalahari experiences.

WORDS & PICTURES **CHRISTOFF EILERD**

Christoff Eilerd (right) and Heinrich Richter tested their new overlanding rigs on a trip to the Kalahari.



There they were – our first lions of the trip! We'd been in the Kalahari for a week and we'd seen their spoor, but nothing more. Now, at Kaa Gate in the north-western corner of the Kgalagadi Trans-frontier Park, we encountered a pride of five lions feverishly slaking their thirst at the waterhole right at the gate!

Kaa was the turnaround point of a two-week adventure that started in August 2024, when my wife Venessa and I left Gauteng with our friends Heinrich and Marissa Richter. Our aim was to explore parts of the Kalahari that few people get to see. We wanted to stay at lesser-known campsites – not necessarily those inside the famous parks. Campsites in the Mabuasehube section of the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, for example, get booked up almost a year in advance and the Central Kalahari Game Reserve is also drawing more visitors. But in between those mega-parks, the Kalahari extends without much care for where park borders begin and end. It was these marginal areas that piqued our interest.

The Richters and us were both sporting new overlanding setups; this trip would also be an opportunity to put them to the test. We'd just taken delivery of a new 2024 Toyota Land Cruiser with an Alu-Cab canopy camper, and the Richters had a new RLD canopy and tent fitted to their Toyota Hilux.

After leaving Gauteng, our first overnight spot was a familiar one: Botsalano Game Reserve west of Zeerust. This reserve offers great bush camping and it's perfect as a stopover since it's 23 km from the Ramatlabama border post and about 50 km from Skilpadshek.

Botsalano is also a mellow introduction to the kind of wild Kalahari camping you can get across the border in Botswana. We camped at Lerako and settled in around the fire to the calls of black-backed jackals and fiery-necked nightjars.

We set off at dawn for Molopo Game Reserve – a place I hadn't been to for 15 years. From Mahikeng, we drove west and followed the gravel (sometimes sandy) road that runs parallel to the Molopo River, all along the border. The day's drive was only 396 km but it took us six hours. Most of the roads hadn't seen a grader for years.

We arrived just after the reserve gate closed at 6 pm, but thankfully the friendly staff let us in. They were busy with game culling, unfortunately, so we couldn't go for a drive in the morning. I'll have to return; hopefully it won't take me another 15 years!

Aside from a loose bolt on Heinrich's rooftop tent, our equipment was doing well. We slept warmly and comfortably, and we had Molopo to ourselves. This was to become a theme for the rest of our journey...

We stirred early enough to catch some bat-eared foxes on the road while driving out of Molopo, and we crossed into Botswana via the McCarthy's Rest border post (65 km). In Tshabong (27 km from the border) we refuelled and did last-minute shopping before driving all the way to Jack's Pan (162 km), which is north-east of Mabuasehube and outside the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park.

It was a full day of driving (10 hours) along cutlines and two-spoor tracks. Don't get caught out by the seemingly small distances on this route – it's slow going.

Jack's Pan, or Jackie's, as some locals call it, is in the KD12 Wildlife Management Area (KD stands for Kgalagadi District), a concession managed by the Koinaphu Trust on behalf of the local Kokotsha, Inalegolo and Phuduhudu communities. (That's where the name

Opposite page, clockwise from top left: Lions drink at the Kaa Gate waterhole. Nighttime at Kaa Gate campsite #1. Gemsbok and springbok seen around Kaa Gate. Wild camping doesn't mean you have to "rough it" if you have the right gear. Venessa Eilerd cooks up a delicious breakfast in Molopo Game Reserve. The group found large lion spoor in the campsite at Jack's Pan, but no sign of the cats themselves. Name Pan campsite #2.

Ko-Ina-Phu comes from.) You need a special permit to access this area – we booked two nights.

The campsite at Jack's Pan is on a dune overlooking a large salt pan. En route we saw lion spoor in the sandy road, and gemsbok and kori bustards on the pan in the distance.

As evening fell, we were greeted by the sound of barking geckos. It still gives me goosebumps every time! This is such a typical sound associated with the Kalahari, whether you're in Namibia, Botswana or South Africa. Of course, it's impossible to see one – the moment you start stalking towards the sound, it stops and the gecko scurries down its burrow.

Since the drive here was long, we spent the next day relaxing. Including rest days is important when planning your overland itinerary. Enjoy where you are!

There were lion tracks everywhere in the campsite at Jack's, but the pride eluded us. On day five of our tour – after a spectacular sunrise over the pan – we departed towards Name Pan in the KD2 concession. To get there, we retraced our tyre tracks to the north-eastern corner of Mabua and then turned north along the cutline to the village of Hukuntsi.

There's another route: You could follow the fence of the Kgalagadi to Kaa Gate, and then turn to Name Pan. But if you haven't pre-booked your permit and campsite in KD2, you have to go via Hukuntsi and enter at the boom gate near Zutshwa.

Although we had a reservation, we wanted to fill up with water and fuel in Hukuntsi, so that's the way we went. From the village, we drove through Zutshwa and soon reached the boom gate to KD2. Here we were greeted by friendly staff who checked our booking. If you were just passing through KD2 towards Kaa Gate, you'd have to purchase a transit permit here: P50 (R67) per person, payable in cash.

We reached Name Pan late in the afternoon. Our travel distance for the day was 211 km, which had taken four hours.

As evening fell, we were greeted by the sound of barking geckos. It still gives me goosebumps every time!

Another amazing sunset and more barking geckos welcomed us to this magical spot. I'd never seen so many huge camel thorn trees either – they stood in a sea of foot-high grass, a scene reminiscent of a lush golf course, albeit a brownish one with lions lurking in the "rough"!

Name Pan has two campsites set well apart from each other along the edge of the clearing. We'd booked for two nights, but also planned to do an exploratory drive to Kaa Gate (50 km to the south-west) to enquire whether there were any campsites available in that section of the Kgalagadi.

We were seeing more lion tracks, but still no lions, and that was why we were so delighted to encounter the pride drinking at Kaa when we drove there the next day. (The road to Kaa Gate was a two-spoor track full of thick sand, which was fun to drive.)

Besides the lions, other good news awaited us at Kaa Gate: They had space available! We decided to forfeit our second night at Name Pan and rather make use of the two nights available here.

On subsequent game drives in the area, we saw lots of gemsbok, eland, spotted hyenas, jackals, vultures, loads of sandgrouse and several species of raptors. We didn't see the lion pride again, but on the last evening we heard two males calling from KD2 outside the park.

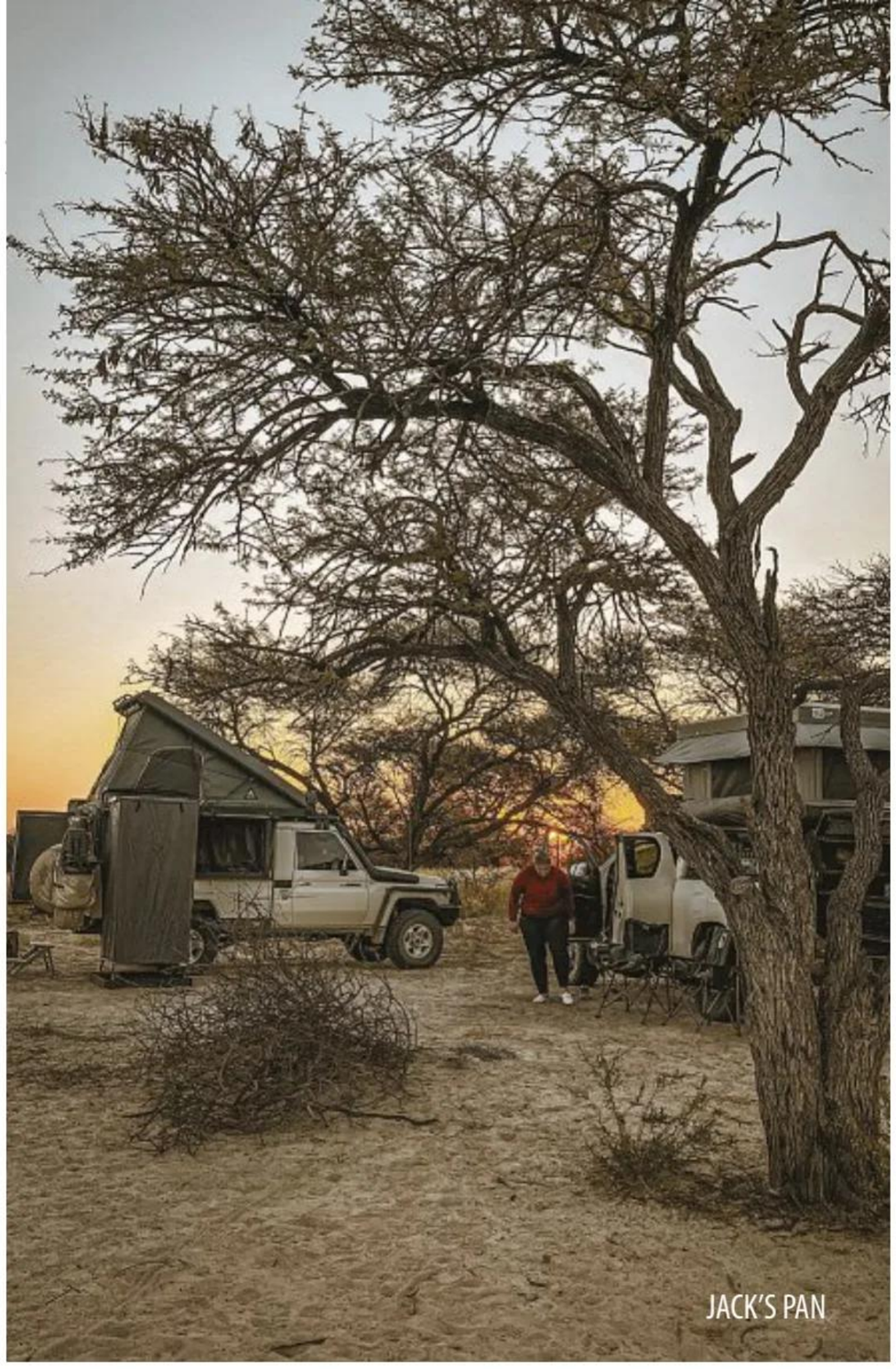
Reluctantly, after Kaa, it was time to head home. We drove back through KD2 to Hukuntsi, and then to Kang where we turned north onto the Trans-Kgalagadi Highway to Kalahari Rest. It was another six-hour drive, even if the distance was only 273 km.

Kalahari Rest had all the luxuries we'd been missing for the past few days: a pool, a bar, Wi-Fi and chalets. We spent a lovely evening here before tackling the highway south to the Ramatlabama border. Before returning home to Gauteng, we spent one last night at Botsalano Game Reserve.

This trip opened my eyes to many fresh facets of the Kalahari. If there's one thing I know, it's that I'll be back as soon as I can!

NAME 2

u-Cab


JACK'S PAN

WILD CAMPING BASICS

Don't feed wild animals! Don't throw food scraps or bones in the veld around camp, and don't leave any water out. This will attract animals, including dangerous predators, and they will start associating humans with food. This can lead to tragedy, for both humans and animals.

Secure your food and rubbish. Do this at night and when you're away from camp. Stow your stuff properly – animals must not be able to reach it. Also secure scented items like toiletries.

Take your rubbish with you. Isolated bush camps are not serviced. Leave the camp in a better state than how you found it.

Dig a deep hole if you make a bush loo. And cover it up afterwards. Burn the toilet paper, but be careful not to start fires. I recommend using a chemical or composting portable toilet so you can truly leave no trace. A good example is the Tentco Porta Potti – it costs around R1 200 from takealot.com.

Move to your shelter or vehicle when you see predators in your campsite. Move slowly and never run. Park your vehicles and trailers in such a way that they form natural barriers. Keep vehicle seats open and accessible.

Take a bright torch or spotlight. Use it to scan for potential threats at night. If you do spot an animal, don't blind them with your light.

Take enough fuel and water. For washing and drinking.

Be fire smart. Only make fire in a designated fire pit. Avoid making a fire when it's windy and/or dry.

STAY HERE

Botsalano Game Reserve

There are around 2 000 head of game in the reserve, including giraffe, zebra, black wildebeest, eland, blesbok, red hartebeest, springbok and rhino.

Facilities: Four unfenced bush camps with basic facilities – Lerako, Legora, Sentry Hill and Safari. Each has cold showers and flush toilets.

Rates: Conservation fee (one-off) R50 per adult; R30 per child under 12; R40 per pensioner; R40 per vehicle and R30 per trailer. Camping R280 per stand (max six people). Fees can be paid via EFT before you visit, or in cash (rand) on arrival.

Where? Between Zeerust and Mahikeng, North West.

Contact: 018 386 8900/01
botsalano@nwptb.co.za

Molopo Game Reserve

Many of the animals and birds found in this remote Kalahari reserve are endemic to the desert regions of southern Africa.

Facilities: 12 unfenced campsites around a central ablution block, shaded by large thorn trees. The ablutions were revamped recently but they're still in need of some additional TLC. There are (brackish) hot showers and flush toilets. A hide next to the campsite overlooks a waterhole.

Rates: Conservation fee R40 per person and R30 per vehicle (one-off). Camping R150 per person. You must pay in cash on arrival.

Where? 250 km north of Vryburg, North West.

Contact: 082 648 3544 (WhatsApp)
molopo@nwptb.co.za

Jack's Pan, KD12

The view from the single unfenced site is spectacular. Judging by the spoor we saw, a large pride of lions frequents the area.

Facilities: None, although there are some remnants of defunct facilities. You must be self-sufficient. Because it's in the middle of nowhere, the camp is not serviced regularly. Take everything in and everything out again.

Rates: Entrance fee (one-off) P40 (R54) per person and P30 (R40) per

The only camping facilities at Kaa Gate #1 are a pit toilet and cold shower.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

When he's not on the road, Christoff Eilerd lives in Randburg. He's a filmmaker and 4x4 and outdoor fanatic. Follow his travels on Instagram (@get.out.go) and YouTube (@getoutgo) – there's an episode about the Kalahari trip described in this article.

vehicle. Camping P80 (R107) per person. Fees can be paid via SWIFT transfer or in cash (pula) at the Kokotsha kgotla. (A kgotla is the traditional community council of a Botswana village.) The town of Kokotsha wasn't on our planned route, so we made a SWIFT payment and the entire booking was done via WhatsApp as they don't have e-mail.
GPS: S24.69605 E22.21414
Contact: 00 267 72 494 794 (WhatsApp only)

Name Pan, KD2

The KD2 Wilderness Area is a 6 500 km² conservation area adjoining the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park. It's an important rainy season calving ground for springbok and wildebeest, and hosts Africa's largest free-ranging eland population.
Facilities: None. The two campsites are spacious and shaded by camel thorn trees.
Rates: Concession fee P50 (R67) per vehicle per day. Camping P120 (R161) per person. Fees can be paid via SWIFT transfer or in cash (pula) at the Zutshwa boom gate.
GPS: S24.20060 E21.07282
Contact: 00 267 75 099 982 (WhatsApp only); info@wildbotswanasafaris.com

Kaa Gate, Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park

There's nothing special about the campsites at Kaa Gate, but they do provide great game-viewing access. Kaa Gate is essentially an overflow camp and stands can't be booked in advance. You can only book and pay (card or cash, pula) upon arrival at the gate.
Facilities: There are two campsites at Kaa Gate. The one has a cold, brackish shower, basin and pit toilet; the other has no facilities.
Rates: Camping P30 (R40) per person. Conservation fees P20 (R27) per person and P4 (R5) per vehicle per day. (The Kaa section is cheaper to enter than the busier Mabuasehube section of the park.) Although the gate has credit card facilities, these are sometimes offline – bring cash (pula) to be safe. Alternatively, you can pay ahead of time via a booking agent like Ultimate Routes (ultimateroutes.co.za).
GPS: S24.35837 E20.62570
Contact: 00 267 397 1405
00 267 318 0774
dwnp@gov.bw

Kalahari Rest, Kang

Because of its proximity to the Trans-Kgalagadi Highway, Kalahari Rest is an ideal halfway stop if you're travelling between Gauteng and Namibia.
Facilities: Campsites share ablutions, which have hot showers (donkey boiler) and flush toilets. Each site has a large camel thorn tree, a braai area, a concrete table, a light and a 220V power outlet.
Rates: Camping with power P190 (R255) per adult; P95 (R127) per child under 12.
Where? 25 km north of Kang.
Contact: 00 267 73 774 009
bmhe@it.bw

For details about other campsites and places to stay in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park and the Botswana Kalahari, see p 90 – 91.

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Fuel? We refuelled in Mahikeng in South Africa and in Tshabong, Hukuntsi, Kang and Jwaneng in Botswana. Most Botswana filling stations take cards, but draw pula at an ATM at the first opportunity so that you have cash in case a card machine isn't working.
Essentials to pack? You must be fully self-sufficient. The closest reliable shops are in Tshabong or Jwaneng. Firewood can be bought from vendors along the roadside (cash only).
Emergency gear? A satellite phone or satellite text messenger can be a lifesaver. Rent one from sat4rent.co.za. Recovery boards and a shovel are useful if you get stuck in the sand.
Do I need a 4x4? Yes. You'll encounter thick sand and potentially mud in the rainy season.
What's the best time to visit? My favourite time is March and April: It's still green in parts and it's not too hot. You might even experience a late-summer thunderstorm.

A first-timer's guide to Moremi

Planning • Accommodation • Roads • Sightings

Moremi. The word alone is iconic, but what does it actually take to visit this famous reserve on the eastern edge of the Okavango Delta? Can you just show up and camp? Do you need a snorkel for your 4x4? Jump in and let's find out!

WORDS & PICTURES **JON MINSTER**

It's late June, mid-winter, and the sun is setting behind the Mbudi River in the Khwai Concession next to Moremi Game Reserve. Elephants drink downstream, then wade through the channels with water dripping from their trunks. A fish-eagle shrieks and a grey heron stalks the reedbeds, looking for one last snack before bedtime. Solo, the resident hippo, snorts as he surfaces, and braai smells waft through the air as the happy campers gather around their fires.

Soon, Gabaemelwe (aka Computer) Njipe will come and do his rounds. Khwai is Computer's domain and he's used to sidestepping Solo or chasing off a hyena looking for scraps. But for most of us campers, it's the wildest place we'll ever spend the night.

Welcome to Moremi, and the greater wilderness surrounding the reserve.

In June and July 2024, the Minster family did a three-week road trip through northern Botswana and Namibia in a hired camper. We weren't in a convoy and my wife Jess and I were a bit nervous to add Moremi to the itinerary, given its reputation as a "serious" 4x4 destination, but our sons Elliot (11) and Francis (9) insisted that we put the rented Hilux to the test. We acquiesced and managed to book four nights in and around the park, which was a feat in itself considering that it was the South African school holidays.

Here's how we planned the trip, what we encountered and what we learnt along the way.

From the top: An elephant wanders through a campsite at Xakanaxa – keep calm and carry on! Zebra on a game drive near Khwai North Gate. Computer Njipe, the man to speak to if you need anything at Khwai Safari Grounds. A mokoro outing on the Mbudi River.

Opposite page: Dusk falls at Kaziikini Community Camp. Lock away your food before you go to bed!

Above: Bonfire time at Khwai North Gate. The campsites are huge and far apart from each other. Take a torch when you walk to the ablution block.

Opposite page, clockwise from the top: Stretching the legs in the Khwai Concession. There are no rules prohibiting you from getting out of your vehicle anywhere in Moremi and surrounds, but use your common sense and always check for animals first. Tea time next to the Mbudi River. A long-nosed reed frog, photographed on a mokoro outing. The bridge over the Khwai River, between Moremi and Khwai village. Chilling in camp at Khwai Safari Grounds.

HOW DID YOU PLAN YOUR VISIT?

We probably started thinking about Moremi a little too late… We only began looking for accommodation in October 2023, for the 2024 winter school holidays, and we quickly discovered that most of the reserve was already fully booked.

We had allocated five days to Moremi and we'd hoped to spend all of our time inside the park, at iconic campsites like Xakanaxa and Third Bridge. (Yes, I know some of you readers are laughing at our ignorance!) Instead, we had to settle for only one night in the park – at Khwai North Gate – and the other three nights in the community concessions to the south and north.

We'd start our adventure at Kaziikini Community Camp, close to South Gate (also known as Maqwee), traverse the park the next day and spend two nights at Khwai Safari Grounds in the Khwai Development Trust Community Concession, then drive back into the park for our last night at Khwai North Gate before transiting the park again and exiting at South Gate back to Maun.

Bushlore Africa (our vehicle hire company) did all the legwork getting our bookings secured. Contacting the community camps, and even the concession holders for the campsites inside the park, can be a frustrating process. But Elzmarie Ferreira at Bushlore was a pro and our vouchers arrived by e-mail a month before we set off.

WHERE DID YOU STAY?

We honestly didn't know what to expect as we drove the abysmal road from Maun towards the park. Would the community camps offer the same wilderness experiences as the camps inside Moremi? Would we feel short-changed?

Kaziikini Community Camp was our first stop and it was indeed a mixed bag. Even though it's "only" 28 km from South Gate, the road is riddled with potholes and dongas and long stretches of sand, so it's not so easy to just pop into the park for the day. Plus, it's an equally long and slow trek from South Gate to the game-rich areas around Xakanaxa, Third Bridge and Khwai.

So, it's best to treat Kaziikini as a stopover and just hang out in the campsite. There are no fences around Moremi and you'll see animals everywhere – inside the park and out. Kaziikini has a permanent waterhole which attracts hundreds of elephants during the dry season. They mill around and often walk right through your campsite.

Be careful. We didn't find them to be aggressive, but it's clearly their territory and they get a bit jumpy when water is scarce, as it was in June 2024. During the night, they ripped all the camp's plumbing out of the ground, which meant there was no water in the ablution blocks the next day. (The canvas ablution block structures had also been badly damaged by elephants.)

What a surprise, then, to discover **Khwai Safari Grounds**. After spending a full day driving through Moremi, via South Gate with a detour to Xakanaxa, we were welcomed warmly by Computer and his team and shown to our campsite on the Mbudi River. The bathroom was clean (with water!) and the elephants we saw were happily drinking from the river and not from sewerage pipes.

The Khwai Concession area rivalled anything we'd experienced during our drive through the park. Home to a clutch of high-end lodges, it has its own road network and you can go for a drive without having to pay park entrance fees. It was very dry during our visit and we only had to do one shallow river crossing. Keep in mind that many tracks are flooded during the wet season and you'd be far safer exploring in a convoy with Tracks4Africa on the GPS and all the necessary recovery equipment.

Our last night in the park was at **Khwai North Gate**. For what you pay to camp inside Moremi, you don't get much in the way of facilities. The ablution blocks are barricaded against elephants – they're

clean but a bit worn out. The stands are far apart from each other, however, and nicely shaded. We did a beautiful late-afternoon game drive west along the Khwai River, trying to keep as close to the water as possible. The floodplain was alive with animals, including a lone wild dog that trotted past herds of zebra and impala with ears pricked.

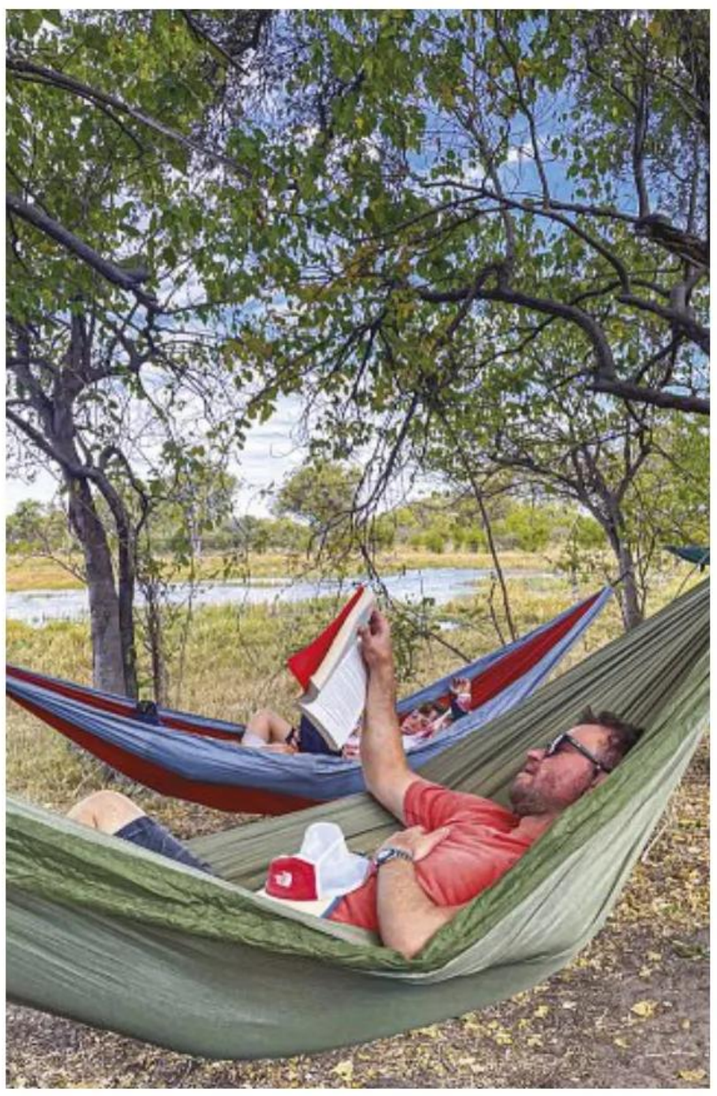
WHAT WERE THE ROADS LIKE?

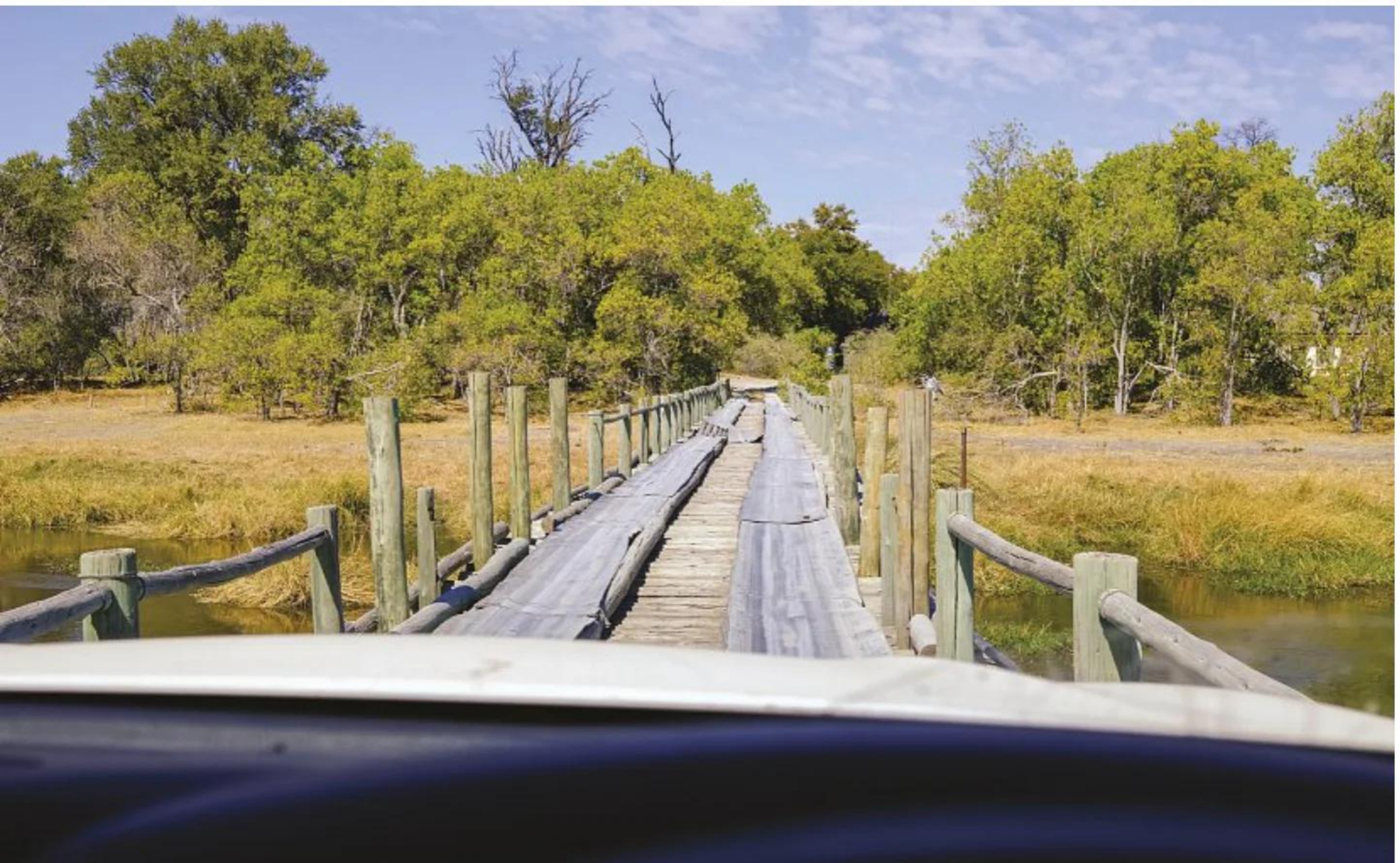
The access road from Maun is embarrassingly bad. It's tar for 40 km from Maun to the village of Shorobe, then a 53 km mess to South Gate. In parts it's so wide it feels like you're crashing through an angry ocean of sand: No matter where you steer your vehicle there's no escaping the chop. We felt sorry for all the lodge vehicles going to and fro, being rattled to pieces on the corrugations. Moremi is one of Botswana's premier wilderness destinations and tourists pay a fortune to visit. The government really could do better.

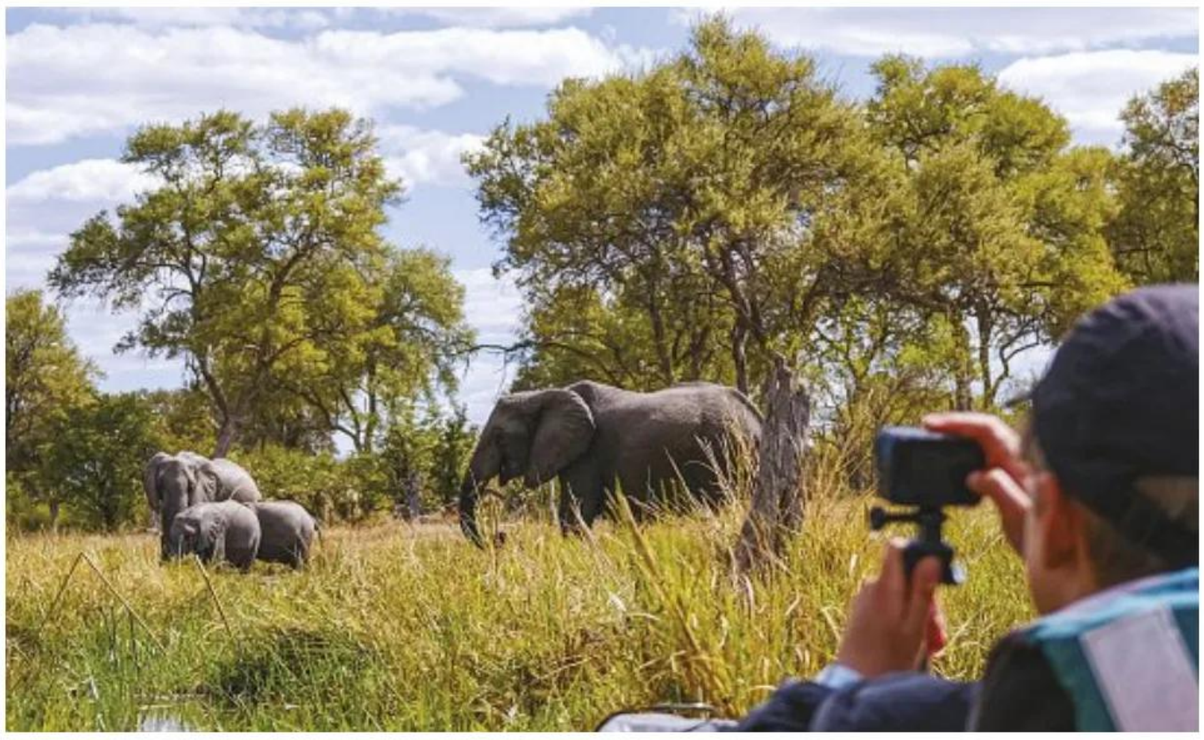
The roads aren't great inside the park either, but that's almost to be expected. We visited in the dry season and we had no problems. We used low range once, for a shallow water crossing between Xakanaxa and Khwai.

Don't expect any road signs. The main roads are easy enough to follow but there are hundreds of tracks that branch off in all directions, especially when you're close to the delta or a river. Many of these are impassable during the rainy season. A GPS is essential, preferably loaded with the latest Tracks4Africa maps.

If you're travelling on your own, try to avoid unnecessary opportunities to get stuck. You don't want to be door-deep in a river with crocodiles and hippos around.







BEST SIGHTINGS?

If you've only ever been to South African national parks like the Kruger, where you interact with animals from a vehicle or behind a fence in a rest camp, Moremi will blow your mind. Your heart rate is elevated because anything can happen at any time. Setting up camp at dusk is exhilarating as you glance around in the fading light for eyes on the periphery of your campfire.

Our game drives were productive – we saw a pair of lionesses eyeing a herd of lechwe, a wild dog as mentioned, plus hippos, crocodiles, baboons, herds of sable antelope, and the usual impalas and zebras. At night, hyenas whooped and lions growled.

The mokoro trip we did along the Mbudi from Khwai Safari Grounds was probably the highlight. We drifted right up to a family of elephants, which had waded in up to their tummies to drink. Babies splashed each other and a grumpy bull shook his ears at us. It was unforgettable to be at water level with these magnificent creatures. They seemed so much bigger than when you're in a car, and you experience their behaviour differently, because you can hear (and smell) everything.

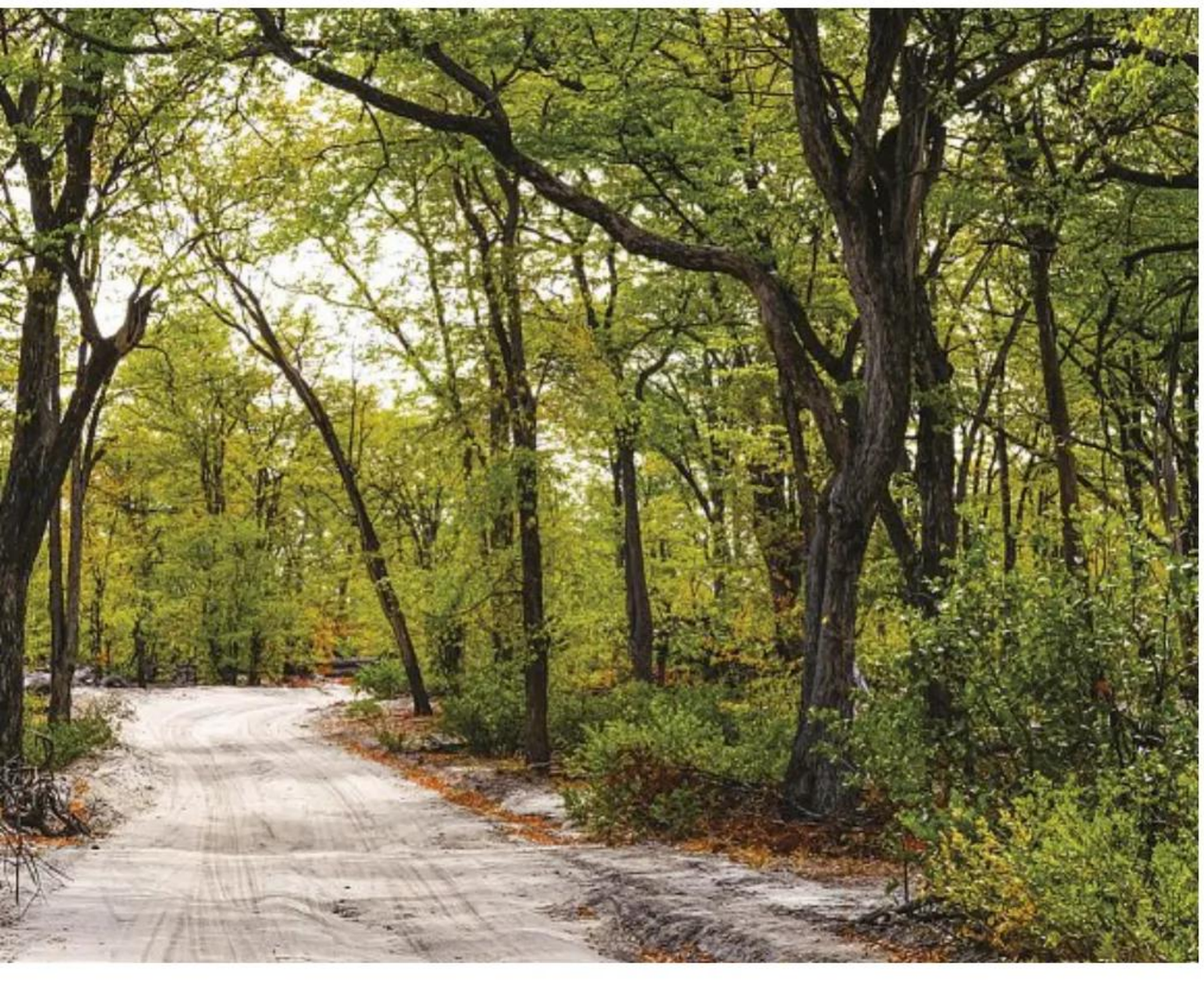
We also saw a multitude of birds, including flashy favourites like southern ground-hornbill, saddle-billed stork, green wood-hoopoe and long-toed lapwing.

TRAVEL TIPS?

- **Book at least a year in advance** – especially if you plan to visit during peak season in winter.

You need to be self-sufficient. You might be able to buy a bundle of firewood at the camps, but that's about it. Kaziikini had a fridge with drinks, and the village of Khwai had a few shops with very basic supplies. Do your shopping and fill up with fuel in Maun.

- **Minimise risk.** If you're travelling with kids, keep them close at night. Lock away all your food and any stinky shoes that might tempt a jackal, hyena or honey badger. Don't travel with any citrus – the elephants go bonkers for it. (You don't want a bonkers elephant in your campsite…)
- **Take plenty of water for drinking, washing and cooking.** Most of the camps claim to have water, but you might arrive to find that the elephants have ripped up the pipes.
- **Don't be disheartened** if you can't get a booking inside the park. The concession areas are just as wild. Definitely spend a few nights in the Khwai Development Trust Community Concession, at Khwai Safari Grounds and Magotho. (We didn't stay at Magotho but others told us it was fantastic.)
- **Make sure your 4x4 vehicle is up to scratch.** You need proper all-terrain tyres, two spare wheels, good suspension, low range and recovery equipment. Khwai village has a cellphone tower and signal is excellent in the immediate vicinity. There's no signal elsewhere in the park.
- **Take cash.** There are credit card machines at the entrance gates and camp offices, but they're sometimes offline.
- **Ask for help** – most tour operators or vehicle hire companies know the system and can help you book your campsites in and around Moremi. We used Bushlore Africa (bushlore.com).



FAST FACTS

Park entrance fees: SADC residents pay P205 (R275) per adult per day; half-price for children aged 8 – 18; and P75 (R101) per vehicle. For a family of four, this works out to P690 (R925) per day.

Mokoro trip: For the four of us, it cost US$100 (R1 800) for a two-hour trip.

Camping rates and contact details:

- Kaziikini Community Camp P220 (R295) per person.
  00 267 686 2851
  kaziikinisafaris.com
- Khwai Safari Grounds P250 (R335) per person.
  00 267 73 681 757
  computergaba@gmail.com
  khwaisafarigrounds.com
- Khwai North Gate US$15 (R270) per person. 00 267 68 65 365; sklcamps.com

For more accommodation in Moremi and surrounding areas, see p 108 – 110.

The heart of Hwange

Hwange National Park is the biggest of all Zimbabwe's parks and teems with wildlife. It borders Botswana and it's close to Kasane and Vic Falls, so you can easily add it to your itinerary. Here's your guide for planning a trip.

WORDS & PICTURES **CHRIS LEGGATT**

It was a still evening and my partner Liz Bazin and I were looking out over a valley in the Daka Plains concession in the north-western corner of Hwange National Park. The landscape washed in a golden haze kicked up by the elephants, as they doused themselves during their evening dust bath.

It was early June 2024 and while food and water were still available, there was concern among the locals that this would be a harsh year for the animals. The last two summers had seen below-average rainfall, and a dry summer usually results in a desperate fight for survival in late spring – especially for the herbivores.

In times of plenty, Hwange's elephant population can swell to more than 45 000. Each adult elephant can consume over 150 kg of food in a day, which takes its toll on a park, even one as large as Hwange. (At 14 651 km² in size, Hwange is bigger than Chobe but smaller than the Kruger.)

Hwange was declared a game reserve in 1928. Soon after, in 1932, warden Ted Davison realised that large quantities of game would not be sustainable without sinking boreholes. Today, there are many boreholes in the park that use solar pumps donated and maintained using funds raised by the Bhejane Trust and Friends of Hwange.

What would we see of Hwange's fabled wildlife? That's what Liz and I wondered when we drove into the park through the Nantwich gate. Over the next 10 days we made our way east across the northern half of the park towards the Main Camp gate. We'd been commissioned to update the *Bradt Zimbabwe* guidebook; Hwange was one of several national parks that we'd visit on our research trip. We were lucky to stay at the luxury lodges in the park, but we also checked out all the public camps and most of the wilderness camps at hides and waterholes. Although many facilities definitely needed an upgrade, the game viewing always made up for it...

Wary adversaries. The abundance of lions and elephants leads to common encounters, which are usually exacerbated during times of drought.

Opposite page, from the top: Platforms and hides, like this one at Shumba Pan, offer wonderful views over the waterholes. Blessing Phiri, a guide from Hideaways Bumbusi Wilderness Camp, points out animal spoor engraved into the rock. Shumba Pan gives a good idea of what you can expect from an exclusive campsite in the park. A cheetah takes a break from eating to survey the surrounds for other predators.

Some of our best sightings were in the west of the park: plenty of elephants, lions and even a wild dog "roadblock" that nearly made us miss the 6 pm gate curfew. But the highlight came one night after supper at Machaba Safaris' Deteema Springs camp. As we made our way back to our luxury safari tent accompanied by an armed guard with a torch, we happened upon a leopard hunting dassies barely five metres from our tent. I'm not sure which of us was more surprised! I managed to fumble my cellphone out of my pocket and capture a few grainy photos.

In the Hideaways Bumbusi concession, we went on a guided walk to a sandstone overhang where an array of animal spoor – lion, giraffe, zebra, impala and even human footprints – were engraved on the walls. Near the petroglyphs lay the ruins of an extensive stone-walled fortress. It was here, among the baobabs, that the Nambya people settled when they broke away from the Rozwi at the start of the 19th century.

Elephants and baboons have damaged much of the complex, but it's still an alluring place to visit. You'll have to stay at Hideaways Bumbusi Wilderness Camp, though: The Bumbusi Ruins and rock engravings are not open to the general public, which does give the site a greater hope of future protection...

After Bumbusi, we drove a loop south of Robins Camp that took in two waterholes: Little Tom's and Big Tom's. Each had a wonderful photography hide, but Big Tom's had a wider view. Herds of elephants approached the long, muddy pool where a lone crocodile gobbled up more than its quota of catfish. A goliath heron waded nearby in the hope of finding a tasty morsel displaced by the crocodile, while an African hawk-eagle watched from a nearby tree.

After some splashing about, the elephants walked right past the elevated hide to the source of the clean water from the borehole, before wandering off and being replaced by the next herd. Classic Hwange!

The area around Main Camp didn't let us down either. Nyamandhlovu and Guvalala are good hides for game viewing, but we were especially lucky at Ngweshla, where we encountered a cheetah on a fresh impala kill.

Hidden in the grass, she'd managed to eat a fair portion without being interrupted by any other predators. The following morning, however, almost all evidence of her presence was gone. Hyenas had scavenged what they could, and two big male lions had moved into the area. With coiffed black manes and muscular bodies, they strutted around, scent-marking as they went.

Later that day, we came across a pride of 14 lions hiding from the midday heat under some trees. They were eventually moved on by a herd of elephants and walked to a nearby pan to drink.

Hwange is technically a Big Five park, but due to poaching, seeing rhino is extremely rare. Thankfully, the anti-poaching teams have been making progress and the Imvelo Safari Lodges group (which manages four camps in the Hwange area) is busy with a programme to reintroduce white rhino under the supervision of heavily armed guards. We joined a guided trip through their rhino camp and the guide explained how the local community will benefit from the reintroduction project: There would be more jobs in tourism and conservation, and some of the funding had also been used to upgrade school facilities and put in more solar pumps.

During our research trip, we explored 10 of Zimbabwe's 11 national parks. Hwange easily provided the best big-cat sightings and the largest herds of elephants, as well as an abundance of other game and good bird sightings. There's a wide range of accommodation in the park to suit all needs: Turn the page to see the breakdown of all the various options.

BE SAFE

- **Don't exceed the speed limit of 40 km/h.** The last thing you want to do is round a corner and startle an unsuspecting elephant.
- **Carry extra food and water in your vehicle.** A breakdown can mean a long wait.
- **Let someone know your daily route.** This is especially relevant if you're not travelling in a convoy. On some of the secondary tracks in the park, it's not unusual to go for several hours without seeing another car.
- **In the event of a break-down, stay with your vehicle.** With no cellphone signal and plenty of wild animals about, wait in your car until help arrives.

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

How do I get to Hwange from Botswana? The park is best accessed via the Pandamatenga border post, which is just 45 km from the Nantwich gate. The gravel road from the border to the gate was in good condition when we visited.

Do I need a 4x4? A high clearance 4x2 is fine for the main gravel roads during the dry season, but if you want to explore in summer (or if you want to drive some of the sandy peripheral roads) a 4x4 is essential.

From Shumba Pan, halfway between Robins Camp and Main Camp, the primary road is "tarred" all the way to Main Camp. Unfortunately, lack of maintenance has resulted in the deterioration of the tar, which has rough edges and potholes, although these are often filled with gravel.

Fuel? Main Camp has the only fuel station in the park. Rather fill up at Pandamatenga: Fuel in Botswana is much cheaper than in Zim (about R22 per litre instead of R30+). Fuel is also available in the town of Hwange.

What do I have to bring? You must be self-sufficient. Main Camp has a basic shop selling a small selection of snacks and alcohol; you can buy firewood for US$5 (R90) per bundle.

If you're coming from Botswana, stock up in a bigger town like Kasane or Francistown. Once in Zimbabwe, your closest stores are in the town of Hwange. There's some fresh produce in Cross Dete, too.

Best time to visit? Daytime temps in winter are pleasant, although the nights can be chilly. The animals tend to congregate around the waterholes. School holidays are busy, but we found early June to be perfect: Game viewing was good and the campsites were quiet.

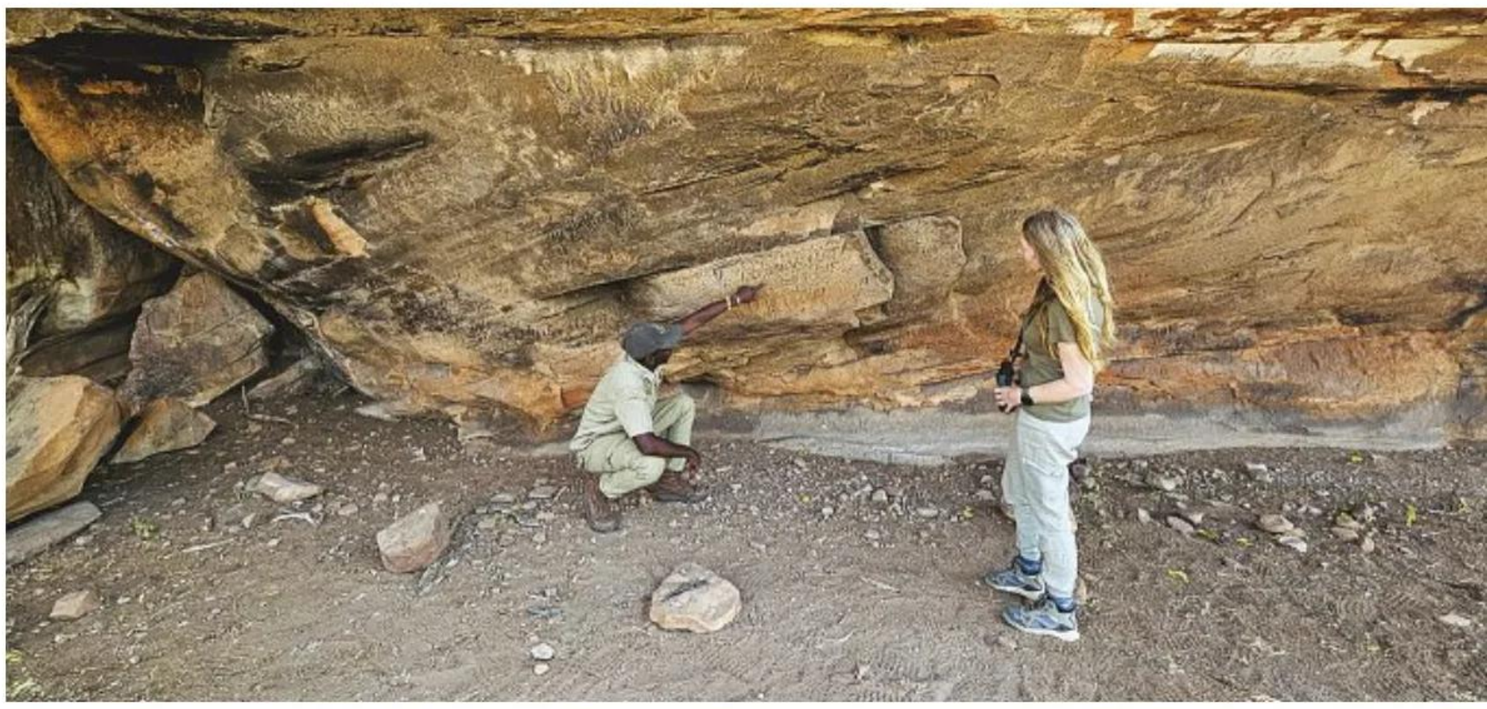
It starts heating up from September, and the rains follow around November, dispersing the wildlife and making the roads muddy. The wet summer months are good for birding.

Park fees: SADC visitors pay US$15 (R270) per person per day. If you're staying at ZimParks (Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Authority) accommodation, the conservation fee is reduced to US$8 (R104) per person per day. It's half-price for kids aged 6 – 12 and free for kids under 6.

SADC vehicles pay US$10 (R180) per day, reduced to US$3 (R54) per day if you're in ZimParks accommodation. Trailers and caravans are charged a separate daily fee of US$10 (R180) or US$3 (R54) depending on accommodation.

Gate times: 6 am to 6 pm.

What else? Guided walks from public camps cost US$10 (R180) per person per hour.



CAMPING INSIDE THE PARK

There are three large camps in the park: Robins Camp, Sinamatella and Main Camp. Robins is privately run; Sinamatella and Main Camp are operated by ZimParks. They also run the campsites at the hides and waterholes.

There are a handful of self-catering lodges, too, which are also privately run by concession owners.

PRIVATE CAMPS

Robins Camp

Robins Camp has the best facilities. Since it's only 12 km from the Nantwich gate, it's a logical first night stop if you're coming from the Pandamatenga border post.

There are 25 stands, each with braai facilities and a cement table and benches. The three ablution blocks are clean and well maintained. Campers are welcome to use the restaurant, bar and swimming pool at the lodge next door.

Rates: Camping US$25 (R450) per person.
Contact: 073 030 2265 (WhatsApp); robinscamp.com

Kapula Private Camp

Kapula is a privately run, self-catering spot just south of Masuma Dam. It consists of two camps, each with four en suite tents and a large communal dining tent. For exclusivity, at least two tents need to be booked in a camp – a setup that's better suited to families or friends travelling together.

The fee includes staff who help ensure your holiday is not engulfed by housekeeping chores. There's a two-bedroom sleeping platform nearby, with its own small kitchen and bathroom.

Rates: From US$65 (R1 170) per person sharing.
Contact: 066 472 8927
kapulacamp.com

ZIMPARKS CAMPS

Main Camp

Main Camp offers budget-friendly accommodation, from camping on an open, dusty piece of ground with tired ablution facilities (there was hot water during our visit), to stock-standard national park chalets. Some of the campsites near the ablution blocks have power points.

There's a restaurant and a shop with very limited stock.

Rates: Camping US$50 (R900) per stand for a max of three people; US$17 (R306) per extra person. If you haven't booked in advance, the walk-in rate is also US$17. Twin-sleeper chalet US$50 – $86 (R900 – R1 540) per night. Four-sleeper chalet US$110 – $200 (R1 980 – R3 600) per night.

Sinamatella Camp

Sadly, Sinamatella is no longer the camp it used to be. The shop, restaurant and bar, along with some of the chalets, were dismantled a few years ago in anticipation of a refurbishment. The project was abandoned and the buildings remain in a sorry state.

However, the campsite (with its ageing ablution block) and remaining few self-catering chalets are situated on the edge of an escarpment, which offers spectacular views over the Lukosi Plains. You can expect hot water, but no power outlets.

Rates: Camping US$50 (R900) for up to three people; US$17 (R306) per extra person. If you haven't booked in advance, the walk-in rate is also US$17. Twin chalet US$75 (R1 350) per night. Four-sleeper chalet US$160 (R2 880) per night.

WATERHOLE CAMPSITES

By far the nicest ZimParks campsites are at the various waterholes in the park. Their proximity to water offers a more immersive nature experience than the bigger campsites above.

These small, (usually) fenced-off areas have space to pitch a few tents. You also get a couple of braai stands and a small ablution block, with one or two toilets and showers.

Waterhole campsites usually sleep up to 10 people. Some can be booked exclusively for the night, otherwise you might be sharing with other campers. Be aware that they're open to other visitors during the day – fine if you pitch your tent off to one side, but if you sleep inside the hide or on a platform, pack up before the early morning photographers arrive.

Mandavu & Jambili: Mandavu Dam is the biggest reservoir in Hwange and it has a wonderful, newly renovated campsite with well-maintained facilities, including gazebos, hot showers and flush toilets. Jambili also offers solitude as it's not visited as often as some of the other waterholes.
Rates: US$150 (R2 700) per stand for up to three people. Walk-in rate, or extra-person rate, US$50 (R900) per person.

Masuma, Shumba, Deteema, Kennedy 1 & Ngweshla: The Masuma Dam campsite and the Shumba picnic site both have good facilities. Shumba is an exclusive campsite for just one party.

The Deteema Hide campsite, also next to a dam, is a little more rustic than the other camps, but it does offer an immersive experience. When we were there, we counted more than 200 elephants around camp at sunset!

Kennedy 1 is set back in a grove of trees, a short distance from its waterhole.

Ngweshla (exclusive campsite) is another favourite in the east. It's under large shady trees, a little way from a waterhole, in a prime game-viewing area.
Rates: To secure your booking, try to get the whole site for US$200 (R3 600) per night (max six people). If you haven't booked, try your luck at the gate for the walk-in rate of US$50 (R900) per person.

Guvalala and Makwa: These are both game-viewing platforms. Closer to Main Camp, the Guvalala Platform was renovated recently. The platform has a roof and a protective cage to keep baboons out and sleeps up to six people. There's not much shade in the vicinity but there are working showers and flush toilets.

Makwa is just south-east of Main Camp, en route to Kennedy 1.
Rates: US$150 (R2 700) per platform for up to three people. Walk-in per-person rate, or rate per extra person: US$50 (R900).

Contact: ZimParks reservation office 00 263 867 770 7627
00 263 77 613 4164 (WhatsApp)
zimparks.org.zw

We visited their offices in Harare, where we spoke to someone named Aliosa who is the Hwange bookings specialist:
00 263 71 628 1441

CAMPING OUTSIDE THE PARK

Save on park fees and stay at one of the well-priced campsites near the Main Camp gate. These private places have better facilities than the ZimParks camps and many are in their own concession so you'll still see plenty of game.

Gwango Heritage Resort
About 1,6 km from Main Camp entrance gate.
Rate: Camping US$10 (R180) per person.
Contact: 00 263 78 355 7773
gwango.com

The Siding
About 2,2 km from Main Camp entrance gate.
Rate: Camping US$15 (R270) per person.
Contact: 00 263 78 236 1284
thebayetecollection.com

Miombo Safari Camp
About 11 km from Main Camp entrance gate.
Rate: Camping US$20 (R360) per person.
Contact: 00 263 81 283 5446
miombosafari.com

Tuskers Campsite
About 25 km from Main Camp entrance gate.
Rate: US$20 (R360) per person.
Contact: resman@amalindacollection.co.zw
"ZimCamping" on Facebook

LUXURY LODGES

Hwange doesn't lack lodges for the luxury market. We can vouch for the hospitality at the ones we stayed at:

- **Daka Plains** dakaplains.org
- **Deteema Springs by Machaba Safaris** machabasafaris.com
- **Somalisa Camp by African Bush Camps** africanbushcamps.com
- **Little Makalolo by Wilderness Safaris** wildernessdestinations.com
- **Nehimba Lodge & Camelthorn Lodge by Imvelo Safari Lodges** imvelosafarilodges.com
- **Ivory Lodge & Sable Valley by Amalinda Collection** (just outside the park) amalindacollection.com
- **Hideaways Bumbusi Wilderness Camp** hideawaysafrica.com

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chris Leggatt runs Eden Adventures (eden.co.za) in Wilderness on the Garden Route. When he's not at work, he's usually out on an adventure to somewhere unusual. The Bradt Zimbabwe *guidebook, which he's currently updating with Liz Bazin, is scheduled for publication in September 2025. Follow him on Instagram: @ChrisCrossingSA*

Rhino Republic

Khama Rhino Sanctuary has rhinos, you don't have to worry about that! Many tourists use the reserve as a quick overnight stop, but it's better to spend two or three nights here to get real value for your money.

WORDS & PICTURES **TOAST COETZER**

The first four rhinos were translocated to Khama in 1993 from northern Botswana. Two of them died not long after (one from previous poaching injuries). In 1995, five more were brought in from South Africa.

A holiday is a strange thing. Sometimes you're so rushed you forget what's most important: to relax. Botswana is a vast country and you often feel you have to fit as much of it as possible into a week or two. The result is that you rarely have time to catch your breath and you hurry past places that have more to offer than you think.

I've been to Khama Rhino Sanctuary many times, but never for more than one night. Typically, you arrive here in the late afternoon because you travelled from somewhere deep in South Africa. Maybe you have time for a quick visit to Malema Pan: the closest place to the rest camp to see a rhino before sunset. The next morning, you'll probably leave right after breakfast to go to Kubu Island or Maun, and you'll miss out on the opportunity to explore Khama.

In February 2024, I spent three nights here and Khama started to feel like home. It was very hot but there's a swimming pool at the restaurant building, and air conditioning and Wi-Fi inside. With two full days at my disposal, I could drive nearly every track in the reserve. There aren't many and the distances are short. I also made sure to spend time at Malema Pan and Serwe Pan, the two places where you have the best chance of seeing rhino.

It's blissful to doze off next to a pan with one eye on the heavy shapes of rhinos kicking up dust as they shuffle around.

Turn the page for your guide to this great little reserve.

Park manager Sidney Modo (above right) is one of the guides who can take you on foot to see white rhino. Zebras wade into the water to drink at the bird hide (right), while these ostriches were seen taking a dust bath near Serwe Pan (bottom right).

1. You're here for the rhinos!

I once heard of someone who visited Khama and *didn't* see a rhino, but it's highly unlikely that you'll spend a full day here without a rhino sighting. In one day, I saw more than 20 individuals between the two main waterholes. (No, I didn't count the same rhino twice…)

The rhinos are heavily guarded; there will always be an armed guard or three under a tree nearby to keep an eye on them. The 24-hour security for the animals is partially provided by the Botswana Defence Force, which has a large base nearby.

The reserve mainly has white rhino, but look closely and you might see one of the handful of black rhino hanging out among them.

One of the best things you can do in Khama is a guided tracking excursion that will take you close to the rhino on foot. You get an adrenaline kick when your vehicle is somewhere behind you and the distance between you and a rhino is about 100 m – and shrinking… I did the excursion with friendly park manager Sidney Modo; it's a unique experience that you can't do in many other places. Best of all? These rhinos still have their horns.

2. But that's not all…

Plains game like zebra, impala, springbok, blue wildebeest, giraffe, gemsbok, red hartebeest and eland are abundant. A kudu may leap across the road from the bushes. Birding is good in the open areas around the pans – I saw a big group of white-backed vultures (and the odd lappet-faced vulture) at Serwe Pan, plus some ostriches taking a dust bath. Some of the white-backed vultures breed in the reserve at a place marked Camelthorn Island on the map (p 64).

Serwe Pan gets its name from the Setswana word "serwe", which means something like "delicious piece of meat" – it's clearly from a time when people still hunted here before the reserve was established in 1993. Malema Pan was named after a man who farmed cattle in the area in the past. (*Not Julius. – Ed.*)

Make sure to bring your binoculars and zoom lens because the viewpoints are set back from the waterholes. It's fun to watch the animals through your binos because then you can appreciate their interactions so much more.

On a guided night drive, you'll see nocturnal creatures like nightjars and black-backed jackals. There aren't lions here but who knows, you might catch a glimpse of a leopard!

3. Don't forget about the bird hide

When you turn left (west) at Malema Pan, you'll soon reach a turn-off to Khama's bird hide. The hide overlooks a small pool of water ringed by dense thornbushes – it's very different to the open terrain around the pans, where you can see birds like kori bustard.

During my time in the hide, I watched warthogs rolling around in the mud and zebras carefully approaching to drink. A terrapin marched past. Small birds came and went, guineafowl took over for a while, and during a lull I saw something unexpected: a greater painted-snipe warding off an aerial attack from an inexperienced (and much smaller) little sparrowhawk.

More than 230 bird species have been recorded in the reserve.

4. Enjoy the campsite

The big manketti trees in Mokongwa Camp make Khama one of the best places to camp in Botswana. (Mokongwa is the Setswana word for the manketti tree.) Every stand feels sheltered because it's surrounded by relatively thick bush. Plus, it's easy to pitch your tent on the soft sand.

If you only stay for one night, you'll miss out on a full day of relaxing in this wonderful campsite. Find a shady spot for your camp chair and you'll soon be visited by curious Burchell's starlings and grey go-away-birds looking for rusk crumbs. Keep an eye on the southern yellow-billed hornbills… They have a thing for windshield wipers and almost destroyed the ones on my Jimny!

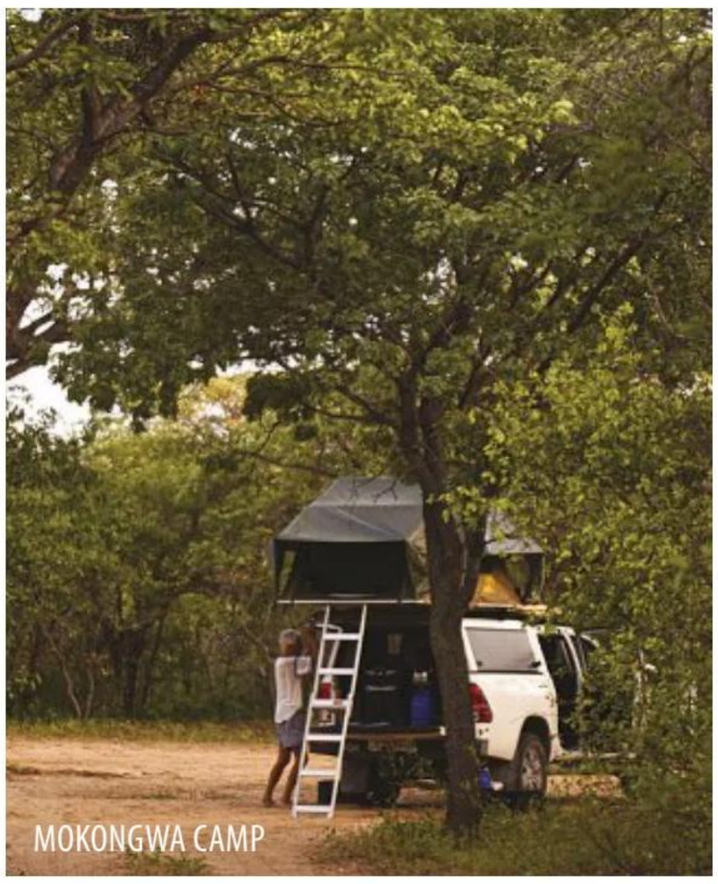
5. Bring your 4x4

There's Kalahari sand under your wheels in Khama Rhino Sanctuary. Even though it's easy to drive your 4x2 from the entrance gate to the campsite, you need the peace of mind that a 4x4 brings if you want to explore the other game-viewing routes. There's thick sand in places, especially on the northernmost Phuduhudu Loop. Remember to lower your tyre pressure when you're driving in sand.

I travelled to Khama in the new five-door Suzuki Jimny and it was the perfect vehicle for the sandy tracks.

If you don't have a 4x4, you can always go on a guided game drive. Guided drives are pricey but still way cheaper than buying your own 4x4…

BIRD HIDE



MOKONGWA CAMP

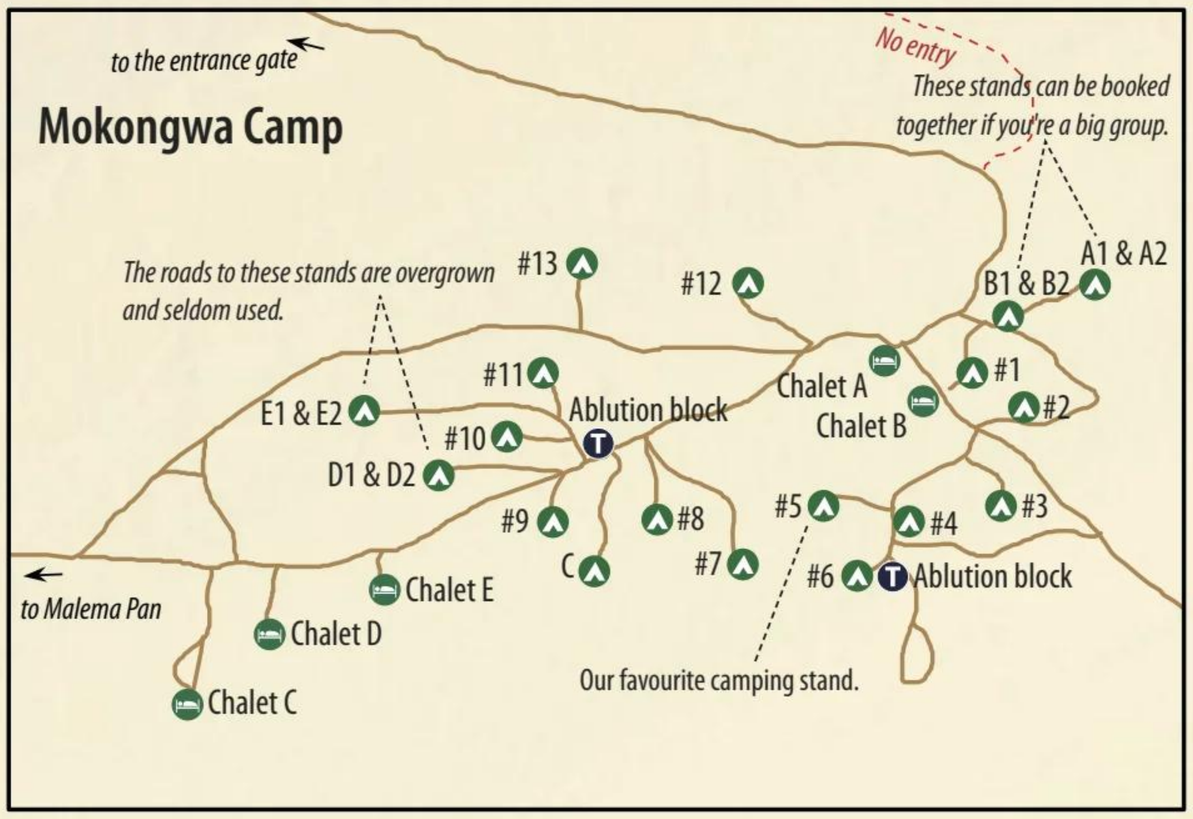
ACCESS ROAD TO MOKONGWA CAMP

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Khama Rhino Sanctuary offers much better value for money than most parks in Botswana.

Park fees: P107 (R143) per adult per day; P53 (R71) per child aged 6 – 12; P131 (R176) per vehicle per day.
Gate times: 7 am to 7 pm.
Camping: P133 (R178) per adult; P67 (R90) per child aged 6 – 12. There are 22 stands, each with a tap and braai facilities. No power points. The communal bathrooms are cleaned regularly.
Chalets: There are eight in total – rates from P854 (R1 144) per night for two people; from P980 (R1 313) for four.
Rhino tracking excursion: P626 (R839) per person. Nobody under 16 or over 60 allowed.
Game drives: Day drive P925 (R1 240) for up to four people, plus P213 (R285) per extra person. Night drive P1 081 (R1 449) for up to four people, plus P299 (R401) per extra person.
Shop: There's a basic shop at the gate that sells ice, cooldrinks and firewood. It's run well and you can also pick up a souvenir like a T-shirt. You can pay with your card.
Contact: 00 267 463 0713; khamarhinosanctuary.org.bw

KHAMA RHINO SANCTUARY



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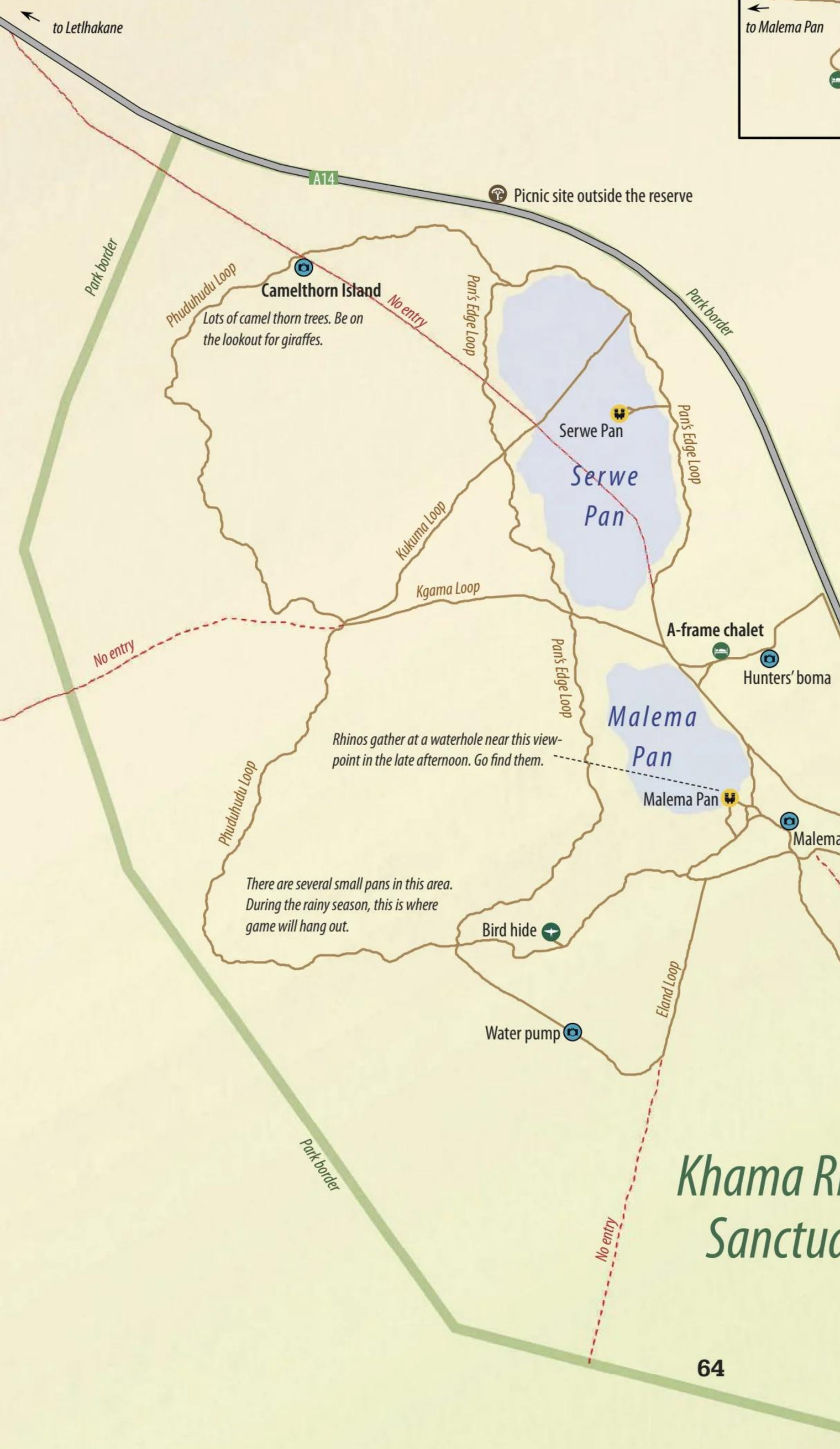


Delta Meat Deli

Delta Meat Deli is family-owned and run business located in Maun in the heart of Botswana.

Meat has been our specialty for over 20 years, supplying quality meat products to the camps and lodges in the region.
We also have a deli shop for self-drives to collect on their way into the Okavango Delta as well as for any walk-in customers.
Our deli has a variety of products from pastries, pre-made meals, treats and a large variety of meat products.
We pride ourselves on being master craftsmen in our industry – skilled artisans in meat preparation methods.
Crafting our products is a true labour of love. We use time-honored recipes that call for hand trimming our meats, applying many of our spices by hand.

With **Delta Meat Deli,** you can trust each and every one of our products was prepared with the utmost care.
Delta Meat Deli wants to make sure that you can buy good quality meat within Botswana that you can take on your adventure through the Okavango Delta. You can plan your journey secure in the knowledge that our large variety of meat products are available for orders, and we pre-freeze them for your travels.

Order pre-frozen meat products for your travels.

Delta Meat Deli AT LIONS GATE

You are welcome to place orders via email to deltadeli@yahoo.com and collect in-store on your way to the Okavango Delta.
Our website **www.deltameatdeli.com** has our location on the A3 main road through Maun, with ample parking for cars and trailers.

E-mail: deltadeli@yahoo.com | www.deltameatdeli.com | Tel: 00267 686 1419

A dash of Namibia

Any loop around northern Botswana should include a few days in Namibia's Zambezi Region, and a few days along the Okavango Panhandle. The rivers that bring life to these areas – the Kwando and Okavango – are what gives them a unique charm and character.

WORDS & PICTURES **JON MINSTER**

The road, if you can call it that, consists of two tracks through bumper-deep sand along the beach next to Horseshoe Bend. To get through this section, you have to accelerate and keep your momentum, otherwise you'll probably get stuck. All good, except that there's an elephant in the way.

We've been watching the elephants for an hour – herd after herd coming down to the famous curve on the Kwando River to drink, swim and socialise. It has been a dry year and the veld is parched. The Kwando is the only permanent source of water for kilometres around, and Horseshoe Bend is the best beach bar in town.

It's wonderful to watch elephants, but it's not so wonderful when the sun has set and darkness is fast approaching. Nighttime is when you want to be back in camp with a fire crackling, not here where things that can eat you will soon be waking up.

The elephant is a young bull and he's full of nonsense. He looks at us with his head cocked. "You wanna go?" he seems to ask.

I gently rev the engine of the Hilux. The elephant snorts and picks up a branch – more like a tree trunk – and waves it at us.

Okay...

The other members of his herd have long since melted away into the bush. It's just this guy left behind and he's staying to prove a point – that Horseshoe Bend belongs to him.

He takes a step towards us and hurls the branch to the ground with a crash. I put the Hilux in reverse and we slalom backwards, tyres spinning in the sand.

Then we hear a trumpet. The elephant stops his advance and shakes his head from side to side. Is that his mom? He snorts, deliberates, then turns tail and canters off to join his family.

I take the gap and churn through the sand, back to the better road that leads to Nambwa Campsite. We're all a bit stunned and drive in silence for a while, until a voice pipes up from the back seat. "That was epic!" my eldest says.

Sunset over the Kavango River from the deck at Ndhovu Safari Lodge. The hippos are nurking and the beer is cold. Life is good!

Opposite page, clockwise from the top: Relaxing to the max in the campsite at Ndhovu Safari Lodge. Campsite cricket at Muchenje, which is fenced so a jackal won't run off with the ball. A boat outing in the Okavango from Guma Lagoon Camp involved some bundu-bashing – searching for a Pel's fishing-owl took dedication! Admire Lubilo is an expert skipper and bird guide at Mukolo Camp.

Beautiful Bwabwata

The geography of northern Botswana is fascinating. The Okavango Delta, fed by the Okavango River (known as the Kavango in Namibia and the Cubango in Angola), empties into the Kalahari sand, feeding other, ephemeral rivers like the Thamalakane and the Boteti near Maun. Then there's the Chobe River, which starts off as the Cuando in Angola, becomes the sinewy Kwando in Namibia and flows into the Zambezi near Kasane.

Getting through this watery maze requires a mokoro or a bush plane – or your passport. Yup, the easiest way to get from one side of the delta to the other is to go around the top, through Namibia's old Caprivi Strip, now called the Zambezi Region.

Ironically, Namibia is often the highlight of a "Botswana" holiday – you can pay for your campsites and meals in rands and spend your days under spectacular trees along wild rivers. Depending on your route, there's a good chance you'll also sojourn up or down the so-called panhandle – the section of Okavango River before it branches into myriad channels and swamps. Most of the panhandle is in Botswana, but there's a bit in Namibia as well.

The panhandle is a prime fishing destination, but it also has plenty to offer birders, who come here from all over the world to see specials like Pel's fishing-owl, African skimmer, white-backed night-heron, slaty egret and many others.

In June 2024, as part of an anti-clockwise loop around the delta in a rented 4x4 camper, which started and ended in Kasane, we spent a week exploring the Kwando River and the panhandle. After threading our way through Chobe National Park along the river road, we camped at Muchenje Campsite & Cottages near the Ngoma border post and crossed into Namibia the next day.

Our destination was Nambwa Campsite in Bwabwata National Park. Nambwa is iconic. The old campsite was one of the wildest in Namibia, right on the Kwando River under massive jackalberry trees, but nearby Nambwa Tented Lodge wanted exclusivity for its well-heeled guests, so the campsite was moved a couple of kilometres away.

The new site is nowhere near as exotic. It's close to an offshoot of the Kwando called Long Lagoon but you can't see the water. That's if the lagoon actually has water... (It was bone dry during our visit.)

Still, the new facilities are amazing. Each stand has a shaded area with a kitchen bench, sink and power point; with a private bathroom behind. There are stunning chandeliers and a beer-bottle shower wall, all made by the Sijwa Project, which upcycles glass waste from African Monarch's lodges. You might not be right on the Kwando, but you're still deep in Bwabwata and there are no fences between you and the animals. Most nights we heard hyenas yipping and lions calling in the distance.

Nambwa Campsite, Nambwa Tented Lodge and Kazile Island Lodge – all part of the African Monarch group – are inside Bwabwata and they're the only places to stay on the western bank of the Kwando River. The roads on that side are sandy and rough – you get a real sense of being deep in the bundu.

The eastern side of the river is different. The tarred C49 follows the river (which eventually becomes the border with Botswana) and takes you to more accessible lodges and bush camps. One of those lodges is Mukolo Camp, owned by Hennie and Veronica Köhne. Mukolo is a classic Kwando destination and we'd booked a boat trip on the river with guide Admire Lubilo.

Admire took us out soon after sunrise. The water was so still that if you flipped a photo of the river and its papyrus-lined banks, you wouldn't be able to tell which half was reality and which was reflection. That is, until a hippo surfaced, giving us all a blood-pressure spike.

We saw various bee-eaters and kingfishers, herons, widowbirds and

Most nights we heard hyenas yipping and lions calling in the distance.

a fish-eagle around every bend. We also saw a shy Allen's gallinule picking its way through the shallows – big birding tick. A huge water monitor raised its head, crocs sunbathed, lechwe looked at us nervously and we caught glimpses of sitatungas in the thickets.

It was a special morning on the water and definitely worth the long drive back to Nambwa Campsite through the Bwabwata sand. Our sundowners that evening were well earned after we helped dig out an Australian tourist's hired vehicle on a particularly messy uphill section.

Moonrise kingdom

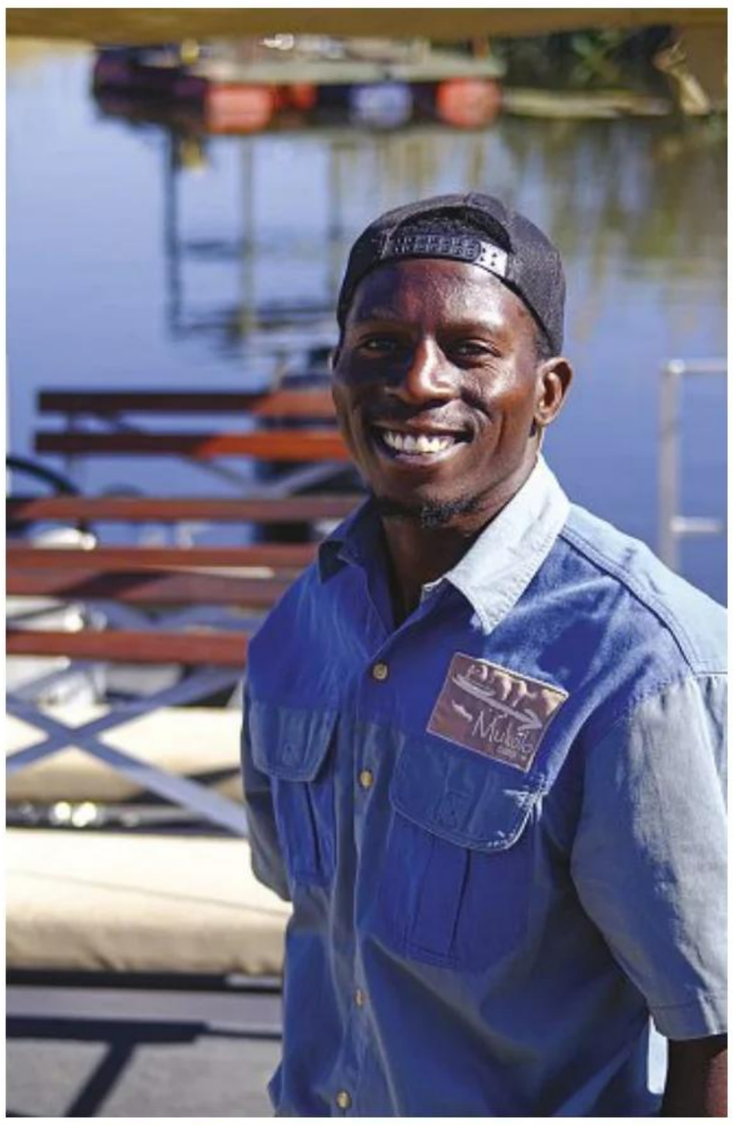
From the Kwando River, we drove the long, straight B8 tar road for 200 km all the way through Bwabwata National Park to Divundu (go slow, watch out for elephants), where we turned south along the C48 to Ndhovu Safari Lodge.

The short section of Kavango River between Divundu and the Mohembo border is crammed with lodges, the most famous of which is probably Ngepi Camp with its wacky bathrooms and croc-proof "swimming pool" in the river. We'd stayed at Ngepi before and it was great, but we were keen to try something different on this trip.

Ndhovu is smaller than Ngepi and there are only two campsites – they're almost an afterthought, tucked away at the end of the property beyond all the safari tents. But they're right on the river and it was lovely and quiet, something that isn't always guaranteed at Ngepi with its overlander trucks and excited backpackers.

The restaurant at Ndhovu was a highlight. We treated ourselves to a home-cooked feast: warm bread, an enormous salad, chicken curry and churros for dessert, all of which was heavenly after four days of camp cooking at Nambwa.

Dawn broke over the river and we watched the sunrise through tent mesh, wrapped in sleeping bags and sipping tea and hot chocolate. It would have been great



A full moon rises over Guma Lagoon on the edge of the Okavango Delta.
Now you're in Africa!

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Border crossings. Ngoma and Mohembo are both small border posts and you shouldn't have any delays in crossing, provided your passports and vehicle paperwork are in order (see p 11). It took less than half an hour both times we crossed.

Roads. The main road through Namibia's Zambezi Region is the B8. It's tarred and in good condition. The same can't be said of the A35 in Botswana, which is the main route down the western side of the Okavango Panhandle. It's a potholed mess for at least 150 km, from the Mohembo border to the town of Gumare. Watch out for traffic police as you exit Gumare: It's a 60 km/h zone for a long way, even if there aren't any signs…

When you leave the main roads, expect rough roads and thick sand. Some lodges are accessible in a high-clearance 4x2 during the dry season, but a 4x4 is recommended.

Supplies. Katima Mulilo in Namibia is a big town with fuel stations and all the usual supermarket chains.

Kongola might be tiny but it has a Shell garage and an excellent Metro Cash & Carry where you can stock up on everything. Also make sure to pop into the craft shop across the road from the Metro – it's one of the best in the region.

Divundu has fuel stations and shops.

In Botswana, you can refuel and stock up in Shakawe, Gumare and Sehithwa, where the A35 joins the A3 to Maun.

Cellphone signal. The law has changed and getting a local SIM card in Namibia is not as easy as it once was. There's an application process that can be done while you wait if you visit a mobile store in a big town like Katima, but if you try go through a smaller vendor it can take up to three days. In Botswana, it's easy to get a local SIM.

Signal in Namibia was good, even in the wilderness areas. In Botswana, it was patchy to non-existent except in towns and villages.

Boat trips. Make sure you do as many of these as possible! It's the best way to experience the rivers. Almost all the lodges offer fishing, sunset, birding and game-viewing cruises. The rates often depend on the size of the boat and the number of people going out. At Mukolo (00 264 66 25 0408; mukolocamp.com), we paid R600 per adult and R300 per child for a three-hour birding cruise on the Kwando. At Guma Lagoon Camp, we paid P400 (R536) per person for a similar trip into the channels of the delta. We didn't see a Pel's, but we did see a white-backed night-heron!

to spend another day at Ndhovu but it was time to push on.

We had to make a decision: Drive directly to the Mohembo border and detour to Tsodilo Hills on our way to Guma Lagoon Camp, our next overnight stop, or go slowly along the river through the Mahango sector of Bwabwata National Park and skip Tsodilo.

We decided on the latter option. The hills, with their forested gorges and prolific rock art, are mystical and sacred; Tsodilo is not a place you can "see" in an hour or two. It would have to wait until another trip when we had more time.

But the road along the river in the Mahango sector was a spectacular consolation prize. The floodplain was chock-full of grazing warthogs and antelope, and more bucket-list birds like knob-billed ducks and black herons doing that umbrella thing with their wings. It was very dry and most of the riverside tracks were hard and exposed. We drove as close to the water as possible, past wallowing hippos, yawning crocs and drinking elephants.

It was Sunday and a derby soccer match was in full swing at the Mohembo border post. The officials let the kids through to watch on the other side while Jess and I sorted out the paperwork. We were back in baby-blue Botswana again; now it was the Okavango somewhere on our left, not the Kavango.

Near the village of Etsha 13, we turned towards the water and surfed sand for about 13 km to Guma Lagoon Camp, which sits where the Okavango Panhandle splits into thousands of smaller waterways.

Dusty, hot and slightly traumatised by potholes, we rolled into our woodland campsite and kicked ourselves again for only booking one night. Guma Lagoon itself is a vast body of water that never dries up, even in lean years, and the camp is right there on its banks; a paradise of trees and lush gardens.

We ordered drinks and sat on the deck as the sun set and the full moon rose

yellow and wobbly out of the Okavango Delta. All the guests stood up and reached out towards it with cellphones and cameras, drawn to the primordial spectacle just as our ancestors were thousands of years ago. A hunter's moon, it was called then.

No hunting for us: There were lamb chops on the menu that night, and a boat trip to look for a Pel's fishing-owl scheduled for early the next morning; then we'd carry on around the delta to Maun and stock up for our next adventure in Moremi Game Reserve (see p48).

But all of that was somewhere in the future. At that very moment, on the deck overlooking Guma Lagoon, I couldn't stop staring at the moon. It rose higher and higher, turning silver and bathing everything in celestial light.

Put the camera down. Say a word of thanks. And file the memory for a time when you might need a little reminder of the good things that still exist in this world.

Elephants are everywhere in Bwabwata. Give them a wide berth, especially if there are babies around.

WE STAYED HERE

Muchenje Campsite & Cottages
A great place to stay just outside Chobe National Park in Botswana, close to the Ngoma border post. There are 10 shaded campsites, some overlooking the Chobe floodplain, each with a braai stand, a 220V power point and running water. The campsites share four clean ablution blocks. Three self-catering cottages are also available.
Rates: Camping from P235 (R315) per adult and P123 (R165) per child aged 5 – 12; free for kids under 5. Cottages from P1 195 (R1 601) per night (each sleeps two).
Contact: 00 267 7500 7327
muchenjecampsite.com

Nambwa Campsite
Four exclusive stands in Bwabwata National Park – each with a kitchen, bathroom and power. The location of the camp is a bit random (it's not next to the river like the old camp was) but the facilities are excellent. A camp attendant is on site permanently and can help with any issues. He also lights the donkey boiler in the morning and evening for hot showers. It takes at least an hour, often longer, to get from the park gate to the campsite along the sandy roads in the park. Also note that campers are only allowed at nearby Nambwa Tented Lodge by prior arrangement.
Rates: Camping from R450 per adult; R225 per child under 12.
Contact: 00 264 81 125 2122
africanmonarchlodges.com

Ndhovu Safari Lodge
A small, peaceful lodge on the banks of the Kavango with a great deck and restaurant that campers are free to use. The two campsites are near the guide accommodation and share ablutions and a washing-up area. Each stand has a braai and power point. Ndhovu's main accommodation option is luxury safari tents, some right on the river. Boat trips and other excursions are available. Meals available in the restaurant.
Rates: Camping from R200 per person; safari tents from R3 930 per night for two people DB&B.
Contact: 00 264 66 259 901
ndhovu.com

Guma Lagoon Camp
An Okavango Panhandle classic, Guma Lagoon attracts fishermen, birders and adventurous, self-drive campers looking to get a taste of the real delta at an affordable rate. There are seven campsites on lawn under trees, each with a braai and private bathroom. No power. There are also various safari tents on offer, some sleeping two and others up to four. Birding and fishing boat trips are available. Meals are also available.
Rates: Camping P200 (R268) per person; safari tents from P1 665 (R2 231) for two people.
Contact: 00 267 77 570 658 (WhatsApp); guma-lagoon.com

Turn to p 116 – 120 for more accommodation details in the Zambezi Region and p 104 for the Okavango Panhandle.

So *this* is a safari!

On a guided mobile safari into Chobe National Park with Kalahari Tours,
you can sit back and let someone else do the driving.
And dinner will magically appear on your plate!

WORDS & PICTURES **TOAST COETZER**

We're up early and in the bush. Our guide, Kennedy Makgoa, explained over coffee that a lion was roaring nearby shortly before dawn. I didn't hear a thing – I slept soundly.

With me on the Kalahari Tours game viewer are two German guests, Jobst and Claudia Regul. I'm on what is called a "mobile safari" – something I've always thought of as an excursion for tourists from Europe or elsewhere. I mean, as South Africans, we like to do our own thing – drive our 4x4s to Kasane and explore Chobe as we please. But with every passing hour, I'm beginning to see the sense in a mobile safari. One thing's for sure, it *feels* like I'm on holiday. Which is the idea, right?

We're about 7 km west of the Serondela picnic spot in the river section of Chobe National Park (see map on p 112). Most visitors – in private vehicles or game viewers – would've entered the park when the gates opened at 5.30 am, but the majority would have entered on the Kasane side, which means we're virtually alone in this part.

After barely a kilometre, Kennedy gently brings the Land Cruiser to a halt – a lioness is lying in the soft, sandy road ahead. She turns to look at us and a cub becomes visible, too. Seconds later, we spot a big male skulking around.

We've barely started taking photos when all hell breaks loose. It seems as if the male wants to separate the cub from its mom – maybe even do it harm. The cub takes shelter under the low branches of a fever-berry tree. When the male tries to follow, the female snarls at him and a short, sharp fight – punctuated with loud growls – ensues just behind the bush. The cub sprints out the other side, pursued by the male, and the female again has to get between him and her baby. Suddenly the male seems to see the light and calms down. Phew, that was wilder than an episode of *Isidingo*!

The three lions lie down in the shade. After a while the curious cub leaves the safety of its mother and trots over to play with the irritated male. We all hold our breath – a swipe from the male would kill the youngster. But luckily nothing serious transpires.

Large herds of elephant and buffalo roaming the Chobe floodplain is an iconic Botswana sight.

Opposite page, clockwise from the top: A cub plays with a male lion during a morning game drive in Chobe National Park. Bettina and Rex Kelly are the owners of Kalahari Tours (and Coffee Buzz) in Kasane. Brunch at the bush camp – a BOGA site is for the exclusive use of your party during a mobile safari. Camp crew Mpolokang Ngurungu and Jacob Matengu tend the fire. A little bee-eater found thanks to the sharp eyes of guide Kennedy Makgoa.

IN OTHER WORDS

Jobst and Claudia Regul, Germany

We chose an overnight safari in Chobe because we wanted to experience the sounds of the bush. Compared to a lodge, you're much closer to nature and surrounded by unfamiliar, exciting sounds while sitting around the campfire.

We loved the young lion family and the interaction between the jealous father and the overprotective mother. Other great sightings were the elephants playing in the river and the mega herd of buffalo that crossed our path. The high density of animals was amazing.

Kennedy explains that the male might have thought this wasn't his cub, and the lioness managed to convince him otherwise. Either way, Jobst, Claudia and I are thrilled with our first sighting of the day.

Kennedy has plenty more up his sleeve. We've just left the lions when hundreds of buffalo stream across the road, heading into the bush from the nearby riverbank. I keep looking over my shoulder towards where the lions are...

Only now does another game viewer arrive at the scene – we've been alone so far. Exclusivity is one advantage offered by a mobile safari; another is that someone else cooks your meals. At 9.30 am, Kennedy turns back towards camp where brunch awaits...

After that, we say goodbye to the bush camp and depart on a final, slow game drive to the Sedudu gate.

My two-day, one-night excursion started the day before, when I met Rex Kelly from Kalahari Tours at Coffee Buzz, the small restaurant in Kasane run by his wife, Bettina. Coffee Buzz is also Kalahari Tours HQ: mobile safari guests assemble here for the start of their trip. After enjoying a light breakfast, I joined other guests on the nearby jetty and we boarded a boat for a morning cruise on the Chobe River.

I've done many such river trips in my life, and they never disappoint. Neither would this one. Our skipper, Chika Mabuku, guided us into great positions to photograph birds like an African darter drying its wings on a branch, a red bishop fidgeting in the reeds, a glossy ibis striding along an island and even a crested barbet, which was calling from a tree on the riverbank.

Besides hippo in the river, we saw plenty of other bigger animals – it was the last day of February and very hot and dry, which meant that everything had come to the water to drink. Small herds of elephant constantly moved in and out, and bulky buffalo bulls walked along the bank in their typically ponderous way.

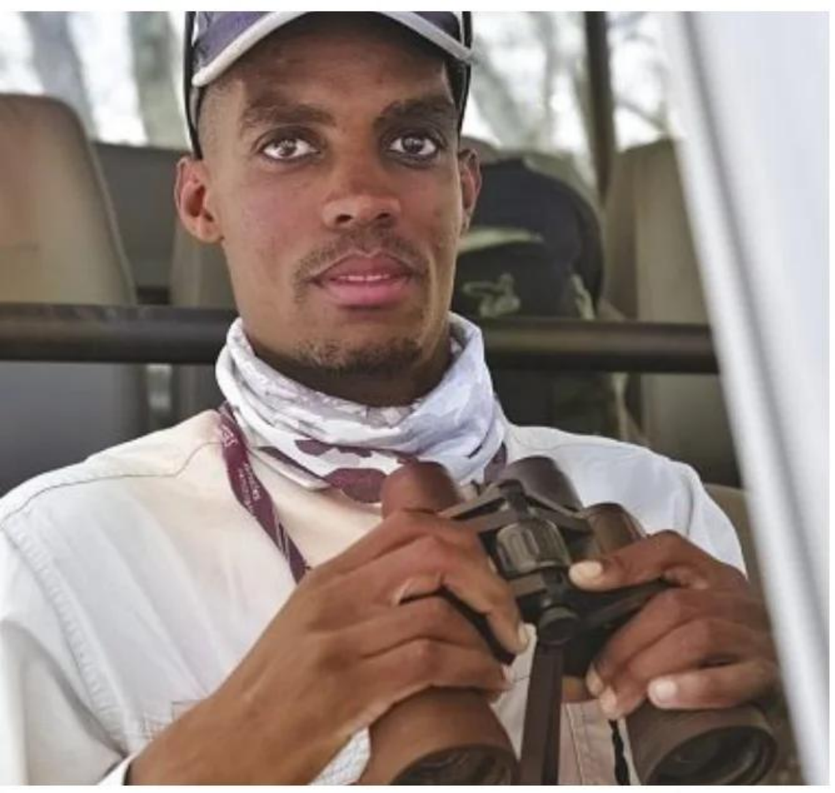
We had lunch back at Coffee Buzz, then Jobst, Claudia and I were introduced to Kennedy who would be our guide for the rest of the trip. We drove to the park and now explored the same shore we'd seen earlier from the boat. A flurry of vehicles had already found a sleepy pride of lions, and we joined them for a while before driving further west, past the Serondela picnic spot where we stopped to stretch our legs. By sunset we were alone on the banks of the river, watching an elephant bull swim across: a classic Chobe scene.

Camp was nearby. As we approached the stand of African teak trees, we could see our friendly campfire flickering. This was a BOGA camp (BOGA stands for Botswana Guides Association), accessible only to registered operators like Kalahari Tours. The public campsite, Ihaha, was a bit further west.

Other camp staff members – Mpolokang "MP" Ngurungu and Jacob Matengu – had already made our beds (a first for me on a camping trip!) and set up a bush shower and toilet. Soon, it was dinner time... Nobody stayed up too late around the fire – it had been a full day!

SIX PROS OF A MOBILE SAFARI

- **You don't have to drive.** Which means you don't have to worry about things like tyre pressure and fuel. On a mobile safari, you just sit back and enjoy the sights.
- **You don't need your own 4x4.** Chobe's roads are soft and sandy and you need a 4x4 to enter. A mobile safari is ideal if you don't own one. Park your car in Kasane and hop onto the game viewer.
- **You don't even need a car!** A mobile safari is great if you're flying into Kasane. You'll save a lot of time and hundreds – maybe thousands – of kilometres driving tiresome roads. Nip up north for a quick bush holiday – easy!
- **You don't have to cook.** All meals are provided, either at Coffee Buzz in Kasane or at the bush camp.
- **You don't need any camping kit**. Kalahari Tours provides a canvas tent; they make your bed (a mattress on the floor, with pillow, sheet, the works) and provide a camping chair.
- **You always have a guide by your side.** What's that bird in the tree over there? Okay, what kind of tree is it? Your guide will answer all your questions – fantastic!



KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Where do tours start? At Coffee Buzz, which shares premises with Kalahari Tours next to the main road (President Avenue) in Kasane.

What do I need? An overnight bag with clothes and personal items such as a camera, sunscreen, etc. All meals and some drinks are included in the price.

What does it cost? Kalahari Tours is offering a special rate to readers: When making your reservation, mention that you read about the offer in this magazine. These are the 2025 low-season rates (valid from start January to end May). In peak season (June and onwards) rates go up by 10%. We did the two-day/one-night option, which cost P3 700 (R4 958) per person. Other options: two-day/two-night P4 600 (R6 164) per person; three-day/two-night P4 950 (R6 633) per person. The luxury option (you get a roomier tent with a private bathroom) costs P9 504 (R12 735) per person for the three-day/two-night option.

What if I only want to go on a game drive? Kalahari Tours offers guided game drives and boat trips for P300 (R402) per person (minimum four people; trip lasts three hours). This rate doesn't include the park entry fee. Tip: Book a game drive for the morning and a boat trip for the same afternoon – then you save money by only having to pay park entry once. Want to go big? Book a five-hour river trip, which includes lunch, for P1 000 (R1 340) per person (minimum four people).

What else? Kalahari Tours offers day visits to Victoria Falls for P700 (R938) per person (minimum two people). They also arrange mobile safaris to the remote Savuti part of Chobe National Park (enquire for pricing). If you're flying into Kasane, Vic Falls or Livingstone, they can pick you up and transfer you to Kasane. Big groups can enquire about possible discounts.

Contact: 00 267 73 897 596 (WhatsApp); kalaharichobe.com info@kalaharichobe.com

Toast was a guest of Kalahari Tours. Thank you to Rex and Bettina Kelly for the invitation.

Where less is more

The Central Kalahari Game Reserve never gets crowded, and that's a good thing. It's a place where the animals still rule.

BY SCOTT RAMSAY

I have spent much of the last 15 years photographing game reserves in southern, eastern and central Africa. Parks like the Kruger and Etosha draw thousands of tourists year-round – understandably so. But increasingly I'm drawn back to places that are not as popular.

The Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR) is one of these places. It's not an easy area to visit, and not easy to photograph. The light is often harsh and the wildlife density is low. But that's okay with me because I can put down my camera and tune into the rhythm of this sacred land.

Then, when I least expect it, the wilderness offers a moment of pure photographic ecstasy. I scramble to get my camera and take the shot.

THE JOLLERS

We woke up early one morning at our campsite at Piper Pan because we'd heard lions roaring during the night. Before the sun rose, we watched a lioness and her three cubs sauntering across the pan towards the waterhole. The cubs were having a jol in the cool morning air, jumping on each other and chewing on their mom's tail. We were the only people to witness this moment.

GEAR: Canon EOS 5D Mark IV; Canon 500 mm lens
SETTINGS: Shutter speed 1/2 000 second; aperture f4.5; ISO 800

HIDE-AND-SEEK

We were enjoying our morning coffee at Letiahau campsite when we heard guineafowl calling in alarm. We drove to the pan and stood on top of the bakkie to scan the surroundings with binoculars.

There, far away in a thorn thicket, a leopard was watching us. I pulled out my 500 mm lens, pumped the ISO and managed to take a few pics in the low light. Then the leopard melted away, the guineafowl chilled out, and we went back to camp to skottel some bacon and eggs.

GEAR: Canon EOS 5D Mark IV; Canon 500 mm lens
SETTINGS: Shutter speed 1/160 second; aperture f4; ISO 2 000

TELL ME A TALE…

Campsites in the CKGR are unfenced, so lions and other animals can wander through at night. You need to be careful, but to me, this is what makes the CKGR so special.

This is the campsite at Letiahau, with my friends Ian Pletzer and Joni-Leigh Doran (and me) gathered around the fire. I took the photo in January 2020, just before the Covid lockdown. A few months later, we were stuck inside our homes back in the city and our time in the Central Kalahari seemed like a beautiful dream.

GEAR: Canon EOS 5D Mark IV; Canon 16 – 35 mm lens
SETTINGS: Shutter speed 5 seconds; aperture f7.1; ISO 800

COLOUR BURST

Summers are sweltering in the CKGR, with temperatures reaching into the 40s. But it's my favourite season to visit the Kalahari because if you time it right, the thunderstorms arrive and the land explodes into life.

On this particular visit in January 2020, there was a mass migration of butterflies. For several days, millions of brown-veined whites fluttered around us, seeking moisture from the pools of water that had collected after the rain.

GEAR: Canon EOS 5D Mark IV; Canon 100 – 400 mm lens
SETTINGS: Shutter speed 1/2 000 second; aperture f4.5; ISO 800

I'M BUSY HERE!

Near Piper Pan, we saw a group of bat-eared foxes crowding a burrow, harassing something inside the hole. Next thing, an aardwolf popped its head out! It was my first sighting of an aardwolf in many years.

GEAR: Canon EOS 5D Mark IV; Canon 500 mm lens
SETTINGS: Shutter speed 1/2 000 second; aperture f6.3; ISO 1 600

COOL CAT

On our way from Deception Pan to Letiahau, we were able to drive quite close to this African wildcat, which was cooling off in the shade of a thicket. I've always known this species to be skittish, but this one was very relaxed.

I've noticed that many of the animals in the CKGR are quite relaxed around humans. I'm not sure if it's because the reserve generally attracts visitors who are more respectful, or if it's because the animals simply don't see enough humans to develop a fear of them.

GEAR: Canon EOS 5D Mark IV; Canon 500 mm lens
SETTINGS: Shutter speed 1/1 000 second; aperture f5.6; ISO 800

FOGGY FAWN

The CKGR is a place of extreme contrasts. It was summertime and we'd just arrived in the reserve. We spent our first night in the campsite at Deception Valley and bizarrely for that time of year, a thick mist rolled in overnight and we woke to chilly temperatures. A small herd of springbok were grazing nearby.

By midday, the mist had burnt off and the thermometer showed 40° C.

GEAR: Canon EOS 5D Mark IV; Canon 500 mm lens
SETTINGS: Shutter speed 1/2 000 second; aperture f4.5; ISO 800

BEER O'CLOCK

At the end of a long, hot summer's day, the air finally cooled. For about half an hour, the light was hypnotically beautiful. It was a brief period of perfection, and more than enough reward for visiting this special wilderness.

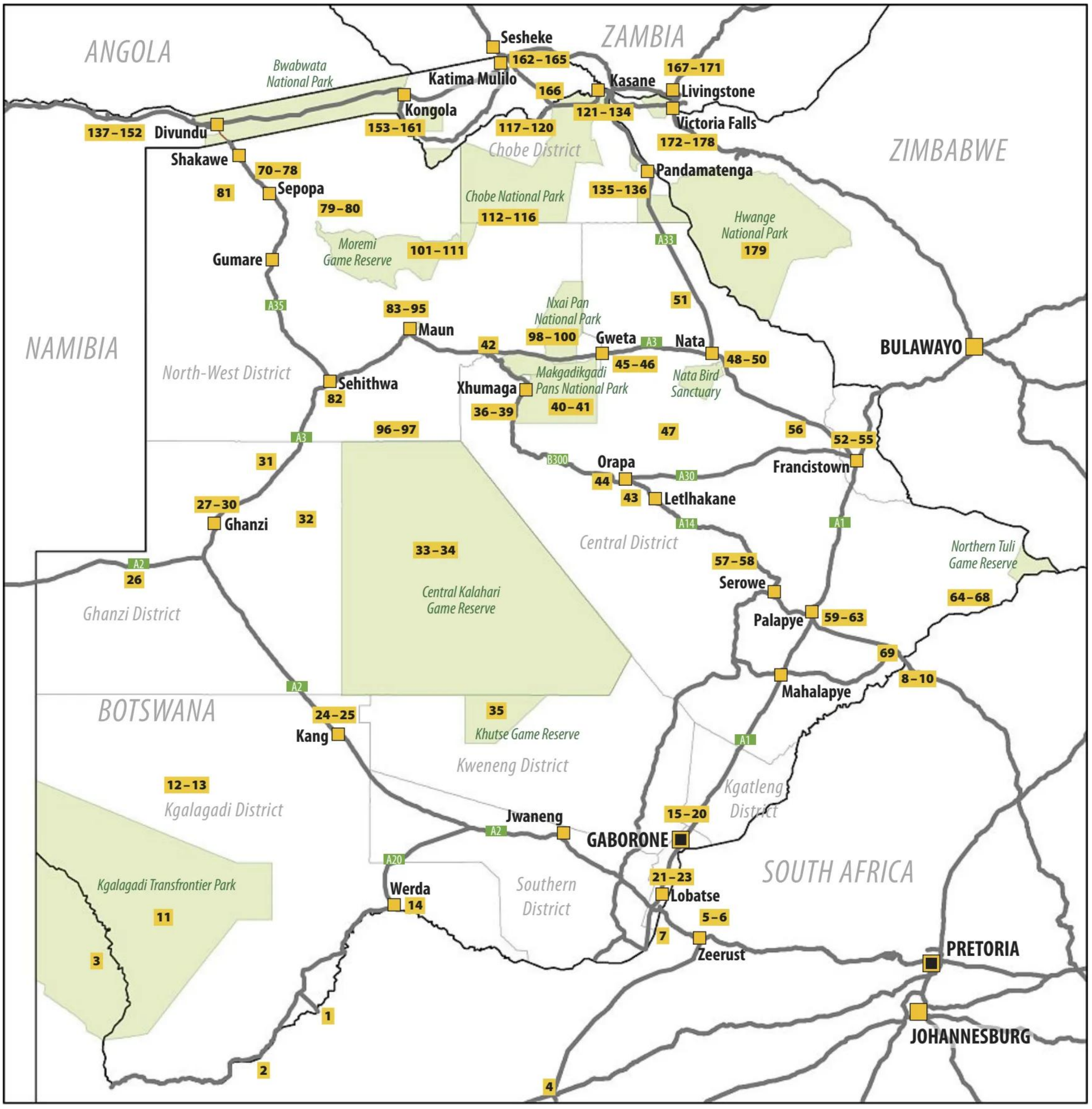
I took a few snaps of my friends Ian and Joni at Letiahau Pan, then joined them for a beer on top of our bakkie. Sometimes, the light in the Kalahari is so perfect that you actually have to put your camera down and appreciate it.

GEAR: Canon EOS 5D Mark IV; Canon 24 – 105 mm lens
SETTINGS: Shutter speed 1/200 sec; aperture f8; ISO 500

Scott Ramsay's new book Spirit of Africa *is out now.*
scottramsay.africa

The Khwai Concession lies next to the northern part of Moremi Game Reserve. Stay at affordable campsites like Khwai Safari Grounds or Magotho Camp (see p 110) and you'll still see plenty of game.

LE ROUX VAN SCHALKWYK



HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

RATES. The rates listed are subject to change and vary depending on the season. In Botswana, winter is considered peak season. Summer is low season and some places drop their rates. Always contact an establishment in advance and enquire about the latest prices. When making your booking, mention that you're a SADC citizen – you might qualify for a discount. Also ask about discounts for children.

Some rates include the mandatory government "bed levy"; others exclude this.

MONEY. Rates are listed in pula with the approximate rand value in brackets. Use this as a guideline only, since the exchange rate fluctuates. In Botswana, you will mostly have to pay using pula. In Namibia you can use rands; you'll need US dollars in Zambia and Zimbabwe.

CONTACT DETAILS. Some places are difficult to reach by phone. Send an e-mail, or contact them via Facebook or WhatsApp. When you call from South Africa, use the international dialling codes as listed.

GPS CO-ORDINATES. We have used the decimal degree format throughout this guide for the GPS co-ordinates listed. Set your GPS to the same format to avoid confusion.

If you plan to explore wilderness areas, purchase reliable GPS products from tracks4africa.co.za

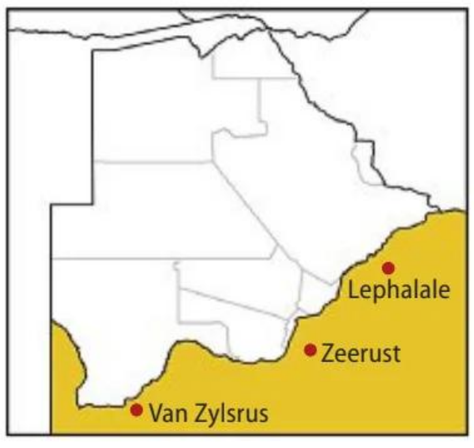
MAP NUMBERS. The numbers on the map above refer to corresponding numbers in our accommodation guide for the various parks, towns and tourist areas.

PLACES TO STAY

A holiday in Botswana means you'll be driving long distances… A good overnight spot is a necessity. Our writers recommend these places in Botswana and along its borders. Unless stated otherwise, the rates listed are for 2025. Use them as a guideline only. Always call or e-mail to double-check beforehand.

MORITI BUSH CAMP (#10)

CHARL VAN DER MERWE



SOUTH AFRICA

NORTHERN CAPE

Middelputs and McCarthy's Rest are small border posts north-west of Kuruman. If you plan to enter Botswana through the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, you have to use the Two Rivers border post at Twee Rivieren.

1 Cullinan Guest Farm

Next to the R380, about 17 km from McCarthy's Rest border post. Three campsites with electricity: R150 per person. Four chalets: R400 per adult; R200 per child under 12. The chalets sleep 10 in total; they share a communal kitchen, dining area and bathrooms.

082 491 6432 (Wilma-lé)

wilmaleoost@gmail.com

"Cullinan Guest Farm" on Facebook

2 Van Zylsrus Hotel

In the town of Van Zylsrus, about 40 km from the Middelputs border post. They have big rooms, a good restaurant and a swimming pool.

En suite rooms from R770 per person sharing B&B. Family room with a double bed and a bunk bed R770 per adult and R200 per school-going child B&B. There's also a self-catering flat for four people: R1 700 per night (breakfast not included). You can have a picnic on a dune as the sun sets, gaze at the stars, hike, or ride on a donkey cart.

Where? 27 Olivier Street

082 777 2301

vanzylsrushotel.com

3 Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park

The South African side of the park is more accessible than the Botswanan side and most of the major game-viewing roads are passable in a 4x2. (Make sure your vehicle has decent ground clearance and remember to lower your tyre pressure a bit – the park roads can be very corrugated.)

There's a variety of accommodation in the park, ranging from big rest camps (Twee Rivieren, Mata-Mata and Nossob) to smaller wilderness camps, catering to campers and those who prefer more comfort.

The park is hugely popular – book at least six months in advance. You'll find all the info and pricing at sanparks.org

NORTH WEST

Many SA tourists heading to Botswana drive through Vryburg towards the Ramatlabama border post, or through Zeerust towards Skilpadshek.

4 De Hoek Guesthouse

In Vryburg. They offer safe parking, free Wi-Fi, aircon and easy access to shops. The owners go out of their way for guests. Double room from R950 per night. Family room (sleeps 3 – 4) R1 400 per night. Breakfast R150 per person. Vryburg is 185 km from the border post at Ramatlabama.

Where? Corner of Naas Raubenheimer and Harry Walker streets.

✆ 082 779 3973 (Corné)

dehoekvryburg@gmail.com

5 Tapologo Lodge

Just 2 km east of Zeerust, next to the N4. They have 18 chalets and one bigger suite. 2024 rates: The chalets sleep two people each and cost R1 150 per night, B&B. The bigger family unit has a double bed and a sleeper couch and costs R1 500 per night, B&B. There is a swimming pool and a playground for the kids. Tapologo has its own restaurant so you don't have to mission to find food – just eat, shower and go to bed. Because it's right next to the N4, you can be back on the road at the crack of dawn. (It's about 55 km to the Skilpadshek border post.)

✆ 018 642 2444

tapologolodge.co.za

6 Doornrivier 4x4

The turn-off to this self-catering guest farm is about 9 km north of Zeerust along the R49 (the road to Tlokweng border post, 90 km further). They have a large farmhouse, perfect for a big tour group.

There are four rooms. Three rooms can sleep three people each (R600 per night); one room sleeps four (R700 per night). There are a couple of other units on the same premises: Twin-sleeper unit from R500 per night; four-sleeper from R800 per night. Camping R120 per adult; R60 per child younger than

CULLINAN GUEST FARM (#1)

SUPPLIED

KOKOMORI BIRDER'S LODGE (#9)

SUPPLIED

The Flame of Africa Tours, Travel & Safari Team have boats in the Zambezi area

Whether you want a stylish cruise or a fishing trip with a difference we have a boat to suit your every need. When visiting the Chobe area it's not what you know but WHO you know that makes the difference. We own and operate a fleet of boats and game drive vehicles to suit every taste and budget, we also do accommodation bookings!

CONTACT
Durban office: 072 880 5646
Kasane office: 00267 737 50380
Website: www.flameofafrica.com
E-mail: info@flameofafrica.com

FLAME of Africa
TOURS, TRAVEL & SAFARI

For latest prices and more information scan this QR code. No app required! Simply open your phone's camera and it will take you to our info pages.

BAOBAB'S BUSHVELD REST (#8)

SUPPLIED

13; free for children under 7.

Stay longer and drive their 4x4 trails. You can also cycle, swim or just enjoy the farm.

083 596 2143 (Rina)

7 Botsalano Game Reserve

See page 42.

LIMPOPO

Grobler's Bridge, north of Lephalale, is one of the most popular border posts because it's on the N11. The smaller Stockpoort border post is a quiet option, but keep in mind that there's a gravel road waiting for you on the Botswanan side.

GO! says: When you're organising your trip, budget at least three hours to cross the border. Although it probably won't take longer than an hour, it's always best to plan for unexpected delays. Don't be tempted to push too hard on the first day of your holiday. Rather stay on the South African side and tackle the border post when you're fresh and rested in the morning.

8 Baobab's Farm Cottages & Baobab's Bushveld Rest

Baobab's Bushveld Rest is in Marnitz on the N11 (Grobler's Bridge is 35 km away). Self-catering accommodation from R650 per night for two people.

The farm cottages are 7,5 km from Marnitz along a dirt road towards Swartwater – a vehicle with high ground clearance is preferable. Self-catering from R850 per night for two people. *go!* readers get a 10% discount – ask when you book!

082 708 1928 (Anél)

anel.malan@worldonline.co.za

baobabaccommodation.co.za

9 Kokomori Birder's Lodge

Kokomori is near Tom Burke; 25 km from Grobler's Bridge. The self-catering chalets are next to the Limpopo River and have recently been renovated. Each sleeps two to four people. There's also a room at the lapa that sleeps two people. R750 per adult; R300 per child aged 10 – 15; free for children under 10.

The private bush campsite has no power and has space for one tour group in up to two vehicles. R400 per night for two people; R150 per extra person. Stand for a caravan with power, ablutions and water R500 per night for two people; R250 per extra person.

082 962 8588 (Minda)

kokomorilodge@gmail.com

10 Moriti Bush Camp

This beautiful place has five exclusive campsites about 3,5 km from the Grobler's Bridge border post. The camps are far apart and all of them have washing-up and braai facilities, and private ablutions with hot water and flush toilets. Four of the five camps have power and lights.

Two of the camps are on the banks of the Limpopo River: Nyala costs R320 per person (max 20 people) and Matopi costs R270 per person (max 10 people).

There are also three campsites next to a natural pan: Kingfisher and Jacana both cost R250 per person (max 10 people each). Hornbill is the only camp with no electricity and costs R200 per person (max 10 people).

Children under 12 stay for free. If you book for three nights or more, or if your group is bigger than eight people, you qualify for a discount – enquire when you book. Take note: Moriti is closed from 1 November to 31 March.

079 515 6357 (Adele)

moriticamp.co.za

MAUN & KASANE

BOTSWANA

STOCK UP FOR A GOURMET SAFARI

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Call or email us to prepare your order.
Tailored to your preference:
Portioned to your needs • Vacuum packed

MAUN

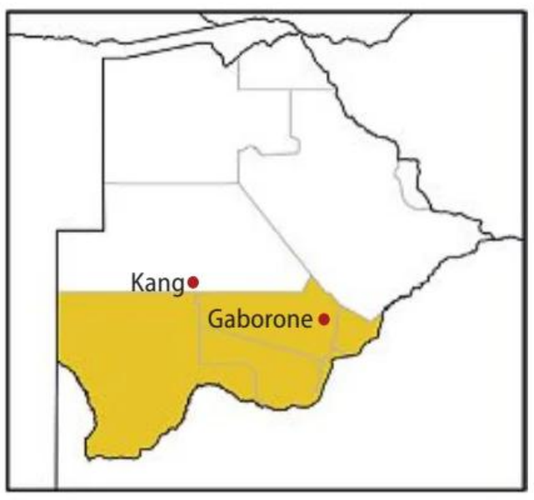
Sir Seretse Khama Ave • S19° 59' 17.59" • E23° 25' 32.77"
info@beefboys.co.bw • Cell: +267 72136006/+267 6864771

KASANE

Plot 2189, Kasane • S17° 47' 53.72" • E25° 9' 21.92"
chobefoods@team.co.bw • Cell: +267 71364587/+267 6250391

A back road near the SA/Botswana border about 50 km east of Gaborone.

ALEX ROCHARD



SOUTHERN BOTSWANA

11 Campsites in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park

Like other national parks in Botswana, the campsites on the Botswanan side of the Kgalagadi are run by different concessions. Most are in Mabuasehube – the eastern section of the park. The Mabuasehube and Mpayathutlwa camps (both in Mabua) are managed by the Inter-Tourism Group. The rest of the campsites are "public" camps, managed by the Botswana Department of Wildlife and National Parks (DWNP): Entrance Gate, Bosobogolo, Monamodi, Lesholoago, Khiding, Matopi, Sizatswe, Thupapedi, Kaa, Swartpan, Gnus Gnus, Polentswa, Rooiputs and Two Rivers. The three campsites used only on the 4x4 trails are also run by DWNP: Sesatswe, Lang Rambuka (Polentswa Wilderness Trail – three days) and Mosomane (Mabua-Nossob Wilderness Trail – two days).

You can enter the park from South Africa or Botswana. If you stay inside the park boundaries, you can move around on both sides without having to show your passport. However, when you enter from South Africa and exit into Botswana, or the other way around, you must get your passport stamped at the Twee Rivieren border post. If you use this border post, or the one between South Africa and Namibia at Mata-Mata, you have to stay in the park for at least two nights.

Park fees: P20 (R27) per person per day; P4 (R5) per vehicle per day. Camping at the Inter-Tourism Group camps (Mabuasehube and Mpayathutlwa): P180 (R241) per person. campsites@inter-tourismgroup.com
00 267 391 0848

Camping at the public camps (all the others): P30 (R40) per person. Wilderness trails: P200 (R268) per person per day (camping rate is not included). 00 267 686 1265
dwnp@gov.bw

ZUTSHWA

A small village north of the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park.

12 Zutshwa Stop Over

At Zutshwa Stop Over, you can camp for P100 (R134) per person, or you can stay in a twin-sleeper room for P300 (R402) per night. Visit the website and download the PDF

brochures for route info.
GPS: Zutshwa Stop Over S24.14334 E21.24837
00 267 75 858 960
zutshwa.com

13 KD2 concession

The area between Zutshwa and the Kaa gate into the Kgalagadi is a private hunting and ecotourism concession called KD2 (Kgalagadi District 2). Self-drive tourists may only travel through the area to get to and from the park gate. The transit route is 4x4 only and you need a permit: Get one in Zutshwa at the self-service kiosk (GPS: S24.14193 E21.24628) or beforehand via tour operator Wild Botswana Safaris – P50 (R67) per vehicle.

You can currently camp at Name Pan, Kaa Pan and Nakalatshepe Pan in KD2. Camping costs P120 (R161) per person, plus a voluntary conservation fee of P50 (R67) per vehicle. (You can also camp in the nearby KD1 concession at Phoswane Pan and Masetleng Pans – enquire using the contact details below.) Pre-booking is compulsory – contact Wild Botswana Safaris
info@wildbotswanasafaris.com
00 267 750 999 82 (WhatsApp)
072 869 8684 (WhatsApp).

WERDA

The filling station in Werda has closed down. Get fuel in Bray or in Tshabong.

14 Cornwall Safari Lodge

One of our southern Botswana favourites – it's about 24 km east of Werda. Camping P200 (R268) per adult; free for kids under 18. Rooms from P995 (R1 333) per night for two people sharing. There's a restaurant, swimming pool and children's playground.
072 798 5051 (Heather)
cornwallsafaris.co.za

GABORONE

The capital is busy during rush hour – avoid the A1 between Gaborone and Lobatse from 4 pm to 6 pm. Wait out the traffic at the Gaborone Yacht Club.

15 Peermont Hotels

If you're dusty, tired and in need of a good meal, a stay at one of these casino hotels in town may be the solution. The four-star Walmont Hotel is at the Grand Palm Hotel Casino and Convention Resort and offers luxury rooms. The three-star Mondior Hotel is in the CBD and has self-catering suites. Both offer Wi-Fi, air conditioning, swimming pools and restaurants. Check the website for the latest rates.
0860 777 900 (in SA)
peermont.com

16 Mokolodi Nature Reserve

You're on a bush holiday, right? Don't stay in Gabs proper, rather go to this reserve 9 km south of the capital. The campsite has five stands – our favourites are Korwe and Blue Thorn. Sites are for a maximum of eight people. Camping P250 (R335) one-off fee for the stand; P150 (R201) per adult per night; P75 (R101) per child. There's no power; donkey boiler for hot showers.

A chalet for two adults and two children under 12 costs P900 (R1 206) per night during the week or P1 150 (R1 541) per night on weekends. A chalet for four adults and four children under 12 costs P1 600 (R2 144) per night during the week or P1 800 (R2 412) per night on weekends. Tourism levy P10 (R13) per person. Rates valid until March 2025.
00 267 316 1955/6
00 267 7132 1021 (WhatsApp)
mokolodi.com

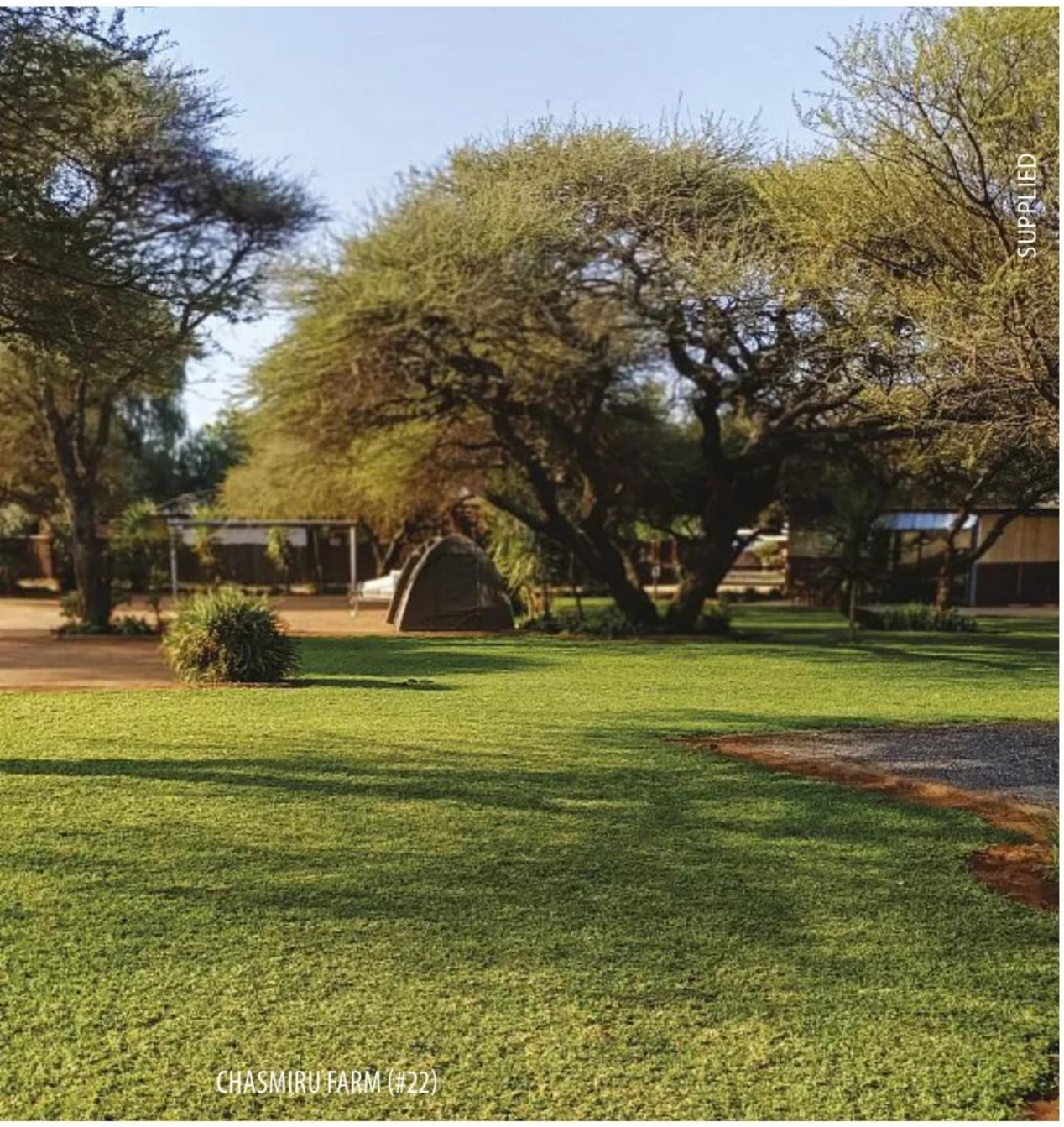
SUPPLIED
THE KLEYNHANS HOME (#18)

17 Mokolodi Backpackers

Less than 2 km from Mokolodi Nature Reserve. There's no signage in front, just the number of the plot (86) and a big wooden gate. This is not your normal backpackers where you're filed into a dorm like sardines: They have separate units with communal ablution facilities and a communal kitchen, plus units with private facilities. Luxury chalet with a kitchen and bathroom P1 150 (R1 541) per night for up to three people; private chalet P980 (R1 313) per night for two people sharing; twin cabin P855 (R1 146) per night for two people sharing; communal cabin (four beds) P330 (R442) per person. Camping P180 (R241) per person. Entertainment area, swimming pool and boma available. Breakfast, lunch packs and dinner on request.
00 267 74 111 165
072 043 6255 (SA bookings)
backpackers.co.bw

18 The Kleynhans Home

Turn off the A1 about 10 km south of Gabs. Stefan and Linda Kleynhans go out of their way to make you feel at home. Book a room in the main building and make use of the braai area and swimming pool. Rooms have en suite bathrooms, aircon, Wi-Fi and a kitchenette. The popular Bush Camp is close by, with three luxury, en suite safari tents that share a


SUPPLIED

CHASMIRU FARM (#22)

lapa/kitchen. There's a wood braai and a gas braai, and a splash pool.

Rooms and tents are R1 500 per night for two people sharing. Groups get discount. New campsite for a maximum of four vehicles: R220 per person. Power, water, Wi-Fi, ablutions and firewood included.

00 267 71 377 100

"The Kleynhans Home" on Facebook

19 Waterside Cottages & Villas

On the banks of the Notwane River, only 14 km south of the CBD. The fully equipped self-catering units are private and have either a water, bush or garden view. Each unit has its own braai, kitchenette, air conditioning, and free Wi-Fi.

A chalet for two people costs P1 380 (R1 849) per night. A villa for two people with its own plunge pool costs P1 970 (R2 640) per night. A family unit for four people costs P2 400 (R3 216) per night and a family unit for six people, with a private pool and fire pit, costs P2 990 (R4 007) per night. All rates include breakfast.

Where? Plot 45, Crocodile Way, Notwane

00 267 7210 4276

watersidebotswana.com

20 The Lazy Duchess B&B

This guesthouse is just north of Gabs in the suburb of Phakalane, off the A1 to Francistown. It offers safe parking, a swimming pool and braai facilities. Self-catering rooms from P995 (R1 333) per night for two people.

Where? Plot 21532, Dille Close, Phakalane

072 798 5051 (Heather)

strumpher.heather@gmail.com

LOBATSE

If you want to overnight near the Skilpadshek border post, Lobatse is your best option.

21 Lord Cumberland Hotel

The hotel is in town. 2024 rates: Standard room from P1 400 (R1 876) per night for two people. Enquire about weekend specials. There's a restaurant if you want breakfast, lunch or a proper Botswana steak for dinner. If there's a party going on in the bar, join in.

Where? Plot 474, Khama Avenue

00 267 533 0281

lch.co.bw

22 Chasmiru Farm

Near the Skilpadshek border post, about 5 km from Lobatse. Camping (with power, water and braai stands) costs R200 per person. There's free firewood, plus a well-equipped kitchen and laundry room. Self-catering chalet R750 per night for two people – there is air conditioning, Wi-Fi and braai facilities.

00 267 72 666 0301 (WhatsApp)

00 267 71 401 122

susancronje@ymail.com

23 Big Valley Game Lodge

The turn-off to this lodge is about 14 km south of Lobatse along the A1 road. 2024 rates: Camping costs P210 (R281) per person. Hotel room P1 980 (R2 653) per night for two people. Chalet accommodation from P1 680 (R2 251) per night for two people, including breakfast. There's a restaurant and a swimming pool. Many activities on offer: zipline, game drives, quad-bike rides and water slides.

00 267 535 0103

bigvalleylodge.com

KANG

Kang might be tiny, but it's an important halfway stop on the Trans-Kgalagadi Highway and therefore has filling stations and shops.

24 Kalahari Rest

This is a great place to spend your first or last night in Botswana. It's about 25 km north of town with a swimming pool and restaurant. Pitch your tent on soft sand under camel thorn trees. Camping with power P190 (R255) per adult; P95 (R127) per child under 12. Chalet for two to three people P1 150 (R1 541) per night. Standard twin room P700 (R938) per night. Game drives should be arranged before arrival.

00 267 73 774 009

bmhe@it.bw

kalaharirest.com

25 Nkisi Stonehouse

In Kang, behind the Ultra Stop filling station. 2024 rates: Double room from R1 274 per night. Family room from R1 751,40 per night. There's safe parking, braai spots, swimming pool and restaurant.

00 267 651 7379

reservations@nkisistonehousekang.com

DID YOU KNOW?

The so-called "Male Hill" (1 390 m) at Tsodilo Hills in north-western Botswana is often called the highest mountain in Botswana, but that's not true. There are a few mountains near Gaborone that are higher. Interestingly, it is often debated exactly which peak is the tallest! A recent report stated Manyelanong Hill (1 486 m) near Otse as highest, with Monalanong Hill (1 476 m) near the village of Mogonye as the second highest.