

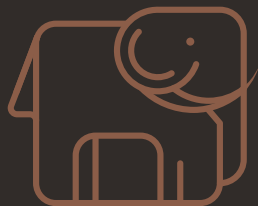


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SELF DRIVE GUIDE TO BOTSWANA



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AS WILD AS IT GETS

Every country has a highlight – that one thing that puts it on the map. Botswana is different. It boasts several of the planet's most celebrated, and totally wild destinations. From the vast Kalahari and the miraculous Okavango Delta to the enigmatic Savuti Channel, it's a country coveted by wildlife enthusiasts the world over and is more than a one-stop destination. Getting the best of Botswana requires time, a 4x4 and knowing exactly where to go. This guide helps you to do that by providing an overview of the best routes, but more importantly, information on which stands to pick at the campsites, where to stop, what to look out for and road conditions. It's the kind of information you won't find in a regular guide book.

Getaway

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MAP KEY

-  Recommended route
-  General roads
-  Formal 4x4 trail
-  Rivers/pans/marsh/delta
-  National parks/game reserves
-  International borders
-  Towns/points of interest
-  Accommodation



NEED TO KNOW

Border control SA citizens with valid passports get a free tourist visa at the border. McCarthy's Rest, Platjan and Mohembo are open from 6am to 6pm, Pontdrift from 8am to 4pm, Two Rivers from 7.30am to 4pm and Bokspits from 8am to 4.30pm. There is a Road tax and mandatory insurance per vehicle and per trailer. If you don't own your vehicle, you'll need a certified letter granting permission to cross borders.

Money matters Credit cards are widely accepted, but facilities are unreliable in remote areas. ATMs run out of cash so carry enough for emergencies. Rands are often accepted near the SA border but further north it's pula or, on the Zim border, US dollars.

National Park bookings The Botswana Department of Wildlife and National Parks (DWNP) handles park entrance fees and also operates all campsites in the Kgalagadi (page 4), certain campsites in the Central Kalahari (page 12) and Makgadikgadi (page 19).

Bookings at non-DWNP camps must be paid before park entrance and vehicle fees. DWNP fees can be paid in cash at park gates (credit-card facilities are sometimes available), in advance at a DWNP office or through central reservations. +267-318-0774, www.dwnp@gov.bw

Camp operators Bigfoot Tours operates in Khutse (page 13) and the Central Kalahari (page 17), +267-395-3360, www.bigfoottours.co.bw Gaing-O Community Trust operates Kubu Island campsite (page 21), +267-297-9612. Kwalate Safaris operates in Chobe (page 51) and Moremi (page 29), +267-686-1448. Xomae Group operates in Moremi and Nxai Pan (page 25), +267-686-2221, www.xomaesites.com. SKL operates in Chobe, Moremi and Makgadikgadi (page 25), +267-686-5365, www.sklcamps.com

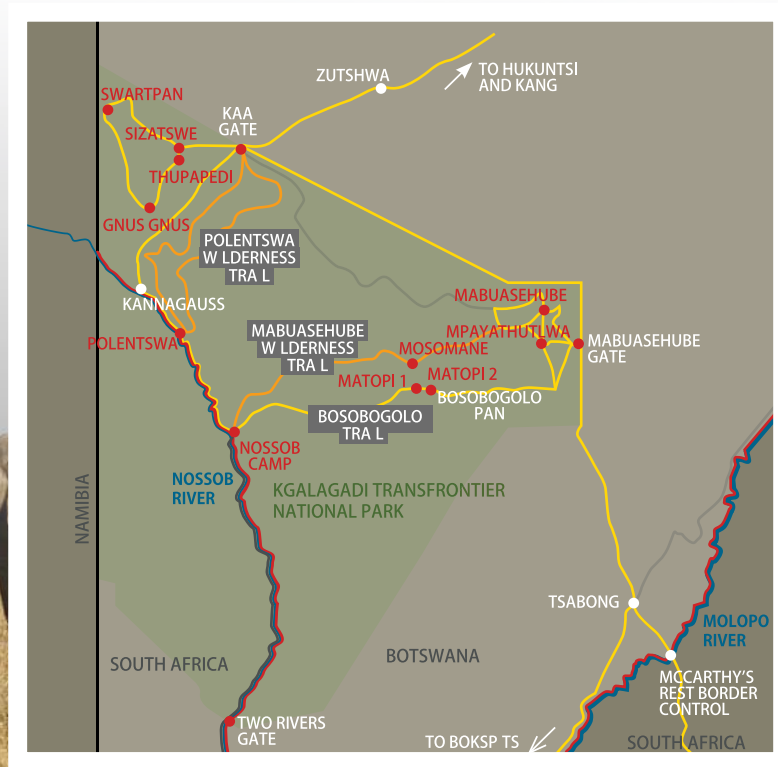
The Tsodilo Hills community operates Tsodilo Hills (page 29), +267-687-8025. Khwai Development Trust operates in the Khwai community concession (page 47), +267-680-1211.

Tyre pressure Experts differ on exact pressures but go as low as 1 bar for sand and mud, and between 2 and 2.4 bar on graded dirt and gravel. In general, softer tyres (around 2 bar) are better for sharp rocks, but provide less protection to the wheel rim. If overspun at pressures below 1 bar, tyres may come off the rim. Tyre pressures should be taken when the tyres are cold.

Vet fences Botswana has vet control fences, including foot-and-mouth stations where travellers are required to disinfect shoes and car wheels before continuing. Vet fence checks can be anything from a smile and a wave to a full inspection. Fresh red meat and citrus are the major concerns and may be confiscated.

KGALAGADI TRANSFRONTIER PARK

Mabuasehube to Kaa



The Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park covers 37 256km² of seasonal pans and Kalahari grassland to the east and west of the Nossob River – the natural border between Botswana and South Africa.

Two Rivers (Twee Rivieren) Gate is the most-used entrance at the park's southernmost tip. Here you can choose to stay within park boundaries, or pass through immigration which allows you to exit into Botswana further north.

On the Botswana side, the best part of the park is around Mabuasehube to the east. To reach this area from Two Rivers is a full day's drive from Nossob Camp to Bosobogolo Pan, and then it's another full day back west to explore the area around Kaa. With the east-west tracks offering much the same in game viewing and scenery, driving both ways is a waste. So to get the most out of the Botswana sections, we suggest avoiding Two Rivers completely and entering Botswana at one of the border controls along the Molopo River.

From the west, the Bokspits border post is best, with a good tar road all the way to Tsabong. From the east, cross at McCarthy's Rest, and head north. In both cases, Tsabong is the last stop for fuel and supplies. Just north of town the tar ends, with graded dirt (beware of potholes) for the first 75km. 36km before the Mabuasehube Gate, thick sand slows progress dramatically so allow about 2.5 hours to reach the gate.

The Mabuasehube region has some of the best wild camping in Botswana – a country with no shortage of spectacular campsites. There are several camping areas to choose from, with two to four stands at each. All are unfenced, but only three have waterholes, which is where you're most likely to see game – especially Kalahari lion. These are the Mabuasehube and Mpayathutlwa pans, and the campsite at Mabuasehube Gate. The latter has (rather dilapidated) ablutions and although there's a photo in the gatehouse showing a leopard behind the bookings desk, it still feels like you're not quite in the park.

PIT STOPS

Tsabong ATM, shops, bottle store, fuel, tyre repair, mechanic, DWNP office **Hukuntsi** Basic supplies, fuel, mechanic, tyre repair **Kang** ATM, basic supplies, fuel, tyre repair, mechanic, DWNP office

ROAD CONDITIONS

Thick sand 36km south of Mabuasehube Gate, and sandy hills on the two Nossob trails. Vehicles with trailers might struggle. Roads in the northwest are little-used and overgrown.

PARK GATES

Two Rivers, Mabuasehube and Kaa Gates have water and ablutions and are open from dawn to dusk, although late arrivals can usually find a ranger at the gate compound. There's no entry after dark, but if there's space you can sleep at the gate stands.

WHERE TO STAY

The DWNP manages all campsites on the Botswana side. For Camping costs, park and vehicle fees see website.
www.dwnp@gov.bw

ACTIVITIES

The Mabuasehube and Polentswa Wilderness 4x4 Trails are booked through the DWNP, in addition to usual park and vehicle fees.



The sites further in, especially at the two main pans, are the ones to book.

Mabuasehube Pan has four stands: stand 1 with beautiful views from a low ridge to the west, stands 2 and 3 to the south, and stand 4 on the eastern side. Mpayathutlwa Pan has three stands, each well spaced along the north of the pan. There are taps at some stands, but water and other facilities are not guaranteed. Some have pit loos and a wooden A-frame for shade, but the sites are very basic, so you'll need to take everything with you – and be prepared to find a bush behind which to do your business.

From Mabuasehube there are four routes to the northwestern section of the park: the Bosobogolo Trail, the Mabuasehube Wilderness Trail, the Mabua-Kaa track and the cut line running along the park's northern border.

The southernmost of these, the Bosobogolo trail, is the main route west – sandy in places, but not treacherous, and with campsites at the Matopi Pans halfway if you want to break the 7-hour drive to Nossob

Camp. Further north, the Mabua-sehube Wilderness Trail is an exclusive, one-way 4x4 trail that also ends at Nossob. Only one booking per day is allowed, with an overnight stop at the beautiful and totally isolated Mosomane Pan. The camps at Matopi and Mosomane have no facilities, so take everything with you.

Slightly further north, the Mabua-Kaa track runs northwest to Kaa Gate. It's overgrown and underused and the 7-hour trip is not recommended unless you love total isolation, or specifically want to scratch your vehicle. Instead, exit the park and go to Kaa via the cut line along the northern border. It may seem less exciting, but there are no fences along the road and game moves freely between the park and the buffer zone to the north. There are two stands at Kaa Gate, also unfenced, and unlike Mabuasehube Gate, these do feel wild, with a permanent waterhole at the entrance that makes it a popular spot for lion. From Kaa there are three southern tracks to explore.

To the southeast lies the three-day Polentswa Wilderness 4x4 Trail which, like the Mabuasehube Trail, must be booked in advance. Its three overnight stands are only available to trail users.



Male Kudu near pan



To reach the start you'll need to take the second southern option: the main track to Kannagauss (sandy, but easy going). From there, it's a short hop to Polentswa and the first leg of the trail.

The third route from Kaa heads west to Swartpan. This loop has the only other camping in the region, with one stand each at Sizatswe, Thupapedi and Gnus Gnus, and two stands 500m apart on the northern edge of Swartpan. None of these has water or facilities and there's isolation aplenty. The loop is a mix of white pan and red Kalahari sand, corrugated and overgrown for long stretches; a 7-hour, bumpy round trip with not much to see that's different from Mabuasehube.

Back at Kaa Gate, the exit road north to Zutshwa is arguably better for game and scenery than any in the northwest of the park. A sandy track winds into the suddenly open bush, with stretches of beautiful grassland that are home to huge herds of eland and oryx.

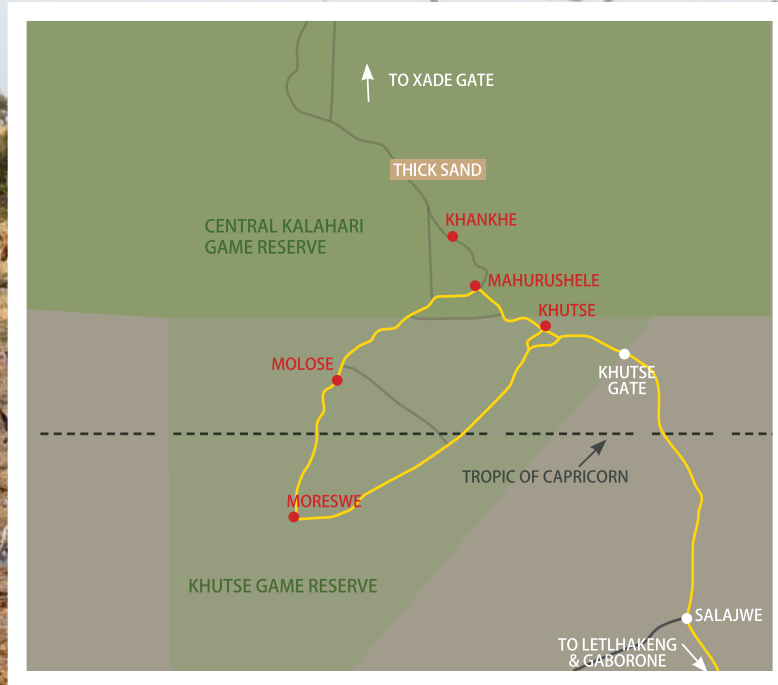
From Zutshwa, the road widens and it's good gravel to Hukuntsi, and from there it's an hour on tar to the A2 highway at Kang.



Zebra in the Zutshwa area

KHUTSE GAME RESERVE

Khutse Gate to the Central Kalahari



Open a map of Botswana and the central Kalahari is unmistakable: a vast, near-featureless expanse at almost dead centre. Tacked to the bottom, and often overlooked, is a roughly triangular protrusion – a relatively small cluster of pans and campsites joined by a loop of Jeep track.

This unobtrusive lump is Khutse Game Reserve – flat, quiet and beautiful – where the single, main track is well-enough travelled not to be overgrown, but not so well used that you won't have entire campsites to yourself.

Entrance to the reserve is via a single gate in the east, which in turn has just one access road: 100km of wide, well-graded dirt that heads north from the tarred highway at Letlhakeng. This is the last fuel point before the park and, if you're continuing north into the Central Kalahari Game Reserve, this will be your last pit stop for at least 600km. Be sure to fill up here before entering the park and be aware that there's deep sand on the northern track that will significantly increase your fuel consumption.

There's a single overflow stand at the gate, but the first of the reserve's five main camping areas is 15km to the west at Khutse Pans – a clutch of 10 neat stands approximately 100m apart, each with a small tree for shade and two small, wood-screened structures containing a pit loo and bucket shower, the standard ablution arrangement for all campsites in the reserve (note: the shower is just a rig – there is no water at any of the campsites).

The campsite at Khutse Pans is the largest in the reserve. Stands 8 and 10 have the biggest trees for shade, while stand 2's loo and shower are some distance from the camping area for some reason. Otherwise, there is little difference between the stands, which feel wonderfully open, with 360-degree views from a grassy plain between the two modest pans. None of the campsites in the park is fenced, so always be aware of animals passing through – there are lions about.

PIT STOPS

Letlhakeng ATM, basic supplies, fuel, tyre repair

ROAD CONDITIONS

Excellent, graded dirt to the gate and mostly smooth, open Jeep track around the southern loop. Some short overgrown sections. Thick sand starts north of Mahurushele Pan and continues almost unbroken for 230km to the Central Kalahari's Xade Gate and beyond. The cut line north is overgrown and very slow going.

PARK GATE

Open from dawn to 6:30pm. You'll get a free photocopied map on arrival. Cool drinks and snacks are on sale. Borehole water is available when the pump works.

WHERE TO STAY

Bigfoot Tours operates all five campsites in Khutse. For Camping costs & park fees see website. +267-395-3360, www.bigfoottours.co.bw



50km to the southwest you'll find the four Moreswe Pan campsites. The track there is easy to negotiate, despite one or two overgrown patches, but there's not much game to see in the waist-high bush en route.

Arriving at the campsites from the east, stands 3 and 4 are just off the main track, about 100m apart in a dense thicket. About 2km around the pan to the north, stand 1 is also hidden in thick scrub, but stand 2, situated on a low rise to the west, is definitely the one to book. It's the only stand with views onto the pan and although the ground is at a slight gradient, it's flat enough to pitch a tent and the view of the sunrise is spectacular.

The road north to the Molose camping area is in reasonable condition and not too sandy. The stands there are in two sections: stands 2, 3 and 4 lie just off the road to the east, about 300m apart, but stand 1 is completely separate, another 3km further up the road.

Of the first three, pick stand 3 for the best views and stands 3 or 4 for more privacy.

Stand 1, to the north, is practically on the road, and is unremarkable except for its proximity to the Molose waterhole (about 500m away). It's the only permanent water for kilometres in any direction so there's a good chance of seeing game up close and personal.

On the 25km stretch northeast to Mahurushele Pan, you'll hit the first stretches of thick sand. Avoid the two straight cut lines north and east, which are sandy and very overgrown, and continue up the main track, which firms up briefly around the pan.

Of Mahurushele's three stands, number 3 is the best. Stands 1 and 2 are just off the main track to the south (number 2 is slightly more private, with a bigger tree for shade), but 1.5km to the north, stand 3 is tucked under a large acacia tree and although you can't actually see the pan from the site, it's just metres away, behind some low bush.

The fifth and final camping area is 10km north at Khankhe Pan. This is arguably the least interesting camping area in the reserve, with four stands clustered around the main track in flat, sandy scrubland. Avoid stand 1, which is right on the road. Stands 2 and 4 are the most private, with small trees for shade.

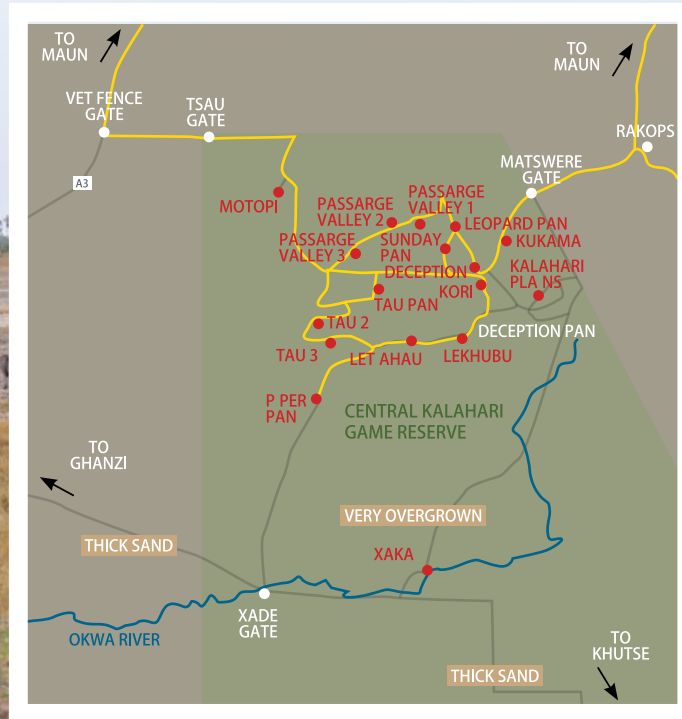
From here the track continues to the northern Central Kalahari. It's thick sand all the way, so a time-saving alternative is to exit the park at Khutse Gate and take the tar roads to Rakops or Ghanzi.

TIP

Deep sand, such as on the track between Khutse and northern Central Kalahari, significantly increases fuel consumption. Be sure to take this into account when planning fuel stops.

CENTRAL KALAHARI GAME RESERVE

Exploring the Northern Central Kalahari



Herd of Zebra grazing on grassland

There are many public-access camping areas in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR). Most of the game congregates around the pan systems to the north, which is also where you'll find the popular camps and game-viewing tracks. Other than at the gates, there is no water at any of the camps in the park.

If you have braved the sandy, overgrown trail from Khutse, Xaka (or Xaxa) is a worthwhile stop. The area has two sites, stand 1 on a low hill feels a little more secure and away from the action, while stand 2 – 600m to the east – is more lively (and smelly) beside a permanent waterhole. The water attracts game for kilometres around, and the area is known for lion and elephant. Both stands are extremely basic with no facilities. You'll need a GPS just to know you've arrived.

Xade Gate is 65km to the west: 3 hours of bumps, sand and stops to clear the trail. Things firm up with 5km to go, and there's good water and hot showers at the gate.

Here the track splits in two, with the option to stay in the park and drive the 75km north to Piper Pan, or exit and head for Ghanzi, 175km to the west. If you're exiting, the first 70km to Ghanzi is very thick, deep sand, but it becomes graded dirt at the Xade waterworks so the last 100km is much quicker. If heading north, the trail to Piper Pan is slow: alternately hard-packed and sandy as the road crosses a succession of small pans.

Piper has two sites – stand 2 on a low, sandy rise just off the southern track, and stand 1, which is 3.5km to the north, under a clump of acacias on the pan's edge. Both have shade, and pit-loo and bucket-rig ablutions, but stand 1 is best, with great views across the pan and a good chance of seeing bat-eared fox.

30km up the road, the track splits again, into a 230km loop that is the focal point of CKGR.

PIT STOPS

Ghanzi ATM, shops, bottle store, fuel, mechanic, tyre repair, DWNP office
Rakops Basic supplies, fuel, tyre repair

ROAD CONDITIONS

The track from Khutse is overgrown, with thick sand to Xade Gate. West of the gate, the sand continues for 70km, then the track is graded dirt to the A3 highway. The 40km between Rakops and Matswere Gate is sandy, but firm, with some deep mud after rain. Best access is via Tsau Gate: a good track, barring thick sand 25km from the tarred A3 (there's a vet fence control 100m north of where the track joins the tar). Inside the park, pan roads can be muddy and impassable after rain; in the dry winter, the resulting ruts are deep and bumpy. Between pans, the tracks are easier to negotiate. There's thick sand on the cut line west of Deception campsite.

PARK GATES

Xade Gate has good water and hot showers. Matswere and Tsau gates have ablutions, but the water is brackish and limited. Gate times are dawn to 6.30pm.



TIP

The best game viewing in the Central Kalahari is around the pans. Poper Pan, Sunday pan and Deception pan are a must visit.

There are eight camping areas RAKOPS along the loop: Deception, the biggest, with six stands; Kori with four; Passarge Valley with three spaced far apart along the northern track; Sunday Pan with three; and Leopard Pan with one stand, which is 7km north of Sunday Pan. Then there are the Tau sites to the west and Letiahau and Lekhubu on the southern loop. The Tau sites are slightly confusing: Tau 1 is no longer in use as it was deemed too close to the luxurious Tau Pan Camp; Tau 3 at Phokoje Pan (with a completely flattened toilet) is a single stand on its own; and Tau 2, another single stand on San Pan, is a further 15km down the track. Letiahau and Lekhubu do not have ablutions, and although there's a waterhole near Letiahau, there isn't much to recommend these sites.

Besides Piper Pan, there are two remaining camping areas off the loop: Kukama and Motopi. The former is a single stand with no ablutions and access is along a rutted track off the main road to Matswere Gate.

The three stands at Motopi, near Tsau Gate, are also to be avoided. They have the standard ablutions, but are overgrown. Stand 2 has good sunset views, but the others are difficult to reach.

For great game viewing and neatest campsites (all have standard ablutions), Piper Pan, Deception, Sunday Pan and Kori are the best. The three Passarge Valley stands are also worth a visit, though. They are tucked in sheltered thickets along the gentle rise that serves as the valley wall in the pancake-flat Kalahari. However water and game are scarce on this stretch and there are better sightings to the southeast.

At Deception Camp (15km north of Deception Pan), the stands are similar: large and tidy, with plenty of shade. At Kori, stand 1 is the best – a cosy camp, closest to the pan. Kori 3 is the biggest, a sprawling site under low trees. Sunday Pan has the best permanent water in the area, and stands 3 and 4 are great.

They're quite close together, but at just 600m from the waterhole on the highest rise in the area, they have beautiful views over the pan to the west. Everywhere in the CKGR is desolate and remote – it's why you go there. But even a slight elevation makes the vast expanse that much more impressive.

WHERE TO STAY

Bigfoot Tours operates Piper Pan, Letiahau, Lekhubu, Kukama, Sunday Pan, Passarge Valley and Motopi. The DWNP operates the gate camps plus Xaka, Kori, Deception and the two Tau sites (San and Phokojie Pans.) For camping costs see websites: www.bigfoottours.co.bw & www.dwnp@gov.bw

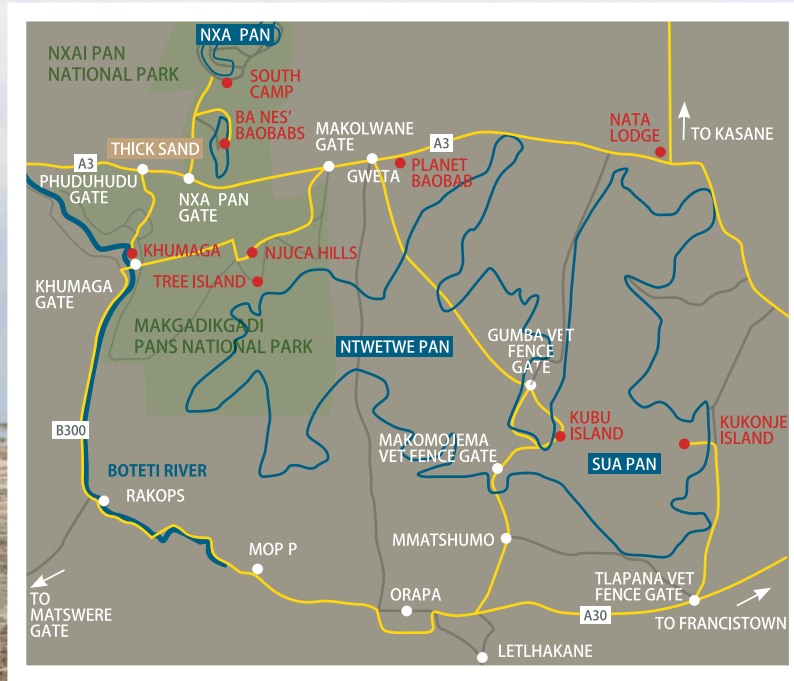
OTHER ACCOMMODATION

Kalahari Plains Camp (+27-11-807-1800, www.wilderness-safaris.com) and Tau Pan Camp (+267-686-1449, www.kwando.com) have various luxury packages. Visit website for park and vehicle fees.



SUA AND NTWETWE PANS

Kukonje and Kubi Islands to Gweta



There are small pan systems scattered throughout Botswana, but when people talk of 'the pans' they mean Sua and Ntwetwe – roughly 8000km² of mud-crust ed immensity, speckled with baobabs and isles of golden grass.

Access to the pans is via a handful of dirt tracks that run roughly north-south between the tarred A3 and A30 highways. From the south, Letlhakane is the major supply point, a large town with all you'll need for the trip. You'll find emergency water at the vet control gates near Kukonje, at Kubu campsite and at the Gumba vet fence, but there's no public water or fuel points until Nata or Gweta, so fill your tanks.

KUKONJE ISLAND

On the far east of Sua Pan is Kukonje Island, a spectacular but often-overlooked atoll, 7km from the pan's edge. To reach Kukonje from the west, take the Jeep track north off the A30, 50m after the Tlapana vet fence gate. The trail is firm when dry, but can become waterlogged and muddy as it nears the pan.

After 50km, there's a gate on the left leading across the pan. There's a checkpoint and you'll be asked to sign in, but access is unrestricted and camping on the island is free.

The final 7km to the island can be tricky. Even in the dry season, crossing the pan is slippery, and in the wet season it's difficult to impossible, but definitely worth it if conditions allow. Currently, there are no dedicated stands on Kukonje, although there are three or four good spots, either on the northern ridge or under the huge baobab near the western edge. It's a question of driving around and stopping wherever is free and takes your fancy. There are no facilities of any kind, just uninterrupted views and beautiful isolation – spoilt only slightly by intermittent cell-phone reception up on the ridge.

Leopard drinking

PIT STOPS

Mopipi Basic supplies, fuel, tyre repair
Letlhakane ATM, shops, bottle store, fuel, mechanic, tyre repair, DWNP office

ROAD CONDITIONS

The A3 and A30 are tar and in good condition, but the trans-pan roads vary. In the dry winter, these roads are firm, but can become impassable when wet. Crossing between Kubu and Kukonje is not a good idea in any season. From the edge of Ntwetwe Pan to Gweta, the tracks are confusing.

WHERE TO STAY

Gaing-O Community Trust operates Kubu Island. Camping fee includes levies. +267-297-9612, www.kubuisland.com. Camping on Kukonje Island is free. Planet Baobab has B&B chalets. +27-11-447-1605, www.planetbaobab.co



KUBU ISLAND

40km due west of Kukonje is Kubu (or Lekhubu) Island, a low, rocky protrusion covered in baobabs, on the opposite edge of Sua Pan. Even in dry conditions, it's extremely ill advised to attempt a crossing directly.

Rather, drive back south to the A30, head west and then take the tar road north to Mmatshumo. From there, it's a bumpy 20km track to the Makomojema vet fence. The final 25km to Kubu is easy when dry, but this border region between Sua and Ntwetwe pans can flood in the summer rains.

Unlike Kukonje, Kubu has an established community-run campsite, which although very basic, has pit loos (the smallest you'll ever try to squeeze into) and 13 designated stands on the western edge of the island. The ones to the north, especially stand 6, have the best sunset views. You can book in advance, or failing that, pay cash on arrival.



TO GWETA

From Kubu, a rocky, twisting track heads 20km northwest to the Gumba vet fence. Here you can head north to Nata, or else drive along the fence to the west, crossing Ntwetwe Pan to Gweta. The route across the pan is stark and desolate – a flat, featureless horizon-line in all directions. It's a beautiful route and, like everywhere else on the pans, an easy, meditative drive when conditions are dry.

Any hint of water, however, can turn the otherwise docile flats to sticky, wheel-sucking mud, so rather take the Nata track due north between the pans if there's any sign of water. From the northwestern edge of Ntwetwe Pan, it's just 30km to Gweta, but even with a GPS device it's easy to take a wrong turn and add to that distance. A fine, powdery dust covers the track, which forks and forks again through low acacia and mopani trees.

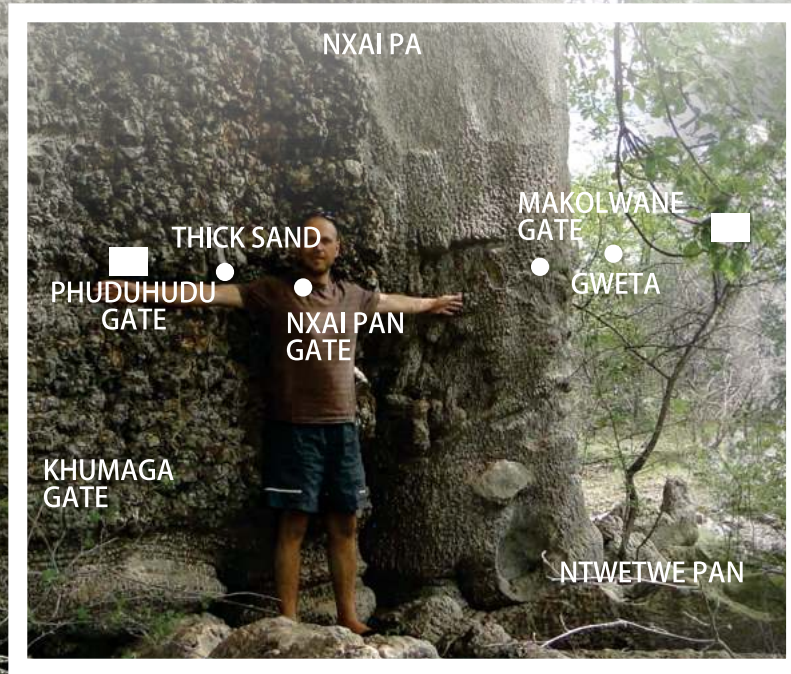
But keep heading north and all roads do eventually lead to Gweta, where there's a cold one waiting at the best bar for miles – Planet Baobab.



Dirt road along fence line to Gweta

MAKGADIKGADI AND NXAI PANS

Ntwetwe Pan to Baines' Baobabs



MAKGADIKGADI PANS

With only one main track and a few small loops to explore, a visit to this national park doesn't present a lot of choices. Camping options are also limited: a large, well-maintained campsite at Khumaga and two small, basic camping areas in the centre, Njuca Hills and Tree Island. That's not to say you should give it a miss: golden grass blankets the central plains, and the light at dawn and dusk is spectacular. Plus, there's plenty of game along the Boteti River. Cattle also cross the river and wander along the eastern bank, but they're outnumbered by huge herds of zebra, as well as hippo, elephant and kudu, and there are lion too.

Entering at Makolwane Gate, it's 45km to Njuca Hills campsite. 'Hills' is a misnomer, but the ever-so-slight rise does constitute the highest elevation for kilometres around. There are two unfenced stands, with Botswana's usual pit-loo and shower-rig ablutions. Stand 1 is small with an awkward concrete bollard and fire pit that make setting up camp there unnecessarily

difficult. Stand 2 is much larger with better shade and lovely sunset views.

Tree Island Camp is 8km southeast, along a rough track that sees little use. It has three stands and standard ablutions. Again, there are no fences and the stands sit close together between a scattering of small pans. It's a more beautiful setting than Njuca Hills, although the track to get there is bumpy and overgrown. A radiator seed net is advisable throughout the reserve, but especially on these southern tracks, which are not well maintained. Without a net, you'll be picking grass and seeds out of your radiator for weeks.

From Tree Island, avoid the overgrown southwestern track and take the more direct Khumaga road to the west. Khumaga Camp is neat and has hot showers. The 10 stands all have taps and shade and are clustered together between two large ablution blocks. Stand 10, on the northern edge, is the most private.

PIT STOPS

Gweta Basic supplies, fuel, tyre repair

ROAD CONDITIONS

The tarred A3 forms the boundary between the parks. From Makolwane Gate to Khumaga the Jeep track is firm and well maintained. Further south, expect more bumps and tall grass on the centre island. There's thick sand north of Khumaga Camp long the Boteti River, and a 20km stretch along the Nxai Pan road and starts 10km south of the Baines' Baobabs turn-off, towards South Camp. Roads on or near the pans are good when dry, but muddy after rains, especially around South Camp, where the resulting ruts make dry-season driving very bumpy.

PARK GATES

There are three gates into the Makgadikgadi Pans National Park: Makolwane, Phuduhudu and Khumaga. Access at Khumaga is via ferry if the Boteti River is high. Nxai Pan has one gate, on the A3 east of Phuduhudu. Gate times: winter 6am to 6:30pm, summer 5:30am to 7pm. There is brackish borehole water and cell phone reception at all gates.

If you're exiting the park here, it's a 2km drive south to Khumaga Gate on the eastern bank of the Boteti River. If the water level is low it's possible to drive across the river, or otherwise take the pontoon ferry for a quick shuttle to the tarred B300 beyond.

Further south, the track continues along the fence line before heading back east to Njuca Hills. The fence along this part of the track is falling down and in many places lies broken across the trail. It's slow going with not much to see – the more interesting areas are to the north.

For Nxai Pan, drive north from Khumaga to Phuduhudu Gate, but give yourself plenty of time to explore the sandy river track and 'hippo loop' on the way. The wide riverbed is dotted with ilala palms and is a focal point for game, although the presence of cattle and the occasional waft of music from the far bank do spoil the effect a little.

The trails in and around the river are very sandy and slow, but the main track firms up towards Phuduhudu and from there, it's 11km of tar east to Nxai Pan Gate.

NXAI PAN NATIONAL PARK

Nxai Pan National Park has even fewer kilometres of roads than Makgadikgadi, but the spectacular camps at Baines' Baobabs and the game-rich plains around South Camp to the north make it a must-see destination. Access is via a single, very sandy track from the park's only gate, and the sand on this road is particularly deep for 20km – 10km on either side of the Baines' Baobabs turn-off. As a tattered sheet of paper stuck to a window at the gatehouse states, it's 'strictly 4x4'.

There are three unfenced stands at Baines' Baobabs, each with a pit loo and bucket-shower rig. Well spaced around Kudiakam Pan, the stands feel completely isolated, with a towering baobab or two providing shade. Stand 1 is to the north, just across the pan from an impressive cluster of seven baobabs after which the area is named. Thomas Baines was an English artist and explorer who painted the trees while on an expedition to what was then South West Africa, between 1861 and 1862.

This painting made the trees famous and they are to this day one of the highlights of any trip to Botswana.

There is no camp at the main baobabs themselves – stand 1 is the closest at 700m, with the other two sites 2.5km to the south on the pan's low, grass-covered fringe. Being so close, stand 1 has great views of the ancient trees, but with every visitor to the park invariably stopping at the site, it's less private than the others, especially during the day.

The most private is stand 3, under another huge baobab, behind a screen of low trees. Stand 2 has the best of both as it's away from the main track under three huge trees, with uninterrupted views across the pan. There is no water at any of the stands so be sure to take everything you need with you.

South Camp, 20km to the north, is a more traditional, communal campsite with ablution blocks and hot showers. The 10 tightly grouped stands sit on the southern edge of Nxai Pan itself and the permanent waterholes

nearby attract far more game than you'll find at Baines'. Stands 3 to 7 have the best shade, with 5, 6 and 7 sitting furthest from the main access road. The remaining stands are on the far sides of the two ablution blocks and have a bit more privacy. For the most solitude, pick stand 1, although be aware that it's a bit of a walk to the loos.

South Camp is a short drive from the main, permanent waterhole – a great place for sundowners while the animals come in to drink. From here, short loops circle the grassy pan and any game is easy to spot on the open plains. The tracks themselves are not quite so flat, however. In the rainy season, the pan surface turns slick, leaving deep tyre ruts and potholes when the surface dries. So be prepared to bounce around or, if it's been raining, to get very muddy.

TIP

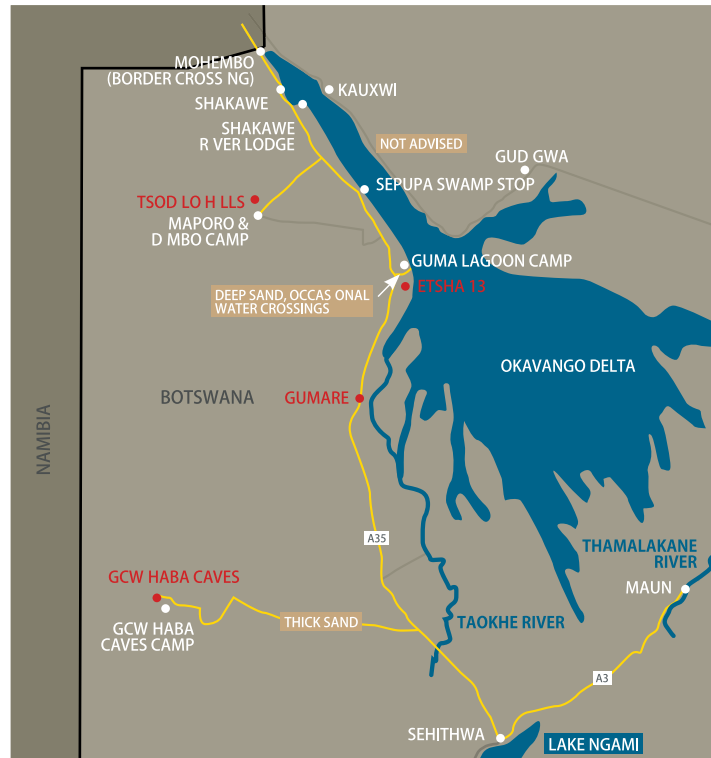
Beware of driving on the pans when it's wet. Any hint of water turns the otherwise easy-going tracks into wheel-sucking mud.

WHERE TO STAY

The DWNP operates Njuca Hills and Tree Island. See website for camping fees www.dwnp@gov.bw. SKL Group operates Khumaga for fees visit www.sklcamps.com. Xomae Group operates Baines' Baobabs and South Camp. Visit website for additional park fees and camping fees www.xomaesites.com

OKAVANGO PANHANDLE

Maun to Mohembo and back



The western side of the Okavango Panhandle is rarely explored by those visiting Botswana, and is primarily used as a thoroughfare between Maun and Mohembo, the last village before the border to Namibia. Wildlife on the western side of the delta is not as prolific as in the areas to the east: local communities cultivate sections directly adjacent to the Okavango flood plain and the region bordering Namibia was historically used for hunting. A squeeze on hunting concessions has meant that plains game and elephant herds are slowly revisiting the area, but the real highlights here are cultural and geological, and a few detours along the way will get you closer to Botswana's heritage.

The 97km stretch of the A3 from Maun to Sehithwa is tar and in good condition and it takes about 1.5 hours. 5km south of Sehithwa is Lake Ngami, one of the last watery remnants of Lake Makgadikgadi – an ancient body of water that dried up to form large salt pans. Lake Ngami is shallow and has a high rate of evaporation so its

size varies drastically. When flooded, it's worth a visit to see large numbers of congregating waterbirds, including various herons and cormorants.

From Sehithwa, the tarred A35 north to Etsha 13 (192km) should be driven with caution. Large sections are potholed and in places the edge of the road has disintegrated. From Etsha 13, north to Mohembo (106km), the road improves slightly and some sections have been repaired. Caution is still advised, however, as livestock often wander onto the road oblivious to oncoming traffic. North of Etsha 13, there is a handful of private campsites and lodges dotted along the Taokhe River section of the delta. The best is Guma Lagoon Camp, at the end of a network of windy, deep-sand tracks northeast of Etsha13. There can be flooding, but most flooded areas can be crossed (just avoid those with a log placed in front of them). There are 7 campsites in total – 6 are secluded and on grass (a rarity in Botswana), with braai facilities and private ablutions with hot water.

PIT STOPS

Gumare ATM, basic supplies, fuel *Shakawe* ATM, food, fuel

ROAD CONDITIONS

The main arteries of this route are tarred, but large sections are riddled with potholes and in places the roadsides are eroded, sometimes to less than a car's breadth. Detours off the main drag to points of interest are either on heavily worn calcrete or thick sand tracks.

PARK GATES

The gates at Tsodilo Hills are open from 8am to 5pm, but are closed between 12.45pm and 1.45pm. There's no water or ablutions at the gates. The gate at Gcwihaba Caves is open from 7.30am to 11:30pm. Water and ablutions are available.



Jackal relaxing in shade



The seventh site is adjacent to the reception area and restaurant. It's sandy and larger than the others, and is situated at the water's edge with the best views of the lagoon.

Further north are Sepupa Swamp Stop and Shakawe River Lodge, both of which can be reached via graded dirt roads and sand tracks off the A35. About 33km north of Etsha 13 is the turn-off to Sepupa, where there are two sets of campsites. Choose the one closest to the river for the best views. Stands are not numbered but there are braai facilities and shared ablutions, and electricity is available at some stands (extra cost per night), although it's unreliable. Shakawe River Lodge is further north, about 15km south of the eponymous town. There are 10 campsites, each with their own water supply, sink and braai facilities. Sites 1 to 7 are on the river and have the best views, and sites 3 and 4 have the best shade.

14km further up the A35 is Mohembo and the border crossing to Namibia. There is a free pontoon at Mohembo that crosses the northern tip of the

panhandle and from there, a route runs back down the eastern side of the delta through various community concessions and into Chobe National Park. The pontoon takes about 10 minutes each way and operates from 6am to 6pm. Navigating the 4x4 track from Kauxwi to Gudigwa and beyond is not advised, however, and should only be attempted in convoy, with permission from the private concessions and accompanied by an experienced guide.

32km south of Shakawe is a 35km graded gravel road leading west off the A35 (calcrete was laid to facilitate 2x4 access, but it's badly eroded and corrugated). This road leads to the gate at Tsodilo Hills, a sacred place where human history stretches back more than 100 000 years. Inhabited by the San, and later Bantu-speaking tribes, the hills are marked with rock art that provides a fascinating historical timeline, and the area was declared a World Heritage Site in 2002. There is a museum at the foot of the hills and three main hiking trails.

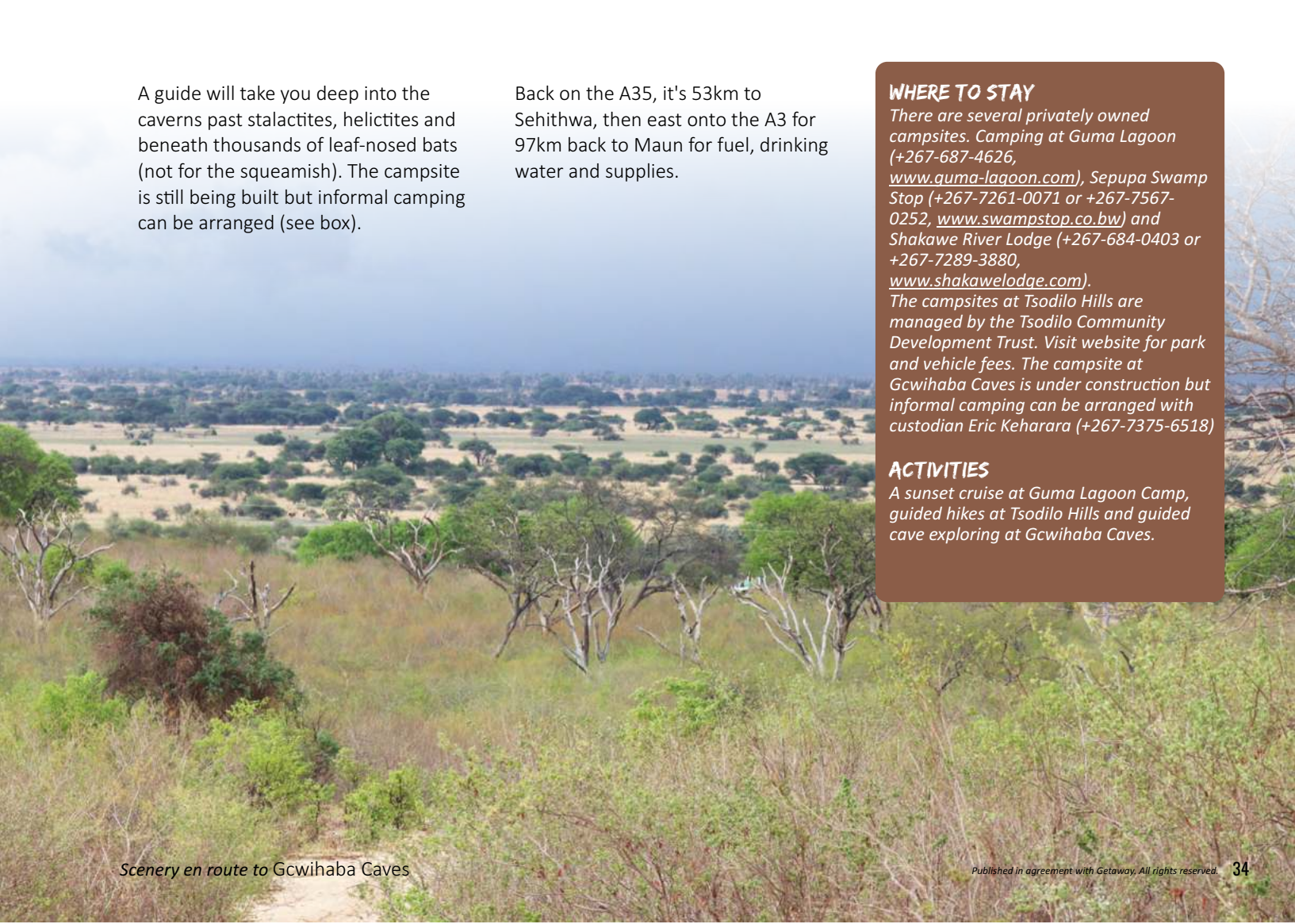
This is a community-run reserve and hiking without a guide is discouraged. There are two main campsites at Tsodilo Hills, Dimbo and Maporo, both situated outside the main gate and poorly signposted. There are no demarcated sites, but there are basic ablutions. Maporo is best for views of Tsodilo's most dominant hill, the highest point in Botswana.

Back on the tarred A35 south, it's about 195km to the turn-off to Gcwihaba Caves and from there, it's 118km to the Gcwihaba Caves gate. Allow at least 4 hours for this section. The first short stretch is graded, with occasional deep sandy patches, but this quickly turns to 4x4 only and it's thick sand from about 80km in. The last section passes through beautiful golden Kalahari scrub, where there's a good chance of spotting plains game. It's one of the country's lesser-known 4x4 routes and well worth a visit before it becomes too popular: the dolomite caves span an area much larger than first presumed and portions are still being discovered.



TIP

Proceed on the A35 (in fact, all of Botswana's roads) with extreme caution – stubborn donkeys and cows will not budge and ostriches play fast and loose with their lives.



A guide will take you deep into the caverns past stalactites, helictites and beneath thousands of leaf-nosed bats (not for the squeamish). The campsite is still being built but informal camping can be arranged (see box).

Back on the A35, it's 53km to Sehithwa, then east onto the A3 for 97km back to Maun for fuel, drinking water and supplies.

WHERE TO STAY

There are several privately owned campsites. Camping at Guma Lagoon (+267-687-4626, www.guma-lagoon.com), Sepupa Swamp Stop (+267-7261-0071 or +267-7567-0252, www.swampstop.co.bw) and Shakawe River Lodge (+267-684-0403 or +267-7289-3880, www.shakawelodge.com). The campsites at Tsodilo Hills are managed by the Tsodilo Community Development Trust. Visit website for park and vehicle fees. The campsite at Gcwihaba Caves is under construction but informal camping can be arranged with custodian Eric Keharara (+267-7375-6518)

ACTIVITIES

A sunset cruise at Guma Lagoon Camp, guided hikes at Tsodilo Hills and guided cave exploring at Gcwihaba Caves.





Black-Winged Stilt

MAUN

Gateway to the Okavango Delta



If you're visiting northern Botswana, chances are that you'll be stopping in Maun for at least a day. It's the gateway to the Okavango Delta and it's positioned on the southern tip of one of the waterways that finger out from this ecological wonder. It's the last vestige of civilisation before things get really wild.

That's not to say that Maun has no wildlife of its own. Bisected by the Thamalakane River, which skirts the southeastern reaches of the delta, Maun's waterways are home to a large variety of birdlife, pods of hippo and many species of antelope. But it's the delta lite, and you're more likely to come across a waterlogged cow than a leaping lechwe on a river cruise.

Still, it's a vital stopover for self-drivers. Besides having ATMs, shops, fuel, tyre repair (a stop at Riley's Garage covers most of these), welders (we recommend Kavango Engineering) and accommodation, it's where visitors to Botswana's northern parks and reserves, such as Moremi Game Reserve and Chobe National Park, can pay park fees at the DWNP and organise campsite bookings with various operators and safari groups in town.

WHERE TO STAY

Camping on the Thamalakane River is best. Old Bridge Backpackers has camping and it has a vibey bar. +267-686-2406, www.maun-backpackers.com (S19° 56.678' E23° 29.303').

Then there is the tranquil Maun Rest Camp +267-7298-3184, www.maunrestcamp.com (S19° 56.587' E23° 29.150').

Audi Camp has spacious sites. +267-686-0599, www.audicamp.com (S19° 56.030' E23° 30.543').

POINTS OF INTEREST

DWNP (S19° 59.056' E23° 25.844'), Kwalate Safaris (S19° 58.672' E23° 25.886') Xomae Group (S19° 58.615' E23° 25.830'), SKL Group (S19° 57.989' E23° 27.037'), Khwai Development Trust and Botswana Tourism (S19° 58.696' E23° 25.460'), Kavango Engineering (S20° 02.615' E23° 27.004'), Viking Gas (S20° 00.745' E23° 25.906'), Riley's Garage (S19° 59.302' E23° 25.553')





MOREMI GAME RESERVE

The Eastern Okavango Delta



CHOBE4X4
SELF DRIVE TOURS

An attraction for 4x4 enthusiasts and a constant battle of nerves for the novice, Moremi's poor roads – some of the bumpiest, sandiest and most waterlogged in Botswana – are unavoidable, but they should never deter anyone from having one of the best wildlife experiences in the world.

Although there are numerous luxury, fly-in lodges scattered throughout the Okavango Delta, if you're on four wheels, Moremi is your only option to explore this UNESCO World Heritage Site, and its public campsites are an essential stop on any trip to northern Botswana.

There are four main camps, all unfenced – one at each gate and two on the western waterways – plus three island camps reached by boat from Third Bridge. The island camps have no facilities, but the rest have drinking water (slightly brackish at South Gate) and ablutions with solar showers.

Arriving from Maun, you'll find South Gate Camp under tall mopane trees behind the gatehouse. There are 10

stands with 4 and 6 closest to the access road, and 8 to 10 the most secluded. It's a quiet, relaxed site, but the main action is north and west so few visitors stay here long term.

From South Gate, three roads head into the reserve: a straight cutline north to Khwai; a meandering track northwest to Xakanaxa; and an alternately rutted, sandy Jeep track west to the three bridges. The cutline is the quickest route to Khwai. It's sandy, but despite some mud after rain it's manageable, just dull: 30km of dense mopane trees with little to see on either side.

The northwest track is much the same, but quicker if you're heading directly to Xakanaxa – about 2.5 hours to the camp depending on what's at the waterholes en route.

It takes about 3 hours on the road west from South Gate to Third Bridge, but allow extra time to explore the tracks around Xini Lagoon, especially beautiful in the late afternoon light. . From Xini, it's 20km to First Bridge and Second Bridge is 2km beyond.

PIT STOPS

Maun ATM, shops, bottle store, gas, fuel, tyre repair, mechanic, DWNP office

ROAD CONDITIONS

Moremi is 4x4 throughout. Even in the dry season, short water crossings are common, especially in the northwest. After rain, many of these become waterlogged and impassable and later dry to deep, bumpy ruts interspersed with thick sand. From Maun, the South Gate access road is hard and potholed. Entering at the North Gate at Khwai requires a river crossing, which is usually straight forward, but can be treacherous when the river is swollen. Third Bridge itself is in poor condition and is often closed - check when entering the park - making it necessary to take a several-hour detour to reach Xakanaxa camp.

PARK GATES

South Gate (Maqwee) and North Gate (Khwai) have camping, water and ablutions. North Gate has the only cell reception in the reserve. Gate times: winter 6am to 6:30pm; summer 5:30am to 7pm.



The bridges themselves – little more than a loose arrangement of mopane trunks – are rickety, but easy enough to cross unless water levels are exceptionally high.


Third Bridge, however, can be problematic. The campsite lies to the southeast of the bridge so arriving from the south is relatively simple.

There are nine stands, plus five permanent tents with en-suite ablutions. Elephant, hippo, lion and hyena are frequently sighted in camp, especially after dark. Baboons have also been known to damage tents, jumping from the tall sausage and jackalberry trees at stands 1, 2 and 3. Stands 7 and 8 are arguably the pick – large, secluded and close to the ablutions.

From Third Bridge, take the northwestern Mboma loop, which is overgrown and sandy on the western side, but passes through spectacular reed beds, home to large herds of buffalo. On the northern tip there's a short river crossing to the Mboma Boat Station, the only place in the reserve that offers guided mokoro trips.



Large herd of Buffalo

A hippopotamus is shown in a body of water, yawning with its mouth wide open. The hippo's head is tilted back, and its large, pinkish tongue is visible. The water is calm, and the background shows some green vegetation on the bank.

Leaving Third Bridge to the northeast can be tricky. If the bridge is open it's an easy hour along well-used tracks to Xakanaxa campsite. If closed, however, allow for a 4-hour detour back past First Bridge, then north along an occasionally waterlogged, and often difficult to navigate, track. Without a GPS, or if water levels are high, it may be significantly more than 4 hours before you pop out again some 10km south of Xakanaxa.

The area south of Xakanaxa has the largest network of tracks in the reserve with plenty of water crossings even in the dry season. The main track, however, poses few problems and there are plenty of side roads that won't trouble novice 4x4 drivers.

The stands at Xakanaxa are spread out in a line along the southern edge of a waterway. Stand 1 is the most secluded on the eastern end, and the ablutions are between 3 and 4, and 5 and Stand 7 is on a slight rise with views over the reeds, and 8 to 10 are the least private, on the access road near the boat station.

From Xakanaxa, the main track heads east to North Gate. The first section passes through dense mopane trees, but then opens out into a beautiful leadwood forest. Don't miss the elevated hide that looks out over a large hippo-filled pool about 15km before the gate.

Camping at North Gate feels a bit wilder than at South Gate. Stands 1 to 3 are the exception – all three are near the gatehouse with views of the cell-phone mast across the Khwai River. Stands 4 to 7 are spread under shady trees in the centre, but 8 to 10 are more isolated, with expansive views down the river to the east and a good chance of seeing elephant crossing the water in the late afternoon sunshine.

Hippo yawning



WHERE TO STAY

Kwalate Safaris operates South Gate and Xakanaxa. www.kwalatesafaris.com

SKL operates North gate.

www.sklcamps.com

Xomae Group operates Third Bridge and one of the islands camps, Gcodikwe 1.

See website for additional park fees.

www.xomaesites.com

ACTIVITIES

Guided boat trips are available between sunrise and sunset. Prices vary according to distance from the main channel. Trips available at Xakanaxa. At Third Bridge trips are available at Mboma and at Mokoro trips are available at Mboma.

See websites for fees.

TIP

The Xakanaxa Boat Station is the furthest from the delta's main channels. They offer the cheapest boat trips in Moremi, but you'll need to book at least two hours to reach open water.

KHWAI DEVELOPMENT TRUST

Moremi to Mababe



Khwai Development Trust is a 180000ha community-owned concession in the northeastern corner of the Okavango Delta. It's wedged between Moremi Game Reserve and Chobe National Park and its natural boundary to the south, the Khwai River, is also its biggest asset. Riverine woodland, dominated by ancient camelthorn, knobthorn and appleleaf trees, stretches the length of the river. The top tiers are home to birds, primates and leopards, while exquisite roan and sable antelope and lechwe join ellies at water level for a drink.

From the wooden bridge outside Moremi North Gate (sometimes called Bridge over the River Khwai), it's less than 1km to Khwai village along a graded gravel road. Firewood, basic supplies and cold beer are available there at the spaza shops. Be sure to stop at the Khwai Development Trust offices to register your arrival by showing your booking and payment. Day visitors are required to pay park and vehicle fees here too.

There are two routes across the southern region of the Khwai concession and while the area does extend north, the best 4x4 driving and game viewing are in the south, along the river. The first route is a graded gravel transit road that loops around the top of the southern section. It's the quickest way from Khwai village to Mababe, but the best route is to keep straight at the fork which is about 2km northeast from Khwai village (left takes you onto the transit road, although it's still a sand track at the fork) towards Moqwara Pan. This section can become flooded during the wet season, so check with the development office if it's safe. Logs placed in front of water crossings indicate that it is not safe to cross. The main track (recommended route on map) keeps fairly close to the river while still avoiding any routes that may have become waterlogged. Various loops peel off this 13km-long stretch and they are worth taking if time allows. Be prepared for water crossings.

PIT STOPS

Khwai village Very basic supplies, Khwai Development Trust offices

Mababe Very basic supplies

ROAD CONDITIONS

The transit road cutting through the Khwai Development Trust is graded gravel and mostly good. Seasonal flooding, however, means that there are several water crossings and occasional detours. Game-drive tracks in the park vary between deep sand and mud.

PARK GATES

No formal gates. Visitors are to report to the Khwai Development Trust offices in Khwai village from 8am to 4pm. Contact +267-680-1211 for park and vehicle fees.

WHERE TO STAY

Khwai Development Trust operates three campsites. Magotho is for self-drivers and Matswere and Sable Alley are usually reserved for tour operators. for fees contact +267-680-1211. Leap Safaris operates Tshaa Riverside Camp. +267-7386-3058, www.mababesafaris.com

Popping back out onto the transit road, it's 5km to the turn-off for Magotho Camp over graded gravel and fine white sand that covers the roadside foliage like snow. It's then another 4.5km of sandy 4x4 track to the campsite.

There are 16 beautiful, large, grassy stands at Magotho but there are no facilities. It's entirely self-sufficient and, less than 300m from the Khwai River, totally wild.

An alternative is Tshaa Riverside Camp, another 14km from the turn-off to Magotho along the transit road. It's just outside the Khwai concession and, technically, falls within Chobe National Park, but it's run by the nearby Mababe village community and at the time of going to print no park fees were payable.

It's a gem, with four large, clean, shady campsites overlooking the Khwai River. There are private ablutions at each stand (stand 2 has a loo with a view) and a donkey boiler for hot water. After a good, hot shower, the G&Ts taste better as you recount the day's sightings while hippo harrumph just metres away.



It's a 22km drive from Mababe village to Chobe's Mababe South Gate, much of it along deep sand tracks, and the drive takes about an hour. If you're heading north into Chobe National Park, keep in mind that the nearest

fuel stop is in Maun and it may be necessary to make the 117km drive along the calcrete road that heads southwest to Shorobe and then onwards to Maun to refuel.



Zebra drinking

CHOBE NATIONAL PARK

Mababe to Kasane



Elephant at Chobe National Park

Bordered by the Chobe River to the north and home to a large marshland fed by the Savuti Channel, Chobe National Park is where you'll find one of the largest concentrations of wildlife in southern Africa. Access to the park is 4x4 only and while it's large – covering nearly 12 000km² in total – the networks of tracks available for game viewing are focused around three main regions: Savuti, Linyanti and the Chobe Riverfront.

At the southernmost tip of the park is Mababe Gate, the only point of entry for anyone travelling to Chobe from the south. From Mababe Gate, it's 65km along Sand Ridge Road to the nearest of the park's three public campsites, Savuti Camp. It's a tough slog along deep sand tracks, and the drive takes 3 to 4 hours. The track carves its way up the park on the eastern side of the Magwikhwe sand ridge and the western side of Savuti Marsh – one of Botswana's famed wildlife regions, fed by Savuti Channel, which drains the Okavango erratically and seemingly independently of rainfall.

Travelling northwards, a deeply rutted mud track (Marsh Road) peels off to the right about 500m from Mababe Gate. This goes all the way to Savuti Camp, skirting the southern section of the marsh and rejoining the main track in places. The southern section of this road can become very muddy and it's best avoided when making the initial drive north. Even when dry, the deep ruts make the road slow going, and there's a good chance of getting stuck and delaying your arrival at camp. So it's best to stay on Sand Ridge Road for the first 50km at least, after which, several side tracks finger their way out towards the marsh and surrounding pans.

SAVUTI REGION

The Savuti region spans the southwestern section of Chobe National Park and comprises woodland, open plains and wetlands. It's legendary for game viewing and it's home to lion prides that have been known to take on big game such as buffalo. There are several Jeep tracks that wind their way through this region.

PIT STOPS

Kasane ATM, shops, bottle store, fuel, tyre repair, mechanic, DWNP offices

ROAD CONDITIONS

Thick sand in most places and tyre-sucking mud after rains, especially near the marsh. The road from Savuti to Ngoma Gate is graded gravel. The A33 transit road is tar.

PARK GATES

Linyanti, Mababe, Ngoma and Sedudu Gates are all open 6am to 6:30pm from May to September and 5:30am to 7pm from October to April.

WHERE TO STAY

SKL Group operates Savuti and Linyanti camps. www.sklcamps.com

Kwalate Safaris operates Ihaha Camp. See website for park and vehicle fees. www.kwalatesafaris.com

The most popular is the section just south of Savuti Camp. Here, sand tracks follow the seasonal Savuti Channel, which drains into the vast marshland. When dry, large sections of the riverbed are navigable (keep to the tracks on either side) and following the channel south to one of the many waterholes and pans – some natural, some manmade – is a good day's game viewing.

There are 14 campsites with braai facilities and elephant-proof ablutions with showers and flushing toilets. The best campsites are the 5 large sandy spots on the northern part of the outer ring that look onto the Savuti Channel. RSV1 (nicknamed Paradise) is prime.



LINYANTI REGION

40km north of Savuti, along a sand road that takes about 4 hours, is Linyanti. Deep sand patches that stretch for up to 1km at a time start 5km from Savuti. From there, the track alternates between these soft patches, firmer gravel sections and several low depressions with high, chassis-scraping ridges in the centre. Most have alternative loops around them. There's just a handful of tracks in the Linyanti region, two of which run along the edge of the Linyanti River, between the campsite and Linyanti Gate 5km northeast. Guests staying at Linyanti are required to check in at the gate first. There are five campsites, all with views over the river. There are braai facilities and shared ablutions. Sites aren't clearly demarcated so look out for markers pinned to the trees.



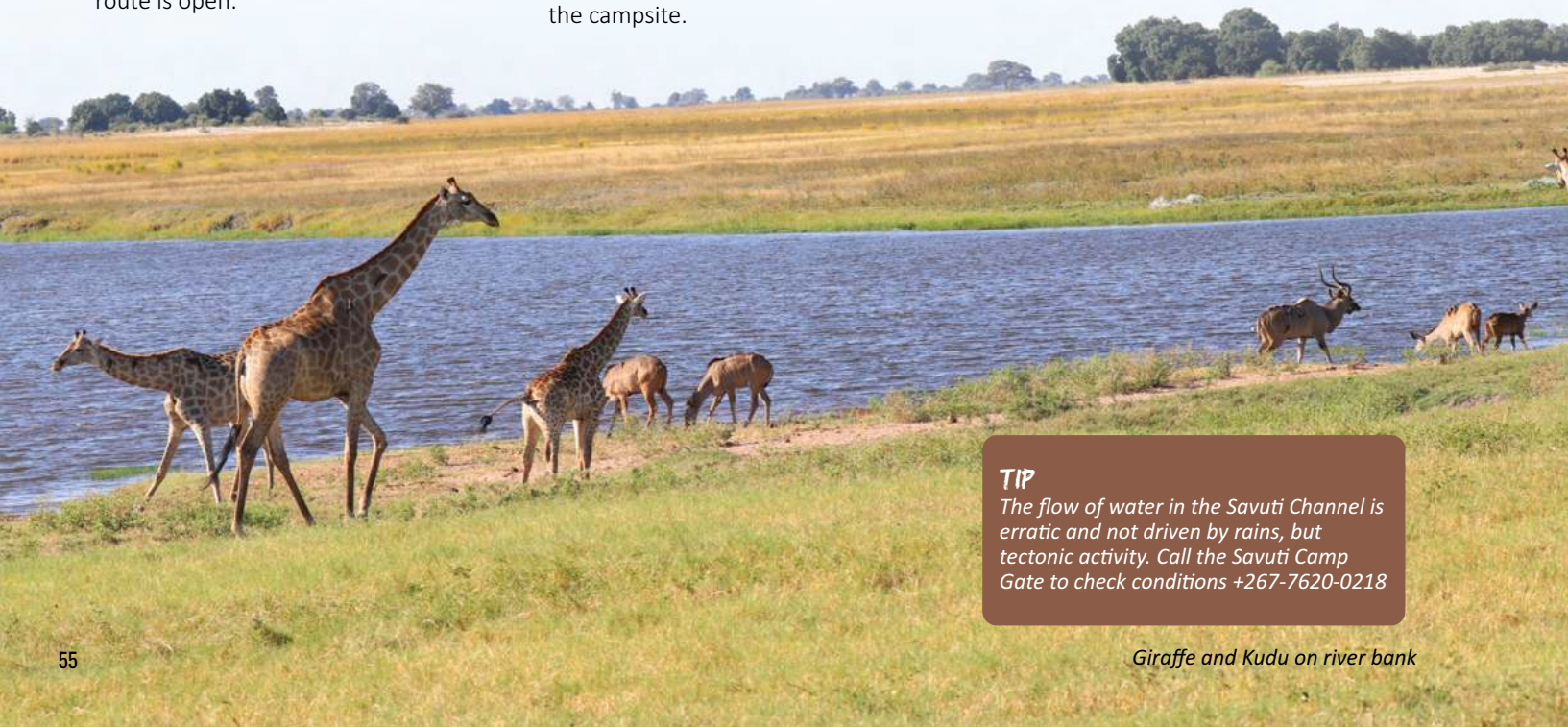
Grey Heron with fish

CHOBE RIVERFRONT

Along the northern part of Chobe, parallel to the tar A33 transit road that joins Ngoma Gate to Sedudu Gate and continues to Kasane, is a 50km loop that runs along the Chobe River. It's a worthwhile detour, time permitting, but visitors are advised to call ahead (+267-625-1772) to ensure that the route is open.

Certain sections of it have been closed to self-drivers in the past and seasonal flooding can also force closure of the track closest to the river.

Camping is at Ihaha Rest Camp. There are 10 sites with basic ablutions. These overlook a hippo pool in the dry season, while in the high-water season, the river is in full flow below the campsite.



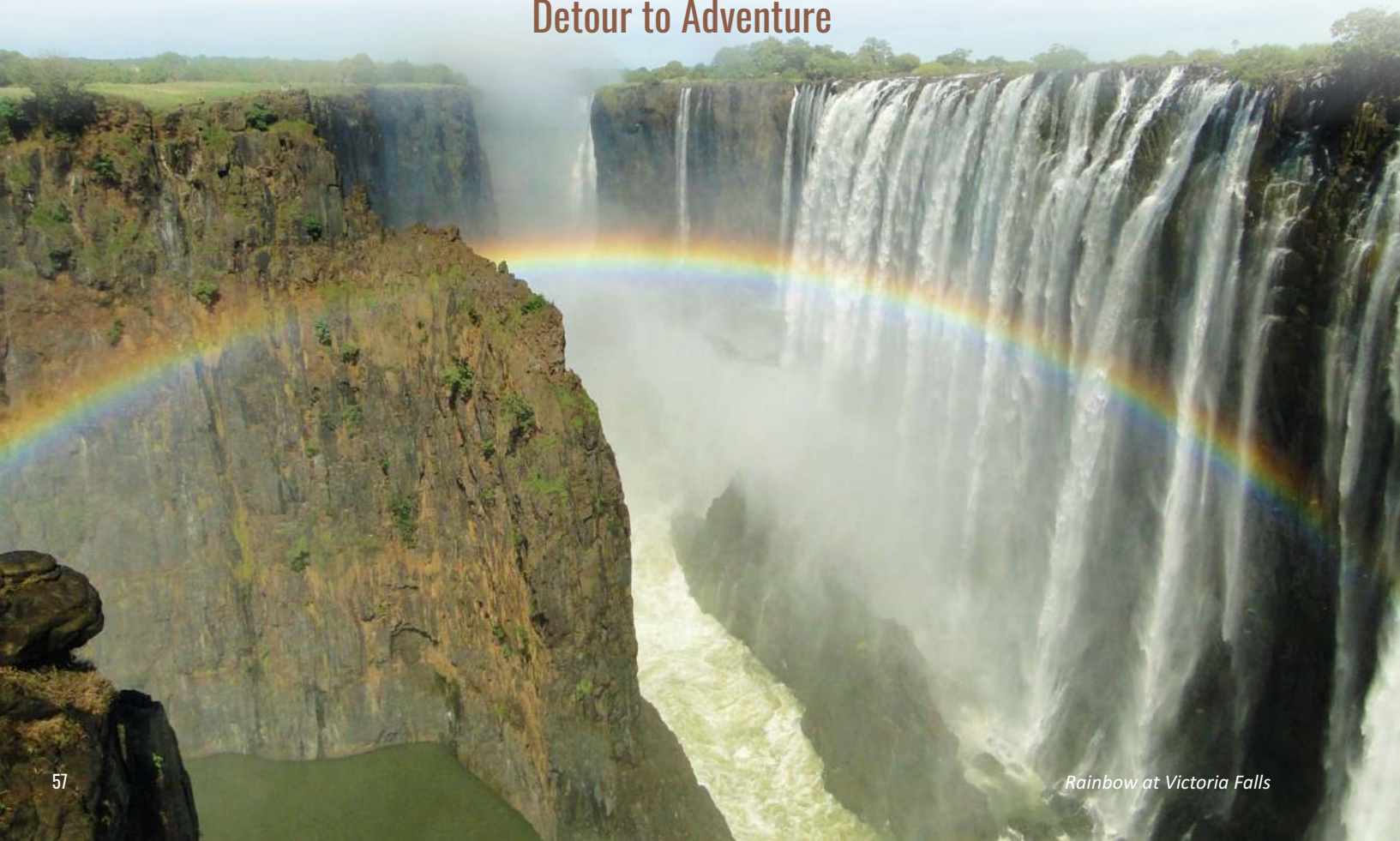
TIP

The flow of water in the Savuti Channel is erratic and not driven by rains, but tectonic activity. Call the Savuti Camp Gate to check conditions +267-7620-0218



VICTORIA FALLS

Detour to Adventure



Victoria Falls is about 74km east of the Kazungula border between Botswana and Zimbabwe.

In town, curio vendors ply their trade between tour operators vigorously flogging the usual adrenaline-pumping activity packages and there's no denying that Victoria Falls is absolutely built around tourism – activities are expensive and the hard-sell energy about town can be overwhelming. It's still possible, though, for 4x4 self-drivers without foreign budgets to make this a worthwhile detour, if they know where to look.

For first-time visitors, and returning ones too, a visit to Victoria Falls National Park is a must. The 16 viewpoints, joined by pathways that wind through evergreen rainforest, all provide spectacular views of different sections of the 1.7km-wide falls, which, at its peak, spills more than 550 million litres of water (enough to fill 220 Olympic-size swimming pools) into the Batoka Gorge every minute. Spectacular doesn't begin to describe it.

To get even closer to the mighty falls, skip the expensive adrenaline activities and take a hike down into the gorge with an experienced guide.

About 5km out of town is the Zambezi National Park. It's the closest you'll get to the eponymous river and it's home to the Big Five. Some sections are accessible by 4x4 only, which means you're likely to have sightings to yourself.

WHERE TO STAY

There are two public campsites in Zambezi National Park, Chundu 1 and 2, on the banks of the river. Camping costs include a conservation fee. +263-470-6077/8, www.zimparks.org
Pamusha Lodge is the best value guest lodge in Vic falls. Rooms have aircon and Dstv. +263-779-369-160 www.pamushalodgevicfalls.com

ACTIVITIES

For fees for entrance to Victoria Falls National Park (S17° 55.502' E25° 50.818') and entrance to Zambezi National Park and fee per vehicle see website (S17° 54.003' E25° 49.036'), +263-470-6077/8, www.zimparks.org. There is a hike into the Batoka Gorge, costs includes park fees. (S17° 55.920' E25° 50.058'), +263-772-368-010, www.rawadrenaline.org

POINTS OF INTEREST

Victoria Falls Info Centre (S17° 55.674' E25° 50.290'), Engen (S17° 55.674' E25° 50.392')

KASANE

Riversides Rendezvous



On the northern edge of Chobe National Park, fringed by the Chobe River, is the town of Kasane. It's an important stopover where self-drivers can restock, get fuel and spares, and attend to both major and minor repairs. There is an airport, and the town's proximity to Kazungula (about 12km) and the border posts to Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe, make Kasane the gateway to the Zambezi. Most visitors to the region pass through quickly, but it's worth spending time here.

Because it overlooks the Chobe River and the Zambezi wetlands, it's a prime spot for stationary game viewing and makes for a welcome break from the road.

There is a handful of accommodation options on the river, but the best for self-drivers is Chobe Safari Lodge, which has an adjacent campsite with its own deck and bar on the river. Here, elephants often wade into the water, trunk-deep, to cool themselves off, while large water birds such as black egrets, marabou storks and sacred ibises search the reed beds for food.

With the sun setting almost directly ahead, it's almost criminal not to open a cold one on the deck while watching the day's last fiery hues fizzle out behind the glassy water.

WHERE TO STAY

Chobe Safari Lodge has about 23 campsites (some are grouped together for overlanders, so the exact number is difficult to ascertain). Stands are small and close together with little privacy. Each has electricity, there are shared ablutions and resident warthogs keep the lawns trim. +267-625-0383/2480, www.chobesafarilodge.com (S17° 48.347' E25° 08.812')

ACTIVITIES

Chobe Safari Lodge offers cruises on the Chobe river.

POINTS OF INTEREST

Kasane Waterfront Mall (S17° 48.284' E25° 08.887'), Botswana Tourism Board (S17° 48.816' E25° 09.250') Builders World (S17° 47.775' E25° 09.298'), Shell Garage (S17° 47.792' E25° 09.262'), DWNP (at the Sedudu Gate) (S17° 50.597' E25° 08.615')

Elephant enjoying the river

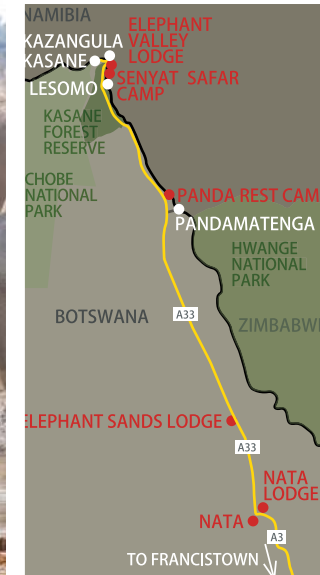




Giraffe on riverbank

IVORY ROUTE

Kasane to Francistown



East of Chobe National Park, between Kasane Forest Reserve and the Zimbabwe border, is what is informally known as the Ivory Route. It's essentially a 300km tarred thoroughfare between Kazungula and Nata, but high concentrations of elephant that migrate between Zimbabwe's western parks (including Hwange and Zambezi) and the forest reserves of Botswana, make it a route with some interesting stopovers.

Two of these are Senyati Safari Camp and Elephant Sands Lodge. They have some of the only waterholes on this eastern corridor and are visited almost daily by migrating ellies that spend hours drinking and bathing themselves in mud before continuing on their journey.

ROAD CONDITIONS

The A33 is tar and in good condition in most places. The roads in the upper eastern section, between Kasane Forest Reserve and the Zimbabwe border, are graded gravel and sand.

WHERE TO STAY

There is camping at Senyati Safari Camp +267-718-81306, www.senyatisafaricampbotswana.com Panda Rest camp +267-716-22264, [www.pandarest@boysnet.bw](mailto:pandarest@boysnet.bw) Elephant Sands Lodge +267-7344-5162, www.elephantsands.com Nata Lodge +267-620-0070, www.natalodge.com

TIP

Despite showing up on a GPS, driving the Hunters Road trail that runs along the Botswana / Zimbabwe border is currently not permitted and anti-poaching units will turn you around.

Elephant at waterhole

TULI BLOCK

Francistown to Platjan Border Post, SA



Tuli Block – wedged in the southeastern corner of Botswana between Zimbabwe and South Africa – is a popular bush break for South Africans thanks to its proximity, diverse landscape and density of game. However, the area mostly comprises private reserves and, as such, self-drive options are limited to the main gravel roads that bisect it. Still, there is plenty to see and some private reserves allow staying guests to explore sections of the park on their own.

The long drive to Tuli from Francistown involves zigzagging east along some badly worn tar roads from Serule, 88km south of Francistown on the A1, to Lekkerpoet Junction, through Selebi Phikwe, Sefhophe and Bobonong. The total distance from Serule to Lekkerpoet is 209km and can take up to 4 hours. From Lekkerpoet Junction the graded gravel transit road to the northeast bisects the Northern Tuli Game Reserve and ends at the Pont Drift border post, which gets you back into South Africa.

About 5.6km along this transit road is the turn-off to Molema Bush Camp, situated inside the Northern Tuli Game Reserve. There are four large, well-spaced campsites at Molema, each under the shade of large trees. Each stand has private ablutions with hot water and braai facilities. Self-driving is not permitted in Northern Tuli Game Reserve, but walking tours and guided 4x4 trips can be arranged on request.

A good, self-drive morning trip, however, is to take the transit road northeast to the Pont Drift border post, crossing the Motloutse riverbed past Solomon's Wall (note: driving along the Motloutse riverbed is illegal). It's a 60km loop (30km each way) that bisects private reserves and there's a good chance of spotting plains game and, if you're lucky, leopard near the road. A section of this transit road, about 5km south of the Motloutse River, is gated farmland to keep out wild animals, especially elephant. There is usually someone posted at the gate to open it and let you through.

PIT STOPS

*Selebi Phikwe Fuel, basic supplies
Bobonong Basic supplies*

ROAD CONDITIONS

The routes between Francistown and Lekkerpoet Junction alternate between good, freshly laid tar and worn, potholed roads. There are roadworks in some sections. Main roads through Tuli are graded gravel, but are heavily corrugated in places. 4x4 paths through drivable sections of the reserve are either sand or rocky.

WHERE TO STAY

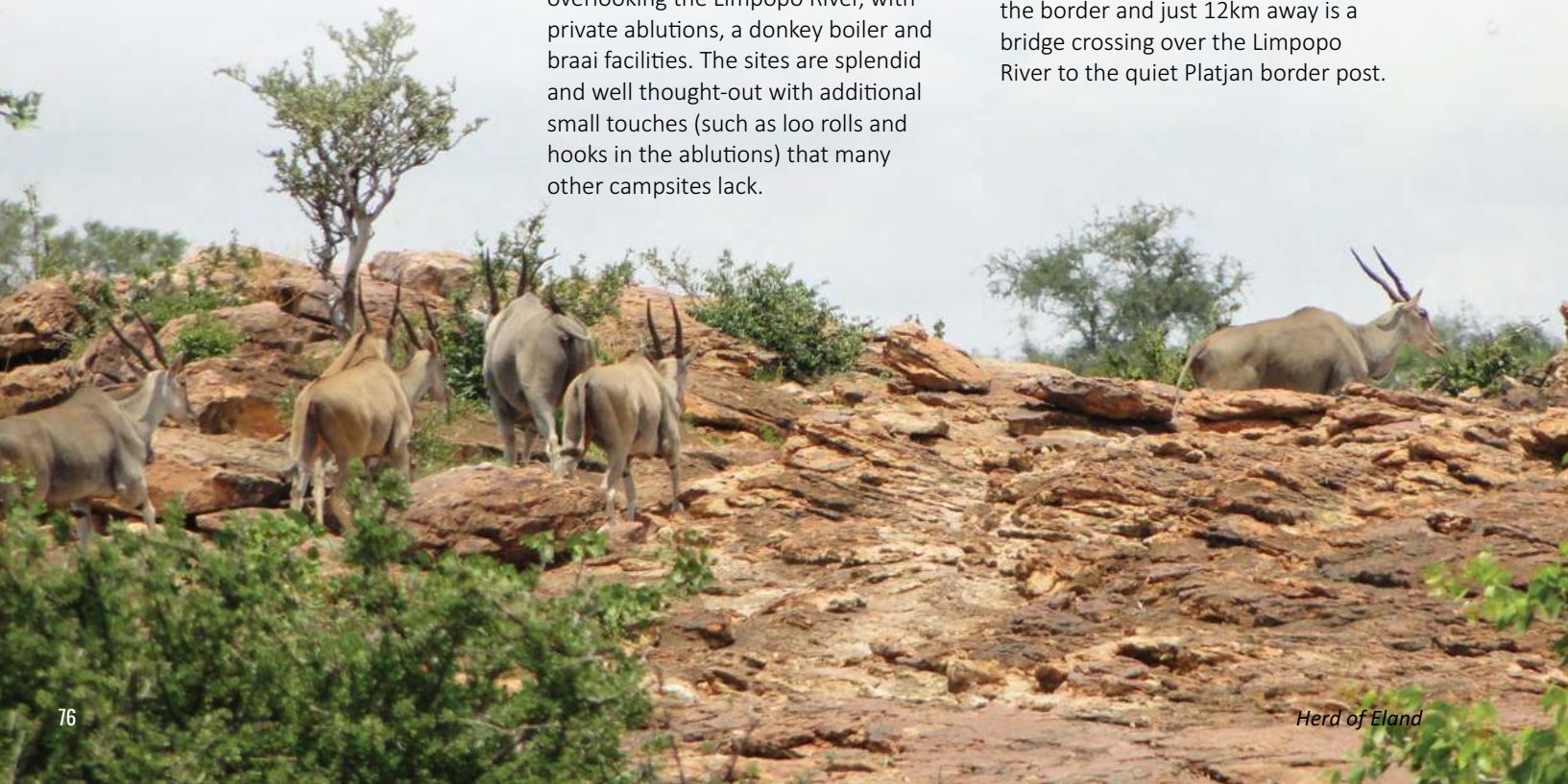
Molema Bush Camp is operated by Tuli Wilderness Trails. Camping fees include community levy). +27-78-391-4220, www.tulitrails.com

Limpopo River Lodge is a privately owned reserved with camping on the banks of the Limpopo River +267-7210-6098, www.limpoporiverlodge.co.za

The best option for self-drivers wanting to make the most of this area, however, is to head southwest at the Lekkerpoet Junction and onto Limpopo RiverLodge Game Reserve, where 120 km² of dirt road is open to explore. Camping is at one of 8 sites overlooking the Limpopo River, with private ablutions, a donkey boiler and braai facilities. The sites are splendid and well thought-out with additional small touches (such as loo rolls and hooks in the ablutions) that many other campsites lack.

Several pans and waterholes dot the reserve and the trails range from sandy Jeep tracks to more challenging rocky sections, all marked out with distances on a map provided at reception.

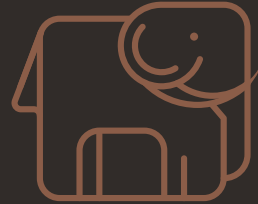
It's a little slice of South Africa right on the border and just 12km away is a bridge crossing over the Limpopo River to the quiet Platjan border post.





Elephant drinking at small waterhole





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